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Building a System for Postsecondary Success

The Pivotal Role of School Counselors

By Molly Strear, Helen Duffy, and Melissa Aste



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Introduction

This brief examines state evaluation policies for evidence that reflects the important role that school counselors can play in supporting postsecondary readiness, defined as engaging in postsecondary education, training, or career after high school. Equipped with advanced training focused on addressing students' postsecondary, career, social-emotional, and school safety goals, school counselors are well positioned to provide the expertise and leadership required to help realize states' individualized learning goals. For example, adult–student relationships are at the center of all personalized learning strategies. Although classroom teachers have regular contact with students, they may lack the expertise to address the full spectrum of students' needs. School counselors represent a potential, but underutilized, resource in providing that personalized student support and broader school staff development to address these student needs.

Growing demands to provide more coherent high school experiences that align with students' postsecondary aspirations are evident in the increasing number of states that mention personalized learning in their *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) plans. Personalized learning—which includes academic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and other college- and career-ready learning and instruction—is mentioned in 39 state ESSA plans, with 17 of those incorporating it as a key component of their state vision for excellence (Knowledgeworks, 2018). Further evidence of efforts to provide students with more personally meaningful and engaging school experiences can be found in the increased number of states mandating some form of individual learning plan for all students. These policies, though well intended, are often underresourced in terms of the human capital necessary to support and guide implementation.

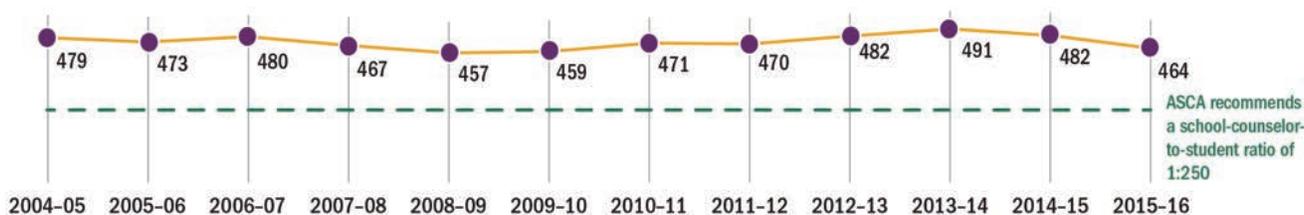
This brief summarizes school counselor evaluation requirements in all 50 states and the District of Columbia and describes the integral role that school counselors can play in large-scale postsecondary and career-readiness initiatives. Because evaluation policies include professional standards and expectations, evaluation models offer valuable insight into state-level expectations of school counselors, resulting in a deeper understanding of school counseling at the state and local levels. A clearer understanding of school counselor expectations can then inform school principals' assignment of duties to counselors. Further, evaluation processes are essential for clarifying school counselor accountability and effectiveness and are necessary to advocate for the role of school counselors through educational policy. Although evaluation of school counselors is conducted at the local level, states can and do provide guidance related to standards and evaluation practices that help school administrators understand the types of services that counselors provide, enabling them to establish local policies, hiring practices, and ongoing professional development that reflect these high standards aligned with local priorities.

In addition to examining evaluation practices and policies, this brief provides a review of literature supporting the role of school counselors in students' postsecondary readiness. The brief also highlights the efforts of three states to bolster the role of school counselors through the implementation of coherent policies—beyond policy that impacts school counselor evaluation—that illustrate focused attention on preparing students for a wide array of postsecondary options.

The Role of School Counselors in College and Career Readiness: An Untapped, Under-Resourced Strategy

There is great potential and opportunity for school counselors to lead efforts in both supporting students and guiding other school staff to teach and elicit interest from students about available career paths (ASCA, 2018a). However, neither the number of school counselors working in schools nor state evaluation guidance reflect this opportunity. Ironically, as states increase the number of policies related to personalized learning and college and career readiness, the number of school counselors remains stagnant. For example, a review of 10-year trends in school-counselor-to-student ratios suggests that most states, and consequently most schools, far exceed the recommended school-counselor-to-student ratio of 1:250. In fact, the national average school-counselor-to-student ratio rose slightly between 2005 and 2015 (ASCA, 2018b).

School-Counselor-to-Student Ratio 2004–2016



FEDERAL LEGISLATION AND THE SCHOOL COUNSELOR'S ROLE

Federal legislation provides little clarity with regard to the important contributions of school counselors. ESSA Title IV says school counselors can play a pivotal role in fostering safe, healthy, supportive, and drug-free environments, but the provisions in Title IV point primarily to coordination activities with community-based organizations and increasing school personnel awareness of mental health programs, community-based resources, and de-escalation techniques. Little attention is paid to the direct service that school counselors can provide in classrooms to support the development of healthy social and emotional skills, nor to the advisement that counselors can provide for postsecondary planning.

