

04

Chapter 4 School Counselors: Academic and College Counseling

Introduction

Using data from NACAC's 2018–19 Counseling Trends Survey and the US Department of Education, this chapter explores student-to-counselor ratios and college counseling activities.

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. Counselors serve an important role in advising students as they progress through secondary school

and prepare for college. Pre-college counseling generally includes activities that help students meet requirements for postsecondary attendance, pursue challenging courses, and navigate the college admission process.

Student-to-Counselor Ratios

According to the US Department of Education, in 2016–17 each public school counselor was responsible for overseeing 455 students, on average,¹ which exceeds the 250-to-1 maximum ratio recommended by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA).² Student-to-counselor ratios also vary widely by state. Only two states—New

Hampshire and Vermont—had ratios below ASCA's recommended threshold. The states with the highest number of students per counselor included Arizona (905), Michigan (741), Illinois (686), California (663), Minnesota (659), and Utah (648).

(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.3.)

Taking into account part-time staff, results of NACAC's 2018–19 Counseling Trends Survey indicated the average overall student-to-counselor ratio for public secondary schools (ending in grade 12) was 263-to-1. Data regarding the extent to which college advising is part

¹ US Department of Education. (2018). *Common Core of Data State Nonfiscal Survey Public Elementary/Secondary Education: School Year, 2016–17 Version 1a*. Washington, DC: NCES. Note: Calculation includes all students and counselors in the state (pre-kindergarten, elementary, and secondary counselors) except for adult education.

² American School Counselor Association. (2016). *The role of the school counselor*. Alexandria, VA: ASCA.

³ 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.

of counselors' job responsibilities showed the average student-to-college counselor ratio was 309-to-1.³ Public institutions assigned substantially more students to each counselor. There also were significant differences in the student-to-counselor ratios by enrollment size (see Table 10).

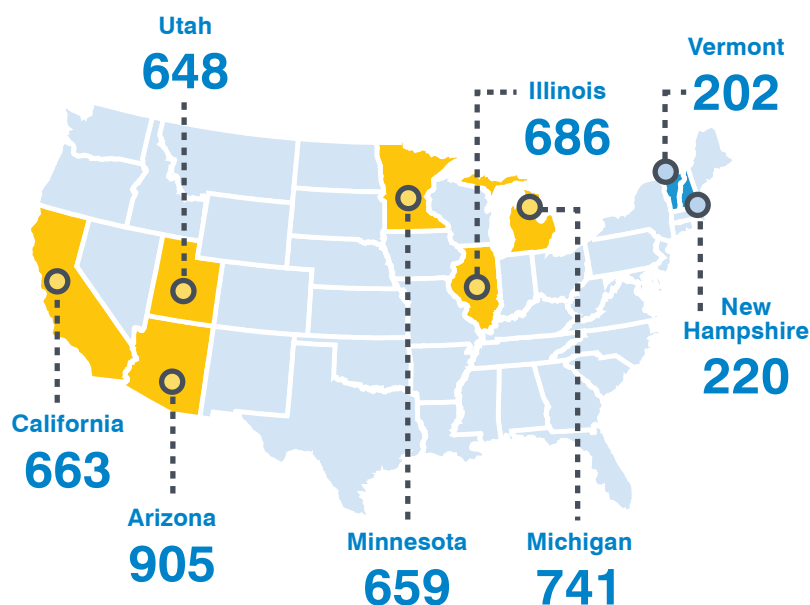
Notably, 48 percent of private schools reported that they employed at least one counselor (full- or part-time) whose sole responsibility was to provide college counseling for students, compared to only 29 percent of public schools. Schools with higher student-to-counselor ratios also were less likely to have a counselor whose duties were dedicated to college counseling.⁴

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 (20 percent)
- Choice and scheduling of high school courses (23 percent)
- Personal needs counseling (26 percent)
- Academic testing (13 percent)
- Occupational counseling and job placement (7 percent)

STATES WITH HIGHEST AND LOWEST RATIOS



- Teaching (5 percent)
- Other non-guidance activities (6 percent)

However, the division of time among these tasks differs significantly based on school characteristics. For example, the counseling staff at private schools spent an average of 31 percent of their time on college counseling, while counselors at public schools

spent only 19 percent of their time on that task. Counselors at schools with more students eligible for free- and reduced-price lunch spent less time on postsecondary admission counseling than counselors whose schools served more affluent populations (see Table 11).

