

Response to Public Agenda Report

A recently released study by Public Agenda illustrates what can go wrong when there are not enough school counselors to support students and when school counselors are placed in positions preventing them from performing the functions they were trained and hired to do. Although the American School Counselor Association, the American Counseling Association, the American Psychological Association, the American Medical Association and other organizations recommend a pupil-to-school-counselor ratio of 250-to-1, the national average is 460 students to one school counselor, with some school districts as high as 1,000-to-1.

The result, as this study confirms, is a significantly decreased ability of school counselors to work individually with students in navigating the complex financial aid and college admission process.

In addition, as the study notes, school counselors are increasingly called on to do work outside of their mission, including: "discipline issues and sorting out scheduling and other administrative mix-ups with the high school."

ASCA agrees with many of the conclusions of the Public Agenda study: more school counselors are needed, and existing school counselors should not be overloaded with non-counseling duties preventing them from spending time successfully guiding students to academic success and postsecondary education. ASCA works closely with school administrators, professional school counselors and the colleges that train school counselors to ensure the highest level of professionalism, but the burden on even the best school counselors has obvious implications for their ability to help students.

ASCA believes the findings of this study can serve as a wake-up call that could bring about substantial and needed changes. The study points out that "young people who characterized their interactions with counselors as anonymous and unhelpful were less likely to go directly from high school into a postsecondary program." Therefore, strong relationships between school counselors and students can lead to more students seeking postsecondary education. This is a good opportunity to provide a positive perspective on the problems and to highlight the need for supporting school counselors so they can be effective, rather than eliminating their positions because some consider them to be ineffective.

ASCA hopes to work with policymakers, education leaders and the Gates Foundation, which underwrote this survey, to place more certified professional school counselors in our schools and to allow them to help students improve academic achievement, career planning including postsecondary education, and personal and social development.

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Talking Points from Richard Wong, ASCA Executive Director

Talking Points in Response to Public Agenda Study: "Can I Get a Little Advice Here"

The recent report ("Can I Get a Little Advice Here") by Public Agenda brings to light the challenges school counselors face and how those challenges ultimately affect students. The report presents a good opportunity to effect substantial and needed change in the education system.

The recent report ("Can I Get a Little Advice Here") by Public Agenda reflects what we as school counselors have known for years, the serious shortage of school counselors threatens our ability to serve all students to the best of our abilities. The lack of meaningful interaction between students and school counselors is related to decreased enrollment in postsecondary education.

Our job as school counselors is to help students improve academic achievement, career and postsecondary education planning and personal/social development for every student. Unfortunately non-counseling duties often limit our ability to provide students with the assistance they need.

The facts are clear: the ratio of students to school counselors is too high. The recommended ratio is 250 students to one school counselor, but the current K-12 national average is 460 to 1 and in some districts, it's as high as 1,000 to 1.

Through the American School Counseling Association and (the state school counselor association), we will continue to work with policymakers, education leaders and other organizations to place more certified professional school counselors in our schools and to allow us to do what we were trained and hired to do.