There is a large gap in postsecondary attainment between students from economically disadvantaged circumstances and students who are not. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) show that, of American students who graduated high school in 2002, only 14% of students from a low socioeconomic status attained a bachelor's degree or higher within 8 years versus 60% of students from a high socioeconomic status (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). Similar patterns among Black, Latinx, and English learner students are pervasive (McFarland et al., 2018), making the role of school counselors even more critical to promote equity in opportunities for postsecondary attainment and success. Indeed, research suggests that school counselors have a significant impact on student preparation for postsecondary education, and research demonstrates that students who engage in individual student planning with school counselors are more likely to plan for college and have higher rates of Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion and college attendance—critical gateways to postsecondary access, especially for disadvantaged populations of students (Dunlop Velez, 2016; Radford, Ifill, & Lew, 2016).

Recent studies focused on students' access to school counselors, particularly among students who are disproportionately underrepresented in postsecondary education and career training, suggest that school counselors remain an untapped resource for providing effective support for postsecondary preparation. Although research demonstrates that school counselors have a significant impact on postsecondary planning, access, and attainment for students from historically marginalized groups, including students of low socioeconomic status (Belasco, 2013), first-generation college-bound students (Radford & Ifill, 2015), and Latinx students (Hurley & Coles, 2015), just three states meet the American School Counselor Association (ASCA)–recommended counselor–student ratio of 1:250. Surprisingly, 1.7 million students attend schools staffed with a sworn police officer but no school counselor (American Civil Liberties Union, 2019). According to another analysis, 38 states fail to provide adequate school counseling resources for students of color, low-income students, or both (Education Trust and Reach Higher Initiative, 2019). Twenty-two states and the District of Columbia mandate school counselors for both K–8 and high schools (ASCA, n.d.). Three states require that counseling services be available but do not specify that school counselors provide those services. An additional five states mandate school counselors, but only in schools serving students in Grades 9–12, and one additional state requires counseling and guidance services in Grades 9–12 but does not specify that a trained school counselor provide those services. Twenty states do not require school counselors or counseling services. Thus, increased awareness of school counselors' roles and impact may be valuable for fostering more equitable K–12 education, and school counselor evaluation is one mechanism for furthering this discourse.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES ON RELATED POSTSECONDARY READINESS POLICIES

The College and Career Readiness and Success Center has developed a number of resources related to federal policies.

- [An Analysis of ESSA, Perkins V, IDEA, and WIOA](#) is a crosswalk of the many elements within these four key federal policies that impact a student's postsecondary readiness.
- [Leveraging the Every Student Succeeds Act to Support State Visions for College and Career Readiness and College and Career Readiness Begins With a Well-Rounded Education: Opportunities Under the Every Student Succeeds Act](#) home in on how ESSA shapes and contributes to students' postsecondary readiness.

The growing demand for personalized learning as the solution for ensuring students are college ready is not aligned with the inputs or resources, in terms of the numbers of school counselors available to support these efforts. Even more concerning, subgroups of students, including Latinx and Black students, are less likely than their peers to have access to a school counselor (Education Trust, Reach Higher Initiative, & ASCA, 2019). It is clear that the current, laudable efforts to increase students' college and career readiness are at risk of being undermined by a lack of supports necessary to ensure these policies are successfully implemented.

These disparities in access and resources for school counselors are one challenge, but another consideration is how states are characterizing the role of the school counselor. To analyze this information, we conducted a review of school counselor evaluation criteria and strategies through a scan of state websites. In the scan, we reviewed criteria, guidance, and resources related to school counselor evaluation practices. The following provides an overview of the state scan, then highlights three states that have developed coherent tools and/or systems for evaluating school counselors that correspond with the appropriate utilization of school counselors to better support students.

School Counselor Evaluation Criteria: A Scan of State Policies

School counselors play a unique role in actualizing personalized learning and ensuring students are college- and-career or postsecondary ready; however, a review of school counseling literature suggests that individual evaluation practices are inconsistent and not aligned with current best practice (Cleveland & Hartline, 2017; Morris & Slaten, 2014). If annual evaluations are required at all, school counselors sometimes are assessed using teacher evaluation tools; others are assessed using school leader evaluation tools; and still others are evaluated using a generic process for pupil services, despite the field's assertion that annual performance evaluation is a key to professional identity and accountability (ASCA, 2015). Thus, our review of public state education agency (SEA) websites is an update to this body of knowledge and analyzes whether there is consistency and alignment with the focus on students' postsecondary readiness embedded into the evaluation requirements of school counselors. Further, performance evaluation has the potential to help school administrators understand the roles and responsibilities of school counselors by defining the unique ways school counselors contribute to students' postsecondary readiness.

To determine the evidence base for school counselor evaluation requirements, processes, and/or rubrics across the 50 states and the District of Columbia, the College and Career Readiness and Success (CCRS) Center conducted a scan of publicly available resources and information on SEA and school counselor association websites.¹ The resulting findings from this scan are summarized in the accompanying infographics. It is important to note, however, that the information reported is based purely on the information publicly available on the scanned websites using the selected search terms, and that missing information does not necessarily indicate that a state does not have school counselor evaluation requirements, processes, and/or tools and resources.

