

INDIANA SCHOOL COUNSELOR SURVEY

2024-25 Results Summary

NOVEMBER 2024

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Annual Indiana School Counselor Survey Results for the 2024-25 School Year

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Results from the thirteenth annual Indiana School Counselor Survey reveal several interesting insights about students' well-being, academic preparation, and college and career readiness in addition to how school counselors spend their time, are expanding counseling program quality, and view how well they are supported.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- **The social-emotional needs of Indiana's students are higher this school year than last** according to 53.4% of the Indiana school counselor respondents. Almost a quarter (21.7%) indicated those needs are "much higher" this year than last. Counselors blame the lingering impact of the COVID pandemic and a shrinking ability to spend time helping students.
- **Confidence is strong in the academic, college/postsecondary, and career preparation of students** though many respondents expressed frustration with the amount of time required to understand and manage the complexities of the state's new graduation requirements.
- Lack of time spent with students was the most frequently mentioned complaint. **Counselor agreement with the statement, "I have enough time to meet with students" dropped to its lowest level since the question was first asked in 2011.** Counselors blamed the shrinkage of time available to spend with students on:
 - Higher caseloads. For the first time in three years, **average student to counselor ratios rose in this year's survey to 351 students per counselor.**
 - Non-counseling tasks. Counselors continued to estimate that **they spend an average of 15% of their time completing non-counseling tasks** such as test monitoring, attendance, and other duties that do not require a counseling graduate degree.
- **Ten percent more Indiana schools reported having a comprehensive counseling program in place compared to last year,** primarily attributed to the state's *Carrying the Torch to Student Success* initiative.
- Counselors' **perceptions of the support received from principals and school leaders rose significantly** this year compared to last, yet counselors continue to ask for more training for themselves and their school leaders.

THE STATE OF SCHOOL COUNSELING

Since the 2011-12 school year, Indiana K-12 school counselors have been asked to answer a series of survey questions about their work. Now, in its thirteenth year, the results of the 2024-25 Indiana School Counselor Survey allow us to look at trends over time as well as the present state of Indiana school counseling. Nearly 400 responses from school counselors across the state were received this year.

This results summary begins with counselors' perceptions of the students they serve, reviews how counselors spend their time, explores trends in counseling program quality and levels of support, and concludes with a handful of recommendations drawn from counselor responses.

STUDENT WELL-BEING

Responding to a new survey question, 53.4% of Indiana school counselors believe the social-emotional needs of their students are **higher this school year** than last year, with almost a quarter (21.7%) indicating those needs are "much higher" than last year. And two thirds (63.9%) indicated there was insufficient availability of local mental health specialists for which to refer students.

Respondents pointed to the lingering effects of the COVID pandemic for the

Student mental health struggles "have increased drastically..."

upsurge saying students' mental health needs have "increased significantly" over the last few years. *"Since COVID, the social-emotional and behavioral needs have become very extreme,"* said one respondent. Another said, *"The mental health struggles have increased drastically and no policy changes have been made to help support schools in their efforts to help students/families."*

Many survey participants shared that they have less time to work with students due to learning and managing the state's new state graduation requirements. *"With the new diploma changes and things that are being mandated, there is little time to work with students on their mental health,"* said one respondent.

