



Southern Connecticut State University

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In reference to

H.B. No. 5005 AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30,
2021

Appropriations Subcommittee on Elementary and Secondary Education

Public Hearing - February 13, 2020

Senator Osten and Representative Walker and esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Margaret Generali and I am a school counselor educator at Southern Connecticut State University and a member of the Connecticut School Counseling Association's Government Relations Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to share in regard to **H.B. No. 5005 AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2021.**

In making these critical budgetary decisions, please consider the importance of school counselors at the elementary school level. School counseling programs provide students with the necessary supports to be successful in school. These supports target critical areas for student development in the following domains: academic, social-emotional, and post-secondary/career. The American School Counselor Association identifies these domains as a guide for services provided to students in grades Kindergarten through 12. At present, a limited number of students at the elementary level have access to these services, leaving them at a disadvantage to their peers. Students who may benefit most from these services are likely not receiving them. Research suggest that high risk behaviors have already begun in middle school. Students adopt an attitude toward school and the world of work during these early years. Weaknesses in emotional regulation skills that are not resolved during these early years, if not addressed, may result in maladaptive behaviors. This further complicates the ability of school personnel to support these students. Education and intervention must occur earlier than middle school.

Schools with elementary school counselor programs provide students with an additional layer of protection. Schools without elementary school counselors represent missed opportunities and are denying students of equal access to supportive services. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) position statement underscores the need for a comprehensive school counseling program for all students as a means to improve "student learning and behavioral outcomes" (Carey & Dimmitt, 2012). Further, research supports the impact of SEL interventions on academic achievement in grades K through 12 (Bavarian, et al., 2013; Durlak et al., 2011; Hanedana & Darling-Hammond, 2015). Research supports the effectiveness of primary prevention and early intervention as key factors for school success.

In order to provide primary prevention and early intervention, school counselors need to be positioned at the elementary school level. Every student deserves this level of consistent support provided by the implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program. Elementary school counselors do not work in isolation. In fact, school counselors are specifically trained to work collaboratively with teachers

and other helping professionals to support students. It is this collaborative mindset and subsequent behaviors that ensures that students K-12 are identified and supported to impact success in academic, social-emotional, and post-secondary/career domains.

Another critical factor related to effectively supporting students is school counselor- student ratio (caseload). Early in my career, I worked as a middle school counselor in an urban public-school setting. My caseload varied from year to year based on the budget and hiring practices in the district. Any given year, I would have 250-500 students on my caseload. I worked tirelessly to support the students in most need, providing reactive services to students who presented from day to day. Yet, I knew there was more I could do for my students and early intervention was critical. Student access to services is directly impacted by student-school counselor ratios. The American School Counselor Association recommends a 1:250 counselor: student ratio.

For the past 13 years, as a school counselor educator, I have trained the next generation of school counselors. I am confident that I have prepared them to provide best practices in their service to students. They are not only knowledgeable about child development and learning, they have expertise in classroom strategies and primary prevention. School counselors are prepared to identify needs, plan interventions and access ancillary services for the students under their care. School counselors are trained to collaborate with teachers and other school support staff to provide students with a comprehensive school counseling program to meet the needs of all students. Unfortunately, there exists a disparity in the range of services provided by school counselors across the state of Connecticut. This disparity is, in large part, related to the unrealistic school counselor-student ratios.

At this time, I am asking that you make school counseling services a priority in our state. Help to provide budgetary support for schools so children will have access to a school counselor at all developmental levels, beginning in the early schooling years. With appropriate student-to-school counselor ratios and an increase in access to student support services, the students in Connecticut will be better able to access the supports that they need to succeed in school and life.

Please ensure that all students have access to school counseling services that provides academic, social-emotional and post-secondary/career readiness programming throughout their school career.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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