Across the country, we found a patchwork of practices related to evaluation of the professional contributions that school counselors can play in supporting postsecondary readiness, school safety, and mental health services. We found the following information in our scan of SEA and state counselor association websites, publicly available resources for school counseling evaluation processes, and/or tools for all 50 states and the District of Columbia:

- Seven states require school counselors to be evaluated on performance using its SEA-developed or SEA-recognized process or tool for school counselor-specific evaluation.²
- An additional 29 states provide school counselor-specific evaluation guidance and/or tools; however, local education agencies (LEAs) are not required to follow state guidance.
- Four states provide evaluation guidance and/or tools that are not specific to school counselors, such as teacher or "specialized school personnel" evaluation guidance and/or resources.
- Five states provide no state-specific tools or guidance but do provide links to ASCA resources.
- Six states have no publicly available information on school counselor evaluations using the search guidelines.

¹ Using Google, the CCRS Center entered the search terms "school counselor evaluation," "school counselor resources," "school counselor program," and "school counselor guidance" for each of the 50 states and the District of Columbia. The search term "evaluation" was used within any publicly available school counselor-specific documents, such as school counselor program guides, models, and/or frameworks, if applicable to that state.

² Four of these seven states allow local education agencies (LEAs) to develop an alternative evaluation method, though this method must be approved by the SEA. Also, Iowa and Minnesota require the evaluation of school counselors using standards not specific to school counselors should the LEA not develop its own school counselor-specific evaluation tool, and Vermont only requires school counselors applying for licensure to be evaluated using its School Counselor Summative Performance Report; for these reasons, these three states were excluded from this number.

| State | School-Counselor-to-Student Ratio** | SEA Evaluation Tools/Resources | State School Counselor Association Evaluation Tools/Resources | Notes |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------|--|---|---|
| Colorado | 1:365 | Rubric for Evaluating Colorado's Specialized Service Professionals: School Counselors | | An LEA may choose to use an alternative evaluation model for its school counselors, but the model must be approved by the Colorado Department of Education. |
| Connecticut | 1:459 | Sample Guidelines for the Evaluation of School Counselor Performance (pages 73-76) | | |
| Delaware | 1:413 | | | |
| District of Columbia | 1:511 | IMPACT: The District of Columbia Public Schools Effectiveness Assessment System (Counselors) | | |
| Florida | 1:484 | School Counselor Performance Appraisal Form (pages 127-130) | | |
| Georgia | 1:466 | Counselor Keys Effectiveness System (CKES) | | CKES was created by the Georgia School Counselor Association in partnership with the Georgia Department of Education. |
| Hawaii | 1:286 | Hawaii Performance Standards for School Counselors | | Hawaii's standards for school counselors were found on the Hawaii Teacher Standards Board website, which maintains the licensing for teachers in the state. |
| Idaho | 1:538 | | Idaho School Counselor Evaluation | |
| Illinois | 1:686 | | | Illinois links to the ASCA School Counselor Competencies on its SEA website as a resource. |
| Indiana | 1:497 | Professional School Counselor Effectiveness Rubric | | |
| Iowa | 1:411 | Iowa Teaching Standards and Criteria | | Iowa Administrative Code requires that school counselors be evaluated on Iowa's eight teaching standards, which are not specific to school counselors. |
| Kansas | 1:475 | Kansas Comprehensive School Counseling Program (page 55) | | Kansas provides guidelines for LEAs to create their own school counselor performance standards for evaluation. |
| Kentucky | 1:441 | Kentucky Framework For Teaching | | Kentucky groups school counselors with social workers in supplemental domains within its Framework for Teaching rubric. |

| State | School-Counselor-to-Student Ratio** | SEA Evaluation Tools/Resources | State School Counselor Association Evaluation Tools/Resources | Notes |
|---------------|-------------------------------------|--|--|--|
| Louisiana | 1:393 | Louisiana Counseling Performance Evaluation Rubric | | An LEA may choose to use an alternative evaluation model for its school counselors, but the model must be approved by the Louisiana Department of Education. |
| Maine | 1:321 | | | |
| Maryland | 1:373 | | | |
| Massachusetts | 1:411 | Guide to Specialized Instructional Support Personnel (SISP) Rubric | Massachusetts Model for Comprehensive School Counseling Programs (page 11) | Massachusetts has a specialized instructional support personnel (SISP) evaluation rubric. The Massachusetts School Counselor Association (MASCA) created two supplemental indicators specific to school counselors in collaboration with the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. |
| Michigan | 1:741 | | Michigan School Counselor Performance Evaluation Tool | |
| Minnesota | 1:659 | Performance Standards of Teacher Practice Rubric | | Minnesota requires that school counselors be evaluated using its Performance Standards for Teacher Practice Rubric should the school board and the personnel representative not agree on an alternative evaluation or peer review process. |
| Mississippi | 1:433 | Mississippi Counselors' Appraisal Rubric (M-CAR) | | |
| Missouri | 1:346 | School Counselor Evaluation Growth Guide (pages 12-35) | | |
| Montana | 1:308 | | Montana School Counseling Program (pages 9 and 23) | The Montana School Counseling Association provides limited guidelines for LEAs to create their own school counselor personnel performance standards for evaluation. |
| Nebraska | 1:381 | | | Nebraska links to the ASCA School Counselor Competencies on its SEA website as a resource. |
| Nevada | 1:486 | School Counselors Professional Responsibilities Standards and Indicators | | |