STUDENT ACADEMIC, COLLEGE, AND CAREER READINESS

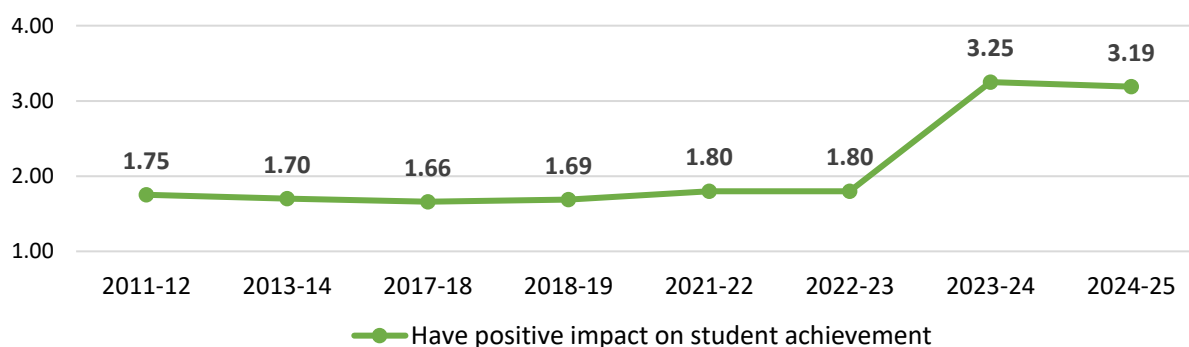
Counselor respondents shared that they could use more training and resources to help students succeed academically and grow in areas of college and career readiness – as has been noted in previous years – but counselors' remain confident in their ability to positively impact student achievement (Graph A).

Learning and adapting to the state’s changing graduation requirements was frequently blamed as a primary obstacle to addressing students’ academic needs. *“The tracking alone at the high school level is becoming unreal,”* said one respondent, *“I think the need is coming for strictly academic counselors and social workers.”*

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Graph A. Impact on Student Achievement

1=Strongly Disagree to 4=Strongly Agree

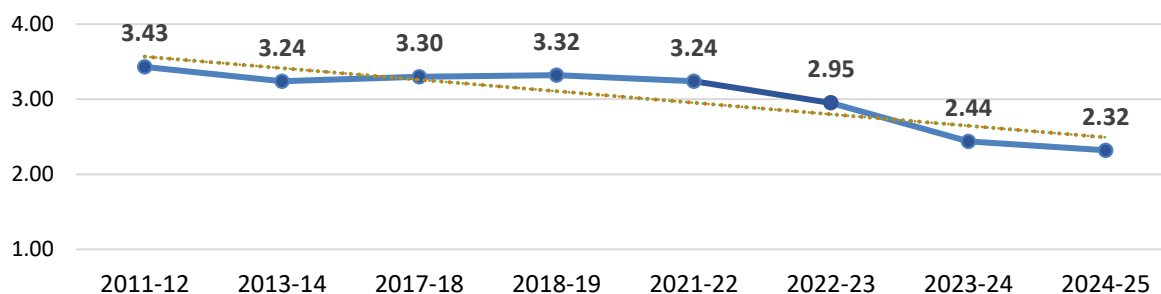


SCHOOL COUNSELOR TIME USE

Counselor agreement with the statement, “I have enough time to meet with students” **dropped to its lowest level since the question was first asked in 2011** (Graph B), reflecting continued frustration with a lack of time in the school day.

Graph B. "I have enough time to meet with students"

1=Strongly Disagree to 4=Strongly Agree



More than a quarter (26.7%) of Indiana school counselors felt the amount of time they were allowed to spend with students had decreased in the last year, yet 18% reported being able to spend more time with students this year than last. Most

