



2026 STATE OF AFFAIRS & LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

School counselors are trained and licensed professionals who are often the first-and most trusted-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.

Minnesota's Critical School Counselor Shortage

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 the 2024-25 school year.** The average school counselor in Minnesota is currently responsible for assisting 539 students, forcing kids to wait days and sometimes weeks to get the help they need. Some counselors in the state are responsible for more than 1,000 students, with the heaviest caseloads often found in elementary and middle schools. **Many elementary students in Minnesota do not have access to a school counselor at all.**

Furthermore, Minnesota's student-to-counselor ratio is approximately 200 students higher than each of our bordering Midwest states, including North Dakota (282:1), South Dakota (336:1), Iowa (340:1), and Wisconsin (362:1). The American School Counselor Association recommends a ratio of 250:1 to comprehensively meet students' academic, social-emotional, and career and post-secondary needs — and Minnesota more than doubles that recommendation.

Research consistently shows that when students have access to school counselors and comprehensive support services, school safety and student success improve dramatically. The evidence speaks for itself:

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

In 2023-2024 the Minnesota legislature and Governor Walz recognized our students' mental and physical health needs. Because of advocacy work, we secured funding through **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 student 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 (i.e., school counselors, school psychologists, school social workers, school nurses, and chemical dependency counselors)
- Increase part-time student support personnel to full-time positions
- Stabilize funding for positions that are temporarily funded.

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

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY #1:

MSCA supports state investment in the hiring of additional school counselors through continued and increased funding of the Student Support Personnel Aid. Additionally, these funds must be protected to ensure they are utilized for hiring and increasing the number of school counselors in the state.

Minnesota Lacks a State-Level Framework for the Role of School Counselors

State policy should clearly define the role of school counselors. When school counselors are assigned duties outside their professional scope—such as **test administration or substitute teaching**—they are unable to fully provide the services students need, including:

- Academic support
- Social/emotional resources
- Career & postsecondary planning

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY #2:

MSCA is bringing forward legislation that would further strengthen the role of school counselors by recommending a dedicated school counselor at each school site, outlining appropriate school counselor duties, and ensuring that at least 80% of a school counselor's time is spent in direct service to students.

Student Support Personnel Workforce Pathway Grant

Also in 2024, a workforce pathway grant program was developed to support students pursuing careers as school psychologists, school nurses, school counselors, and school social workers in Minnesota, with a specific focus on training more licensed providers of color and Indigenous providers. Beginning in 2024 and continuing annually, approximately \$5 million/year is allocated to this grant program. Each eligible university training program may apply for up to \$750,000 to support graduate students with tuition, stipends, and other educational expenses during their training and internship.

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY #3

MSCA Supports sustained funding through the Student Support Personnel Workforce Pathway Grant. This funding must stay focused on three key priorities: reducing the student-to-school counselor ratio statewide, diversifying the school counseling workforce to better reflect our students' demographics, and ensuring every student has access to the support they need.

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!**

Questions? Please contact me at:

Name of Constituent/School Counselor

Contact Email/Phone