



Virginia School Counselor Association Urges the Virginia General Assembly to Increase Student Access to School Counselors

Virginia School Counselors:

- Hold a *minimum* of a Master's Degree in counseling, which *exceeds* the educational requirement of Virginia's Qualified Mental Health Professionals (QMHP-C) and *meets* Virginia's degree program requirements for Licensed Professional Counselors (LPC).
- Receive 700+ supervised hours of clinical practicum and internship experience counseling students in the school setting prior to completion of a CACREP* graduate program.
- Receive mandatory mental health training in the recognition of mental health disorder and behavioral distress, including depression, trauma, violence, youth suicide, and substance abuse (SB1117).
- Are specifically trained to provide social/emotional learning, prevention programs, mental and behavioral support, and crisis response in the school setting, in addition to academic and career development.

Steps In The Right Direction in 2019 GA Session:

- **Passed House Bill No. 1729** – amends the Code of Virginia by adding a section:
§22.1-291.1:1. School counselors; staff time: *Each school counselor employed by a school board in a public elementary or secondary school shall spend at least 80 percent of his staff time during normal school hours in the direct counseling of individual student or groups of students.*
- **Passed Senate Bill No. 1406 and partially funded at \$12 million.**
 - Changes the name of guidance counselors to school counselors and requires school boards to employ school counselors in accordance with a 3 year phase-in of improved school counselor-to-student ratios with an ultimate goal of 1 school counselor for every 250 students in grades Kindergarten through 12 as recommended by the Virginia Board of Education (Annual Report: November 2016, also proposed 2019) and the American School Counselor Association (ASCA). Total cost will be \$82-84 million.
 - Proposed budget to fully fund SB1406 and HB2053 for 2019 was \$36 million.

VSCA's Recommendations

Standards of Quality Revision

- The Virginia School Counselor Association supports an update to the Standards of Quality (SOQ) as proposed by the Virginia Board of Education especially related to changes in instructional (school counselors), administrative, support personnel, and staffing requirements.
- Fully fund SB1406 that was passed in the 2019 GA session
- ***Fully fund further lower staffing ratios to the national recommendation: Local school boards shall employ one full-time equivalent school counselor position per 250 students, with no caseload being larger than 300 in grades Kindergarten through 12.***

Rationale

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- A comprehensive school counseling program in every elementary, middle, and high school is a necessary component of any effort directed at school safety (Nims, 2000).
- School counselors can be catalysts for identifying students with depression and suicidal thoughts (Erickson & Abel, 2013).
- Schools with lower school counselor to student ratios had statistically significant lower rates of student suspensions and fewer disciplinary incidents (Lapan, Whitcomb, & Aleman, 2012)
- Students with access to school counselors and comprehensive school counseling programs are more likely to achieve academically and behaviorally, particularly students in high-poverty schools (Lapan, Gysbers, Stanley, & Pierce, 2012).
- Students in schools with more fully implemented school counseling programs had a more positive perception of school climate and safety within their school (Lapan, Gysbers, & Petroski, 2001).
- In Colorado, reducing school counselor-to-student ratios yielded a highly lucrative return on the state's investment, totaling approximately \$319,842,750 or \$20 saved for every \$1 invested in school counselors (Colorado Department of Education, 2016).

Guidance Counselor versus School Counselor

What's the difference?

Guidance Counselors	School Counselors
Guidance Counselors focused on vocational guidance	School Counselors focus on social/emotional, academic, and career/college development
Guidance Counselors worked in isolation within schools	School Counselors work in collaboration with teachers, administrators, parents, outside counseling agencies, and other stakeholders
Guidance Counselors did not have set standards for practice	The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) released the ASCA National Model: A Framework for School Counseling programs in 2002
Guidance Counselors worked mostly at the high school level, and only with some students	School Counselors are educators trained to work with ALL students K-12

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