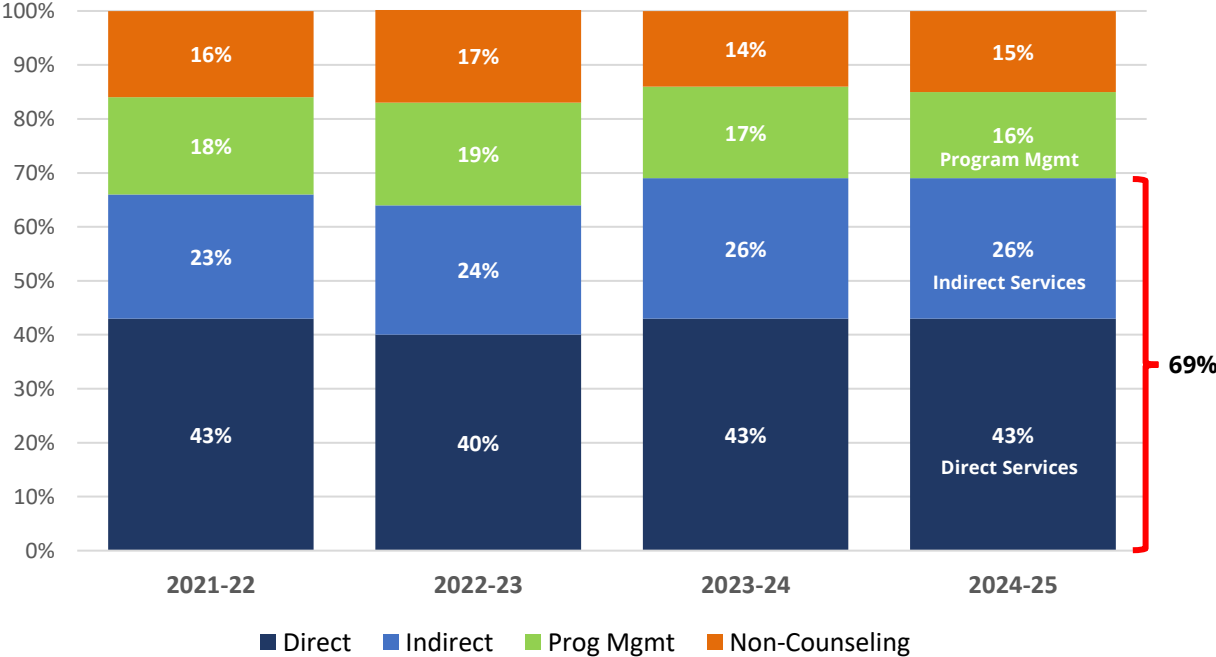
6 INDIANA SCHOOL COUNSELOR SURVEY

school counselors (55.3%) indicated the amount of time spent with their students had not changed significantly this year compared to last. One respondent summed it up this way, *“My school has incredibly high needs, limited resources, and not enough adult bodies to help get everything done for a proper program.”*

How Indiana school counselors say they spend their time has also remained relatively unchanged over the last four years.

Based on the four time-use category definitions of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA), counselors indicated spending a total of 69% of their time (Graph C) providing a mix of Direct Services (e.g. face to face with students) and Indirect Services (e.g. supporting students through parent or teacher conferences) compared to the suggested total of 80% recommended by the ASCA National Model.

Graph C. School Counselor Time Use



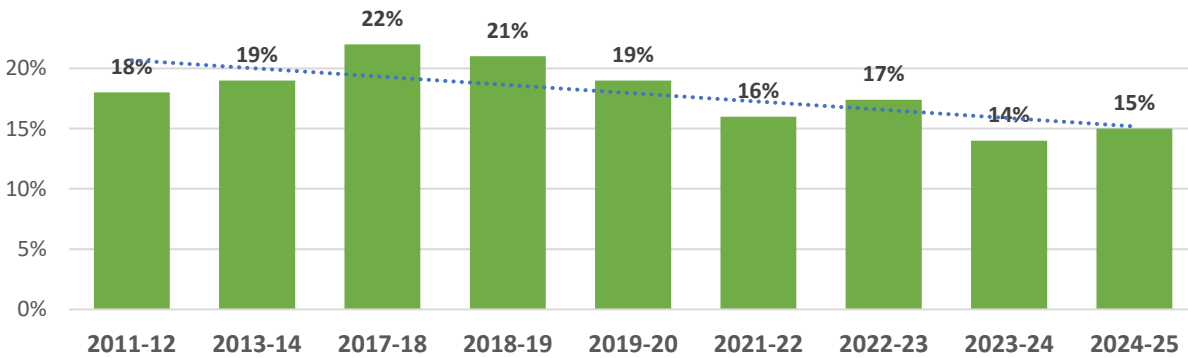
Commented one survey completer, *“I would love for [my] district to create and maintain a comprehensive school counseling model that is data driven and represents 80% of our time...[but] we are overseen by the assistant superintendent who does not have the background nor focus to guide our program.”*

Non-counseling tasks “are monopolizing my time.”

