

# STUDENT-TO-SCHOOL-COUNSELOR RATIOS AND ASCA NATIONAL MODEL IMPLEMENTATION PROMOTE MORE INFORMED COLLEGE DECISION MAKING



## WHAT ARE THE FINDINGS?



**Lower student-to-school-counselor ratios and complete implementation of the ASCA National Model lead to engagement in higher-quality college counseling learning activities.**

**85%** of students in low-ratio (278:1) schools reported that their school counselors made an effort to really get to know them and treat them as an individual compared with 67% of students in high-ratio schools (300:1 or more)

**First-generation college students attending schools with low student-to-school-counselor ratio, applied to and were accepted into more colleges than continuing-generation students attending high-ratio schools.**

**Lower ratios + more complete implementation of the ASCA National Model may play a role in closing the college knowledge gap between first-generation college students and continuing-generation students.**

- Data gathered from students taking a subset of items on the College Admissions Knowledge Evaluation Test (CAKE) show that students attending low-ratio schools scored higher (67% correct) than students in high-ratio schools (46% correct).
- Students at schools with fully implemented ASCA National Model scored 66% correct (on the CAKE subset) compared with 46% of students with less-implementation of the ASCA National Model.



## WHAT CAN WE LEARN?

- 1** Lowering student-to-school-counselor ratios provides school counselors with more opportunities to offer college counseling support to graduating high school students.
- 2** Lowering student-to-school-counselor ratios can allow school counselors to better implement the ASCA National Model to guide their work with students.
- 3** Low student-to-school-counselor ratios combined with full implementation of the ASCA National Model can lead to more-informed college decision-making for graduating high school students.

Read the full report: [www.schoolcounselor.org/effectiveness](http://www.schoolcounselor.org/effectiveness)

**SOURCE:** ASCA grant-funded research study.

More than 300 12th-graders, attending 10 different high schools across the United States, participated in an online survey to examine if graduating 12th-graders attending schools with lower student-to-school-counselor ratios that implement the ASCA National Model engage in a wider and more in-depth range of college counseling learning activities.

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## School Counselors Matter

**School counselors are just one part — but an important part — of a system that ensures students have excellent educational experiences.**

As part of a school support team, school counselors provide critical social-emotional and academic supports. Through a comprehensive school counseling program that promotes success and achievement for all students, school counselors can help set students on a path for postsecondary success.

In particular, students of color and students from low-income families benefit from having more access to school counselors. For example, [Black students are more likely than](#) their White peers to identify their school counselor as the person who had the most influence on their thinking about postsecondary education. And research [links](#) the student-to-school-counselor ratios that meet the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) recommendation in high-poverty schools to better academic outcomes for students, such as improved attendance, fewer disciplinary incidents, and higher graduation rates.

**Simply put: There are not enough school counselors in the U.S.**

The [ASCA recommends](#) that schools maintain a ratio of 250 students per school counselor, and that school counselors spend at least 80 percent of their time working directly with or indirectly for students.

- **Across all schools, the average student-to-school-counselor ratio is [464 to 1](#).**

What's more, nearly 1 in 5 students — about 8 million children — do not have access to a counselor in their school at all, and nearly 3 million of those students do not even have access to other school support staff, such as school psychologists or social workers.

- **Across high schools, the average student-to-school-counselor ratio is **311 students to 1**.**

Only 1 in 5 high school students is enrolled in a school where there is a sufficient amount of school counselors. This means there are 11 million high school students who are enrolled in a school without enough school counselors.

