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CHAPTER 4 SCHOOL COUNSELORS: ACADEMIC AND COLLEGE COUNSELING

Introduction

Using data from NACAC's 2017–18 Counseling Trends Survey, this chapter explores student-to-counselor ratios and college counseling activities.

NACAC's *Statement on Precollege Guidance and Counseling and the Role of the School Counselor* defines precollege counseling as generally including activities that help students: 1) pursue the most challenging curriculum that results in enhanced postsecondary educational options; 2) identify and satisfy attendant requirements for college access; and 3) navigate the maze of financial aid, college choice, and other processes related to college application and admission.¹

School counselors play a key role in assisting students through the transition to postsecondary education. By collaborating with school administrators, teachers, community representatives, government officials, and parents, school counselors can be significant assets throughout the college application and admission process.

Student-to-Counselor Ratios

According to the US Department of Education, in 2015-16 each public school counselor (including pre-kindergarten, elementary, and secondary counselors) was responsible for overseeing 470 students, on average.² US Department of Education data show that student-to-counselor ratios vary widely. Only two

states—New Hampshire and Vermont—had ratios below the 250-to-1 maximum ratio recommended by the American School Counselor Association.³ The states with the highest number of students per counselor included Arizona (902), Michigan (744), California (708), Minnesota (694), and Illinois (676).

(A list of average public school student-to-counselor ratios for all 50 states plus the District of Columbia can be found in Appendix Table B.10.)

Results of NACAC's 2017–18 Counseling Trends Survey indicated the average student-to-counselor ratio for public secondary schools (ending in grade 12), taking into account part-time staff, was 268-to-1.

¹ National Association for College Admission Counseling. (1990). *Statement on Precollege Guidance and the Role of the School Counselor*. Available at: <https://www.nacacnet.org/globalassets/documents/advocacy-and-ethics/statement-of-principles-of-good-practice/roleofschlcounselnew.pdf>.

² US Department of Education. (2016). *Common Core of Data State Nonfiscal Survey Public Elementary/Secondary Education: School Year, 2015–16 Version 1a*. Washington, DC: NCES.

³ American School Counselor Association. (2016). *The role of the school counselor*. Alexandria, VA: ASCA.

Data regarding the extent to which college advising is part of counselors' job responsibilities showed the average student-to-college counselor ratio was 297-to-1.⁴

Public institutions assigned substantially more students to each counselor. There also were significant differences in the student-to-counselor and student-to-college counselor ratios by enrollment size (see Table 12).

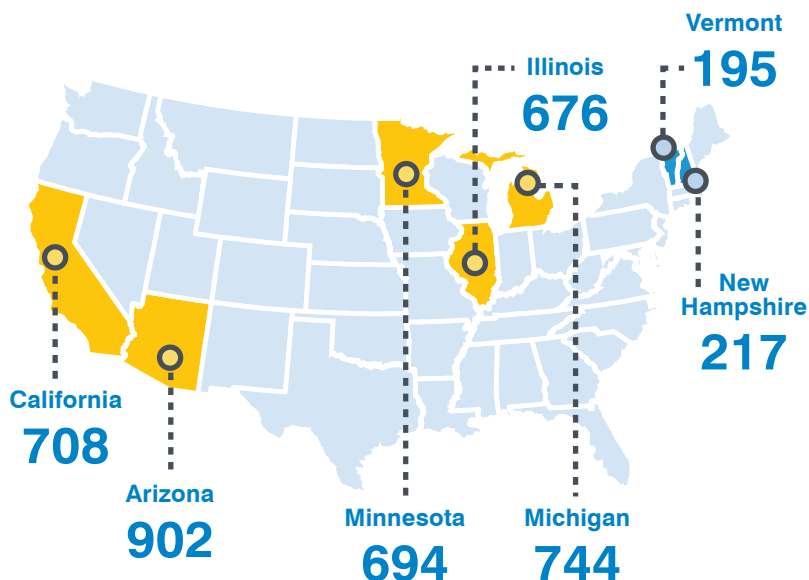
Notably, 75 percent of private, non-parochial schools reported that they employed at least one counselor (full- or part-time) whose sole responsibility was to provide college counseling for students, compared to 58 percent of private, parochial schools, and only 33 percent of public schools. Schools with higher proportions of students eligible for free- and reduced-price lunch and those with higher student-to-counselor ratios also were less likely to have a dedicated college counselor.⁵

Staff Time for College Counseling

Postsecondary admission counseling is one of many functions of school counselors. On average, the time that counselors in secondary schools spend on various tasks breaks down in the following way:

- Postsecondary admission counseling (30 percent)
- Choice and scheduling of high school courses (20 percent)

STATES WITH HIGHEST AND LOWEST RATIOS



- Personal needs counseling (22 percent)
- Academic testing (12 percent)
- Occupational counseling and job placement (6 percent)
- Teaching (6 percent)
- Other non-guidance activities (5 percent)

However, the division of time among these tasks differs significantly based on school

characteristics. For example, the counseling staff at private, non-parochial schools spent an average of 54 percent of their time on college counseling, compared to 39 percent at private, parochial schools, and only 21 percent at public schools. Counselors at schools with more students eligible for free- and reduced-price lunch spent less time on postsecondary admission counseling, as did those with larger enrollments and higher student-to-counselor ratios (see Table 13).