| State | School-Counselor-to-Student Ratio** | SEA Evaluation Tools/Resources | State School Counselor Association Evaluation Tools/Resources | Notes |
|----------------|-------------------------------------|---|--|--|
| New Hampshire | 1:220*** | New Hampshire Implementation Manual for Comprehensive School Guidance and Counseling (pages 73-75) (Note: resource no longer available online) | | |
| New Jersey | 1:369 | | New Jersey School Counselor Evaluation Model (pages 26-40) | |
| New Mexico | 1:481 | | | |
| New York | 1:363 | | | New York links to the ASCA School Counselor Competencies on its SEA website as a resource. |
| North Carolina | 1:368 | Rubric for Evaluating North Carolina's School Counselors | | An LEA may choose to use an alternative evaluation model for its school counselors, but the model must be approved by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. |
| North Dakota | 1:304 | | | The North Dakota School Counselor Association links to the ASCA School Counselor Performance Appraisal as a resource. |
| Ohio | 1:447 | Ohio School Counselor Evaluation System (OSCES) Rubric | | |
| Oklahoma | 1:439 | The School Counselor's Guide (page 69-Appendix G) | | |
| Oregon | 1:498 | Oregon's Framework for Comprehensive School Counseling Programs (page 60) | | Oregon links to the ASCA School Counselor Competencies in its Framework for Comprehensive School Counseling Programs as a resource for developing school counselor performance evaluations. |
| Pennsylvania | 1:381 | Pennsylvania School Counselor Assessment Rubric | | |
| Rhode Island | 1:418 | Rhode Island Model Evaluation & Support System (pages 41-65) | | An LEA may choose to use an alternative evaluation model for its school counselors, but the model must be approved by the Rhode Island Department of Education. Currently, only two alternative LEA models have been approved. |
| South Carolina | 1:359 | ADEPT Performance Standards for School Guidance Counselors | | |

| State | School-Counselor-to-Student Ratio** | SEA Evaluation Tools/Resources | State School Counselor Association Evaluation Tools/Resources | Notes |
|---------------|-------------------------------------|--|---|---|
| South Dakota | 1:386 | South Dakota School Counselor Evaluation Program-Appendix L | | |
| Tennessee | 1:335 | Tennessee Comprehensive School Counseling Model Implementation Guide (page 48) | | An LEA may choose to use an alternative evaluation model for its school counselors, but the model must be approved by the Tennessee Department of Education. |
| Texas | 1:442 | Texas Evaluation Model for Professional School Counselors (TEMPSC-II) | | |
| Utah | 1:648 | Utah Effective School Counselor Performance Standards Rubric | | Utah's School Counselor Performance Standards Rubric was created by the Utah Comprehensive Counseling and Guidance Program, which is part of the Utah State Board of Education. |
| Vermont | 1:202*** | Transcript Review Worksheet – School Counselor | | A summative assessment report is only required for school counselors applying for licensure in Vermont. |
| Virginia | 1:361 | Virginia School Counselor Summative Assessment Report | | |
| Washington | 1:499 | Washington school counselor benchmarks | | Washington's school counselor benchmarks were developed by the Professional Educator Standards Board, which is composed of 12 people who are appointed by the governor to make recommendations related to policy and oversee the preparation, certification, and evaluation systems in the state. |
| West Virginia | 1:376 | West Virginia Evaluation Rubrics for Counselors | | |
| Wisconsin | 1:434 | Wisconsin School Counselor Performance Evaluations | | The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction links to six sample evaluations for school counselors as potential resources. |
| Wyoming | 1:343 | | | |

** School-counselor-to-student ratio column is based on <https://www.schoolcounselor.org/asca/media/asca/Publications/ratioreport.pdf> and <https://www.schoolcounselor.org/asca/media/asca/home/Ratios15-16.pdf>

*** Meets the ASCA recommended ratio of 1:250

An Overview of Three States

Based on the information gleaned from our state-level review, Colorado, North Carolina, and Indiana emerged due to the comprehensive nature of state-level guidance and professional coherence for school counselors. Although only North Carolina requires the use of its state-developed tools in its public schools, all three states had robust evaluation systems designated for school counselors, indicating shared expectations regarding roles and responsibilities. Whereas other states had similar systems in place, Colorado and Indiana leveraged additional initiatives (such as individual academic student plans), legislation, and/or funding involving school counselors. North Carolina was identified for informally contributing to the development of Colorado’s school counselor evaluation, as well as legislation specifying appropriate school counselor duties. Indiana also is included because the state received a substantive endowment to support a comprehensive school counseling initiative, as well as recent recognition for a record number of ASCA Model Programs through the Recognized ASCA Model Program (RAMP) designation in 2017–18. CCRS Center staff talked to representatives from each state to deepen our understanding of school counseling at local and state levels. The following synopses are based on these conversations, a review of materials on SEA websites, and any additional materials provided by the state representatives.

