



# Southern Connecticut State University

Testimony of Jennifer Parzych, Ph.D.  
Southern Connecticut State University  
Department of Counseling and School Psychology

*in regards 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, Representative Walker, and respected members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Jennifer Parzych and I am a school counselor educator at Southern Connecticut State University, former middle and high school counselor, as well as a member of the Connecticut School Counselor Association's Government Relations Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony in matters related to H.B. No. 5005 AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2021. **Specifically, supporting equitable access to comprehensive school counseling programs across the state through direct funding,** or through a separate fund.

**Disparate ranges of school counselor-to-student ratios exist in Connecticut, dependent on grade level and location.** The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) recommends a 1:250 ratio. In Connecticut, the average ratio is 1:441. Connecticut ranks 32<sup>nd</sup> in the nation, with four northeast states ranking in the top 10 and none below us. As principal investigator of a research team studying the impact of ratios on student outcomes specifically in Connecticut (Parzych, Donohue, Gaesser, Chiu, 2019), state-level data was analyzed to identify higher- and lower-performing schools at each grade level (elementary, middle, high), and location (urban, suburban, rural). High-performing schools were defined as those that had a combination of highest values of graduation rates plus college-going rates plus achievement scores and lowest values of suspension plus absenteeism rates. Low-performing schools were defined as those with the opposite combination – lowest values of graduation rates plus college-going rates plus achievement scores and highest values of suspension plus absenteeism rates. Significantly higher school-counselor-to-student ratios exist in lower-performing schools (e.g., high school = 1:285, middle school = 1:891) versus caseloads in higher-performing schools (e.g., high school = 1:182, middle school = 1:211). Additionally, limited access to elementary level school counseling services exists in Connecticut. Approximately three-quarters (74%) of school districts provide no comprehensive school counseling services to K–5 students. In those that do, school counselors in lowest SES districts often need to split their time between more than one elementary school providing service to 800+ students, whereas highest SES districts with elementary school counselors are meeting the ASCA recommended 1:250 ratio.

**Socioeconomic status and community resources have an impact on the ability of school counselors to effectively deliver comprehensive school counseling programs.** When comprehensive school counseling programs are fully implemented, direct services delivered emphasize prevention interventions for all students in their academic, social-emotional, and career development needs, as well as provide responsive services for the smaller percentage of student population in times of critical

need. In discussion with school counselors from across the state, including different grade levels and District Reference Groups (DRGs), I continue to gain perspective not readily apparent from publicly available student performance data alone. For example, in some rural communities with limited access to services due to availability, distance, or transportation, there is an expectation that student mental health is fully served through school support services (school counselors, social workers, school psychologists). To meet the increasing needs (i.e., anxiety, depression, dysregulation), the proactive prevention programs found through the school counseling curriculum and designed to be delivered to all students, is frequently eliminated in response. School counselors in urban districts report similar challenges, where their school days are spent in “reactive, survival mode.” While school counselor-to-student ratios are generally lower in more affluent, suburban communities, significant concern has also been expressed by counselors if their ratios were to increase. School counselors in some of the higher SES communities report their ability to serve students with their academic, social-emotional, and career development needs would be negatively impacted given the significant increase in mental health issues.

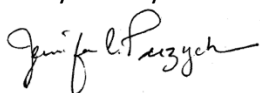
### **Students in districts with elementary school counselors have improved performance**

**outcomes versus districts without.** Currently, 26% of districts in Connecticut employ school counselors across all grade levels. Students in districts that have K–12 school counselors produce higher graduation rates, higher college entrance and persistence rates, lower chronic absenteeism rates and fewer out-of-school suspensions when compared to districts with school counselors beginning in grade 6. Improved performance outcomes are seen across urban, suburban and rural locations. For example, in districts with K–12 school counselors, 69.4% report graduation rates greater than 90%, compared to districts without elementary school counselors, where only 45.8% report graduation rates greater than 90%.

Access to a school counselor should not be an amenity reserved for students with privileged backgrounds. Research indicates regular access to a school counselor is a necessity, particularly for students most in need of intervention and support in high-poverty districts (Carrell & Carrell, 2006; Lapan, Gysbers, Stanley & Pierce, 2016; McIntosh, 2010; Uthall, 2006). Further, results from the current Connecticut study suggest that context matters. School counselor-to-student ratios may be optimal at 1:250, but grade level and socioeconomic factors of a district require close consideration.

Poverty impacts students’ lives in multiple ways. It is no secret that students in high poverty schools are left at a disadvantage in comparison to students in more affluent districts. Access to support staff is essential in order to provide services to combat poverty related impact such as food and home insecurity, environmental stress, and home-school connection.

Thank you for your time and consideration.



Jennifer L. Parzych, Ph.D.  
School Counseling Program Coordinator and Associate Professor  
Southern Connecticut State University  
[Parzychj1@southernct.edu](mailto:Parzychj1@southernct.edu)

Connecticut School Counselor Association  
Government Relations Committee, Member