

Missouri School Counselors



Executive Summary

School counselors support the academic, career and social/emotional development of students in elementary and secondary schools. In addition to responding to immediate student needs (e.g., conflict, crisis), school counselors can facilitate learning and individual student planning for the transition through school and into college or the workforce. High counselor-to-student ratios, time-intensive administrative tasks, and limited resources (e.g., class time, funding) create barriers to regular, high-quality counselor-student interactions. Sufficient access to school counselors is associated with improved student outcomes, especially for low-income, minoritized and/or first-generation college students.

Highlights

- Missouri's **Comprehensive School Counseling Program (MCSCP)** outlines the expectations for the direct and indirect services that Missouri school counselors should provide in order to **support students' academic, career and social/emotional needs**.
- Missouri currently has an **average counselor to student ratio of 1:339**, which is significantly higher than the recommended 1:250 standard.
- **Urban schools with high percentages of nonwhite students are most likely to have reduced access to school counselors.**

Limitations

- Due to wide variations in school contexts and characteristics, it is difficult to directly link improvements in student performance with specific counseling interventions.
- Because time-on-task information is collected only at the individual school/district level, it is difficult to estimate the average amount of time that Missouri school counselors currently spend with students compared to time spent on non-counseling tasks.

Research Background

Missouri Comprehensive School Counseling Program

The Missouri Comprehensive School Counseling Program (MCSCP) outlines a complete K-12 counseling framework that is meant to support the academic, career and social/emotional development of Missouri's students and meet the Missouri School Improvement Program (MSIP) school counseling standards. In addition to responding to immediate and crisis needs ("responsive services"), school counselors also provide counseling curriculum and individual student planning to support every student's academic performance, decision-making, college & career readiness and social/emotional development.¹ In elementary schools, counselors work

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with teachers to help all students develop career awareness. During middle school, counselors are encouraged to work with students to develop individual career and academic plans (ICAPs) which guide high school course selection and career exploration. Counselors also work proactively during high school to help students link their course choices to their career goals, and to facilitate the transition between high school and the next step (college or career).

Access to school counselors in Missouri

One of the most common barriers to counselor access and efficacy is the amount of time available to spend on individual student planning. Because of limited state-level reporting, it is difficult to determine how well Missouri counselors are able to facilitate the MCSCP program standards and how much time is spent on direct versus indirect services (**Table 1**).¹ While individual districts collect “time-on-task” information, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education does not currently collect this information, making it unclear how much time counselors have to spend with each student or how many students fill out the ICAP. Broader national trends suggest that many school counselors spend a disproportionate amount of time on indirect (non-counseling) services, which has been magnified during the response to COVID-19.^{2,3} As schools have adjusted to COVID-19 procedures, school counselors have reported increased administrative burdens and crisis response needs which have limited their ability to work with all students at pre-pandemic levels on topics like college counseling and career planning.³ Schools have also reported new technology hurdles due to limited internet and device access.

Missouri’s counselor to student ratio of 1:339 is

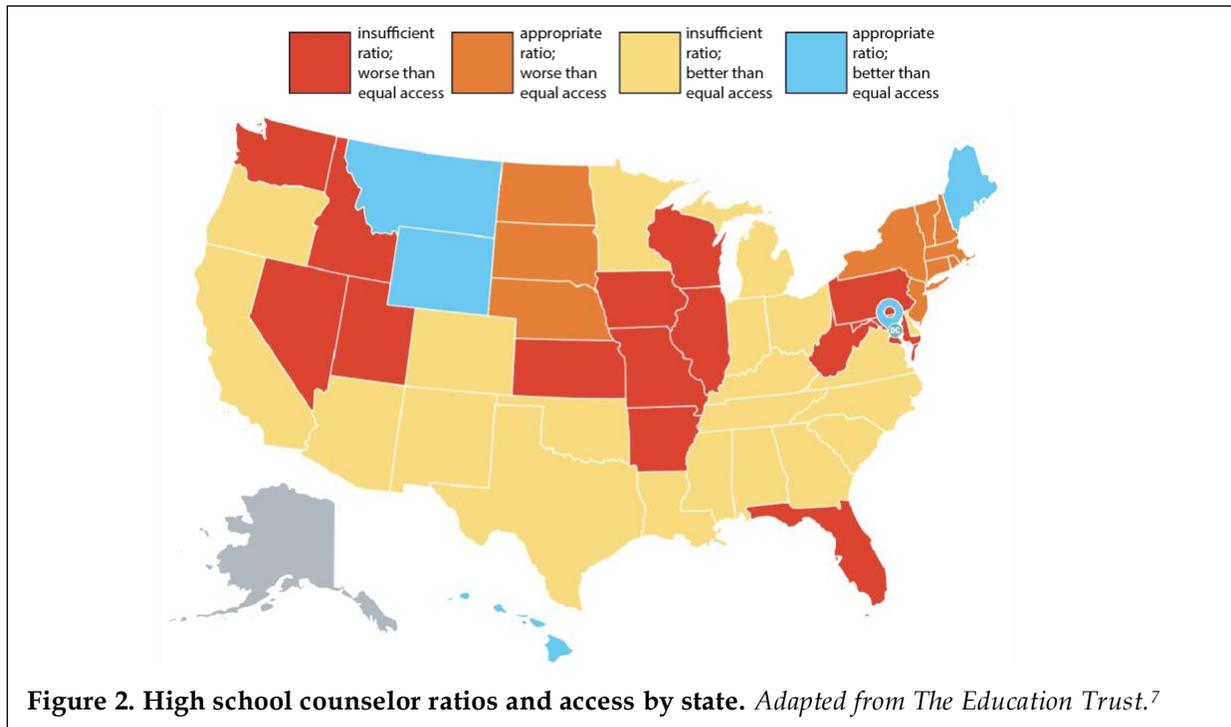
significantly higher than the American School Counselor Association’s (ASCA) recommended ratio of 1:250.⁴ First-generation, low-income and minoritized students typically benefit most from the opportunities offered by a comprehensive school counseling program. For example, financial aid counseling programs have been identified as one of the most effective components of school counseling programs to increase financial aid applications and college enrollment in these populations.⁵ Comprehensive school counseling programs in high-poverty Missouri schools are associated with improved attendance and graduation rates when counselor to student ratios are kept under the 1:250 recommendation level.⁶ While schools in high-poverty regions of Missouri

Recommended Use of Counselor Time (Percentage Rate)					
Missouri Comprehensive School Counseling Program Components		Elementary School	Middle/Junior High School	High School	K-12
Direct Service	School Counseling Curriculum	35-45	25-35	15-25	25-35
	Individual Student Planning	5-10	15-25	25-35	20-30
	Responsive Services	30-40	30-40	25-35	25-35
Indirect Service	System Support	10-15	10-15	15-20	10-15
Total*		100	100	100	100

*Note: 100% of the school counselor’s time should be devoted to the implementation, delivery, and management of the comprehensive school counseling program.

Table 1. MCSCP recommended standards for time spent on direct and indirect counselor services.¹

tend to have slightly better school counselor ratios, students of color often attend schools with high counselor to student ratios (**Figure 2**; similar trend in AK, WI, WV, WA).^{6,7} Nationally, rural districts tend to have better counselor-to-student ratios than more diverse urban districts, suggesting that high-poverty, urban school districts may be disproportionately affected by counselor shortages.⁸



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