Summary of School Counseling Resources in Highlighted States

| State | Key Legislation | State-Developed Evaluation Tool | Notable Qualities |
|----------------|--|---|---|
| Colorado | <p>Annual Evaluation Process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Senate Bill 10-191 ■ House Bill 13-1257 <p>School Counselor Corps Grant Program:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ House Bill 08-1370 ■ Revised Statute 22-91-101 et seq. <p>Individual Career and Academic Planning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Senate Bill 09-256 ■ Senate Bill 08-212 | <p>Rubric for Evaluating Colorado’s Specialized Service Professionals: School Counselors*</p> | <p>Mandated annual evaluation of school counselors using a state-approved process/tool</p> <p>School Counselor Corps Grant Program</p> <p>Mandated Individual Career and Academic Planning process</p> |
| North Carolina | <p>School Counselor’s Role:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ General Statute 115C-316.1 <p>Annual Evaluation Process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ General Statute 115c-333.1 | <p>Rubric for Evaluating North Carolina’s School Counselors</p> | <p>Mandated annual evaluation of school counselors using the state-developed evaluation tool</p> <p>Mandated that school counselors spend at least 80% of their time providing direct services to students and that it is prohibited for school counselors to be coordinators for standardized testing</p> <p>Self-paced training modules for school counselors and administrators for effective integration of evaluation materials</p> <p>Formation of a State School Counselor Leadership Team focused on school counselor and administrator skills in supporting student career and college readiness</p> |

| State | Key Legislation | State-Developed Evaluation Tool | Notable Qualities |
|---------|-----------------|---|---|
| Indiana | | Professional School Counselor Effectiveness Rubric* | <p>Mandated annual evaluation of school counselors using a state-approved process/tool</p> <p>\$49 million in grant funding provided by the Lilly Endowment Inc. to support a comprehensive school counseling initiative in Indiana</p> <p>A record number (82) of Recognized ASCA Model Program (RAMP) designations within Indiana in 2017–18</p> <p>Formation of a Counselor Evaluation Leadership Team, which developed the state evaluation tool as a mechanism to intentionally promote partnerships between school counselors and administrators</p> <p>Relevant state-level research on school counseling practices and outcomes conducted by the Indiana Chamber of Commerce Foundation</p> |

* Note. This evaluation tool is a guiding resource for LEAs.

Colorado

An examination of school counseling in Colorado reveals several policies and programs emphasizing the role of school counselors as skilled service providers who support students’ academic, social, emotional, postsecondary, and workforce readiness development, despite the fact that school counselors are not required in the state’s schools. Notably, Colorado’s Educator Effectiveness–State Model Evaluation System (Senate Bill 10-191; House Bill 13-1257), School Counselor Corps Grant Program (House Bill 08-1370; Colorado Revised Statute 22-91-101 et seq.), and ICAP: Individual Career and Academic Plan (Senate Bill 09-256), position school counselors as integral stakeholders in the Colorado education landscape. According to ASCA (2017), the school counselor–student ratio is 1:365.

Colorado’s Educator Effectiveness–State Model Evaluation System. Like many states across the country, Colorado has a history of evaluating school counselors with tools designed for teachers. Thus, there has been a dearth of consistent mechanisms for establishing school counselor accountability. To refine educator evaluation methods, the State Council for Educator Effectiveness engaged in advocacy efforts in 2010 to establish state-level evaluation systems for education stakeholders that uphold rigorous practices supporting student success. These efforts resulted in Senate Bill 10-191, providing regulations for a state model evaluation system for all licensed personnel. Of these groups, nine special services providers (i.e., other licensed personnel) were identified, including school counselors. An evaluation tool was designed through an iterative process involving state-level pilot programs, work groups, and consultation from rubric developers, practitioners, and the state council for educator effectiveness. In 2013, House Bill 13-1257 further clarified state-level expectations for the evaluation process, resulting in additional guidelines for local-level evaluation practices. For example, as a state with local control, LEAs can establish comparable evaluation systems. However, assurances must be submitted to the SEA to ensure compliance with annual state evaluation policies. Colorado’s process resulted in 11 evaluation rubrics—including one specifically for school counselors—designed to capture the practices associated with each unique position.

One component of the Colorado counselor evaluation system is the [Rubric for Evaluating Colorado’s Specialized Service Professionals: School Counselors](#). The rubric includes a thorough description of an effective school

counselor, aligning with ASCA's conceptual framework for school counseling (ASCA, 2012). In addition to the quality standards for professional practice, the Colorado State Model Evaluation System requires annual evaluations to demonstrate student achievement through measurements of outcome data. This evaluation model encourages clear communication between school counselors and their evaluators to clarify the complexity of their positions within diverse school communities. To account for the variance within school counseling positions, the SEA provides supplemental materials to support counselor evaluation, which include guidance regarding service delivery through comprehensive school counseling program development, recommended school counselor–student ratios (1:250), distribution of time, appropriate activities, and examples of evidence to demonstrate professional experience through “look-fors” and “artifacts.” When viewed as a whole, the Colorado State Model Evaluation System for Evaluating School Counselors reflects a clear vision for school counselors in Colorado that includes high-quality standards, accountability, and measures of student achievement.

