

INCREASING COUNSELOR TO STUDENT RATIO IN SCHOOLS

(Adopted by Convention Delegates May 2000)

WHEREAS, The California State PTA supports quality public education for all children and encourages the development of each student to his or her full potential; and

WHEREAS, School counselors assist students with academic planning, vocational, career and college choices and provide assistance and referrals to students who are troubled by social or other problems; and

WHEREAS, The National PTA resolution Comprehensive Guidance Counseling Services states that “students in school are vulnerable to the pressures and problems of the society in which they are nurtured,” and “failure to identify learning problems and difficulties experienced by youth may result in problems of greater magnitude;” and

WHEREAS, According to recent national data collected by the United States Department of Education, California ranked last among states in its average student-to-counselor ratio; and

WHEREAS, The current average ratio is one counselor to 1056 students in California schools, while the American School Counselor Association recommends a ratio of one counselor to 250 students; and

WHEREAS, Increasing the ratio of counselors to students would allow counselors to give students more individual attention for academic or social guidance; now therefore be it

RESOLVED, That the California State PTA and its units, councils and districts support efforts to educate the public about the need for more counselors in schools;

and be it further

RESOLVED, That the California State PTA and its units, councils and districts support efforts in their local communities to increase the ratio of counselors to students in schools; and be it further

RESOLVED, That the California State PTA and its units, councils and districts support legislation to increase the ratio of counselors to students in schools.

BACKGROUND SUMMARY

The role of the school counselor is extremely important in the life of a student. The counselor provides direction in planning academic courses, helps the student explore career options and provides information and guidance in the selection of a college or vocational program.

In many schools, counselors also handle discipline. This may include meeting with students and parents, planning and implementing strategies for improvement, and serving as a resource to school staff on behavioral issues.

In addition to these duties, the counselor is often the person the student turns to for help with personal problems such as depression, family crisis and peer relationships. Without intervention, such personal problems can seriously hamper a student's ability to succeed in school. Depending on the severity of the situation, the counselor may lend a sympathetic ear, suggest solutions or connect the student and family with additional outside help.

As a result of a shortage of counselors in California, many students do not receive the assistance they need. A counselor with more than 500 students has less opportunity to provide individual attention to students. Students may not receive the academic and vocational guidance they need. This guidance is critical as students face a rapidly changing job market and a complex and competitive college application process.

Drug abuse and violence continue to be problems in schools and counselors often represent the first line of defense in dealing with these issues. When counselors are overwhelmed by an extremely large group of students to assist they are less likely to identify the students who need additional help and less able to give these students the time and attention they need.

The American School Counselor Association recommends one counselor to 250 students. In order to give each student the best chance of success, it is vitally important to increase the ratio of counselors to students.