

Staffing Model, Part D: Counseling and Responsive Services for Learning Support

Resource Proposal

Provide funding for student support staffing to include social workers, counselors (including guidance counselors), family advocates, and/or psychologists at ratio of 1 staff per 500 elementary students and 1 staff per 350 secondary students. School districts will use the allocation to staff schools with a combination of social workers, counselors, family advocates, and psychologists, depending on school need. Also provide a regional support system in the nine ESDs to provide direct student support services, technical assistance and coordination of related initiatives. Implementation of these proposals will have a direct positive impact on graduation rates and other educational outcomes for students, particularly children in poverty.

This paper describes student support recommendations, which should be viewed in relation to other proposals for school safety, and school health. The staffing ratios included in this proposal provide the foundation for guidance counseling in middle and high schools and must be integrated with student graduation support and Navigation 101 (see Part II, 4).

Background on the Need for Learning Support

Washington public schools need adequate support personnel that, based on an ongoing local assessment of need, can provide the range of support services and resources necessary for all students to achieve our state's learning expectations. Ideally, student support is delivered using a comprehensive approach that spans student health, safety, and support, and include school guidance and counseling. Evidence-based practices suggest that a tiered system of intervention is an effective model for student support. At the foundation is a safe, healthy, supportive learning environment, and a core set of knowledge and skills for all students; then for a subset of students with identified needs—generally 15-20% of the student population—a range of services and other resources specifically designed to identify and mitigate what are essentially non-academic barriers to learning; and finally for a small group of students with significant social, emotional, or behavioral needs—generally 3-5% of the student population—a set of intensive direct services and/or case management. In many cases, student support personnel will refer these students to community service providers; too frequently, referral is not an option because of a lack of adequate community resources, and the school is left as the sole service provider for students with intensive needs.

Barriers to learning take on many different forms. For instance, approximately 38% of all WA public school students experience poverty to the degree that they receive Free or Reduced-price meals through the National School Lunch and Breakfast program. The effects of such poverty on learning, including inadequate food, shelter, and clothing, are well documented. While substance abuse rates have declined somewhat over the past 30 years, in 2006 approximately 5% of middle school students and 16% of high school students are heavy drinkers, and 7% of middle school students and 19% of high school students reported recent marijuana use. About 4% of Washington children and adolescents suffer from a diagnosed mental illness or mental disorder that results in either inpatient or outpatient

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services from Washington’s public mental health system. Mental health problems are the leading cause of hospitalization among WA school-aged youth, and nearly 1 in 4 adolescent deaths are the result of suicide. Although the juvenile arrest rate has declined over the past 20 years, fewer of those juveniles who are arrested are incarcerated, and of those who are incarcerated, the length of stay in detention is shorter. This trend, along with strengthened truancy laws in the past 10 years, means that an increasing number of juvenile offenders are actually attending school. In addition to decreased academic achievement, students with non-academic barriers to learning drop out of school more frequently than their peers who do not experience such barriers. For the 2005-06 school year, approximately 5.7% of all high school students dropped out of school.

To change these outcomes, Washington must invest in the systematic delivery of student support, counseling, and guidance and graduation advising. Traditionally, schools rely upon counseling staff to provide assistance to students, but with hundreds of students per counselor, it is virtually impossible for school counselors alone to be responsible for all the needed advice and guidance. To provide students more access to adult assistance, schools turn to educator-advisors to create a school-wide atmosphere of support. While children naturally turn to their parents for help when problems arise, they frequently turn to trusted teachers as well. This may be increasingly true as students mature, and certainly among students with disrupted homes, or in families without experience in Washington schools.

The resources proposed for Navigation 101 and graduation advising will increase the number of adults keyed into helping students through school. But merely naming an advisor for each student proves insufficient. Structured activities – a curriculum of skill building – provide a focus to the advisor-student relationship. The curriculum helps educators know what skills to teach and helps students know what outcomes are expected.

To organize all these services, districts need more staff. They need guidance counselors who can help teacher-advisors as they support student learning. Counselor’s specialized knowledge can be extended with the use of educator-advisors, but even this cannot be effective for all students given the current critically low number of counselors. They need counselors and support at the elementary level to address barriers to learning.

Student support staff, combined with Navigation 101, new graduation advisors, additional resources for struggling students and English Language Learners, and regional support from ESDs will permit districts to knit together a support system that reduces barriers to learning.