School Counselor Corps Grant Program. Another prominent advancement for school counseling in Colorado is the School Counselor Corps Grant Program (SCCGP). Highlighting the importance of school counselors in the legislative declarations, House Bill 08-1370 and Colorado Revised Statute 22-91-101 et seq., the SCCGP was developed to improve access to school counselors. The SCCGP is intended “to increase the graduation rate within the state and increase the percentage of students who are appropriately prepared for, apply to, and continue into postsecondary education” (Engelman, Pugh, Tucker, & Ruthven, 2018, p. 5). Over the last 10 years, Colorado has invested more than \$75 million from the Colorado General Fund through a series of competitive, 4-year grant cycles that have placed more than 300 licensed school counselors in more than 400 secondary schools across the state. The SCCGP emphasizes school counseling services that promote postsecondary readiness and prioritizes schools with dropout rates, free and reduced-price lunch eligibility, and postsecondary remediation that exceed state averages.

In addition to increasing the number of licensed school counselors in Colorado, the SCCGP has systematically evaluated the program outcomes for funded schools while engaging in a recursive process to refine the roles of SCCGP school counselors. According to the 2018 legislative report on the SCCGP, funded school counselors are positioned to develop comprehensive school counseling programs that align with the ASCA National Model (2012), which has been associated with positive educational outcomes for students in funded schools (Engelman et al., 2018). Compared with nonfunded schools, SCCGP-funded schools have demonstrated increased graduation rates and higher rates of concurrent enrollment, career and technical education course participation, FAFSA completion, and attendance at career and college events (e.g., career fairs, campus tours). These positive outcomes highlight Colorado’s investment in school counseling and the connection between state legislation and student success.

ICAP: Individual Career and Academic Plan. The third notable element of Colorado’s approach is its Individual Career and Academic Plan (ICAP) process. In response to educational data illustrating a widening achievement gap that included low rates of postsecondary achievement, Colorado enacted Senate Bills 08-212 (2008) and 09-256 (2009), resulting in a state-level mandate requiring LEAs to develop ICAPs for all students in Grades 9–12. Although not required, the Colorado Department of Education highly recommends LEAs begin developing ICAPs for students as early as Grade 6. With an emphasis on postsecondary and workforce readiness, the SEA developed milestones to guide an interactive process with students to support individual graduation and postsecondary success plans. Over time, these milestones gave way to quality indicators intended to guide the ICAP process and thus shifted from a checklist of items to complete to an ongoing process that is individually defined for each student based on indicators of quality. The ICAP process is intended to promote a postsecondary and workforce

readiness school culture that facilitates academic and career empowerment, exploration, and collaboration. Although the ICAP process engages all educational stakeholders (e.g., students, guardians/caregivers, school leaders, teachers), school counselors are among the first identified as key advocates for moving this work forward. In congruence with the professional expertise of licensed school counselors, this state initiative highlights the important role of school counselors for fostering career and college readiness for all students. A quality ICAP process includes a team of school professionals, including administrators, classroom teachers, special educators, and others, often led by a school counselor, to build a cohesive and integrated curriculum that will inform each student's individual career and academic goals.

North Carolina

Despite the fact that school counselors are not mandated in every school and North Carolina is a local control state, clear expectations for the roles and responsibilities of school counselors emerged in the state as key components of their comprehensive evaluation guidance. That guidance includes a state-level job description, professional school counseling standards, and a rubric developed specifically for school counselors. In 2006, North Carolina's SEA convened an advisory team that revised its state school counselor job description, outlining the duties of school counselors to align with national best practices in the ASCA National Model (2012). In 2008, this was reformatted further into five professional standards, comparable in organization to the North Carolina professional standards for all licensed educator professional disciplines, re-envisioning school counseling in North Carolina to meet the needs of 21st-century learners. These North Carolina school counselor standards continue to be aligned with the ASCA National Model (2012) for comprehensive school counseling programs, and position school counselors as leaders and advocates that promote academic, social, emotional, and career development. This state vision expects counselors to navigate the diverse needs of school communities by providing services that range from individualized to schoolwide interventions that promote student achievement through data-driven practices. In 2013, the commitment to comprehensive school counseling services was solidified further through North Carolina General Statute 115C-316.1, indicating school counselors should spend 80% of their time providing direct services to students, and prohibiting school counselors from standardized test coordination. This notable legislation provides guidelines for LEAs to ensure school counselors are positioned to develop comprehensive school counseling programs that align with counseling best practice.

