

Samantha Collins



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Testimony of Samantha Collins
[College & Career Counselor; Director, CT School Counselor Association]

in regards to

H.B. No. 6439 (COMM) AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH, 2023, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR

Appropriations Subcommittee
Public Hearing – March 1, 2021

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Samantha Collins and I am a counselor in Connecticut and a Connecticut School Counselor Association Board of Directors Member. Thank you for the opportunity to offer **testimony in strong support of the need for school counselors and other support services in all of Connecticut's public schools in regards to H.B. No. 6439 (COMM) AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH, 2023, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.**

Research shows that implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program has a positive impact on student outcomes, including **improved attendance, reduced discipline, improved grades, increased SAT scores, increased graduation rates, increased college-going and persistence rates.** A K-12 comprehensive school counseling program is planned, sequential, developmentally appropriate and is delivered by a certified school counselor with adequate training. Comprehensive school counseling programs address each student's social-emotional, career, post-secondary planning, and academic needs. A comprehensive school counseling program is data driven, and includes a collaboration effort with school administrators, classroom teachers, student support services, school staff, parents, and community stakeholders. This cannot happen without school counselors in all of Connecticut's public schools. Currently, **fewer than 25% of Connecticut's elementary school children have access to school counselors and comprehensive school counseling programming.** Recent research in Connecticut has identified that students in **districts with elementary school counselors have improved performance outcomes versus districts without,** regardless of location or socioeconomic status (Parzych, Donohue, Gaesser, Chiu, 2019). The elementary school years set the foundation for developing the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary for children to become healthy, competent, and confident learners.

Connecticut is **37th** in the nation in student to school counselor ratios at 457:1. School counseling positions were actually **cut** in some districts during a global pandemic in which the students of Connecticut need access to social emotional, academic, and career support more than ever. Funding needs to be directed towards student support services. It is unfair and unethical that students have to bear economic and health-related stress with less support. Their parents are unemployed, they are worried about contracting COVID in school and bringing it home to their older relatives, and they are managing an entirely new school routine. They are stressed, they are worried, and they are scared. The adults of Connecticut need to support our future, our children. After an extended period of distance/hybrid learning, our students will need school counselors more than ever. Educators and students cannot continue to perform at the same level when their environment continually becomes more challenging due to increased pressures and diminished resources. It is time that Connecticut funds the recommended school counselor ratio of 250:1 or less.

I respectfully encourage the appropriations committee to address the lack of adequate financial support for school counseling positions in the state of Connecticut. I would ask that you adopt guidelines and recommendations for appropriate student-to-school counselor ratios and funding to increase access to student support services. Research in Connecticut shows that lower-performing schools and schools in lower-socioeconomic status communities maintain higher caseloads than higher-performing schools (Parzych, Donohue, Gaesser, Chiu, 2019).
In CT:

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- High-performing schools average school counselor-to-student ratios:
 - High School Level = 1:182, Middle School Level = 1:211
- Low-performing schools average school counselor-to-student ratios:
 - High School Level = 1:285, Middle School Level = 1:891

Lowering ratios allows school counselors to effectively deliver a comprehensive school counseling program to better meet students' academic, career, post-secondary planning, and social-emotional needs (Parzych, Donohue, Gaesser, Chiu, 2019). Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Samantha Collins
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