

2012 National Survey of School Counselors

True North: Charting the Course to College and Career Readiness

Overview

Over the next decade, the nation needs 22 million students to earn a college degree to meet the demands of the workforce, but America is expected to fall short of this goal by at least three million.¹ The challenges appear well before students begin college: One in four public high school students fails to graduate on time,² and of those who graduate, one-third need remedial courses in college.³ In times like these, we must be strategic with all of our educational resources, so that students are prepared for the productive futures they deserve. School counselors are top among these critical resources. They are positioned in schools — and in students' lives — to ensure students get the support they need to stay on track to graduate from high school ready for college and career.

As part of the continued commitment to supporting school counselors, the College Board Advocacy & Policy Center's National Office for School Counselor Advocacy (NOSCA) — in collaboration with Hart Research Associates and Civic Enterprises — conducted its **second annual** national survey of school counselors in 2012. The survey was administered to a nationally representative sample of 2,890 middle and high school counselors and supplemented by a second survey of 439 school administrators.

The first national survey in 2011, *Counseling at a Crossroads*, revealed that school counseling as a profession was at a crossroads. As one of our nation's greatest resources, our school counselors could either become central to accelerating student academic achievement in our schools or remain at the margins of educational progress. Now, faced with an incontrovertible need to improve student achievement, school counseling is no longer at a crossroads. The *2012 National Survey of School Counselors, True North: Charting the Course to College and Career Readiness*, provides powerful evidence that school counselors and their administrators know true north — and they are poised to chart the course of their students' college and career success. However, a lack of focus, training, accountability, and resources for counselors stands in the way of real progress. This survey is one of the major initiatives of NOSCA's "Own the Turf" campaign for college and career readiness counseling and is supported by a generous grant from the Kresge Foundation.

On **Oct. 25, 2012**, the College Board Advocacy & Policy Center will release the survey findings and recommended paths forward **at the College Board Forum in Miami, Fla.** Leaders in the education community will discuss the significance of the survey findings from their distinctive perspectives and address implications for the future. The panel discussion will also be delivered live via webcast to thousands of school counselors, educators and policymakers around the country. This event is part of a larger campaign that will continue throughout the year, bringing together national and state education leaders, policymakers and advocates, counselors and students.

Paths Forward

Building upon the comprehensive recommendations in the 2011 report *Counseling at a Crossroads*, the 2012 report *True North* provides additional insights related to the potential of counselors and to accelerate student achievement. From the state house to the schoolhouse, education leaders (including counselors themselves) can **act now** to ensure counselors can provide students the resources they need to be successful. Additional policy recommendations are:

- Include counselors as integral partners in education policy;
- Include counselors in Common Core implementation;
- Provide counselors, teachers and administrators with preservice and in-service training that aligns counselors' work to students' college and career readiness;
- Align counselor accountability measures with student, school and district goals;
- Accelerate FAFSA completion initiatives for students; and
- Support collaboration among counselors, teachers and community groups.

Survey Highlights

The 2012 National Survey of School Counselors, True North: Charting the Course to College and Career Readiness provides insights on school counselor efficacy, training, accountability and resources:

- 1. Efficacy:** In the 2011 *National Survey of School Counselors, Counseling at a Crossroads* we found that school counselors, on average, have high expectations for themselves, their students, their schools and the education system; but reality in their schools falls far short of their hopes. The 2012 survey showed that counselor and administrator views were strikingly similar on ideals and opportunities. More powerfully, they shared a belief in school counselors' ability to help boost student success. Faced with crowded classrooms, overwhelming caseloads and dwindling budgets, counselors believe in their own efficacy — and their principals and vice principals agree.
- 2. Training:** Counselors are among the most highly educated professionals in the education system, with three-quarters of counselors holding a master's degree (83 percent). Yet nearly three in 10 (28 percent) believe their training did not prepare them well for their job, and more than half (56 percent) feel only somewhat well trained. The 2012 survey provides insights into the preservice (graduate school) and in-service (professional development) training, with implications for the different types of educators that prepare counselors for their work at varying stages of their careers. The survey demonstrates a powerful correlation between counselor preparation — both during graduate school and through ongoing professional development — and their students' outcomes. The survey also identifies key areas where additional training and professional development for counselors could accelerate college and career readiness for students.
- 3. Accountability:** The 2012 survey provided additional insights into the state of accountability systems for school counselors, building on the 2011 finding that a majority of school counselors support accountability measures and incentives for counselors to meet the 12th-grade college- and career-ready goal (61 percent of counselors support this measure), with stronger than average support among counselors in urban public schools (65 percent, with 32 percent who strongly support it), schools with high minority populations (75 percent, with 44 percent who strongly support it), and schools with lower-income students (70 percent, with 38 percent who strongly support it). In an era of data-driven decision making, counselors and administrators express support for certain measures of accountability. These areas of consensus align with counselors' unique contributions in supporting the college and career success of their students. Despite limited examples of schools and districts that are using data and accountability to drive decision making, the majority of accountability measures remain uneven and underimplemented in the counseling field. In many places, the accountability measures for counselors are actually discouraging counselors away from their work to promote college and career readiness.
- 4. Resources:** The stakes around resource alignment are high. Over the next decade, the nation needs 22 million students to earn a college degree to meet the demands of the workforce, but America is expected to fall short of this goal by at least three million.⁴ Meanwhile, student need is on the rise,⁵ and schools are facing continued budget cuts.⁶ In these austere conditions, counselors can be at the leading edge of making increased postsecondary and career readiness a reality, but they cannot do this work in isolation. The survey provided insights into areas where increased utilization and collaboration of existing resources could accelerate student achievement.

1. A. Carnevale, N. Smith, and J. Strohl, *Help Wanted: Projections of Jobs and Education Requirements Through 2018* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, 2010).

2. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, "The Condition of Education" (2011): http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_scr.asp.

3. U.S. Department of Education, "The Condition of Education" (2011): http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_rmc.asp#info.

4. Smith and Strohl, *Help Wanted: Projections of Jobs and Education Requirements Through 2018*.

5. Kids Count report: "America's children are advancing despite the economy." Annie E. Casey Foundation.

<http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Education/2012/0725/Kids-Count-report-America-s-children-are-advancing-despite-the-economy> in Knickerbocker, Brad. *Christian Science Monitor*, <http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Society/2011/0817/Report-Child-poverty-rate-hits-20-percent-in-US-as-families-struggle>. August 17, 2011.

6. Stephen Ceasar and Teresa Wantanabe, "Education Takes a Beating Nationwide," *Los Angeles Times* (July 31, 2011):

<http://articles.latimes.com/2011/jul/31/nation/la-na-education-budget-cuts-20110731>; Nora Fleming, "Parent, Community Groups Pressed to Fill K–12 Budget Gaps," *Education Week* (March 13, 2012): http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2012/03/14/24gift_ep.h30.html?qs=district+budgets; and Christine Samuels, "Tight Budgets Put Some Superintendents on Part-Time Status," *Education Week* (January 30, 2012):

http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2012/02/01/19parttime_ep.h31.html?qs=district+budgets.