

Testimony of  
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On Behalf of the  
Michigan School Counselor Association (MSCA)

To the  
Governor's Mental Health and Wellness Commission  
September 12, 2013

Good evening. My name is Leslie Anderson and I am the President Elect of the Michigan School Counselor Association.

I have provided you with a handout that contains a red chart on one side and a blue chart on the other. The red chart explains the training and expertise of a Professional School Counselor. The blue side is an overview of the Comprehensive School Counseling Curriculum that is endorsed by the ASCA, MSCA and MDE. Many studies have proven that Comprehensive Counseling increases standardized test scores, decreases drop out rates and increases classroom success when fully implemented. Please note at the bottom of this page that student to counselor ratio recommended to fully implement Comprehensive Counseling is 250 to 1. In 2008, the student to counselor ratio in the state of Michigan was 634 to 1. Unfortunately, these ratios are climbing at an alarming rate in Michigan. 35 states in this country have legislated mandates for school counselors in their public schools. Many of these mandates include ratios. The state of Michigan has no legislated mandates for school counselors at all. As a result, school systems are cutting non-mandated counselors to lower educational costs.

When Comprehensive Counseling is fully implemented, school counselors provide preventative education to ALL students. Often, Professional School Counselors are the first to identify student and family needs and are able to make referrals to the appropriate school and community agencies for treatment. Michigan currently has only four buildings in the state who can document full implementation of the Comprehensive Counseling Program. It's not for lack of training or motivation on the part of school counselors, it is for lack of counselors.

I'd like to tell you about a student that I worked with. I'll call her Mary. Years ago I met Mary when she was sent to my office during her first week of high school. Mary arrived in my office wearing clothes that were several sizes too big. Her shoulders were slumped forward and her hair was pulled over her face. She sat in my office for about a half hour and never spoke a word. She later wrote me a four page letter with very tiny print telling me that she had much to talk about. Our silent meetings continued. I was told many times to "give up" on Mary. I was told it was a waste of time to sit with her. I was told she clearly was not intelligent or motivated and that sometimes "we just have to realize that we can't save them all."

I learned over time that Mary's mother had been violently raped by a stranger several years earlier. Mary was a product of that rape. Her mother chose to give birth to her and to raise her, but Mary was a constant reminder to her mother of that horrible crime. Mary had spent her life trying to "disappear" so that her mother would be happy. Mary was suicidal and felt that she contributed nothing of value to this world.

By the end of her freshman year she asked me if I would get my tongue pierced if she were to graduate on time. I said, "no, but I would get my ears pierced again." I was able to meet with Mary for three years. During that time, we were able to get help for her mother and for Mary through various community agencies. I tested Mary and learned that she had an extremely high IQ. I was completely surprised when she came into my office her last week of school to tell me that we had an appointment. We got our ears pierced together that week just in time for her graduation.

Mary graduated from college and is now attending law school. She is a beautiful, confident young woman. Did I save Mary? No. A whole network of interventions helped her to achieve this success. I do wonder, however, where she would be if there had been no school counselor office where she could sit in silence when she was a freshman. Who would have been equipped to know what her needs were?

Recently a woman said to me that she thought school counselors were a waste of her tax dollars. She said she didn't want her tax money paying for something her kids didn't need. Schools are for teaching, not for providing therapy. Here is my response to her:

If your children are receiving nothing from the school counselor, you have a valid complaint. Your children should be receiving a comprehensive curriculum of preventative lessons to help them succeed in school and in life. If your school does not have enough counseling staff to provide this curriculum, COMPLAIN. I ask you this, if your children and mine were sitting in a classroom and a potential shooter entered the building, would you rather your tax dollars had paid for prevention and early intervention in the life of that potential shooter, or would you rather your tax dollars pay for the aftermath of a school shooting?

Two weeks ago, I returned for my 22<sup>nd</sup> year as a school counselor. After a few days, I was told that my job was eliminated. I could tell you that sad story of being unemployed for the first time since I was 14, but that isn't the important thing. ANOTHER 500 or so students have not one mental health professional in their school this year. Abuse and domestic violence will not be identified. Educational Development Plans will not be completed. Bullies will be disciplined, but not counseled. The bullied will not have someone to teach them coping skills.

Michigan needs legislated mandates for school counselors. Professional School Counselors are the front line to identification and early intervention for students and families. We have thousands of students in this state who do not have access, or who have very limited access to a School Counselor at this time. Let's put our front line back in place.

# PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL COUNSELOR CREDENTIALS

<b>CREDENTIAL REQUIREMENTS</b>	<b>Endorsed School Counselor</b>	<b>Licensed School Counselor</b>
<b>BACHELOR'S DEGREE</b>	Bachelor's Degree in education	Bachelor's Degree
<b>CERTIFIED TEACHER</b>	Must hold a valid Teaching Certificate	
<b>MASTER'S DEGREE</b>	Master's Degree in Counseling	Master's Degree in Counseling
<b>APPLIED EDUCATION</b>	*Student Teaching *3-years Teaching Experience *100 Practicum Hours *600 Clock Hour Internship with supervision	*100 Practicum Hours *600 Clock Hour supervised internship
<b>CERTIFICATIONS AND LICENSURE</b>	*MDE Teaching Certificate with school counselor endorsement MI Dept. of Ed *Must meet basic teaching of reading requirements *Many Endorsed School Counselors are also Licensed Professional Counselors	*MDE School Counselor License
<b>TESTING</b>	MTTC Test #51 – School Counselor	MTTC Test #51 – School Counselor
<b>CONTINUING EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS</b>	*First renewal : 9 semester hours in a planned course of study, or approved Master's Degree *Second Renewal : 6 Credits or 18 CEUs beyond the first 9 PLUS 3 years of teaching experience	6 Credits or 180 CEUs clock hours every 5 years

A Master's Degree in School Counseling prepares a Professional School Counselor to provide education, prevention and early intervention to ALL students

## PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL COUNSELORS ARE UNIQUELY EQUIPPED TO:

- focus on educational planning, college and career readiness, academic achievement, social/emotional intelligence, safety within the school environment and early identification of academic and mental health issues and disabilities.
- Provide classroom lessons and curriculum to proactively address issues such as anti-bullying, school safety, character, communication skills, multiculturalism, family dynamics, etc.
- identify student needs and to make referrals to the appropriate community agencies, legal systems, academic interventionists and mental health providers
- identify mental and behavioral issues BEFORE they manifest in violent ways and to provide and obtain appropriate preventative interventions.
- to provide crisis prevention and intervention plans within an academic institution.