

# INDIANA SCHOOL COUNSELOR SURVEY

2022-23 Results Summary

---

MARCH 2023



## Annual Indiana School Counselor Survey Results for the 2022-23 School Year

A total of 460 Indiana school counselors, the highest number in three years, responded to this year's annual school counselor survey commissioned by the Indiana Department of Education. The 2022-23 results reveal some dramatic shifts in counselors' use of time, perceptions of support, and student to counselor ratios. It also reveals school counselors' challenges with addressing high levels of student anxiety and stress.

### SURVEY RESPONSES - STUDENT NEEDS

Almost every school counselor survey respondent (95.4%) indicated they are seeing a rise in student needs this year, with student anxiety and stress at the top of the list. The word "anxiety" was mentioned in 36.6% of responses asking Indiana school counselors to identify the top needs of students. Counselors say students are expressing and experiencing anxiety in a multitude of ways.

- *I am seeing an incredible rise in student needs. Anxiety and other mental health issues are more prevalent, based on teacher and parent reports. Behavioral needs have increased as documented by a 150% increase in behavior referrals from teachers this current school year vs last school year.*
- *Student emotional needs have skyrocketed. More students are being hospitalized, are self-harming, and [expressing] suicidal ideation than in past years.*
- *There has been a decrease in student's abilities to problem-solve and take initiative. Students also have had an increase in emotional dysregulation, aggression towards self/others, inability to focus and decreased stamina/perseverance on tasks.*
- *I have seen significant increases in the need for mental health services ranging from biweekly counseling to inpatient treatment. Eating disorders are increasing for us. Also, depression and anxiety are high. Sometimes our local mental health providers can see students but a 3-week waiting period is not unheard of.*
- *I have sent home 5 students this year alone for concerns about self-harm. I am constantly getting requests for counseling services for anxiety and depression. I am noticing a rise in social anxiety. Many students are refusing to eat in the cafeteria.*
- *The mental health and behavioral needs are frankly overwhelming.*

Only a small number of survey respondents indicated that the increase in student needs over the last three years is starting to ebb and that things might be improving.

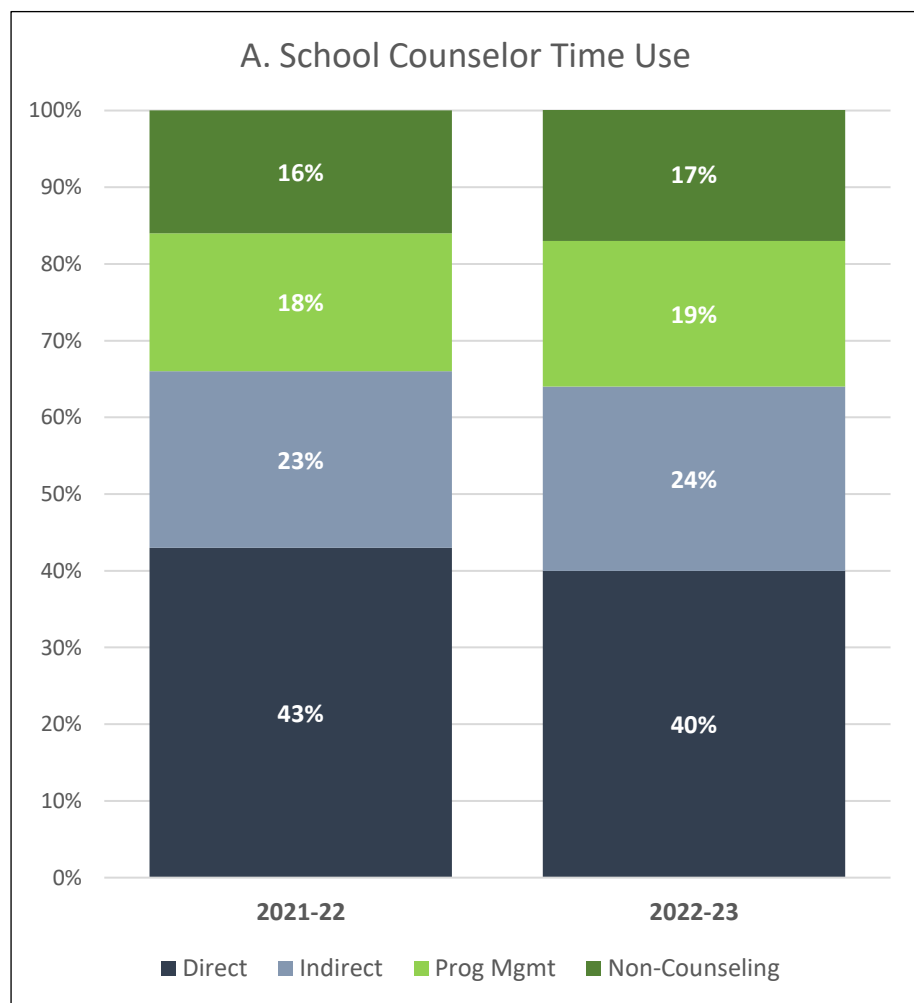
- During the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 school years I saw a significant increase in students with anxiety and poor social and coping skills. This year has felt a bit less chaotic...and a bit more "normal" in that we as an entire school can work with students on social emotional skills because we do not have to social distance."