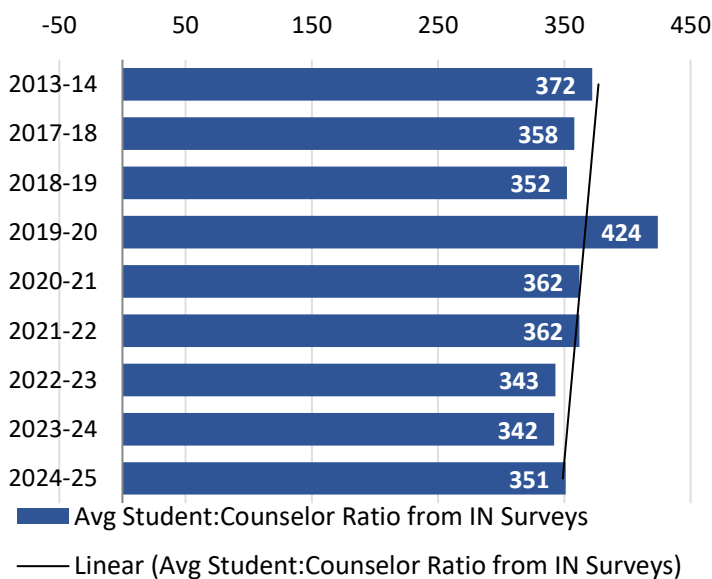
The desire of survey respondents to secure more time with their students is complicated by non-counseling tasks, defined as duties school counselors perform that are unrelated to the counseling program’s mission. Survey respondents indicated non-counseling tasks consumed 15% of counselors’ time on average, which is comparable to previous years (Graph D). For some

counselors, however, the non-counseling tasks are a significant burden. *“My school corporation does not hire the appropriate staffing for test coordination, 504 coordinators, a CTE coordinator, or a registrar,”* said one respondent, *“so those tasks are monopolizing my time.”*

Graph D. Non-Counseling As a Percentage of Counselor Time



Graph E. Average Indiana Student to Counselor Ratios Over Time



The amount of time school counselors are able to spend with their students is also affected by how many students are in a counselor’s caseload. **For the first time in three years, student to counselor ratios rose** in this year’s survey to an average of 351 students per counselor, reversing a five-year downward trend (Graph E).

Said one survey respondent, *“I am one counselor with 630*

students this year. I am supported by my administration, however, it's just too much to feel like I am making a difference. More gets added to our plates every year by our corporation when we cannot keep up with what we already have to do."

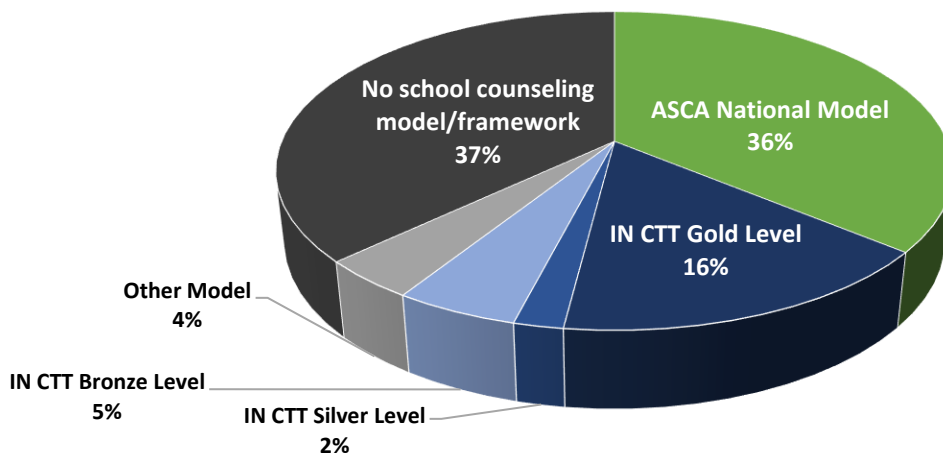
The recommended student to counselor ratio according to the national association for school counselors is 250 students per school counselor. On average, school counselors reported spending an average of 9.4 hours per week beyond their contracted hours.

