



AMERICAN COUNSELING ASSOCIATION

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Written Testimony for the FY 2011 Public Witness Record

**House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies
2358-C Rayburn House Office Building**

Submitted Electronically
to lh.approp@mail.house.gov
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April 14, 2010

The Honorable David R. Obey, Chairman
The Honorable Todd Tiart, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Obey and Ranking Member Tiart:

On behalf of the American Counseling Association (ACA), the nation's largest non-profit organization representing school counselors and professional counselors working in other settings, we respectfully request that you provide \$80 million in funding for the Elementary and Secondary School Counseling Program (ESSCP) for fiscal year (FY) 2011. ESSCP is the only federal program that provides funds specifically for developing and expanding comprehensive school counseling programs.

As you know, the president's FY 2011 budget request calls for the elimination of this important program. Though ACA appreciates the administration's interest in improving school climate, eliminating ESSCP will substantially reduce students' access to professional school counselors, school social workers and school psychologists, and the comprehensive school counseling programs and services they provide. This is especially concerning in light of recent studies showing students' mental health and social/emotional needs continue to rise.

Congress has strongly supported ESSCP over the years, ensuring that this important program has received a continued increase in funding. In FY 2008, Congress provided \$48.6 million for the program, exceeding the \$40 million statutory funding trigger; thus, in addition to elementary schools, middle and high schools were also eligible to apply for ESSCP grants for the first time. ESSCP increased to \$55 million for FY 2010. However, because of the trigger, only \$15 million of ESSCP's FY 2010 funds can go to middle and high schools. Thus, funding ESSCP at \$80 million for FY 2011 would ensure equal funding for both elementary and secondary schools.

Given the extraordinarily high student-to-professional ratios in many schools, more school counselors, school social workers and school psychologists are needed in order to meet the great demand and to fully realize the benefits of comprehensive school counseling programs. Currently, the average student-to-counselor ratio across the country is 467 to 1, nearly double ACA's recommended ratio of 250 to 1. The related professions also experience caseloads well above their recommended ratios. The School Social Work Association of America recommends a student-to-school social worker ratio of 400 to 1, and the National Association of School Psychologists recommends a student-to-school psychologist ratio of 500-700 to 1 when school psychologists are providing comprehensive services.

The need for increased funding of ESSCP is also illustrated by the huge demand for federal assistance to build the capacity for school counseling programs in school districts across the country. The current funding level allows support for only 1 in 10 applications. In 2009, 64

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school districts – comprising more than 850 schools and more than 429,000 students – across 29 states obtained new grants to establish or expand school counseling programs and services. The administration's FY 2011 budget proposal to eliminate ESSCP would threaten the capacity-building efforts of existing grantees and eliminate the absolute priorities that seek to meet this growing public demand for school counseling programs.

Highly trained and licensed/certified to work in school settings, professional school counselors, school social workers and school psychologists provide *the full range of students*, across general- and special-education, with essential "9 a.m. to 3 p.m." mental health services and academic supports. This is the most cost-effective way to address current student problems that impose barriers to learning, while also identifying problems early on, preventing future problems, and helping students and schools achieve college and career readiness. These professionals also provide expert consultation to and collaboration and coordination with teachers, principals, families and community-based professionals who provide the "3 p.m. to 9 p.m." services for students and families requiring more intensive or extended care.

Moreover, comprehensive school counseling programs have been found to positively impact numerous school factors, including academic achievement, school safety, and post-secondary outcomes. Consider the following:

- A recent meta-analysis of school counseling outcome research involving 117 studies of 153 school counseling interventions with 16,296 students found a significant effect size of .30. This means that the students who participated in the school counseling interventions improved almost a third of a standard deviation more than their peers who did not receive the interventions.¹
- Surveying 22,601 students, and after researchers controlled for socioeconomic status and enrollment size, students attending middle schools with more fully implemented comprehensive counseling programs reported earning higher grades, having fewer problems related to the physical and interpersonal milieu in their schools, feeling safer attending their schools, having better relationships with their teachers, believing that their education was more relevant and important to their futures, and being more satisfied with the quality of education available to them in their schools.²
- A state-wide study of Missouri high schools found that students in schools with more fully implemented school counseling programs were more likely to report that they had earned higher grades, their education was better preparing them for the future, their school made more career and college information available to them, and their school had a more positive climate (greater feelings of belonging and safety at school, classes less likely to be interrupted, peers behaving better). After controlling for school enrollment size and socioeconomic status, positive program effects were still found.³

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As other recent studies have documented, high quality school counseling services enable teachers and principals to move beyond antiquated systems to real reforms, improving student behavior, well-being and achievement. School-employed mental health professionals are also instrumental in implementing school climate initiatives and in managing partnerships with community providers to make community schools successful. Thus, to achieve desired goals, even the best teachers and principals need a strong complement of professional school counselors, school social workers and school psychologists spearheading a comprehensive school counseling program.

With education budgets reeling and families experiencing enormous hardships in the wake of the recession, now is the time to increase, not eliminate, federal support for the Elementary and Secondary School Counseling Program. Thank you for this opportunity to submit written testimony on this important matter. If you have questions, please contact Dominic W. Holt, MSW, MFA in the ACA Office of Public Policy and Legislation at (703) 823-9800, ext. 242, or dholt@counseling.org.

Sincerely,



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¹ Whiston, S. C. & Quinby, R. F. (2009). Review of school counseling outcome research. *Psychology in the Schools*, 46(3), 267-272.

² Lapan, R.T., Gysbers, N.C., & Petroski, G.F. (2001). Helping seventh graders be safe and successful: A statewide study of the impact of comprehensive guidance and counseling programs. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 79, 320-330.

³ Lapan, R.T., Gysbers, N.C., & Sun, Y. (1997). The impact of more fully implemented guidance programs on the school experiences of high school students: A statewide evaluation study. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 75, 292-302.