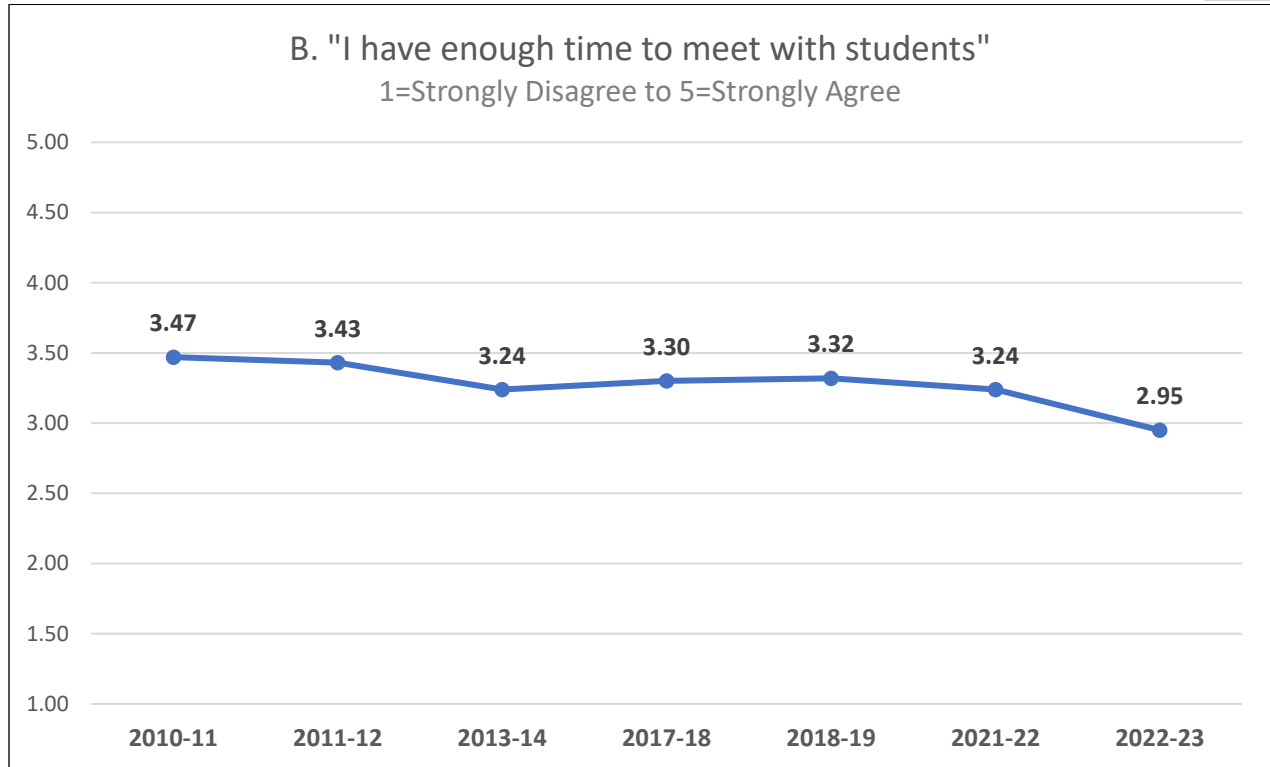
## SURVEY RESPONSES – THE STATE OF SCHOOL COUNSELING

