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More School Counselors Needed in California

Groundbreaking career-path study calls for more school counselors to help students connect with careers

Sacramento, CA: A recent study evaluating the barriers that prevent students from connecting education with careers has identified a lack of school counseling staff as the biggest impediment to providing career development services to students¹.

The study, commissioned by the California Legislature and published by the California Research Bureau (CRB), recognizes an additional investment in school counselors as a top policy goal among efforts to increase student access to career education.

"This groundbreaking study confirms the critical role of the school counselor in helping students identify career technical education and postsecondary pathways that lead to sustainable careers," said Loretta Whitson, Executive Director for the California Association of School Counselors.

The release of the CRB study follows legislation enacted in 2006 that significantly increased the number of school counselors in California to about 2,500 statewide. Prior to the enactment of the Middle and High School Supplemental Counseling Program (MHSSCP), the student-to-counselor ratio in California was 960-to-1 and it was not uncommon for students to matriculate without ever discussing academic and career options with a trained school counselor. Research conducted by the Center for Student Support Systems at the University of San Diego demonstrated measurable gains in student outcomes following the first year of program implementation, including a 10% increase in students applying to post-secondary institutions². Despite these gains, California's student-to-counselor ratio still ranks among the highest in the nation. The CRB study underscores the need for additional state investments in school counseling programs.

Speaking amongst a panel of educators who were called together to respond to the study, Whitson identified its potential to re-focus education policy discussions: "We thank all of the State Senators and Assembly Members for their support of this study as well as lead investigator Patricia de Cos. Ms. de Cos reminds us that the ultimate goal of education is to prepare students to find careers that help them build successful lives. The study also shows how school counselors are critical in that effort and that although we still have a long way to go, we are marching in the right direction with recent investments to increase school counseling services throughout the state. Her research shows we must keep up the momentum!"

¹ de Cos, Patricia and Julie Chan. 2009. *The Careers Project: School Survey of Middle and High School Principals in California..* California Research Bureau.

² Rowell, Lonnie, L. Whitson, and S. Thomas. 2008. *The Middle and High School Supplemental Counseling Program: Increased Support for Student Success in California Schools.* University of San Diego Center for Student Support Systems