



**Testimony of Lisa Kilcourse  
Elementary School Counselor  
VP Fairfield County & PR Chair  
Connecticut 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 on Elementary and Secondary Education  
Public Hearing -March 9, 2021

**Governor's Proposed FY 2022-2023 Budget for  
Elementary and Secondary Education Agencies**

**State Department of Education/School Counseling Funding**

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and respected members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Lisa Kilcourse and I am an elementary school counselor as well as VP Fairfield County & Public Relations Chair for the CT School Counselor Association. I am grateful for the opportunity to share 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.**

While some may remember their old "guidance counselors," I'd like to bring light to the world of the current elementary school counselor role. As the sole school counselor of my building, I have a caseload of ~300 students and I am tasked with providing proactive and reactive support for all students. My day consists of proactive work: K-4 counseling lessons (academic, social/emotional, and career focused), individual counseling sessions, and groups sessions. During the day there are reactive support situations: calls for support on the walkie talkie for students' escalating behaviors, crisis calls, parent phone calls/emails, and meetings to discuss student concerns. I provide Adult SEL for all staff in staff meetings as well as opportunities throughout the school day and after school. I monitor and provide interventions for students receiving tier 2 + tier 3 support. I create goals for these students that align to CASEL competencies. I am the hub for student concerns. Teachers, administrators, and staff know they can come to me to collaborate and discuss ways to support our students. I meet with each student in our building individually for "minute meetings" in an effort to connect with each student and to identify and make sure no one falls through the cracks.

In this current covid climate, I have recently seen an increased need for counseling services in school. We have had an uptick in anxiety and OCD behaviors as well as an uptick in outbursts

and unexpected behaviors from students that previously did not. There has been an increased need for mindfulness practices school wide as well as teaching and working on coping skills. This need for more SEL has created an increase in my 1:1 counseling and increased need and request for Social skills groups. I have had to develop and deliver increased numbers of proactive services such as lessons, connections/community building opportunities, and opportunities to provide a sense of belonging for all students in our building or those learning remotely. The CDC states that “Research has shown that young people who feel connected to their school are less likely to engage in many risk behaviors, including early sexual initiation, alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use, and violence and gang involvement.” School counselors provide this connection as well as provide a positive safe school climate. The CDC also states that “students who feel connected to their school are also more likely to have better academic achievement, including higher grades and test scores, have better school attendance, and stay in school longer.” Connecticut schools that have appropriate student to counselor ratios are able to appropriately provide support for students’ academic achievement and goal setting.

While we are not post-Covid we are in a better place than when we were at the start. This time, we are facing students with academic concerns due to how they accessed their education or those with inconsistent intervention services due to interruptions in learning. Therefore we are increasing caseload numbers for tier 2 and tier 3 supports. While this helps close the gap, it means that being the sole school counselor of the building, I will face situations that will need to be prioritized.

School Counselors have the tough job of being proactive (meeting with students, providing lessons, working with parents) and also reactive (responding to crisis, responding to parent and teacher concerns). On a typical day there are both of these happening simultaneously and it is nearly impossible with one school counselor. While I realize working to improve our ratios is not an easy task, due to funding, I am confident that an investment in school counselors is an investment in our children.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



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