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SCHOOL COUNSELING PROGRAM QUALITY

A strong majority of survey respondents (63.2%, 146 schools) indicated their school has a comprehensive school counseling program aligned with state or national standards, **a 10% increase in the number of schools with a quality school counseling program** compared to last year (Graph F), the increase coming almost entirely from a 10% rise in the number of Indiana schools implementing the state's *Carrying the Torch to Student Success* (IN CTT) comprehensive counseling model.

Graph F. Comprehensive Counseling Model Use



About a third (36%) of respondents said their schools use the ASCA National Model as an organizing framework, approximately a third (37%) reported having no school counseling model or framework, and the remaining schools used Indiana's *Carrying the Torch to Student Success* framework or a similar model. The *Carrying the Torch to Student Success* initiative – now in its third year – was developed by the Indiana Department of Education in collaboration with the Indiana School Counselor

Association (ISCA). The initiative provides a robust online development system and ongoing, written feedback from trained reviewers to encourage all Indiana K-12 schools to implement a quality, comprehensive counseling program.

Said one counselor, *“As a Gold Level Carrying the Torch school, we were blessed with many resources that allowed us to attain that goal.”* But other survey completers noted that while they aspire to implement a comprehensive counseling model, lack of time and the needs of students make it difficult, *“We are using the ASCA model and we have prepared a Comprehensive Counseling Plan, but I don't feel we are implementing it due to all of the other responsibilities and the mental health needs of students.”*

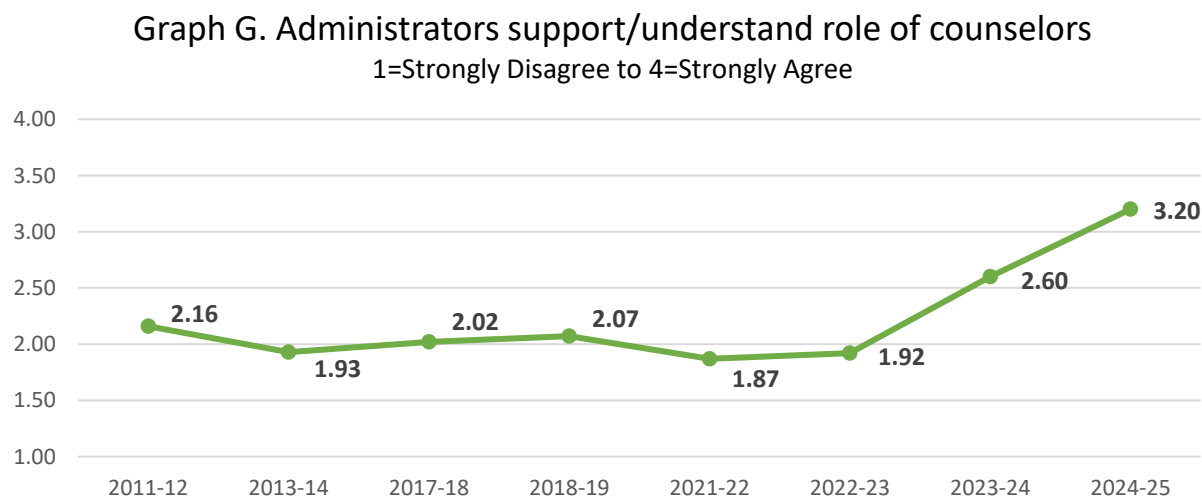
As a Carrying the Torch school, we were blessed with many resources...”