### Time with Students

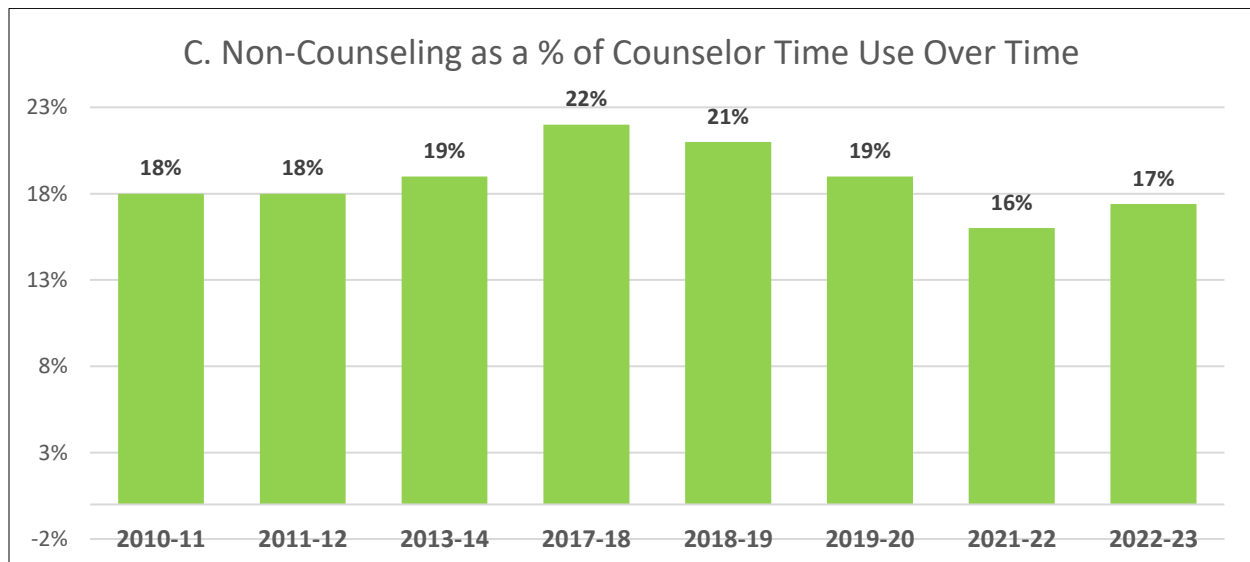
The rise in student emotional and mental health needs over the last two years is complicated by the continued struggle by school counselors to find enough time to work with students according to this year's survey. The percentage of time Indiana K-12 school counselors say they are able to spend directly working with students dropped from 43% last year to 40% this year (Graph A).

Also striking, more Indiana K-12 school counselors disagreed with the statement that they have enough time to meet with students than at any other time in the last 11 years (Graph B).





School counselors continue to report spending almost a fifth of their time (17% this year) in non-counseling tasks such as test administration and proctoring that take them away from directly addressing student needs. The percentage of time spent by Indiana school counselors on non-counseling tasks unrelated to the goals of the school counseling program has changed little over the last decade (Graph C).



School counselor respondents were mixed regarding whether more administrators are working to reduce non-counseling tasks.

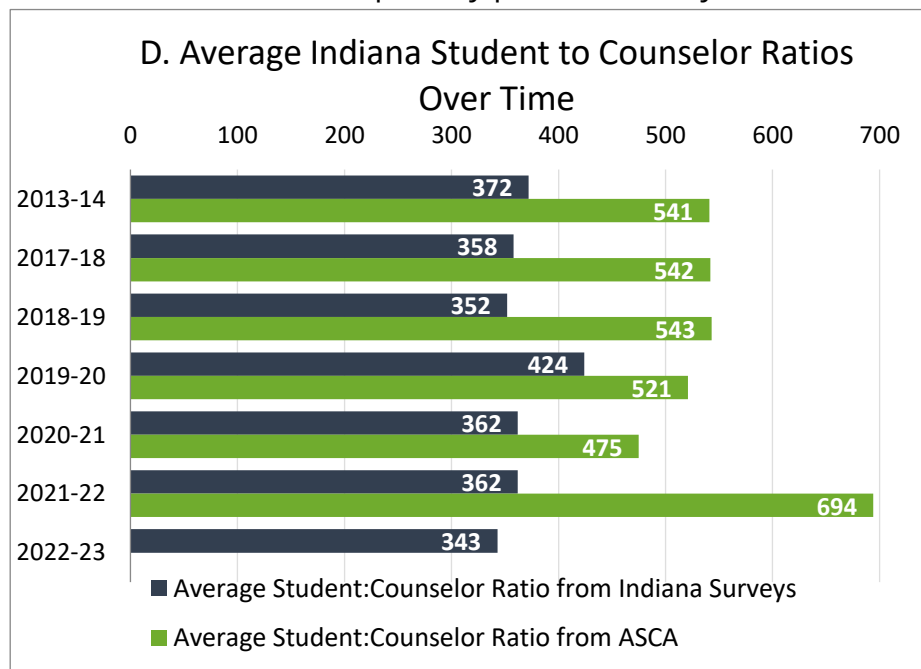
- *[My administrator is] supportive but limited. He supports me and is trying to free me of non-counseling duties. But the setup of our school/district and staffing has tied his hands to a degree.*
- *He says he is [helping reduce non-counseling], but we do not feel supported in that. We are loaded down with far too many non-counseling "other duties as assigned" to actually do much.*
- *VERY SUPPORTIVE! My principal regularly checks in with me and tries to help delegate non-counseling tasks to other areas so that I can spend time with students. Our parent support group helps with purchases for materials.*

