

2025 MSCA ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

Advocating for our students is a school counselor's super power. I genuinely believe this and see it every day. Advocating for ourselves and our profession, however, can be intimidating and confusing. Where to even begin? There are so many ways we can advocate for ourselves and our profession and not all of them have to be big, grand gestures. While Day on the Hill is a "big A" advocacy opportunity there are plenty of small "little a" advocacy moments like correcting staff members who call you guidance counselors, don't know you can support classroom lessons, run small groups, or so much more.

I believe, as I know many of you believe, that advocacy is a crucial part of jobs as school counselors and while we are used to being in positions to advocate on behalf of our students, advocating for us as professionals is just as crucial. In 2024, in partnership with school social workers, school psychologists, and school nurses, Minnesota appropriated over 29 millions dollars in student support funding, 35 millions dollars for the 2025 school year, and an additional 10 million dollars to address the student personal workforce pipeline and the barriers that exist that prevent people from going into the school counseling profession.

As you have conversations with administration, superintendents, parents, community members and leaders, state senators and representatives, we hope you find the information contained in this toolkit helpful, insightful, and idea generating.

The toolkit includes the following materials:

- *Key messages to guide your discussions with administrators, the media, legislators and others*
- *Calendar of important legislative dates and suggested advocacy activities*
- *Tips for speaking with your legislators and reporters*
- *Sample letter/email/social media post to send to your legislators*
- *Tips for writing a letter to the editor*
- *Sample letter to the editor to submit to your local newspaper*

If you have any questions, please contact me or the MSCA Advocacy Committee. We could not do this without you and are grateful for your dedication to our profession!

Sincerely,
Sydney Piras
MSCA President-Elect

2025 KEY MESSAGES

School counselors are trained and licensed professionals who are often the first point of contact for students who are struggling. Every day, school counselors collaborate with other professionals to address students' academic, social, personal, mental health and career development needs.

In 2023-2024 the Minnesota legislature and Governor Walz recognized our students' mental and physical health needs. Because of our work, we secured:

Student Support Personnel Aid

A provision many years in the making, this is ongoing state aid in the form of a student support personnel allowance to help fund more necessary school support positions. This is intended to grow mental health teams, not backfill current budgets.

Schools must use this funding in the following ways:

- Hire new support personnel staff
- Increase part-time student support personnel to full-time positions
- Stabilize funding for positions that are temporarily funded positions.

"Student support services personnel" is defined as "school counselors, school psychologists, school social workers, school nurses, and chemical dependency counselors." Districts will receive funding on a formula basis with charter schools guaranteed at least \$20,000 in annual aid and small districts at least \$40,000. Intermediate districts and other cooperative entities will also be entitled to this aid stream.

This is a \$64 million investment in school years 2024-2026 and \$117 million investment in school years 2026-2028.

Subjects of Bargaining

Public employers are required to bargain with their employees over certain subjects, like working conditions and compensation. This past year the law was expanded to include student personnel ratios in schools, meaning employees at any traditional public school can bargain with their employer about the ratio of school counselors to students.

Despite the bills that have been passed and the strong interest shown by school districts to hire more support staff, **Minnesota's student-to-counselor ratio remains one of the worst in the nation, ranking 48th out of the 50 states as of 2024.** The average school counselor in Minnesota is currently responsible for assisting 541 students, forcing kids to wait days and sometimes weeks to get the help they need. Furthermore, Minnesota's student-to-counselor ratio is at least 200 students higher than each of our bordering Midwest states.

Research shows **dramatic benefits to overall school safety when students have access to comprehensive support services** and demonstrates how student success is affected:

- Increased post-secondary enrollment and career readiness.
- Increased school attendance rates, ACT scores and graduation rates.
- Decreased disciplinary action and suspension rates.
- Increased math and reading proficiency levels.

We know that students need these comprehensive supports now more than ever, and will continue to need them as they return to school buildings when this pandemic is done.

We took steps in the right direction by funding the Support Our Schools Act in 2016 and the Student Support Personnel Aid in 2023 – but there is still a critical shortage of school counselors in Minnesota.