(See Appendix Table B.4 for a correlation matrix of significant associations for time spent on various job responsibilities and school characteristics.)

⁴ Chi-squared test for exclusive college counselor and institution type ($X^2(2) = 44.0, V = .141, p < .01$; Correlation (Spearman's Rho) for exclusive college counselor and students per counselor ($-.388, p < .01$).

TABLE 10. AVERAGE STUDENT-TO-COUNSELOR AND STUDENT-TO-COLLEGE COUNSELOR RATIOS, BY SCHOOL TYPE AND ENROLLMENT, 2018–19

	Students per Counselor	Students per College Counselor
Total	263	309
<i>Type</i>		
Public	274	319
Private	192	244
<i>Enrollment</i>		
Fewer than 500 students	203	224
500 to 999	291	339
1,000 to 1,499	302	369
1,500 to 1,999	316	409
2,000 or more students	375	477
<i>Free and Reduced Price Lunch (FRPL)</i>		
0 to 25% of students eligible	243	300
26 to 50%	277	328
51 to 75%	285	331
76 to 100%	244	272

SOURCE: NACAC Counseling Trends Survey, 2018–19.

NOTE: Independent *t*-test indicated significant difference by control in both students per counselor ($t(2,195) = 7.4$) and students per college counselor ($t(2,187) = 4.7$), $p < .01$. Correlation (Pearson *R*) for enrollment and: students per counselor (.537), students per college counselor (.464), $p < .01$.

TABLE 11. PERCENTAGE OF TIME COUNSELING STAFF SPENT ON VARIOUS TASKS, BY SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS: 2018–19

	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	20.1%	22.6%	26.6%	13.2%	6.7%	5.1%	5.7%
<i>Type</i>							
Public	18.5	23.7	27.2	13.3	6.9	4.6	5.8
Private	30.6	15.9	22.4	12.8	5.4	8.0	5.5
<i>Enrollment</i>							
Fewer than 500 students	20.6	18.9	25.4	14.1	7.5	7.1	6.3
500 to 999	21.4	22.0	27.0	14.1	6.4	3.8	5.2
1,000 to 1,499	19.3	26.7	27.7	11.8	6.3	3.0	5.2
1,500 to 1,999	17.4	27.7	29.0	11.7	5.5	3.3	5.4
2,000 or more	17.5	32.3	27.0	9.8	5.4	2.8	5.1
<i>Free and Reduced Price Lunch (FRPL)</i>							
0 to 25% of students eligible	26.5	19.6	25.1	12.2	5.7	5.8	5.1
26 to 50%	18.4	23.5	27.1	13.2	7.2	5.0	5.5
51 to 75%	18.0	23.6	25.8	14.7	6.9	4.8	6.2
76 to 100%	17.1	23.8	27.9	13.4	7.2	4.3	6.3
<i>Students per Counselors</i>							
100 or fewer	20.5	19.6	27.4	11.6	7.4	7.1	6.5
101 to 200	22.3	20.6	26.2	12.5	6.7	6.3	5.4
201 to 300	19.5	23.3	26.9	13.9	6.7	4.3	5.4
301 to 400	18.5	25.5	26.2	13.2	6.7	3.9	6.1
401 to 500	18.5	23.3	28.1	14.1	6.6	3.9	5.6
More than 500	19.4	22.8	24.5	16.9	5.5	4.4	6.4

SOURCE: NACAC Counseling Trends Survey, 2018–19.

NOTE: Independent *t*-test showed difference by school type in percentage of time spent on postsecondary counseling ($t(2194) = -15.4$, $p < .01$). Correlation (Pearson *R*) for percentage of time spent on postsecondary counseling and percentage of students eligible for FRPL ($-.254$), $p < .01$.