### Student to Counselor Ratios

Lack of sufficient time for school counselors to be effective is also attributed to high student-to-counselor ratios. The issue was especially prevalent early in the 2022-23 school year after the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) reported that Indiana had the highest jump in student to counselor ratios in the United States last year.<sup>1</sup>

Though student-to-counselor ratios in the state have long been higher than

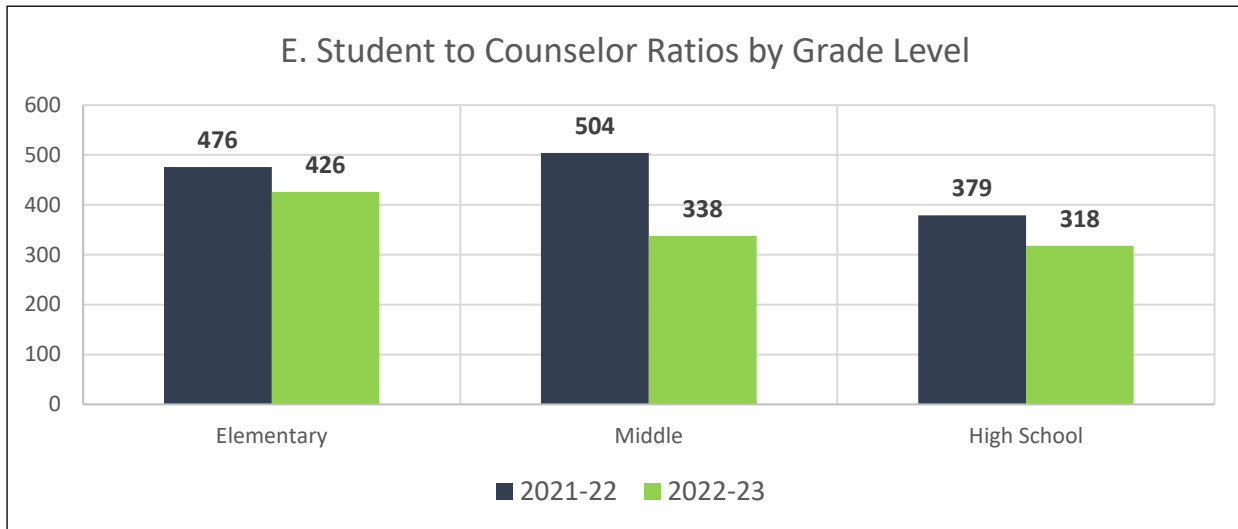
the national recommended average of 250 students per counselor, the 2022-23 Indiana school counselor survey paints a different result than the ASCA report with Indiana counselors reporting lower student-to-counselor ratios – at an average of 343 students per school counselor this year – compared to the year before (Graph



