



**National Association for  
College Admission Counseling**

*Guiding the way to higher education*

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## **DRAFT Legislative Language: Graduate Coursework in School Counseling**

### A Bill:

To provide funds to institutions of higher education to develop graduate coursework in college admission counseling for students of counseling programs.

### FINDINGS

(a) School counselors can be effective catalysts to improving access to higher education for all students.

(1) Research shows that counselors, when consistently and frequently available and allowed to provide direct services to students and parents, can be a highly effective group of professionals who positively affect students' aspirations, achievements and financial aid knowledge. College Board research indicates that counseling services can have a dramatic effect on students' education plans.

(2) Repeated academic studies have found that improving counseling would have a significant impact on college access for low-income, rural, and urban students. If counselors are equipped to actively support students and families through the college admission process, rather than simply disseminating information, students' chances of enrolling in postsecondary education will increase. ACT recommends that schools provide student guidance to engage students in college and career awareness and ensure that students enroll in a rigorous curriculum to prepare for postsecondary education.

(3) The Education Trust states that school counselors need to be integral players in closing the achievement gap between low-income and minority students and their more advantaged peers.

(4) The National Association for College Admission Counseling reports that 92% of high school counselors consider themselves the primary source of information for their students about paying for college. Sixty-five percent of public secondary school counselors at low-income schools believe that students and parents are discouraged from considering college as an option due to lack of knowledge about financial aid.

(5) All students deserve access to quality information about postsecondary education, and school counselors are among the best and most easily accessible sources of such information. High school students report wanting more individual time with their school counselor for college planning and often do not know what coursework would prepare them for postsecondary education or for specific careers.

(6) Counseling on postsecondary options opens doors to families. Low-income and first-generation families often overestimate the cost of tuition and underestimate available aid; students from these backgrounds have access to fewer resources college application and financial aid resources than other groups, and less likely to fulfill their postsecondary plans as a result.

(7) College preparation intervention programs can double the college-going rates for at-risk youth, can expand students' educational aspirations, can increase students' educational and cultural capital assets, and can boost college enrollment and graduation rates.

(8) School counselors are highly qualified. All fifty states require school counselors to hold state school counseling certificates; 39 states require a Master's degree and 2-5 years of teaching experience. According to the National Association for College Admission Counseling's 1998 Secondary School Counselor Survey report, ninety-eight percent of counselors employed in public secondary schools held at least a Master's degree.

(b) The 2003 U.S. Department of Education High School Guidance Counseling report indicates that the top two goals of high school counselors are academic preparation and postsecondary planning. However, in public secondary schools nationwide, the achievement of these goals is regularly hampered by structural constraints.

(1) Public secondary school counselors face unmanageable student caseloads. The U.S. Department of Education reports that the average student-to-counselor ratio in high schools is 315:1. This falls far above the ratio recommended by the American School Counselor Association, which is 100:1. As a school reform measure, the Pathways to College Network recommends maintaining sufficient human resources, including well-qualified counselors, to enable underserved students to prepare for, enroll, and succeed in college.

(2) Public secondary school counselors are able to devote only a fraction of their time to college counseling. While school counselors at private schools spend an average of 58 percent of their time on postsecondary education counseling, counselors in public schools spend an average of 25 percent of their time on postsecondary counseling.

(3) The counseling function is complex, and in some cases, overburdened with unnecessary and counterproductive duties. Counselors provide a range of services to students including academic advising and postsecondary counseling, mental health and personal counseling, and drug abuse and violence prevention. Retaining a strict focus on these duties is essential to improving student achievement, as is eliminating administrative and other duties unrelated to counseling.

(4) Within such tight time and work constraints, counselors need training and support to ensure access to the most current college application and financial aid information or risk falling behind in the effort to inform students about postsecondary options.

(5) Research indicates that most counseling graduate programs do not include coursework in college admission counseling. Few programs offer such courses, and there are no required courses for aspiring counselors in college admission counseling.

#### DEFINITIONS

(a) Eligible entity – An eligible entity for this Act is defined as:

(1) An institution of higher education; or

(2) A partnership consisting of one or more institution of higher education and one or more community organizations such as businesses, professional associations, community-based organizations, philanthropic organizations, State agencies, or other public or private agencies or organizations.

(b) School counselor – A school counselor is defined as an individual who has documented competence in counseling adolescents on academic matters in a school setting and:

(1) is licensed by the State or certified by an independent professional regulatory authority;

(2) in the absence of such State licensure or certification, possesses national certification in school counseling or a specialty of counseling granted by an independent professional organization; or

(3) holds a minimum of a master's degree in school counseling from a program accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Education Programs or the equivalent.

#### GRADUATE COUNSELING CURRICULUM PILOT PROGRAM

(a) Pilot Program established. Grants will be awarded to institutions of postsecondary education for the development of graduate coursework in college admission counseling. The purposes of the program are to:

(1) improve student preparation for postsecondary education

(2) better train counselors in counseling for postsecondary education

(3) encourage innovation and interdepartmental cooperation to establish graduate coursework in college admission counseling

(4) facilitate the evaluation of new methods of instruction and coursework as they relate to student postsecondary preparation and enrollment

(b) Required uses of funds. Eligible grantees receiving grants under this section shall use grant funds to:

(1) offer a graduate-level course in college admission to students enrolled in graduate counseling programs;

(2) partner with at least one Title I eligible local education agency (school district) to provide the coursework to school counselors free of charge;

(3) establish an assessment that allows students who have completed the coursework to evaluate the outcomes of the coursework related to student postsecondary preparation and enrollment

(c) Allowable uses of funds. Eligible grantees receiving grants under this section may use grant funds to:

- (1) hire an additional instructor to teach graduate coursework in college admission counseling
- (2) present at or convene meetings of counselors, college admission officers, professors, or other related professionals to share information about course requirements, best practices, and assessments;
- (3) develop institutional consortia to offer the same course at several institutions;
- (4) seek recognition as a professional certification or licensing requirement for such coursework;
- (5) disseminate information about the course to state or local education agencies, or to prospective students;
- (6) establish such a course as a distance education course.