Expectations for school counselors in North Carolina were articulated further by a multidisciplinary School Counselor Development Team that developed the [North Carolina School Counselor Evaluation Process](#) in 2015. The School Counselor Development Team created a thorough framework for school counselors and administrators to systematically evaluate school counselors' annual performance. All licensed personnel are required to engage in an annual evaluation process (General Statute 115c-333.1(a)); thus, school counselors in North Carolina public schools must be evaluated using the state evaluation process, or a validated, field-tested evaluation system that includes a comparable evaluation cycle to assess the state's professional standards. The state evaluation process requires a detailed self-assessment and professional development plan, as well as multiple observations and artifacts that support rubric ratings. In addition to providing a comprehensive evaluation process guide and rubric, the state also developed training modules for school counselors and administrators to support the effective integration of the evaluation materials, while promoting transparency and collaboration between school counselors and school administration. The SEA's extensive guidance clearly demonstrates a commitment to school counseling in North Carolina and a belief that comprehensive school counseling programs are integral to student success.

Self-paced modules are available to public school counselors and school administrators to support their understanding, implementation, and evaluation of comprehensive school counseling program standards. Ongoing collaboration between the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) consultant for school counseling and the North Carolina School Counselor Association (NCSCA) strengthens the awareness of professional development needs to support the implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs that reflect national standards. This awareness, among other things, has led to state-level efforts to strengthen school counselor and administrator collaboration; it also has led to professional development that emphasizes postsecondary readiness skill development, including the formation of a State School Counseling Strategic Leadership (SCSL) Team focused on school counselor and administrator skills to support student career and college readiness. This team—facilitated by the NCDPI, NCSCA, and the University of North Carolina system, with representatives from higher education preparation programs, school districts, state agencies, and the business community—has helped improve school counselor preparation through regional and [online training modules](#) that promote mastery of postsecondary readiness interventions and policy changes. Modules focus on topics such as building a college-going culture, career planning, financial aid, and college applications; some modules also are designed for superintendents and principals who want to maximize school counselor impact on student success. Although systematic data collection capturing the effectiveness of school counselors at the state level is limited at this time, evidence of state-level efforts to support comprehensive school counseling programs in North Carolina can be seen through increased understanding of appropriate and effective roles of school counselors at the local level, as well as a continued influx of recognized ASCA Model Programs through the RAMP³ designation. Further, the SCSL Team recently recommended [a State Board of Education policy revision](#) through the Professional Educator Preparation and Standards Commission that now requires higher education school administrator preparation programs to include in their curricula “the role of instructional and student services personnel.” The team suggested that such a policy could open some doors for increasing administrator awareness of school counselor roles. State leaders acknowledge that their progress to date has been a team effort, which has been challenged by budget constraints. Although the current ratio of school counselors to students is approximately 1:368 (ASCA, 2017), increased school administrator awareness of appropriate and effective roles for school counselors would ensure that counseling positions remain a priority.

Indiana

Although Indiana has a relatively high school counselor–student ratio of 1:497 (ASCA, 2017), Indiana emerged as a state of interest due to recent investments in and recognition of school counseling programs. Indiana is a state that relies heavily on local control (as do Colorado and North Carolina), so the Indiana Department of Education provides various recommendations to guide local school counseling policies and practices. In particular, Indiana has invested substantive time and resources into understanding the roles and responsibilities of school counselors to support student success. The SEA offers detailed guidelines for school counselor preparation that align with current best practice (e.g., ASCA, 2012) and state licensure requirements. In addition, the SEA partnered with the Indiana School Counselor Association in 2010 to establish a Counselor Evaluation Leadership Team, which consisted of a multidisciplinary taskforce of administrators, school counselors, counselor educators, and community partners. This committee developed the School Counselor Effectiveness Rubric as a mechanism to intentionally promote school administrator and school counselor partnerships focused on increasing school counselor effectiveness in the following domains: Academic Achievement, Student

³ Schools that earn the RAMP designation engage in a yearlong evaluation of their comprehensive, data-driven school counseling program.

Assistance Services, Career Development, and Professional Leadership. In concert with the Indiana School Counseling Competencies for Students (2015), the evaluation process encourages systematic assessment and data collection to measure student goals and learning outcomes, and provides guidance for measuring school counselor effectiveness through student outcome data. Although not required of LEAs, the state-level evaluation recommendations offer clear guidance for school counselors in Indiana.

Interestingly, over the last several years, school counseling in Indiana has been brought to the forefront of educational dialogue through various avenues, resulting in increased awareness of the importance of school counseling. In 2014, the Indiana Chamber of Commerce Foundation conducted a [research review](#) on current school counseling practices in the state. In part, this review was intended to examine whether school counseling had changed since a statewide research study involving school counselors in 1994. Results from the original study, *High Hopes, Long Odds* (Orfield & Paul, 1994), indicated a need for increased awareness regarding the roles and responsibilities of school counselors, improved training and practice associated with postsecondary readiness services, and more appropriate allocation of school counselor time. Nearly 20 years later, many of the same challenges remained for Indiana school counselors, including a continued need for postsecondary and workforce readiness skill development of counselors (Indiana Chamber of Commerce Foundation, 2014). Respondents in the report noted that the state educator evaluation system has provided clarity about the expectations of effective counselors and has “been well-received and even embraced by school counselors and the school counselor associations” (Indiana Chamber of Commerce Foundation, 2014, p. 32). Similar statewide counseling research focused on examining exemplar school counseling programs (Indiana Chamber of Commerce, 2015) and school counselor–administrator partnerships (Indiana Chamber of Commerce Foundation, 2016). Both reports highlighted the importance of school counselor–specific evaluation tools that align with state and national school counseling models to help Indiana school counselors develop and maintain effective school counseling practices.