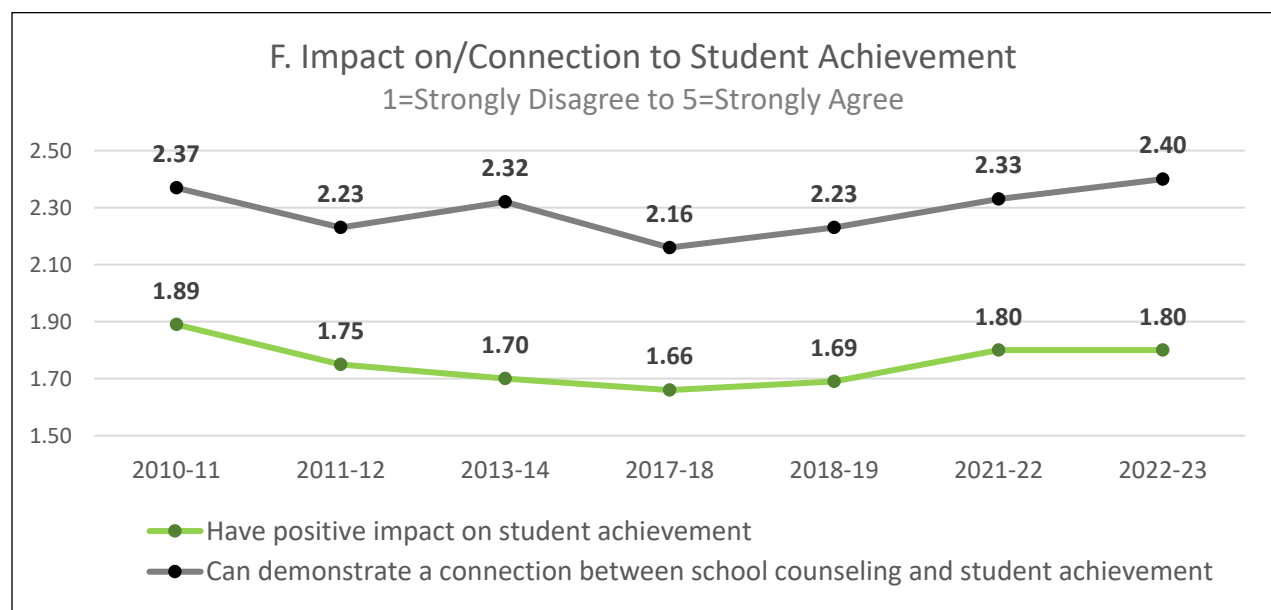
<sup>1</sup> The ASCA ratio is determined by a simple calculation dividing the total number of Indiana school counselors by the total number of Indiana K-12 students in a given year but does not account for schools without a school counselor.

D). Counselors reported a drop in average student to counselor ratios at every grade levels (Graph E).

### Student Achievement



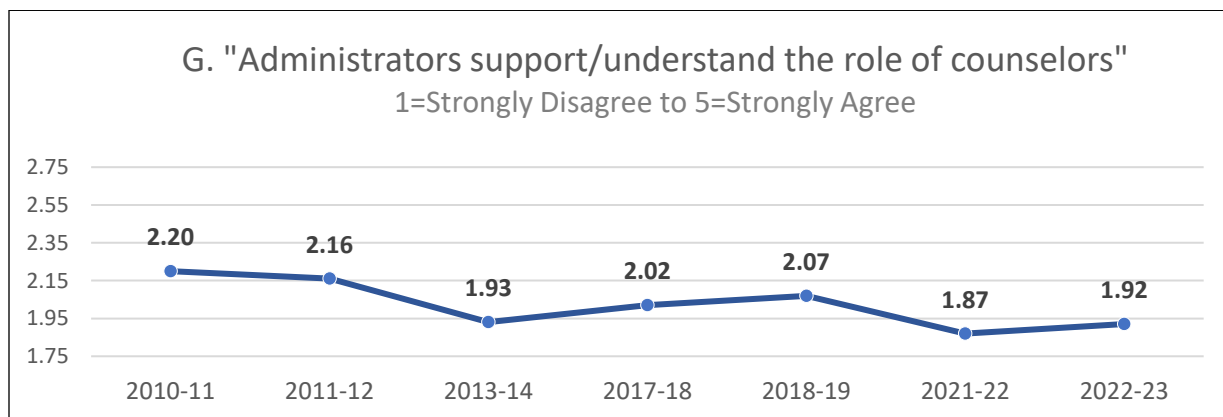
While the primary focus of school counseling is to improve student achievement, Indiana school counselors in this year's survey continue somewhat or strongly disagreeing with the statement "I have a positive impact on student achievement" (Graph F) though a slightly higher number than in previous surveys believe they can demonstrate a connection between their work and student academic success.



