



Connecticut School Counselor Association

A Chartered Division of the American School Counselors Association

**Testimony of Eileen Melody
School Counselor, Mansfield Middle School
Governing Board Member of the
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**

Appropriations Subcommittee on Elementary and Secondary Education
Public Hearing - March 9, 2021

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and respected members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Eileen Melody, and I am a school counselor, and a member of the Governing Board of the Connecticut School Counselor Association. I appreciate this opportunity to share this testimony in regards to **H.B. No. 6439 AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2021.**

The Connecticut School Counselor Association (CSCA) is the professional organization representing the state's more than 1200 school counselors, while promoting leadership and advancing the professional school counseling identity. We are a charter division of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) which provides us with current and relevant information to enhance our skill level and professionalism.

This school year has been one in which the value of school counselors has been recognized as absolutely essential for the well being and success of students. School counselors have led the way in supporting Connecticut's students through this pandemic. Never before have I witnessed this large number of lonely, disengaged, and worried students. My school days are spent responding to the needs of my students and their families by creating opportunities for them to access technology, develop student habits for successful learning, and manage their mental health needs. I am the person in the school building that weaves together all worlds of students' lives by making teachers, parents, administrators and outside agencies knowledgeable of key information related to the individual student. I remove the many barriers that my students face each day. There is no one else in the school building that holds this responsibility. That is my "why" for what I do.

I strongly believe that all Connecticut students should have equal access to a comprehensive school counseling program delivered by a certified and highly trained school counselor. Such a model addresses the numerous and significant academic, social-emotional, post-secondary and career readiness needs of every student.

Research shows that implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program by a school counselor 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 2017, ASCA position paper, *The School Counselor and Comprehensive School Counseling Programs*, shares that "School counselors design and deliver comprehensive school counseling programs that improve a range of student learning and behavioral outcomes (Carey & Dimmitt, 2012). These programs are comprehensive in scope, preventive in design and developmental in nature."

We know now, thanks to recent research in Connecticut (Parzych, Donohue, Gaesser, Chiu, 2019), that students in districts with elementary school counselors have improved performance outcomes versus districts without, regardless of location or socio-economic status. The current status in Connecticut is that fewer than 25% of Connecticut's elementary school children have access to school counselors and comprehensive school counseling programming.

We can change this by including in the Governor's budget opportunities for districts to receive support for school counselor positions. This will lead to positive student outcomes for all of Connecticut's students. As a Connecticut School Counselor, I am passionate about equitably advocating for the needs of all students so that they can reach their academic, career, and personal goals without facing barriers. When all Connecticut students have equal opportunity to work with a certified school counselor who will advocate for them, lead them to appropriate academic interventions, and help them explore their futures, then we have met our responsibility of caring for our students.

To this end, I, and the CSCA, respectfully encourage the Appropriations Subcommittee on Elementary and Secondary Education to address the lack of adequate financial support for school counseling positions in this budget by amending it. The CSCA believes that all schools should have school counselors, and that there should be an appropriate student-to-school counselor ratio for the most effective delivery of the comprehensive school counseling program.

The recent Connecticut research quoted above (Parzych, Donohue, Gaesser, Chiu, 2019), identified that higher performing schools had on average lower school counselor-to-student ratio (High School Level = 1:182, Middle School level = 1:211) while low-performing schools had on average significantly higher school counselor-to-student ratio: High School Level – 1:285, Middle School Level = 1:891. The CSCA has proposed legislation to the Education Committee leadership to provide for more school counseling positions with caseloads which meet the 1:250 counselor-to-student ratio.

The CSCA is willing to continue working with this committee to achieve the above goals. Please feel free to contact me or a member of the Connecticut School Counselor Association Board of Directors, and use our expertise as a resource so that we can work together to achieve our common purpose of supporting and educating Connecticut's children.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Eileen Melody, Governing Board Member of the The Connecticut School Counselor Association

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