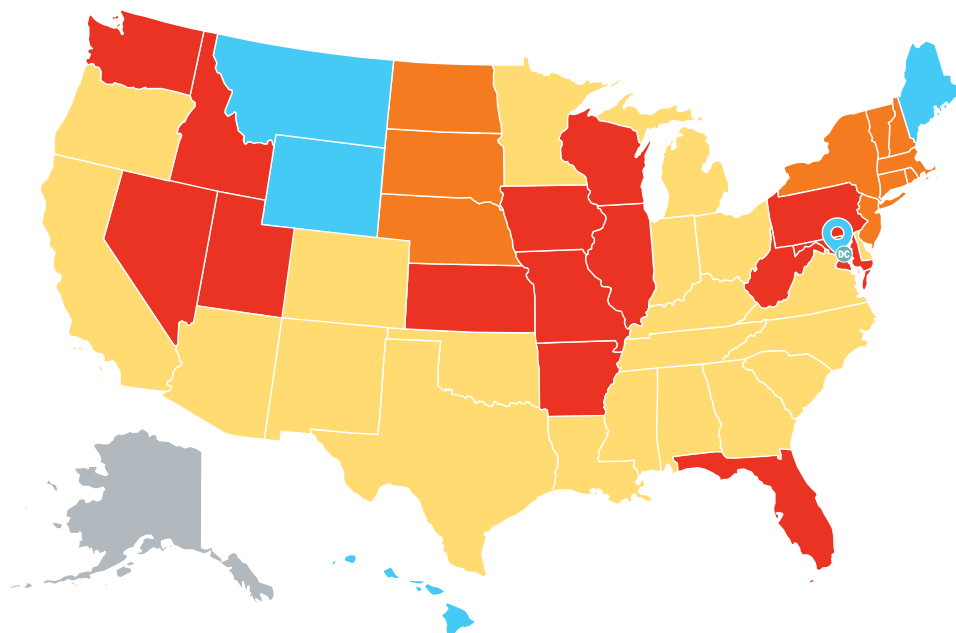
**Too often, school counselors are not available to students of color and students from low-income families.**

Students of color and students from low-income families have been overlooked and underserved for far too long. If anything, they deserve *more* access to school counselors than their peers — not the same, and certainly not less. And yet, the schools serving the most students of color or the most students from low-income families are shortchanged when it comes to school counselors.

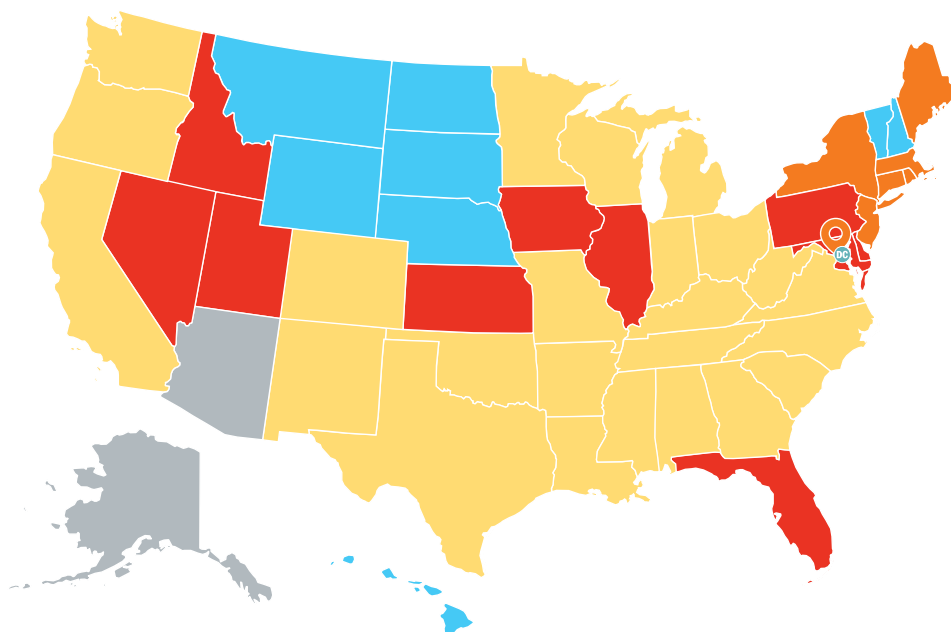
- **Across all schools**, 38 states are shortchanging either their students of color, students from low-income families, or both.
- **Across high schools**, a school counselor who serves predominantly students of color has to serve 34 more students every year than a school counselor who serves fewer students of color, and 27 states are shortchanging either their students of color, students from low-income families, or both.

