

Access to high-quality college counseling is an important part of a student's college search. A key predictor of college attendance is having college plans by 7th grade, according to researchers.¹ A College Board study found that "an additional high school counselor is predicted to induce a 10 percentage point increase in four-year college enrollment."² Students from historically underrepresented groups may not have the same built-in support network as some of their peers, and therefore rely more on school support services for information and guidance throughout the college search process.

Nationwide, access to high-quality college counseling is limited by a lack of specialization and high student to counselor ratios. Very few public schools have one counselor solely devoted to college counseling. In addition to college counseling, duties can include academic advising, scheduling, testing, and psychological counseling. College counseling is often an afterthought and something counselors engaging in if there is time. High student to counselor ratios often mean that counselors end up taking on more of an impersonal, information-dispensing role, rather than providing meaningful guidance to students as they make postsecondary plans.

Why this Matters in Tennessee

In recent years, Tennessee's policy context has helped create a college-going culture in the state. Because of Tennessee Promise, more students are starting to see themselves as college-bound. Advise TN has made high-quality counseling a priority in Tennessee and placed dedicated college counselors in thirty high schools. The student to counselor ratio in Tennessee is 350:1. The American School Counselor Association recommends a ratio of 250:1.³ Policymakers in Tennessee have started to address the problem, but many students still need access to high-quality college counseling.

A focus on providing more Tennessee students with access to high-quality college counseling will help increase college enrollment and degree attainment. With someone to guide students through the selection process, students will be exposed to the full range of postsecondary options. Students will have a better understanding of the true cost of college, and how these postsecondary options align with their goals for the future. More students choosing a postsecondary option that is the right fit for them will increase the number of students on paths where they are more likely to persist and complete a degree, supporting the Drive to 55.

"In Tennessee and across the nation, the majority of school counselor preparation programs currently include very little—if any—explicit training on college and career advising..."⁴

Questions to Consider

- What formal training or expertise should college counselors be expected to have?
- How can the state support professional development opportunities related to college counseling?
- How does state funding affect the ability of K-12 schools to provide high-quality counseling?
- Does this policy recognize the importance of professional college counseling?

¹ Building a College Going Culture: Principles and Examples, McDonough, (p. 4)

² Measuring the Impact of High School Counselors on College Enrollment, Hurwitz and Howell, (p. 1)

³ These 30 Tennessee schools are getting new college counselors, courtesy of the governor's office, Chalkbeat, Tatter

⁴ Seamless Pathways: Bridging Tennessee's Gap Between High School and Postsecondary, TN Department of Education, February 2017, (p.13)