



Equality Isn't Equity: Every Student Needs A Great School Counselor

High-quality school counselors are critical to our young people. **As educational advisers**, they guide students through their educational journeys, from selecting which classes to take to what post-secondary opportunities to pursue and how to navigate college applications and financial aid. **As advocates**, they play key roles in ensuring students get the great teachers they deserve and the supports they need to be successful. **They provide social-emotional support and critical service coordination** to students and families, both inside school and out. And they are often the ones in the building responsible for everything from student interventions to family nights.

In other words, school counselors are critical elements of student — and school — success.

According to the [National Association for College Admissions Counseling](#), 12th graders who talked about their future plans with a school counselor were:

- 6.8 times more likely to complete a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).
- 3.2 times more likely to attend college.
- 2 times more likely to attend a bachelor's degree program.

Counselors are particularly important for [first-generation students](#):

- How much time counselors spend on college readiness activities is positively related to first-generation college students' beliefs about college affordability.
- First-generation college students who speak with a counselor about college are more likely to report intentions of enrolling in a bachelor's degree program and taking or planning to take the SAT or ACT.

But many of our young people aren't getting the access to high quality school counselors they need, and that is particularly true for students of color and students from low-income families.

CONSIDER THIS:

While most high school students (95%) are [reported to have](#) at least some access to a school counselor:

- Over 1 in 5 American high schools (21%) and just under a million high school students (850,000) [do not have access](#) to any school counselor. That student population is larger than the entire population of 83 of the 100 largest U.S. cities.
- Counselors in high-poverty schools [serve about the same number](#) of students as counselors in low-poverty schools, even though we know that students in high-poverty schools tend to need more support.

MEANWHILE:

- [1.6 million](#) students, kindergarten through high school, attend a school with a Sworn Law Enforcement Officer (SLEO), but **NO** school counselor.

And this reality is [more likely for students of color](#):

- Latino students are 40 percent more likely than White students to attend a school with an SLEO but no school counselor; Asian students are 30 percent more likely; and Black students are 20 percent more likely.

If our investments are an indicator of our values, this is about as clear a sign as any that when it comes to our Black and Brown students, schools prioritize policing students over preparing them.

Ultimately, these inequities in access to school counselors contribute mightily to inequities in everything from [course access](#) and [college and career readiness](#) to college matching, [access, and success](#) for students of color and low-income students.

Students of color and students from low-income families — who are more likely to be navigating challenges outside school, more likely to be underestimated academically, and more likely to be the first in their families to pursue a college degree — need more access to great school counselors, not the same and certainly not less.

The Reach Higher Initiative, started by former First Lady Michelle Obama during her time at the White House, works to inspire every student in the U.S. to take charge of their future by completing their education past high school. Reach Higher continues to help underserved students navigate the college-going process and building the capacity of the school counseling profession. The Reach Higher Initiative now lives at Civic Nation, a non-profit focused on innovative engagement and awareness initiatives.

The Education Trust is a nonprofit organization that promotes closing opportunity gaps by expanding excellence and equity in education for students of color and those from low-income families from pre-kindergarten through college. Through research and advocacy, the organization builds and engages diverse communities that care about education equity, increases political and public will to act on equity issues, and increases college access and completion for historically underserved students.