- Student Support Personnel Aid, when fully rolled out, will provide \$65 million in funding for positions. That is a great number, but if new school counselors have the same inappropriate duties as current ones – administering tests, substitute teaching– we will never meet the needs of our students. We need the state to pass a great policy to make sure this great funding reaches our students.
- With the funding levels provided by the 2016 grants, it will take approximately **20 years of funding** for Minnesota to reach the *national average* of students to counselors (450-to-1) and a total of more than 57 years to reach the *recommended ratio* of 250-to-1.

MSCA is bringing forward legislation that would further strengthen the role of school counselors by recommending a school counselor in each site, outlining appropriate and inappropriate school counselor duties, and identifying necessary student to school counselor ratios at each grade level. Additionally, MSCA will continue to advocate for and address barriers preventing professionals from joining the school counseling field by increasing access to funds to help pay for graduate school in school counseling AND partial loan forgiveness options. These are bold initiatives and **we urge legislators to support policies that enable school counselors to better serve Minnesota students' academic, postsecondary, and mental health needs.**

2025 ADVOCACY CALENDAR

The purpose of this calendar is to provide MSCA members with recommended grassroots actions to show support for student support services and increased funding for school counselors and other licensed professionals. We have identified specific actions to correspond with important dates during the legislative session and throughout the calendar year.

Note: All of these dates are approximate and subject to change.

February

February 4: Day on the Hill

- School counselors from across the state will come to the Capitol to talk to legislators about the importance of investing in our work.
- Visit the MSCA website for information on how to register for Day on the Hill!

March

Early to mid March: First committee and second committee deadline

- This is the deadline by which committees must act favorably on a policy bill in both bodies (House and Senate).
- Be prepared to contact your legislators, encouraging them to support the MSCA agenda (details will come from MSCA Government Relations Committee).

March 29 to March 31: Legislative break for Eid

April

Action alerts

- Watch your emails for action alerts in coordination with legislative hearings.

Late April: Third committee deadline

- This is the deadline for committees to act favorably on major appropriations and finance bills. This is typically when omnibus bills are assembled.

April 11 to April 21: Legislative break for Easter/Passover

May

Action alerts

- Watch your emails for action alerts in coordination with legislative hearings.

Late May: Legislative session adjourns

- Stay tuned for information about what the Legislature accomplished this session and follow-up correspondence about action steps to advocate for our profession and funding support throughout the summer and fall of 2025

June-October

Connect with your legislators/candidates

- Be sure to stay in touch with your legislators over the summer. The MSCA Government Relations Committee will provide ideas for creative advocacy.

August 12: Primary Election Day

- Many local school districts will hold referenda elections, or school board elections on this date.

Oct. 26-27: MSCA Conference (Duluth)

- Professional development opportunities will be provided at the MSCA conference around legislative advocacy.
- MSCA will provide continued updates and suggestions on how counselors can be effective advocates in 2026.

November

Nov. 4: Election Day

- Check Minnesota's Secretary of State website to check what is on your ballot
- <https://www.sos.state.mn.us/elections-voting/whats-on-my-ballot>

December

Preparation for 2026 legislative session

- MSCA will provide continued updates and suggestions on how counselors can be effective advocates in 2026 via email and the MSCA listserv.

TIPS FOR TALKING TO YOUR LEGISLATOR

Your goal is to develop an ongoing personal relationship with your elected representatives, as well as to influence their position on specific issues or bills. Here are a few general things to keep in mind when speaking to them.

- [Know who your legislator is](#) before making initial contact on an issue.
- Do not be intimidated. You are the expert on what is happening in your schools and with your students. Share your personal story. Do not feel like you have to reference bill numbers or know the funding formula.
- Do not assume that your legislator knows about your work and its impact on students. Take the time to share what you see in your schools and with your students. Do not use jargon.
- Know your issue. Provide facts and figures to back up your position, along with the personal anecdotes. Refer to the key messages and other materials in the advocacy kit.
- Don't debate with a legislator or give ultimatums such as "I won't vote for you if you do not support my position." Respect the legislator's right to disagree with you.
- Put the legislator at ease by convincing them that you are there to serve as a resource. Be a partner, not an adversary.
- Put broad policy issues in a local perspective. Legislators who know how issues will impact local voters tend to grasp ideas more easily and are generally more receptive.
- Be a good listener. Hear what your legislator has to say on the issue.
- Be sure to thank the legislator for taking the time to hear your position.
- Once a legislator gives you a commitment, it is appropriate to check back with him/her later. However, do not badger him/her with excessive phone calls.
- Do not be disappointed if your legislator sends an aide. Aides are critical to the process.
- Be brief, prepared, clear, honest, accurate, persuasive, timely, persistent and grateful.
- Always follow up with a written thank you note and amplify your main points. If your legislator had questions during your meeting, provide that information promptly and offer to serve as a future resource.
- You should view your relationship with a legislator as a long-term commitment to educating and communicating with him/her. The relationship may take time to cultivate but can be built through trusted, frequent communication.