**38 states are shortchanging either their students of color or students from low-income families, or both.**

**Figure 1: Statewide High School Student-to-School-Counselor Ratio *and* Access for Students of Color**



**Figure 2: Statewide High School Student-to-School-Counselor Ratio *and* Access for Students from Low-Income Families**



-  Unequal access, too few counselors
-  Unequal access, enough counselors
-  Better than equal access, too few counselors
-  Better than equal access, enough counselors

Source: The Education Trust analysis of data from the [2015–16 Civil Rights Data Collection](#) and the [2015–16 Common Core of Data](#).



**These data paint a clear picture: In too many states, students — especially students of color and students from low-income families — do not have meaningful access to counselors.**

School counselors can play a critical role in ensuring that students get opportunities to have safe, enriching experiences in and out of school, and in helping prepare students for postsecondary success — all in ways that meet their individual needs. But it's difficult to do that meaningfully if school counselors are responsible for supporting unmanageable numbers of students.

**What Advocates Can Do**

Here are some questions that education leaders and advocates should ask about how school counselors are being incorporated into plans for improving opportunity and outcomes for all students — especially for students of color and students from low-income families:

**If adequacy is a problem in your state or district:**

- Is there a [set requirement](#) for the number of school counselors per school or per number of students? If so, are the requirements being met? If not, what is the strategy for ensuring that there is an adequate number of high-quality school counselors in each school?
- Are there particular districts across the state where the problem is most pronounced? If so, what can be done to support those districts to place more school counselors in schools?
- What, if any, funding can be leveraged in the short term to address the most severe shortage areas? In the long term?
- How is the state or district ensuring there is a pipeline of school counselors? How does that strategy include partnerships with colleges and universities to appropriately train new school counselors?

**If equity is a problem in your state or district:**

- What are the policies or procedures for allocating school counselors across districts or schools, and why is the distribution of school counselors inequitable?
- What is the strategy for providing more school counselors in high-need schools?

# IMPACT OF SCHOOL-COUNSELOR-TO-STUDENT RATIOS ON STUDENT OUTCOMES

Study shows impact of school counselor ratios on student outcomes.



## WHAT ARE THE FINDINGS?



### A school-counselor-to-student ratio of 1:250 has a significant effect on student attendance, SAT mathematics, SAT writing and SAT verbal scores.

In Indiana, the average school-counselor-to-student ratio of 1:250 resulted in:

- 0.3% higher attendance (i.e. every day in a school of 1,000 students, three more students attend class than otherwise).
- 18 points higher SAT mathematics scores.
- 19 points higher SAT verbal scores.
- 16 points higher SAT writing scores.



### Students in districts with elementary school counselors have improved performance outcomes versus districts without.

Connecticut school districts report

- Schools with K-12 school counselors:
  - ▶ 69.4% report graduation rates greater than 90 percent.
- Schools without elementary school counselors:
  - ▶ 45.8% report graduation rates greater than 90 percent.
  - ▶ Approximately 72% of school districts provide no comprehensive school counseling services to students in grades K-5.



### Lower-performing schools/schools in lower-socioeconomic-status communities maintain higher caseloads than higher-performing schools.

In Connecticut:

- High-performing schools average school-counselor-to-student ratio:  
High school = 1:182 Middle school = 1:211
- Low-performing schools average school-counselor-to-student ratio:  
High school = 1:285 Middle school = 1:891



## WHAT CAN WE LEARN?

**1** Lowering ratios allows school counselors to effectively deliver a comprehensive school counseling program to better meet students' academic, career and social/emotional needs

**2** Socioeconomic status and community resources have an impact on school counselors' ability to effectively deliver comprehensive school counseling programs.

