



AMERICAN COUNSELING ASSOCIATION

**Written Testimony for the Public Witness Record
Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee Hearing, April 22, 2010
"ESEA Reauthorization: Meeting the Needs of the Whole Student"**

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The American Counseling Association (ACA), the nation's largest non-profit organization representing school counselors and other professional counselors working in different settings, is grateful for the opportunity to submit written testimony on meeting the needs of the whole student in the context of reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). We applaud the committee for devoting time and attention to this important issue.

Professional school counselors play an important role in ensuring that students are ready to learn, and able to reach their maximum potential. All states require graduate-level training in school counseling as an entry-level prerequisite for credentialing as a school counselor, and forty-four states require completion of a master's degree in school counseling or related field. School counselors receive substantial training in a range of areas encompassing children's growth and development within the education system, including in human development, counseling interventions, assessment, academic development, and research and evaluation. Professional school counselors provide the full range of students—across general- and special-education populations—essential "9 a.m. to 3 p.m." school counseling services and academic supports, as well as consultation, collaboration, and coordination with teachers, principals, families and community-based professionals providing the "3 p.m. to 9 p.m." services for students and families requiring more intensive support.

Studies document that high-quality school counseling services increase academic achievement, and can help narrow the college-access gap between lower-income and higher-income student groups. School counseling services help increase students' well-being, improve student behavior, reduce incidence of bullying and other disruptive behavior, and foster more productive school environments.

- 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 (ES) of .30.¹ 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. In other words, school counseling interventions have a larger effect size than aspirin for preventing heart attacks (ES of .06) and larger than the overall effectiveness of acetaminophen, a.k.a. Tylenol (ES of .19).²
- 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.³

- 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.⁴

Professional school counselors and related personnel are instrumental in implementing individual and school-wide interventions (e.g., Response to Intervention (RTI), Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), school climate surveys, etc.), expanding family- and community engagement in education, and managing linkages that make community schools successful. As our education system continues to evolve, we believe there will be an even greater need for professional school counselors and their colleagues to help students, teachers, principals and entire schools succeed. We believe ESEA reauthorization must continue to invest in professional school counselors and related school-based personnel as key partners with teachers and principals, in order to achieve maximum improvements in academic achievement and economic competitiveness.

ACA is very concerned about proposals to eliminate the Elementary and Secondary School Counseling Program (ESSCP). ESSCP was first established as a demonstration project in 1994, under Senator Harkin's leadership. Since that time the program has come to serve as a key resource for often cash-strapped state and local education agencies. ESSCP is the only federal program that provides funds dedicated exclusively to hiring professional school counselors, school social workers and school psychologists to develop and expand comprehensive and collaborative school counseling programs. The need for ESSCP is all too clear. The current funding level (\$55 million for FY2010) allows support of only about 1 in 10 applications. In 2009, the program helped more than 429,000 students in some 850 schools across 29 states get counseling services through new grants to establish or expand counseling programs. ESEA reauthorization must continue to provide focused support for school counselors and related school-based personnel, who are working daily to prepare students for academic and personal success.

We would welcome the opportunity to work with the committee to develop safeguards and standards to ensure that federal support for counseling services and personnel is increased, not eliminated, under ESEA reauthorization. For future correspondence, 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. Thank you again for this opportunity.

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

² Dimmitt, C. (March 24, 2010). Evidence-based practice in school counseling: using data and research to make a difference. National Center for School Counseling Outcome Research and Evaluation. University of Massachusetts - Amherst. Slide presentation.

³ 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.

⁴ 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.