Heightened awareness of school counseling in Indiana is perhaps most evident by the substantive investment of more than \$49 million in grant funding provided by the [Lilly Endowment Inc. Comprehensive Counseling Initiative](#). Beginning in 2016, a series of noncompetitive planning and competitive implementation grants were distributed to public and charter schools statewide to bolster comprehensive school counseling programs that promote students’ academic, social, emotional, college, and career development. In addition, Indiana’s commitment to comprehensive school counseling programs is visible by the substantive increase in RAMP designations in 2017–18 and the [Indiana Gold Star](#) recognition awarded to exemplary school counseling programs by the SEA. Indiana has made school counseling programs a clear priority that it hopes will translate into positive postsecondary outcomes for all students.

Evaluation and a Vision for School Counseling

Colorado, North Carolina, and Indiana are not the only states engaged in evaluation designed to support the unique roles of school counselors. However, these states have prioritized a shared vision for school counseling, and demonstrated commitment to practices that align with the ASCA National Model (2012).⁴ North Carolina is among seven states and the District of Columbia requiring the use of state-generated evaluation tools and practices. Both Colorado and Indiana allow LEAs to determine whether they use state resources for school counselor evaluation, so long as their local processes result in evaluations of appropriate school counselor standards. Further, Colorado and Indiana have used significant funding to augment their school counseling staffs and programs—Colorado

⁴ American School Counselor Association published *The ASCA National Model: A Foundation for School Counseling Programs* in 2003 in an effort to standardize the field. These guidelines are about school counseling programs, not standards or evaluation guidance for those who implement them.

through public grant funds and Indiana through a generous investment from a private foundation. North Carolina used some of its Race to the Top funds to validate its school counselor evaluation rubric. Continued professional development and resources to support comprehensive school counseling program implementation and school counselor evaluation in North Carolina is supported through limited state and federal funds.

Even with such differences, all three states have developed robust evaluation systems. Their rubrics are publicly available and use ASCA's school counselor competencies for guidance highlighting the multifaceted roles of school counselors. This approach helps ensure school counselors fulfill their potential to contribute in meaningful ways to student success. In addition, both Colorado and North Carolina use additional policy levers that add teeth to what could have remained an ideological debate and wish list. Colorado has perhaps used policy to link its school counselors more intentionally to its postsecondary goals than others by including school counselors as integral stakeholders in the successful implementation of ICAP. Finally, all three states involved important stakeholders in the process of developing their resources and evaluation guidance, including state agency staff, school and district administrators, school counselor preparation professionals, members of school counselor professional organizations, and most importantly, school counselors themselves. With high expectations, these states piloted their processes, collected feedback, and refined their guidance based on that feedback. Doing so not only ensures that resources and guidance reflect the best thinking in the field, but also ensures the buy-in of those who will use these tools. Although individual evaluation practices may not be an obvious priority for increasing school counselor visibility or educational policy advocacy, this brief provides examples of state-level efforts to support a commitment to school counseling at local and state levels through school counselor-specific evaluation expectations.

Conclusion

States that are focused on increasing the college and career readiness of students must attend to the inputs needed to meet this goal. Personalized learning or career pathways are strategies many states are using to balance specific student interests, real-world application, and academic rigor. However, research suggests that the current level of staffing and incentives (through evaluation) for school counselors is not aligned with these policy expectations.

For states and local education agencies grappling with the implementation of personalized learning to increase students' college and career readiness, the following are some important suggestions.

- Examine and understand the current staffing patterns of school counselors, both in elementary schools, where they can focus on holistic development and prevention, and in secondary schools, where college- and career-readiness planning and exploration increases for students.
- Review the equity of access of students and subgroups of students to school counselors among districts and secondary schools throughout the states, with close scrutiny on schools designated as low performing, as well as schools that serve large numbers of students who are disproportionately underrepresented in postsecondary education and training, such as English learners, students with disabilities, and Latinx and Black students.
- Consider the current policies and systems not only for evaluation of school counselors, to ensure that the criteria and incentives are in place to focus school counselors on direct support to students, but also for development of staff to offer direct support to students focused on personalized learning, with the goal of ensuring college and career readiness.

- Develop incentives and strategies to direct resources at building the capacity of schools through the expertise of school counselors to personalize learning for students and ensure that they have explored, planned, and participated in activities that lead to college and career readiness.

In short, school counselors have the potential to act as leaders and advocates who foster the academic, social-emotional, and career development of students through a multitiered system of support in diverse educational environments (ASCA, 2018a). Clearly defined school counselor evaluation practices have the potential to increase awareness of counselors' expertise and eventual impact on students' postsecondary success. Thus, well-defined expectations and outcomes for school counselors may leverage this important role to better support effective implementation of personalized learning plans.

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