**3** School-counselor-to-student ratios may be optimal at 1:250, but grade level and socioeconomic factors of a district require close consideration.

Read the full report: [www.schoolcounselor.org/effectiveness](http://www.schoolcounselor.org/effectiveness)

**SOURCE:** ASCA grant-funded research of school counselor ratios and student outcomes in three states (Indiana, Connecticut, and New York).

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# The Role of the School Counselor

**S**chool counselors are certified/licensed educators with a minimum of a master's degree in school counseling, making them uniquely qualified to address all students' academic, career and social/emotional development needs by designing, implementing, evaluating and enhancing a comprehensive school counseling program that promotes and enhances student success. School counselors are employed in elementary, middle/junior high and high schools; in district supervisory positions; and counselor education positions.

School counselors serve a vital role in maximizing student success (Lapan, Gysbers, & Kayson, 2007; Stone & Dahir, 2006). Through leadership, advocacy and collaboration, school counselors promote equity and access to rigorous educational

experiences for all students. School counselors support a safe learning environment and work to safeguard the human rights of all members of the school community (Sandhu, 2000) and address the needs of all students through culturally relevant prevention and intervention programs that are a part of a comprehensive school counseling program (Lee, 2001). The American School Counselor Association recommends a school-counselor-to-student ratio of 1:250.