TALKING POINTS FOR 2025

It is important to be informed about current legislative events and priorities for school counselors prior to meeting with legislators. Here are some things to keep in mind this year!

Stress the Need for Change

You were elected by our communities to meet their needs. Right now our students and their families are crying out for this investment. We need to do better by our kids and make sure support services are prioritized. Minnesota is 48th in the nation for how likely a student is able to see a school counselor. We need you to help our schools prioritize our students' mental and physical health needs.

Minnesota continues to be at the bottom of the nation in student-to school counselor ratio. Data to support this includes:

- Minnesota is 48th in the nation for student-to-school-counselor ratio at 541:1.
- This is about 200 students higher than each of our bordering states including North Dakota (298), South Dakota (339), Iowa (353), and Wisconsin (308).
- The American School Counselor Association recommends a ratio of 250:1 to comprehensively meet students' academic, social/emotional, and career/post secondary needs.

We are asking you to support bills that provide recommendations for school counselor to student ratios, clarify the role of the school counselor, as well as loan forgiveness and grant programs to increase the school counselor workforce in Minnesota.

- The Minnesota School Counselors Association is working to bring forward legislation that further strengthens student mental health and academic supports by stating the need for a school counselor at each school site, recommending student to school counselor ratios at each grade level, and outlining appropriate and inappropriate school counselor duties.

Share de-identified stories about what you're seeing in schools. Consider the following topics:

- Are you able to effectively do your job given your ratios? Be prepared to answer questions about ratios in your school and surrounding schools.
- Are you able to effectively do your job given the duties expected of you? Are your duties appropriate for school counselors and include direct services to students, or are they inappropriate?
- Are you able to be proactive or are you frequently operating reactively?
- What are the mental health needs of students like in your schools? Are you seeing an increase in depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, etc.?
- Are students in greater need of academic and postsecondary supports?

Possible Pushback/Questions from Legislators and How to Respond:

“We should put any additional school funding on the formula/local control.”

You were elected by our communities to meet their needs. Right now our students and their families are crying out for this investment. We need to do better by our kids and make sure support services are prioritized.

Minnesota is consistently ranked 47th or 48th in how likely a student is able to see a school counselor. We need you to help our schools prioritize our students’ mental and physical health needs.

“We can’t afford this.”

Our children can’t afford us not doing this.

“How many school sites currently have a school counselor?”

Half. About 1,100 of the state’s 2201 school sites report having a full 1.0 FTE school counselor. Another 400 school sites have a partial FTE at each school site, but having a school counselor at the school on Tuesday does not help with whatever crisis of the day the school encounters on Monday. This leaves 700 school sites across the state with no school counselor.

“Are there enough school counselors/school nurses/school social workers/school psychologists licensed in the state to meet this need?”

Absolutely. There are thousands of licensed school counselors in Minnesota not working in schools. Part of the reason they leave schools is due to unmanageable caseloads and the lack of support to engage in appropriate school counseling duties (like providing individual and group counseling) as opposed to inappropriate school counseling duties (such as lunch duty, substitute teaching, and test administration).

SAMPLE EMAIL/LETTER TO LEGISLATOR

*The text and suggested messages below are for guidance only.
You know your story best; personalize and share additional
information you feel is important.*

Dear Senator/Representative [LAST NAME]:

I have worked as a licensed school counselor for [XX] years. I am writing to ask you to support [Insert New Bill Info Here].

