



NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND (NCLB) REAUTHORIZATION: 2009 RECOMMENDATIONS

The National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) and its state and regional affiliates represent more than 20,000 college counseling and admission professionals nationwide. As educators dedicated to helping students make the transition to postsecondary education, NACAC members' leading policy priority is solving the college access crisis. In elementary and secondary education, two principles must be addressed to achieve this goal: (1) access to quality counseling on postsecondary preparation and (2) access to college-preparatory curriculum for all students. Additionally, support for school counselors through professional development and inclusion of school counselors in school reform efforts is essential to improving student achievement and college access.

I. Improve access to school counselors for all students.

- ★ Implement the provisions of the *Pathways to College Act* with the purpose of increasing access to school counseling services for the neediest students, reducing the student-to-counselor ratios in the neediest school districts; and removing structural barriers that prevent school counselors from providing effective service to students.
- ★ Amend the Elementary and Secondary School Counseling Program (ESSCP) to increase the authorization to \$75 million; to make necessary changes to ensure program funds reach high schools; and to add a definition of "comprehensive school counseling program" to emphasize college readiness and collaboration with other school-based support staff to reduce barriers to learning and help all students achieve academically.

Rationale: Research conducted by NACAC and in collaboration with our colleagues in the Pathways to College Network shows that access to quality school counseling has a significant impact on the academic achievement and postsecondary planning of all students, but especially low-income students. However, many students don't have access to a school counselor in the critical secondary school years when postsecondary planning must happen. Additionally, many quality school counselors nationwide are overburdened with large student caseloads and non-counselor duties, both of which hinder their abilities to provide quality postsecondary advising.

The Elementary and Secondary School Counseling Program (ESSCP) is the only federal program exclusively designed to provide funds to hire school counselors and other school-based professionals that help eliminate barriers to learning. This small but effective program has only recently been appropriated sufficient funds to allow high schools to receive grants to hire counselors. The addition of a definition of "comprehensive school counseling program" would ensure that grant funds have a direct affect on student achievement and school reform.

II. Fully integrate school counselors into No Child Left Behind.

- ★ Ensure that school counselors are able to receive professional development funding under Title II of NCLB.
- ★ Involve school counselors in the annual review of AYP indicators, and other school reform efforts required under NCLB.

Rationale: No Child Left Behind does not fully integrate school counselors into accountability and school reform programs. Organizations like NACAC, Education Trust, and College Board and have advocated for a stronger counselor presence in the law's provisions. Research proves the positive impact school counselors have on academic achievement and postsecondary planning of students. Their participation in school reform efforts should therefore be encouraged.

III. Improve access to college preparatory curriculum for all students.

- ★ Amend allowable uses of Title I funds to allow the neediest high schools to develop and support innovative approaches to improving curriculum, including dual enrollment or early college programs in partnerships with colleges and universities.
- ★ Provide incentives to allow states to develop more equitable K-12 finance structures.
- ★ Support state innovation in providing expanded curricular opportunities for all students, while maintaining flexibility and state autonomy in developing curriculum standards and content.

Rationale: Successful completion of a college preparatory curriculum is a better predictor of college success than test scores, and is in fact a better predictor of bachelor's degree completion than any other factor (US Department of Education, 1999). Performance in college preparatory courses is the most important factor in admission decisions (NACAC, State of College Admission 2008). Currently, low-income and other underserved students lack access to rigorous curriculum and therefore are not as prepared for postsecondary education as their more affluent counterparts. Although great improvements have been made in the college enrollment and graduation of low income and minority students over the last several decades, the gap between high and low income students in high school graduation, college enrollment, and completion has remained steady for 35 years. Access to rigorous curriculum for all students is the best way to expand access to higher education, increase postsecondary completion, and improve the quality of the workforce.