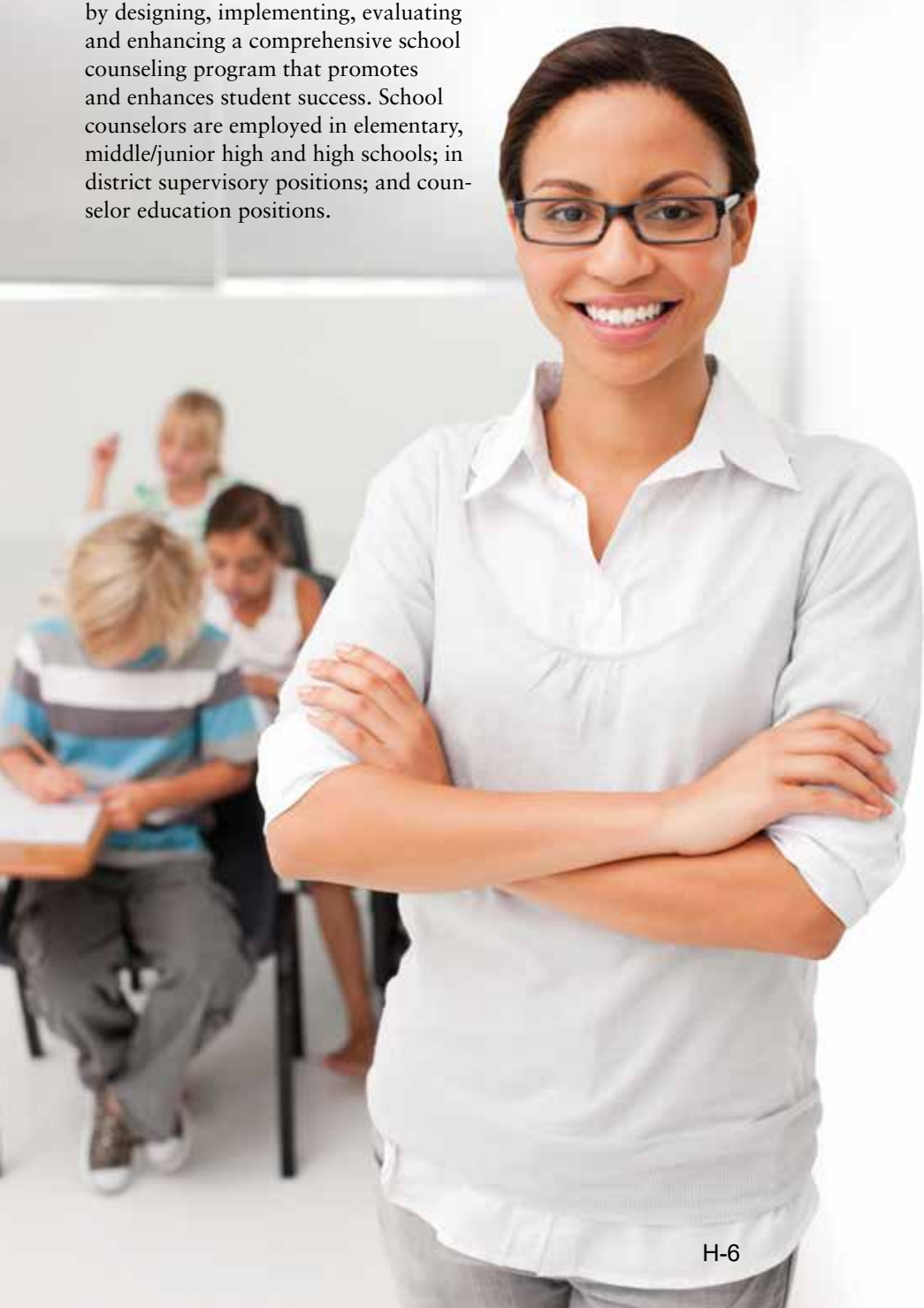
## The School Counselor's Role

School counselors have a minimum of a master's degree in school counseling, meet the state certification/licensure standards and abide by the laws of the states in which they are employed. They uphold the ethical and professional standards of ASCA and other applicable professional counseling associations and promote the development of the school counseling program based on the following areas of the ASCA National Model: foundation, delivery, management and accountability.

### FOUNDATION

School counselors create comprehensive school counseling programs that focus on student outcomes, teach student competencies and are delivered with identified professional competencies.

**Program Focus** – To establish program focus, school counselors identify personal beliefs that address how all students benefit from the school counseling program. Building on these beliefs, school counselors create a **vision statement** that defines what the future will look like in terms of student outcomes. In addition, school counselors create a **mission statement** that aligns with their school's mission and develop **program goals** that define how the vision and mission will be measured.



**Student Competencies** – Enhancing the learning process for all students, the **ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success** guide the development of effective school counseling programs around three domains: academic, career and social/emotional development. School counselors also consider how **other student standards** that are important to state and district initiatives complement and inform their school counseling program.

**Professional Competencies** – The **ASCA School Counselor Competencies** outline the knowledge, attitudes and skills that ensure school counselors are equipped to meet the rigorous demands of the profession. The **ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors** specify the principles of ethical behavior necessary to maintain the highest standard of integrity, leadership and professionalism. They guide school counselors' decision-making and help to standardize professional practice in order to protect both students and school counselors.

## MANAGEMENT

School counselors incorporate organizational assessments and tools that are concrete, clearly delineated and reflective of the school's needs. Assessments and tools include:

- **school counselor competency and school counseling program assessments** to self-evaluate areas of strength and improvement for individual skills and program activities
- **use of time assessment** to determine the amount of time spent toward the recommended 80 percent or more of the school counselor's time to direct and indirect services with students
- **annual agreements** developed with and approved by administrators at the beginning of the school year addressing how the school counseling program is organized and what goals will be accomplished

- **advisory councils** made up of students, parents, teachers, school counselors, administrators and community members to review and make recommendations about school counseling program activities and results
- **use of data** to measure the results of the program as well as to promote systemic change within the school system so every student graduates college and career ready
- **curriculum, small-group and closing-the-gap action plans** including developmental, prevention and intervention activities and services that measure the desired student competencies and measure the impact on achievement, behavior and attendance
- **annual and weekly calendars** to keep students, parents, teachers and administrators informed and to encourage active participation in the school counseling program

## DELIVERY

School counselors provide services to students, parents, school staff and the community in the following areas:

