



## **ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION ACT (ESEA) REAUTHORIZATION: 2013 RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE AMERICAN COUNSELING ASSOCIATION (ACA)**

The American Counseling Association, the nation's largest non-profit membership organization representing professional counselors, recommends the following policy priorities as essential to improving the effectiveness of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in supporting students' academic, social, emotional, college, and career achievements

### **I. Increase Access to School Counselors for All Students.**

- Amend the Elementary and Secondary School Counseling Program (ESSCP) to increase the authorization to \$75 million.

**Rationale:** School tragedies over the recent months have increased focus on the need for mental health supports in schools. ACA urges reauthorization for the Elementary and Secondary School Counseling Program as contained in ESEA, Title IV, Part D Subpart 2, Section 5421(c)(2). This program helps to increase student academic achievement and improve school safety by increasing school counseling programs and school-based mental health professionals in the schools that demonstrate the most need. There is an overwhelming interest and demand for this competitive grant, which improves student-to-school counselor ratios and reduces schools' rates of disciplinary actions. It is imperative that the program's goals be prioritized for schools.

### **II. Fully Integrate School Counselors into the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.**

- Enable school counselors to receive professional development and be involved in school improvement plans under Title II of ESEA. (See Attachment for specific language changes to currently authorized ESEA.)

**Rationale:** ESEA does not fully integrate school counselors into professional development and school improvement programs. In a number of instances throughout ESEA, professional development for school counselors and other specialized instructional support personnel (SISP) is included only "as appropriate," whereas participation by teachers and administrators is allowed without qualification. Research shows the positive impact school counselors and other SISP have on the academic, social, and emotional achievement, and college and career readiness of students. Their participation in school improvement efforts should therefore be strongly encouraged, if not required.



**III. In any newly proposed grant program, such as the Successful, Safe, and Healthy Students State Grants program included in the Elementary and Secondary Education Reauthorization Act of 2011 (S. 3578), mental health services should have a baseline allocation, just as physical education does.**

- Under Section 4304. Successful, Safe, and Healthy Students State Grants,(2) Allocations, (A) In General--, include the following: "Not less than 20 percent of the subgrant funds are allocated for mental health programs including comprehensive school counseling and school climate programs."

**Rationale:** In S. 3578, a new Successful, Safe, and Healthy Students program would provide formula grants to States for implementing comprehensive programs to foster positive learning conditions in public schools, including mental health services, physical health services, and school safety strategies. As recent events in our schools have highlighted, preventative and responsive mental health programs are critical to our students' success. All too often, unfortunately, these services are usually the first to be cut when budgets get tight. Due to the still prevalent stigma surrounding mental health services and the severe underfunding of our nation's mental health system, mental health programs should have a funding baseline allocation at least equal to that for physical health services.

**IV. Give School Counselors and Specialized Instructional Support Personnel Adequate Representation in the Department of Education.**

- Establish an Office of Specialized Instructional Support Personnel within the Department of Education, as called for in H.R. 1940, the "Reducing Barriers to Learning Act of 2013."

**Rationale:** H.R. 1940 improves our investment in specialized instructional support personnel (SISP), including school counselors, school psychologists, and school social workers, to adequately address all barriers to student academic success. ACA strongly supports establishing an Office of Specialized Instructional Support Personnel within the Department of Education, as directed in this bill. This new office would provide much needed professional development opportunities, evidence-based research in these unique fields, provide technical assistance, and coordination with state and local agencies. An Office of Specialized Instructional Support Personnel would also ensure that U.S. Department of Education initiatives involve the professional knowledge and skills of school counselors and other specialized instructional support personnel.