



Annual School Counselor Legislative Education Day

May 14, 2021

About MSCA:

The Michigan School Counselor Association (MSCA) seeks to promote academic excellence in professional school counseling by strengthening the identity and competencies of professional school counselors so that they may more effectively serve students, parents, teachers, employers, and communities. The association represents over 600 school counselors across the state.

School Counselors:

- have a minimum of a master's degree in school counseling, must pass the Michigan School Counselor Exam, and meet state certification/licensure requirements;
- provide school-based mental health services that help link behavior, environmental factors (e.g., family, classroom, school, community), instruction, and learning;
- focus on helping students address their academic, social/emotional, and college/career development goals;
- work to promote safe learning environments for all members of the school community.

Michigan's Student - to - School Counselor ratio: 49th worst in Nation!

Research-based recommended ratio:
250 to 1

Michigan's student-to-school counselor ratio:
691 to 1

National average:
430 to 1

For 2018-19, based upon most recent data available from the National Center for Education Statistics

Impact of the Pandemic on Students & Learning

- In the last year, many students have been exposed to trauma, physical isolation, disengagement from peers, and a multitude of other factors that have the potential to negatively impact their mental health, academic success, and career readiness.
- As students transition back into the schools, it is imperative that social/emotional learning and supports are established early and often so that students can find comfort, security, and safety from trusted adults in the school community.

Lack of access to school counselors impedes recovery

- Where accessible, school counselors are typically the first school-employed mental health professional to interact with students. Not only do school counselors identify the mental health needs of students, but school counselors also work with parents and teachers on recouping learning loss due to the pandemic and preparing students for postsecondary success.

What About Mandated Ratios?

- **House Bill 4156:** earlier this year, Rep. Felicia Brabec (D-Pittsfield Twp.), together with 36 cosponsors, introduced a bill mandating that all schools maintain a pupil-to-school counselor ratio of 450 to 1 (the research-based recommended ratio is 250:1). The bill was referred to the House Education Committee. Not everyone will support this solution to Michigan's students' lack of access to school counselors, specifically because of "Headlee" concerns that this would be an unfunded mandate. Still, MSCA is grateful to Rep. Brabec for starting the conversation this session about this serious problem.
- **However, mandated student-to-school counselor ratios will not guarantee desired outcomes,** especially if school counselors are required to spend the majority of their time on inappropriate activities, displacing direct student services and other activities appropriate to the role of a school counselor. See separate ASCA handout "Appropriate and Inappropriate Activities for School Counselors."

Proposal to Allocate Federal Relief Funds for a Michigan Comprehensive School Counseling (SC) Grant Program

- MSCA urges lawmakers to follow Colorado's success and establish a Comprehensive School Counseling Grant Program designed to address issues created or exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- In 2008, Colorado established a School Counselor Corps Grant Program (SCCGP) to provide competitive grants to school districts to increase the availability and effectiveness of school-based counseling services for secondary school students. State leaders created the program to improve graduation rates and increase percentages of students preparing for, applying to, and continuing on to advanced education and training programs. A similar program was just initiated in Utah to provide matching grants to hire licensed school counselors to serve elementary students.
- Rep. Alex Garza (D-Taylor) recently reintroduced legislation, HB 4548, creating a \$5 million School Counselor Corps Grant program "to support districts in providing effective school counseling to pupils." MSCA is grateful to Rep. Garza for his leadership on this issue. Our proposal is similar HB 4548 but includes a focus on responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and is designed to have lower administrative costs.

The Purpose of the Michigan SC Grant Program: to develop comprehensive school counseling programs to impact the following metrics:

- Academics - improve graduation rates and "on-track" for graduation; reading scores (3rd grade); recoup learning loss due to the pandemic
- Social/Emotional - provide Social/Emotional Learning (SEL) to support student mental health - this will impact attendance rates and academic performance
- College/Career - improve matriculation to postsecondary institutions; improve degrees/certifications earned - postsecondary completion rates; increased career development awareness that filter into career and technical education programming.

Existing Funding

31a, At-Risk Funding: MSCA is extremely grateful for legislators' support of At-Risk funding in the School Aid budget, funding which schools may use to support school counselor positions (Sect. 31a, current year funding = \$522 million). Still, out of 889 school districts in the state, 345 report having no school counselors.

31n, School Mental Health and Support Services: While the funding in the School Aid budget for School Mental Health and Support Services is important and impactful, grants are based upon a *Medicaid-reimbursement model for mental health services* (Section 31n, recently increased from \$39 million to \$ \$55.6 million using federal relief funds). The preventive and early intervention services provided by school counselors, impacting academic, social/emotional and career success, are NOT covered by Sect. 31n.

MSCA's Other Top Priority:

Please Support Pending Legislation Addressing Implementation Problems with New Professional Development Requirements for School Counselors

MSCA is very grateful to the efforts of Sen. Lana Theis (R-Brighton) and Sen. Jeff Irwin (D-Ann Arbor) to develop legislation last session addressing implementation problems with PA 151 of 2017. SBs 805-806 (which we expect to be reintroduced) would: extend the deadline for school counselors to meet the new professional development requirements, to allow adequate time for all school counselors to access quality professional development; expand professional development opportunities to include Department Provided Professional Development (DPPD) and college course work which meet the MDE standards; and allow individuals currently teaching in the classroom and not serving as school counselors, to either nullify or suspend their school counselor credential, without impacting their teaching certificate. We expect the bills to be reintroduced this session with some revisions.

FINALLY, Thank You for Preserving Options for Fulfilling 2nd Year Foreign Language Graduation Requirements!

MSCA would like to thank Sen. Jim Stamas for taking leadership on this issue, and for all the lawmakers last session who supported Senate Bill 171, now Public Act 158 of 2020.

As some lawmakers may recall from the 2019-2020 session, legislative action was needed to preserve the option for students to fulfill the second-year foreign language requirement for graduation by taking career technology and vocational education or visual and performing arts instruction. Without a statutory change, these options were set to expire for students graduating after 2024.

Again, thank you to Senator Stamas for sponsoring the legislation, thank you to lawmakers who supported the bill, and thank you to Gov. Whitmer for signing it into law!