Historical Funding Levels in Washington

Staffing Model, Part D: Counseling and Responsive Services for Learning Support

Historically, Washington funding formulas have provided funds for schools to employ counselors as part of the Certificated Instructional Staff (CIS) ratio of 1 CIS per 21.7 students (1:18.8 grades K-4). No specific allocation or policy establishes how many counseling staff are intended for schools. In fact, statutes pursuant to public education in Washington require only high schools to provide counseling.

Although state funding formulas do not specifically delineate funding for support components, we can identify state funding at about 1 pupil support per 3,922 students and 1 guidance/counselor at 1 per 498, district-wide. The counselor to student ratio is distributed across grade bands differently: 1:652 at elementary schools, 1:445 in middle schools and 1:371 in high schools (based on head-count data).

Districts are under significant pressure to utilize resources from certificated funding ratios to meet instructional needs rather than support needs. Thus, districts typically fund support activities in other ways, using local levy funds, local, state, and federal competitive grants, and collaborative partnerships with community-based service providers. This results in an ever-changing patchwork quilt of student support funding across the state, which leads to support service inequities and likely contributes to disparities in academic achievement.

The following table identifies major student support funding initiatives in Washington State:

Program	Grant Type	Year Established	Initial Annual Funding	Current Funding	Number of Districts Served
Readiness to Learn	Competitive—2 years	1993	\$3.6M	\$3.6M	117
Sub. Abuse Prev/Intervention	Formula—2 year contracts	1989	\$4.8M	\$4.9M	69
Fed. Safe Schools – Healthy Students	Competitive—4 years	2001	Variable	Variable	Unknown

The Readiness to Learn (RTL) Program was established in 1993 as part of the Education Reform Act. This program was created to reduce barriers to student success in school associated with factors outside of the school setting. RTL grants are administered competitively on a biennial basis. Funds are used primarily for hiring of ESA certificated and classified staff that provide direct services to students and their families. Funding has remained static since the program's inception, despite enrollment increases and inflation. These factors have significantly diminished the scope of the program. Recent RTL program evaluations are demonstrating program effectiveness across both academic and non-academic variables.

The Substance Abuse Prevention/Intervention Services Program (P/I) was established in 1989 as part of the Washington's Omnibus Drug Act. Originally funded with state general fund dollars, it is now primarily funding via a Federal substance abuse prevention block grant. Funding is distributed on a

Staffing Model, Part D: Counseling and Responsive Services for Learning Support

formula basis to 13 regional grantees (9 regional consortia and 4 large school districts). These grantees use funds to place intervention specialists, in high need schools to provide direct services to students, including screening and referral, brief counseling, prevention education, and case management. Intervention specialists are a mix of ESA certificated school counselors and social workers, or classified paraprofessionals holding specialized drug/alcohol counseling credentials. Program evaluation data for the P/I program demonstrate reductions in substance abuse and increased attendance, better grades and improved school engagement among those students served by the program.

Like RTL, the P/I program funding is used primarily for personnel, and funding has remained static since its inception in 1989. Again, the effects of enrollment increases and inflation have seriously eroded the scope of this program.

The Safe Schools / Healthy Students program (SSHS) is a Federal initiative. Since its inception in 2001, a number of Washington school districts have received SSHS grants, either as individual districts or as a part of an ESD-led consortium. Individual districts that have received grants include Seattle, Spokane, and North Thurston. Grants are competitively administered on a national basis. Potential funding amounts are tied to enrollment, with a high end potential of up to \$2.5M per year for four years. However, grantees are no longer eligible for funding after these 4 years.

Little to no funding is available for districts to provide sustained student support through competitive grants.

Estimates of Necessary Resource Levels

What we know from common sense is that society has changed in the last 30 years, our current funding levels do not address student support issues, and that we need to draw from other researchers and district practice to identify an appropriate resource level for a new funding system. The table below summarizes resource level recommendations and experience:

	Summary
Resources in Other States	
Tennessee	1 Social Worker per 2,000 average daily membership (ADM, students), 1 Psychologist per 2,500 ADM
School Finance Researchers	
Picus/Odden for Wa Learns	Grouped across all support categories (nurse/counselor/social worker/etc): 1 FTE for 100 poverty students, with a minimum of 1.0 for a prototypical school; an additional 1:250 guidance counselor at the elementary and high school level.
Conley, 2007	1 counselor for every 250 students; 1 Social worker per school.