

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

IOWA SCHOOL COUNSELORS and College and Career Readiness

A study of school counselors' roles, responsibilities, and practices to prepare Iowa students for their future as reported by school counselors and administrators.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

College and career readiness has become an area of increased emphasis throughout the country.

First Lady Michelle Obama's Reach Higher Initiative is a coordinated effort to prepare and encourage all students to complete a meaningful credential beyond their high school diploma. This initiative recognized that an emphasis should be placed on quality school counseling to help achieve the nation's postsecondary attainment goals. Future Ready Iowa similarly created a statewide alliance of educators, business and industry leaders, state agency and elected officials, and policy makers to work toward a goal of at least 70% of all Iowans in the workforce completing training and education beyond high school by 2025. The Iowa Governor's STEM Council also recognized that school counselors need to be involved in supporting students to becoming college and career ready, and to do so in a meaningful way.

These efforts are consistent with the American School Counselor Association's (ASCA) assertion that school counselors are vital to prepare PK-12 students to be academically, socially, and emotionally ready for college and career. School counselors receive this training in their professional programs, yet national studies identify barriers to implementing college and career programming as part of a comprehensive school counseling program. These studies indicate a significant discrepancy between what school counselors are trained to do versus what they are assigned to do in their school districts. The survey of school counselors and administrators conducted for this report sought to identify perceived and preferred roles for school counselors in Iowa related to college and career planning in order to make recommendations to improve postsecondary outcomes for students.

The postsecondary attainment and attrition data indicate that the PK-12 system succeeds in supporting students to graduate from high school but needs additional resources to prepare students to successfully transition to and complete postsecondary education. This impacts the educational success of the state, and more significantly the state's economic and workforce development future.

POSTSECONDARY ATTAINMENT IN IOWA

Graduation to Enrollment to Attainment - Attrition rates:

- 90% graduate high school
- 71% enroll in postsecondary education
- 43-47% complete postsecondary credential

Degree Attainment Rankings:

- Iowa ranks 1st in HS Graduation rate
- Iowa ranks 13th in population with AA or higher
- Iowa ranks 26th in population with BA or higher

This lack of postsecondary completion is of utmost importance given the prevalence of high and middle skill jobs in Iowa, many of which are in STEM fields, for which Iowa currently lacks adequate numbers of appropriately trained workers. Based on their training and role definition, school counselors are in an ideal position to assist students with preparation for and in obtaining knowledge of in-demand careers as early as elementary school. Similarly, school counselors guide students to acquire foundational skills during their middle and high school education on the way to a postsecondary institution so they are truly college and career ready.

“A continuing increase in STEM interest and achievement

by PK-12 students, resulting from the work of the Iowa Governor's STEM Council and the STEM Council's Working Group on Engaging School Counselors, is essential to fulfilling the demand for STEM workers in Iowa so that it can maintain Iowa's leadership position in education and industry. School counselors are well positioned to be at the forefront of working to increase STEM interest considering their extensive professional training in college planning and career development, but at this time it appears that they are not being fully utilized in this capacity in most schools. This needs to be addressed.”

~ Rob Denson
DMACC President

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In order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the gap in preparation and practice of school counselors in Iowa and to further the work of the Governor's STEM Council, the Iowa School Counselor Association (ISCA) commissioned this study through collaboration with and support from Des Moines Area Community College (DMACC) and Heartland Area Education Agency. The survey assessed awareness regarding the role of school counselors in preparing Iowa's PK-12 students to make quality college and career decisions.

Additionally, it examined the extent to which school counselors are performing the roles for which they have been trained and identified any areas of gaps between current practice and the preferred role aligned with national school counseling standards. The study was designed to answer the following research questions:

1: HOW DO STAKEHOLDERS DEFINE THE SCHOOL COUNSELOR'S ROLE IN COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS?

2: WHAT IS THE STAKEHOLDER'S PERCEPTION OF THE ROLE AND FUNCTION OF A SCHOOL COUNSELOR?

3: HOW DO STAKEHOLDERS COMPARE THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN SCHOOL COUNSELORS' CURRENT FUNCTION AND THEIR FORMAL STANDARDS FOR PRACTICE?

CURRENT STATE OF SCHOOL COUNSELING

Student-to-counselor ratios:

- Iowa ranks 26th in student-to-counselor ratio
- Iowa's ratio is 423:1; ASCA recommended maximum is 250:1
- Iowa's ratios are 69% higher than recommended

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

SCHOOL COUNSELORS AND ADMINISTRATORS AGREE!

- Career and postsecondary planning is an important role and function of school counselors
- School counselors are trained to implement career and postsecondary planning activities and are interested in increasing the amount of time spent with students in this area
- School counselors want and need updated training with information related to in-demand careers and postsecondary options to pursue those careers
- School counselors want and need additional professional development on the importance of using data, specifically related to program advocacy and identifying inequities in college and career placement
- Time and resource allocation are barriers to adequately delivering college and career programming for all students when school counselors maintain excessively large caseloads (423 students per school counselor in Iowa)
- School counselors spend too much of their time in non-counseling related activities, such as test coordination, clerical tasks (data entry, record keeping), and master scheduling, according to state and nationally recommended standards
- The school counselor/administrator relationship is crucial to successful student support and outcomes
- It is important for school counselors and administrators to communicate more regularly regarding the role and practice of school counselors in implementing college and career planning activities

RECOMMENDATIONS

ENHANCE THE SCHOOL COUNSELOR-ADMINISTRATOR PARTNERSHIP

- Clarify school counselor role for school counselors and administrators to one that prepares all students for college and career, at the preservice level and through ongoing training.
- Schedule regular school counselor and administrator meetings to review data and develop college and career programming
- Conduct time/task analyses; identify/discuss barriers that inhibit college and career readiness tasks
- Advocate for appropriate school counselor roles in order to best support college and career readiness
- Clearly define the purpose behind school counselors conducting non-counseling related tasks
- Use evaluation models accurately reflecting the roles and responsibilities of school counselors
- Recognize the school counselor's role in supporting teachers to include college and career components throughout all curricular areas and classroom instruction

INCREASE COLLEGE AND CAREER TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

- Develop statewide professional development for counselors and administrators focused on data-informed college and career readiness programming, including the school counselor's role and addressing inequities
- Provide training support to existing school counselors and administrators that reflects their unique geographic needs
- Partner with university training programs to include college and career readiness in preservice training programs for both school counselors and school administrators

UTILIZE TECHNOLOGY AND DATA TO DRIVE COLLEGE AND CAREER DECISION MAKING

- Examine the impact of student-to-school counselor ratios on student outcomes
- Analyze school and student data to identify inequities in college and career development and student outcomes
- Facilitate audits of graduation rates, student access to courses, college application rates, college matriculation rates, and college completion rates
- Gather process, perception, and outcome data to determine effectiveness of college and career interventions
- Share results and leverage support with education stakeholders



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