

Comments Specific to Part XV Special Services Sec. 10-145d-922

This new section fundamentally changes and undermines the role and function of the school counselor in schools, which is primarily preventive in nature and exists to serve every student. In contrast, the other special services staff identified (school psychologist, school social worker, school MFT and speech and language pathologist) work primarily with the small group of students exhibiting difficulties in learning and school adjustment. The school counselor focuses on teaching skills and competencies to all students based on the nine national standards in the three domains of academic, personal/social and career planning through the Connecticut Comprehensive School Counseling Program (2008), published by the State Department of Education. In addition, the school counselor, through the individual planning component, works with each high school student to develop an individual plan which includes career exploration, defining future goals and identification of postsecondary options, including college. If the role of the school counselor is expanded to include the multitude of special education duties outlined in this new section, the preventative and planning work that all students need will be severely diminished. With the current focus on improving graduation rates, reducing dropouts, and providing equitable education services and postsecondary opportunities to all Connecticut students, this is not the time to reduce the level of guidance services. The proposal is directly contradictory to the secondary school reform plan, which seeks to provide more personalized support and guidance to students.

The proposal is also counter-productive in resolving several issues recently identified in a research brief written by the Center for School Counseling Outcome Research at the University of Massachusetts Amherst (study conducted in partnership with the Connecticut State Department of Education and the Connecticut School Counseling Association in 2010), found at:
<http://www.ctschoolcounselor.org/sites/ctschoolcounselor.org/files/ConnecticutEvaluationReport.pdf>.

This report calls for reducing the student-to-counselor ratio so that school counselors can establish a personalized working alliance with each and every Connecticut high school student. Additionally, the report calls for the elimination of work tasks that interfere with the goal of counselors spending 80% of their time working directly with students. If this special services section is accepted without removing the school counselor designation, school counselors will be spending vast amounts of time facilitating PPT meetings, special education case management, testing, and the myriad of administrative tasks outlined in the proposal. As a result, counselors will struggle to deliver the components of the comprehensive program, and students will no longer receive the guidance support services they need in order to succeed in school and identify meaningful and substantial postsecondary goals and plans.

In summary, I believe that the inclusion of the school counselor discipline in this new special services section demonstrates a fundamental lack of understanding of the role and function of school counseling services and how it differs substantially from the other special services providers. School counselors do not operate like school psychologists,

social workers, MFTs or speech and language pathologists. Every child in every school in Connecticut will meet with their counselor in both the curriculum areas (classrooms, assemblies, small groups) and the postsecondary planning component of the comprehensive program.

Please recognize that including the school counseling role in this section will drastically reduce the effectiveness of school counselors and lessen the substantial benefit that students receive when school counselors are able to implement their standards-based comprehensive model.

Respectfully submitted,

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