The Minnesota School Counselors Association is bringing forward legislation to strengthen the role of school counselors by stressing the need for a school counselor at each site, outlining appropriate school counselor duties, and recommending appropriate school counselor to student ratios. These are bold initiatives that offer important clarification of the role of a school counselor, and **we urge legislators to support these bills in 2025.**

As a licensed school counselor, I am trained and uniquely qualified to help boost students' academic performance, support their social and emotional needs, improve college readiness and prepare them to enter Minnesota's workforce. This places me, and my colleagues, at the frontlines of seeing what our students deal with daily. I can tell you; our students are struggling. They were even before the pandemic.

To aid them in their success, they need access to critical supports. Licensed school counselors work in close coordination with teachers and other student support professionals when available such as school nurses, school psychologists and chemical dependency counselors. I am sad to report, however, that our students often don't have adequate access to these supports. And as we help students bounce back from the COVID-19 pandemic, these supports are more needed than ever. *[Insert personal remark about how many students you serve, a case when a student's needs weren't met, etc.]*

Minnesota needs to help our students have access to much needed support services that we know are critical to contributing to their success. I would be happy to further discuss what this funding could mean for the students I work with every day. Thank you for your legislative service, and I look forward to partnering with you in the fight for our students' future.

Sincerely,
[NAME], [ADDRESS], [PHONE NUMBER]

TIPS FOR WRITING A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

While it may make sense to submit letters to large newspapers like the Star Tribune and Pioneer Press, the reality is your letter is competing with hundreds of other submissions for publication. **Submitting a letter to your local newspaper or online news platform has a far better chance of being published and read.**

Legislators pay close attention to their local newspapers. During session, when legislators are away from their districts, monitoring local news coverage is one of the best ways for them to stay up to date on the issues their constituents care about most.

Be sure to follow the guidelines, like the deadline of the newspaper and the word count limit (often between 150-250 words). Some newspapers list their guidelines on their website, and some do not. If you're not sure about your newspaper's guidelines, call the newspaper and ask the editor.

It is common practice for newspapers to only publish letters written by residents who live in the community where the newspaper is circulated. To make verification easier for your newspaper, list your home address, phone number and email address at the end of your letter. (Personal contact information is never published, it is only used to verify that you live in the community.)

If your letter gets published, write a short email to the editor thanking him or her. It's also a good idea to share the letter with your elected officials, colleagues and social media networks.

SAMPLE LETTER TO THE EDITOR

*The text and suggested messages below are for guidance only.
You know your story best; personalize and share additional information
you feel is important.*

To the editor:

For the last [XX] years, I have worked as a licensed school counselor [at *school name* or in *school district*]. In my time as a school counselor, I have worked tirelessly with a diverse variety of students, providing them with the support necessary to ensure their success as future leaders.

In our school district, I work with [XXX] students each [week/month]. With limited resources and increasing demands for support services, students are forced to wait days or weeks to meet with me. This problem isn't unique to [school name] – in too many school districts across Minnesota, the average counselor is responsible for nearly 600 students. That is significantly higher than the recommended ratio of 1 counselor for every 250 students. Our students cannot achieve in the classroom when they are told to “take a number” to receive support outside of the classroom, especially as we help them manage mental health crises and significant personal stressors.

I urge the Minnesota Legislature to implement a long-term, sustainable solution that helps districts hire more counselors and support staff.

Please join me in contacting State Representative [NAME] at [EMAIL ADDRESS] and State Senator [NAME] at [EMAIL ADDRESS] and ask them to support [Insert School Counseling Bills Here]. Urge them to support Minnesota's future leaders.

Sincerely,

[NAME]

[ADDRESS]

[PHONE NUMBER]

SAMPLE SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS

The text and suggested messages below are for guidance only. You know your story best; personalize and share additional information you feel is important. But use the #mnleg and tag your legislators to make sure they see it.

We can put the emotional support every student needs right in their schools, but only if the richest Minnesotans pay their fair share so districts can hire more counselors and mental health professionals. #mnleg

Students need support as they bounce back from the COVID-19 disruptions. School counselors will be a crucial part of that, but our current ratios are unworkable. #mnleg needs to provide funding for counselors and mental health professionals now!

In many districts across MN, the average counselor is responsible for nearly 600 students -- more than double the recommended ratio of 1 counselor for every 250 students. We need funding for more counselors to meet students' needs. #mnleg

School counselors are crucial to student success in the classroom and beyond. But MN sits at the bottom for student-to-counselor ratios, which means many students will never have access to one. #mnleg can increase funding to right this wrong.