⁴ The student-to-college counselor ratio is based on both the total number of counselors who exclusively provide college counseling for students and the total number who provide college counseling among other services for students. As such, it overestimates the focus on college counseling. Both full-time and part-time counselors were included in this calculation.

⁵ T\Chi-squared test for exclusive college counselor and: institution type ($X^2(2) = 223.5, V = .343, p < .001$; Correlation (Spearman's Rho) for exclusive college counselor and: percent eligible for FRPL (.174), students per counselor (.398), $p < .01$).

TABLE 12. AVERAGE STUDENT-TO-COUNSELOR AND STUDENT-TO-COLLEGE COUNSELOR RATIOS, BY SCHOOL TYPE AND ENROLLMENT, 2017–18

	Students per Counselor	Students per College Counselor
Total	243	297
<i>Type</i>		
Public	268	313
Private	188	263
<i>Private non-parochial</i>	181	254
<i>Private parochial</i>	198	276
<i>Enrollment</i>		
Fewer than 500 students	179	213
500 to 999	283	341
1,000 to 1,499	282	340
1,500 to 1,999	304	389
2,000 or more students	338	466
<i>Free and Reduced Price Lunch (FRPL)</i>		
0 to 25% of students eligible	215	285
26 to 50%	278	321
51 to 75%	277	311
76 to 100%	238	283

SOURCE: NACAC Counseling Trends Survey, 2017–18.

NOTE: One-way ANOVAs showed there was a statistical difference between school type and: the number of students per counselor ($F(2, 1,890) = 53.3, p < .001$); the number of students per college counselor ($F(2, 1889) = 10.8, p < .01$). Correlation (Pearson R) for enrollment and: students per counselor (.323), students per college counselor (.347), $p < .01$.

TABLE 13. PERCENTAGE OF TIME COUNSELING STAFF SPENT ON VARIOUS TASKS, BY SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS: 2017–18

	Postsecondary admission counseling	Choice and scheduling of high school courses	Personal needs counseling	Academic testing	Occupational counseling and job placement	Teaching	Other non-guidance activities
All Schools	29.5%	20.1%	21.6%	12.2%	5.7%	5.5%	5.4%
<i>Type</i>							
Public	21.4	23.0	25.2	13.2	6.8	4.9	5.6
Private	47.3	13.9	13.8	10.2	3.1	6.8	5.0
<i>Private non-parochial</i>	53.7	12.2	10.3	9.3	2.4	7.2	5.0
<i>Private parochial</i>	38.7	16.2	18.4	11.5	4.0	6.3	5.0
<i>Enrollment</i>							
Fewer than 500 students	30.6	17.2	19.6	13.2	5.8	7.4	6.2
500 to 999	31.8	19.0	21.5	12.8	5.5	4.3	5.1
1,000 to 1,499	28.7	24.1	23.5	10.9	5.7	3.4	3.8
1,500 to 1,999	24.2	25.6	27.5	9.0	5.8	3.5	4.3
2,000 or more	20.0	29.5	25.6	9.6	5.5	4.2	5.6
<i>Free and Reduced Price Lunch (FRPL)</i>							
0 to 25% of students eligible	38.5	17.9	18.9	10.5	4.5	5.3	4.4
26 to 50%	20.5	22.9	25.7	13.2	7.0	5.1	5.6
51 to 75%	19.7	22.0	24.0	15.3	6.8	5.5	6.6
76 to 100%	19.8	23.4	24.6	13.5	7.1	5.0	6.7
<i>Students per Counselors</i>							
100 or fewer	35.4	16.2	19.4	11.3	5.1	7.3	5.2
101 to 200	34.9	18.8	19.9	11.3	5.1	5.4	4.7
201 to 300	25.7	21.4	23.4	12.9	6.2	4.8	5.8
301 to 400	22.0	24.4	23.5	13.6	6.1	5.3	5.1
401 to 500	23.5	21.3	24.0	12.3	6.8	4.0	8.2
More than 500	25.0	19.9	22.3	14.7	5.7	6.0	6.3

SOURCE: NACAC Counseling Trends Survey, 2017–18.

Note: One-way ANOVAs showed there was a statistical difference between the percentage of time spent on college counseling and school type: $F(2, 1881) = 539.5, p < .001$. Correlation (Pearson R) for percentage of time spent on college counseling and: enrollment ($-.133$), percentage of students eligible for FRPL ($-.446$), student-to-counselor ratio ($-.199$), $p < .01$.