### Direct Services with Students

Direct services are in-person interactions between school counselors and students and include the following:

- **School Counseling Core Curriculum** – This curriculum consists of structured lessons designed to help students attain the desired competencies and to provide all students with the knowledge, attitudes and skills appropriate for their developmental level. The school counseling core curriculum is delivered throughout the school's overall curriculum and is systematically presented by school counselors in collaboration with other professional educators in K-12 classroom and group activities.
- **Individual Student Planning** – School counselors coordinate ongoing

systemic activities designed to assist students in establishing personal goals and developing future plans.

- **Responsive Services** – Responsive services are activities designed to meet students' immediate needs and concerns. Responsive services may include counseling in individual or small-group settings or crisis response.

### Indirect Services for Students

Indirect services are provided on behalf of students as a result of the school counselors' interactions with others including **referrals** for additional assistance, **consultation and collaboration** with parents, teachers, other educators and community organizations.

## ACCOUNTABILITY

To demonstrate the effectiveness of the school counseling program in measurable terms, school counselors analyze school and school counseling program data to determine how students are different as a result of the school counseling program. School counselors use data to show the impact of the school counseling program on student achievement, attendance and behavior and analyze school counseling program assessments to guide future action and improve future results for all students. The performance of the school counselor is evaluated on basic standards of practice expected of school counselors implementing a comprehensive school counseling program.

## Summary

School counselors are certified/licensed educators with the minimum of a master's degree in school counseling and are uniquely qualified to address the developmental needs of all students through a comprehensive school counseling program addressing the academic, career and personal/social development of all students.

## References

- Lapan, R. T., Gysbers, N. C., & Kayson, M. A. (2007). *Missouri school counselors benefit all students*. Jefferson City, MO: Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.
- Lee, C. (2001). Culturally responsive school counselors and programs: Addressing the needs of all students. *Professional School Counseling, 4*, 163-171.
- Sandhu, D. S. (2000). Alienated students: Counseling strategies to curb school violence. *Professional School Counseling, 4*, 81-85.
- Stone, C. B. & Dahir, C. A. (2006). *The transformed school counselor*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company.



# WHO ARE SCHOOL COUNSELORS?

School counselors are certified/licensed educators who improve student success for ALL students by implementing a comprehensive school counseling program.

## EMPLOYED AT ALL LEVELS



Also employed in district supervisory positions; and school counselor education positions



## SCHOOL COUNSELOR QUALIFICATIONS

- ▶ **Hold, at minimum, a master's degree in school counseling**
- ▶ **Meet the state certification/licensure standards**
- ▶ **Fulfill continuing education requirements**
- ▶ **Uphold ASCA ethical and professional standards**



## SCHOOL COUNSELOR'S ROLE

School counselors are vital members of the education team and maximize student success

- ▶ **Help all students:**
  - apply academic achievement strategies
  - manage emotions and apply interpersonal skills
  - plan for postsecondary options (higher education, military, work force)
- ▶ **Appropriate duties include providing:**
  - individual student academic planning and goal setting
  - school counseling classroom lessons based on student success standards
  - short-term counseling to students
  - referrals for long-term support
  - collaboration with families/teachers/administrators/community for student success
  - advocacy for students at individual education plan meetings and other student-focused meetings
  - data analysis to identify student issues, needs and challenges