Survey respondents indicated that the most difficult elements to implement when developing a model counseling program were:

- Creating a school counseling program advisory council
- Completing an annual self-assessment of the school counseling program
- Implementing an action plan with goals and outcomes
- Monitoring counselor’s own use of time.

SCHOOL COUNSELING PROGRAM SUPPORT

For the second year in a row, **counselors’ perceptions of the support they receive from principals and school leaders rose significantly** (Graph G) to its highest point since the question was first asked in 2011.



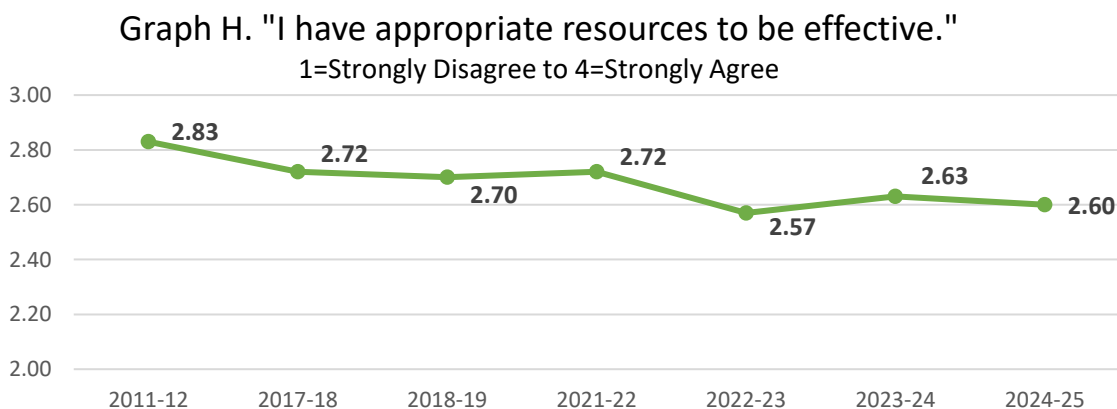
Though most school counselors agreed or strongly agreed that their administrators support their school counseling programs, fewer counselors felt that their administrator had “received training about & understands the appropriate role of a school counselor.”

One survey respondent pointedly said, *“I do not believe the majority of secondary principals value counselors”* and another suggested assistance from the professional association for administrators, *“Encourage the Indiana Association of School Principals (IASP) to require training of all principals on what their school counselor's role really is and explain why using [the term] “guidance counselor” is no longer appropriate. I've told my principal numerous times why, but he doesn't believe anything I say unless he hears it from the IASP.”*

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School counselors were less enthusiastic about the availability of professional development and additional resources to support their school counseling programs (Graph H) with average responses remaining lower than in the past.



But **agreement was high among survey respondents for more professional development and training to improve effectiveness.** The key areas of interest for professional development included:

- *Post-secondary planning:* Counselors expressed a strong interest in learning more about college and career readiness, particularly related to trades, apprenticeships, and alternatives to four-year degrees. Several requested training in career discovery, scholarship opportunities, and guidance on

navigating post-secondary pathways for students with varying academic backgrounds.

- *Social-emotional learning (SEL) and mental health*: SEL support was a recurring theme, with counselors seeking strategies to address students' emotional regulation, trauma, anxiety, and resilience. There is also interest in learning about the impact of psychotropic medications on student behavior and mental health. Moreover, counselors want practical techniques for handling absenteeism, improving student motivation, and integrating SEL into academic support.
- *Government relations and advocacy*: Many counselors mentioned the need for advocacy training, particularly in how to advocate for more counseling positions and influence administrative decisions. Legislative updates and changes to diploma requirements and other educational policies are also of high interest.
- *Behavioral and academic interventions*: Counselors highlighted the need for professional development on handling challenging behaviors, executive functioning, and academic interventions to support students at risk of falling behind. Strategies to bridge academic gaps, particularly for neurodiverse and trauma-impacted students, were also a concern.
- *504 plans and special populations*: The survey revealed interest in learning about and improving 504 processes, particularly for English language learners, and strategies to better serve students with disabilities.
- *Technology and innovation*: There was a focus on understanding the implications of artificial intelligence (AI) on students' academic and social lives, as well as how to integrate data collection and analysis into counseling programs for improved outcomes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

