



**National Association for
College Admission Counseling**

Guiding the way to higher education

DRAFT Legislative Language: College Preparatory Counseling

A Bill

To provide funds to local education agencies to hire, train, and support school counselors for the purpose of providing information and guidance to students and their families about preparing for and pursuing postsecondary education.

FINDINGS

(a) An educated workforce is crucial to the success of the American economy. Access to higher education for all students is critical to maintaining an educated workforce.

(1) Over 80 percent of the 23 million jobs that will be created in the next 10 years will require postsecondary education. Only 36% of all 18-24 year olds are currently enrolled in postsecondary education.

(2) Workers with bachelor's degrees earn on average more than \$17,000 annually than those with high school diplomas. Moreover, those who earn bachelor's degrees can be expected to earn \$1 million more over a lifetime than those who only finished high school. Individuals with professional degrees pay more than \$18,000 more in annual taxes than high school graduates.

(3) The unemployment rate of high school dropouts is nearly four times that of college graduates.

(4) More than 12% of the US population aged 25 to 34 that did not complete high school receive public assistance, compared to only .4% of the same age population with bachelor degrees.

(5) Currently, nearly all (87%) of students from the top income quartile enroll in college, while just over half (57%) of students from the lowest income quartile enroll. If this enrollment gap is allowed to continue, the portion of the American population without postsecondary education will grow, while jobs in industries requiring more advanced education also grows. This combination could have devastating impacts on American economic, social, and political health.

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

(1) Research shows that school 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 school counseling would have a significant impact on college access for low-income, rural, and urban students. If

school 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.

(c) 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 250:1. 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 school counseling function is complex, and in some cases, overburdened with unnecessary and counterproductive duties. School 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 school counseling.

(4) Within such tight time and work constraints, school 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 course work 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) A local education agency; or

(2) A partnership consisting of one or more secondary school 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 children and 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.

SCHOOL COUNSELORS AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

(a) Amendments to NCLB – Involve school counselors in efforts to develop, implement and assess programs intended to increase student achievement:

- (1) Provide funding to hire additional school counselors at low-income high schools;
- (2) Involve counselors in their school's annual review of AYP indicators;
- (3) Develop a program that provides each student with an understanding of the academic and career implications of national, state, and local assessment results;
- (4) Employ a comprehensive school counseling program, the purpose of which is to provide rigorous academic preparation for all students, and that promotes regular coordination between school counselors and teachers on curriculum development;
- (5) Support ongoing professional development, in conjunction with NCLB Title I and Title II programs, focused on trends and strategies in school counseling, curriculum, instructional techniques, technology, academic and career advising, and data-driven programs;
- (6) Provide outreach and communication to parents through the school counseling office.

ENHANCED ACCESS TO POSTSECONDARY ADVISING

(a) Required Use of Funds – Grants will be awarded to eligible entities to improve access to quality college counseling for secondary school students. Each program funded under this Act shall:

- (1) be comprehensive in addressing the postsecondary advising needs of all students;
- (2) develop a written comprehensive plan of action that outlines student needs and sets forth goals and objectives for meeting those needs;
- (3) develop an evaluation process that measures progress toward meeting those goals and objectives;
- (4) hire school counselors and support staff to ensure that a postsecondary advisor is available to provide personalized postsecondary planning assistance to all students;
- (5) ensure the availability of a school counselor to coordinate or provide personal post secondary advising services for all students in the school setting;
- (6) ensure each student has at least one meeting with a school counselor or other professional or organization, such as a community based organization (CBO), approved by the school no later than the first semester of the first year of secondary school to discuss postsecondary options, outline postsecondary goals, and create a plan to achieve those goals;

(7) provide outreach between school counselors and other school-approved postsecondary advising professionals and students' families and communities.

(b) Allowable Use of Funds – Programs funded under this Act may use grant awards to:

(1) provide professional development opportunities to school counselors or other school-approved professionals in postsecondary advising

(2) provide access to school counselors or other school-approved professionals outside the school setting, after school, on weekends, or during the summer;

(3) establish and maintain dual-enrollment programs for students;

(4) provide access to college admission representatives, financial aid administrators, career specialists, visits to local college and university campuses, and other contact with postsecondary education professionals

COLLEGE ACCESS INFORMATION

(a) Required Use of Funds – Grants will be awarded to eligible entities to provide information to secondary school students about postsecondary education, preparing for and pursuing postsecondary education, and career options and planning. Each program funded under this Act shall:

(1) purchase and maintain materials about postsecondary options and financial aid for students and their families;

(2) ensure that all students and their families receive information no later than the first semester of their first year in secondary school about high school graduation requirements, grade promotion requirements, available college preparatory curriculum, the college admission process and application procedures, college entrance and achievement tests, federal, state, and local financial aid opportunities, career opportunities, state and local assessment requirements, and any other college or career preparatory information sought by students or their families

(b) Allowable Use of Funds – Programs funded under this Act may use grant awards to:

(1) create and maintain a postsecondary access center in the school setting that provides information on colleges and universities, career opportunities, and financial aid options.

(2) provide opportunities for students to participate in opportunities to explore postsecondary opportunities outside of the school setting, such as college fairs, career fairs, college tours, workplace visits, or other similar activities;

(3) provide workshops or seminars for students and their families on preparing and paying for college, including assistance with the application process, test preparation, writing essays, applying for state, federal, or private financial aid, visiting college and university campuses, choosing and preparing for careers, or any other postsecondary or career information sought by students or their families

- (4) provide programs to highlight various careers or provide access to professionals, to highlight education needed to prepare for such careers and professions.

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.