## IDEAL CASELOAD

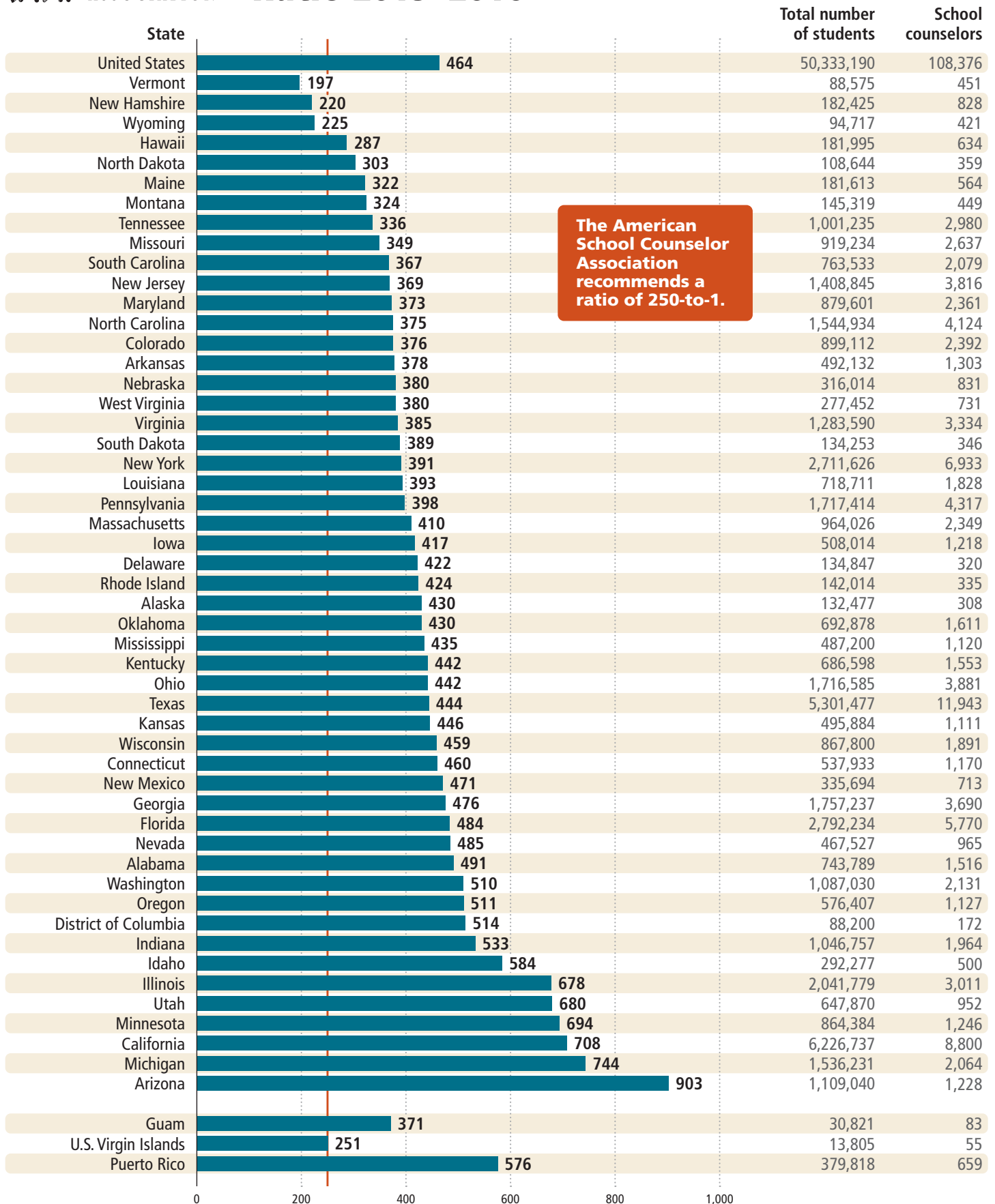
250 students per school counselor



AMERICAN SCHOOL COUNSELOR ASSOCIATION

For more information, resources please visit [www.schoolcounselor.org](http://www.schoolcounselor.org)

# Student-to-School-Counselor Ratio 2015–2016



The American School Counselor Association recommends a ratio of 250-to-1.

DATA SOURCE: U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS, COMMON CORE OF DATA (CCD), "STATE NONFISCAL PUBLIC ELEMENTARY/SECONDARY EDUCATION SURVEY," 2015-16 v.1a.