### Administrator Support

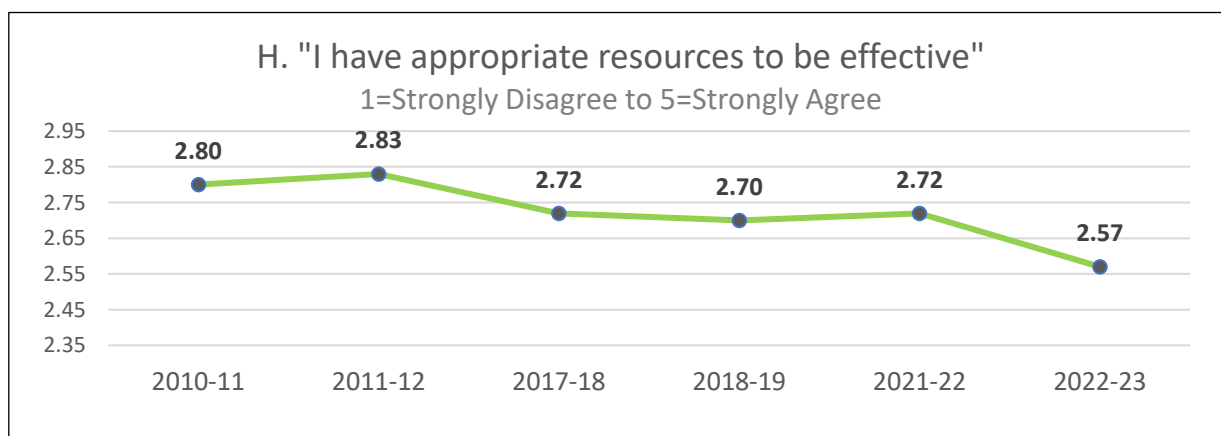
This year's survey found encouraging evidence of improvements in administrator understanding and support of K-12 school counselors' roles. A robust 81.0% of school counselor respondents this year agreed that their principal/school leader "is supportive of the mission and goals of the school counseling program" even though only 54.0% felt their administrator had "received training about & understands the appropriate role of a school counselor."

On average, Indiana school counselor responses have consistently disagreed with the statement that their "administrators support and understand the role of school counselors," but figures improved nominally this school year (Graph G).



### Program Resources and Professional Development

School counselor opinions are mixed regarding the availability of professional development and other resources. One of the most precipitous drops seen in this year's survey – the largest since the surveys began in 2010 – is the average number of Indiana school counselors saying they have the appropriate resources to be effective (Graph H), from a twelve-year high of 2.83 to this year's 2.57.



Yet in a separate question, 61.5% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their school counseling program “has the resources it needs to be effective.”

A wide majority of K-12 school counselors (82.5%) report participating in annual professional development and more than half (69.9%) indicate they “could use more training/resources to help students succeed academically,” especially in the area of student social-emotional well-being, motivation, and self-efficacy.

I could use more training/resources to help students succeed academically.	69.9%
I could use more postsecondary readiness training/resources to help students prepare to succeed in college and other postsecondary education/training programs.	59.6%
I could use more training/resources to help students understand the various postsecondary education and training options, in addition to four-year college, to help them prepare for a career.	60.5%
I could use more training/resources to help students improve their social-emotional well-being, motivation, and/or self-efficacy.	79.8%

## SURVEY RESPONSES – FINAL COMMENTS

The last question in the annual school counselor survey asks what ONE change counselors would like to see in order to be more effective. The most frequent responses in this year’s survey were more time, additional counseling staff, and smaller student caseloads. Listed below are selected quotes from the open-ended question.

### Additional Staff

- *[Add] another school counselor to lower our student-to-counselor ratio. Everything else would fix itself with more time available.*
- *Another counselor or social worker in the building. My enrollment is up, and serving over 600 students, many with significant needs, is nearly impossible even with the support I receive from administration.*

### More Time

- *I work every night after school and every weekend [and] never have enough time to do what is expected of me.*

- *More time! Or at least more focused time. I feel like I am constantly being pulled in 20 different directions per day, so it's difficult to feel like I am accomplishing what I need/want to do.*
- *More time during the school day to meet with groups. It's hard to find non-class time to meet with groups about anxiety, depression, college search, personal growth, etc.*

