

POLICY BRIEF: SCHOOL COUNSELING & COLLEGE ACCESS

The Need

In order to be successful in college or career and technical education, students and their families need to be informed on how to best prepare for these postsecondary options. Such preparation includes information on curriculum planning, student financial aid, the college admission process, and career planning. High school students and their families are faced with high-stakes decisions that will affect the rest of the student's life, including their career and lifetime earning potential. With the right resources and training, a school counselor is the best source for this critical information for all students.



Students from all socioeconomic backgrounds need access to school counseling. However, overwhelming student-to-counselor ratios and accompanying counselor case loads prevent the neediest students from obtaining meaningful college planning information in high school, and only a fraction of students are served by and community-based organizations. Additionally, although school counselors are required to hold masters' degrees in counseling in many states, few graduate programs require coursework specifically on college counseling. Research from NACAC and coalition partners reveal that school counselors often seek reliable information on how to advise students on the complex federal student aid system.

NACAC Recommendations & Member Priorities

1. Amend No Child Left Behind to include current the provisions of the *Pathways to College Act* regarding federal support for professional development of school counselors for the neediest school districts, and to emphasize college counseling and postsecondary preparation in school counseling programs.
2. Amend the Elementary and Secondary School Counseling Program to include a definition of "comprehensive school counseling program" that emphasizes college readiness and collaboration with other school-based support staff to reduce barriers to learning and help all students achieve academically.
3. Increase funding for GEAR UP, TRIO and ESSCP for FY2010, programs focused on providing quality counseling services to needy students.

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The Research

Research on college readiness and student achievement often cite the need for all students, but especially low-income and first generation students, to have access to information about how to prepare academically and financially for college. Studies also refer to the need for mentorship—a student's access to an adult who can help them navigate the process of preparing for, applying for, and paying for college (Consortium on Chicago School Research, 2008), a role for which the school counselor is well-suited.

All students need access to quality information about postsecondary education. Regardless of socioeconomic background, students often do not know what coursework would prepare them for college admission or for specific careers (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2008). School counselors are among the best and most easily accessible sources of information about postsecondary preparation.

Low income and minority students often overestimate the cost of tuition and underestimate available aid; they are less informed than other groups about the financial aid process and available aid, and more likely to alter their postsecondary plans as a result (State Higher Education Executive Officers, 2003).

School counselors play a critical role in establishing and maintaining a college-going culture in the school. Because counselors are often the only college educated adults that the neediest students have access to, it is especially important they have the resources to do their job effectively (Council of the Great City Schools, 2008).

Our Partners

NACAC collaborates with the following organizations in support of school counseling programs:

- ★ American School Counseling Association (www.schoolcounselor.org)
- ★ National Alliance of Pupil Services Organizations (www.napso.org)
- ★ National Council for Community and Education Partnerships (www.edpartnerships.org)
- ★ Alliance for Excellent Education (<http://all4ed.org>)
- ★ Council for Opportunity in Education (www.trioprogams.org)