How could K-12 school counseling be more effective in preparing students for success? The responses from survey completers offered several ideas:

1. **Clarify Counselor Roles.** Survey respondents pointed to a mix of unwieldy and unrealistic role expectations – from counseling to scheduling and college and career readiness – as an ongoing challenge. Many feel that the

expectations of school counselors have become too broad, leading to burnout. *"We are expected to be masters of all areas, and it just isn't possible,"* said one respondent. Another suggested, *"The job needs to be clarified and split into multiple roles."*

Counselors feel strongly that their core responsibilities are diluted with tasks like data entry, test proctoring, and graduation tracking.

Without clear role definitions, counselors feel they are 'on call' for just about anything that needs to be done. *"Currently, I am responsible for attendance, all 504s¹, any behavior calls, coordinating ILEARN... and much more. We are being pulled [away] to do way too much outside of our role,"* said one counselor. Another said, *"Too much is expected of a school counselor. Administrators are protective of teacher time and focus on teaching students, but no one is protective of the school counselor role. We are expected to be masters of all areas, and it just isn't possible."*

"We are expected to be masters of all areas, and it just isn't possible."

Working to clarify what school counselors should and should not do could have positive outcomes. Said one counselor, *"I think the need is coming for strictly academic counselors and social workers. The tracking alone at the high school level is becoming unreal. I sometimes feel like a glorified secretary."*

- 2. Help Counselors Find More Time with Students.** School budgets rarely allow for hiring additional counseling staff but schools can creatively consider using part-time aides and school counseling program interns; thoughtfully reducing non-counseling duties; or delegating tasks such as test coordination, attendance collection, and new registration duties to others in order to allow counselors to focus more on their core responsibilities of student support and program development.

School counselor respondents repeatedly noted the lack of time they were allowed to spend with students, sharing frustration with what has been termed "tending duties" that have little direct connection to helping students.

¹ Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act requires elementary and secondary schools to develop a plan to ensure that a child with a disability identified under the law receives instruction and related services that help the student succeed.

Said one, *“I did not go into school counseling to be an accountant. I went into it to connect with and protect children from societal elements that damage their development. My job has become more and more bureaucratic and less and less about being a trusted adult for growing kids.”*

- 3. Expand Professional Development for Counselors and Leaders.** Open-ended survey responses were notable this year for the number of school counselors asking for expanded professional development, including more training for their principals and school leaders on the appropriate roles and responsibilities of school counselors.

Some survey respondents gave kudos to their school’s leadership, *“we have great school counseling leadership in our district now. I am excited for the future.”* Yet, it was frequently noted that additional training is needed regarding how counselors and administrators can better understand and support each other. Said one, *“A lot of times, I feel like I’m on an island. I feel very supported by administrator and teachers, but I don’t feel like I have a team that I can consult with for school counselor specific needs and interventions.”*

In addition to these recommendations, there were a number of other important concerns listed by survey takers that may require additional attention, notably:

- Lack of oversight and potential misuse of the state’s emergency licensing/permits that allow unqualified individuals to serve as “counselors.”
- Continual changes to the state’s graduation requirements and subsequent increase in the complexity and record-keeping tasks required of counselors.
- A continual need for more school counselors at the elementary level.

CONCLUSION

This report is made possible with the generous sponsorship support of [INvestEd](#) which partners with Indiana families and schools to help navigate funding options and avoid student debt.

This report is produced through a collaboration between the [Indiana School Counselor Association](#) (ISCA), [Indiana Association of College Admission Counselors](#) (INACAC), and [Inspire Success](#) whose mission is to inspire those who help students succeed.

For questions about the annual Indiana School Counseling Survey, please contact [Aimee Portteus](#) at [Inspire Success](#).