#### Smaller Caseloads

- *If I could work with fewer students, I could target their needs [and] help them be more productive/successful/focused on meeting their educational and personal goals.*
- *The one thing that would help me be a more effective school counselor would be if Indiana passed a law that schools had to have a counselor ratio of 1 to 250. Having over 400 students to manage is not sustainable.*

#### Support

- *SUPPORT: I feel like the counseling program is not well supported in my district. We spend a lot of time on non-school counseling tasks such as test coordination, master scheduling, acting as 504 coordinators and lunch duty. When I have brought up concerns or possible solutions, I have been iced out by the admin team. My fellow counselors never want to advocate for change [which could potentially] cause conflict so everything feels very lonely.*
- *I think it would be more helpful to get buy-in from school staff to help facilitate some lessons effectively. I don't know how to get staff to understand all the facets of making students well-rounded with academic, career, and social/emotional needs being met. I feel as though everything comes back on me, but I physically do not have the time to do all of the things and respond to crises as I am the only counselor in my building.*
- *If we could get actual training into administration licensure programs about the role of a school counselor, that would trickle down to helping us do our jobs more effectively.*

#### Resources

- *More FREE resources that we can use with our students (lesson, speakers, campaigns, etc.). Money always seems to be an issue.*
- *More support from mental health services outside of our school. We NEED more mental health services in our communities and better partnerships with the school. Honestly, I feel like each school needs an LMHC on staff.*
- *Crisis intervention is the challenge almost on a daily basis with increasing numbers of students requiring one on one support. Having more mental health services readily available to our students would improve our abilities to focus more on the academic and career-college initiatives.*

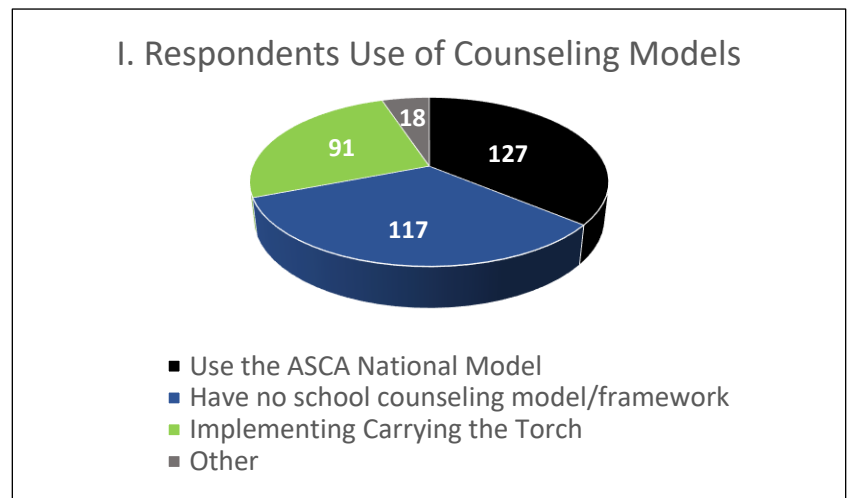
### Fewer Non-Counseling Tasks

- *No covering classes, no lunch duties [since] we are covered up during enrollment, scheduling time, and lots of testing (AP testing, SAT, PSAT, WIDA). You name it.*
- *[As] the administrative designee when the principal is out of the building, I am frequently called on to act as the principal (behavior, discipline, investigating threats, etc.). I am also given non program duties, such as academic progress monitoring, facilitating testing, etc. This takes up so much time and impacts my ability to be consistent in classroom lessons and small group counseling.*

The Indiana Department of Education has conducted the annual survey of Indiana school counselors almost every year since the 2010-11 school year and plans to continue conducting the survey in the future.

This school year the Department introduced an online training platform to help any Indiana K-12 school create a comprehensive school counseling program, free of charge. The program, called Carrying the Torch to Student Success, is correlated with the national school counseling program model produced by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA). Research compiled by ASCA points to improved student outcomes with the implementation of a counseling model.

In its first year, the Carrying the Torch online training system has already enrolled 160 schools, 91 of which responded to the survey. Graph I shows that the ASCA National Model is the most frequently used model by respondents while 33% of survey completers (117 total) indicated they have no school counseling model or framework in place at all.



For questions about the annual Indiana School Counseling Survey, contact Michelle Clarke or Rebekah Frazer at the Indiana Department of Education. This report is produced through a collaboration between the Indiana Department of Education and Inspire Success whose mission is to advance what works to elevate student success.