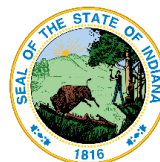


INDIANA SCHOOL COUNSELOR SURVEY

2023-24 Results Summary

NOVEMBER 2023



INDIANA
DEPARTMENT *of*
EDUCATION

Annual Indiana School Counselor Survey Results for the 2023-24 School Year

Since 2010, an annual survey has been conducted of Indiana School Counselors serving the state's students at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. A total of 272 Indiana school counselors completed the 2023-24 annual survey conducted by Inspire Success in collaboration with the Indiana Department of Education and Indiana School Counselor Association (nearly 40% smaller than the 460 completing the survey last year).

This year's results reveal that students' post-COVID mental health challenges continue to be very high as are schools' need for additional support. Survey responses also indicated minor shifts in counselors' use of time, perceptions of support, and student to counselor ratios.

SURVEY RESPONSES - STUDENT NEEDS

As in the previous two years since COVID, school counselors indicated that **the mental health needs of K-12 students continue to be extremely high**. In open-ended responses, school counselors said:

- *The mental health of kids is awful. We need more help. A therapist in schools would be awesome for those that need help beyond my level of expertise.*
- *Our country's mental health crisis has been detrimental for not only the students we serve but also staff members - teachers and even professional school counselors.*

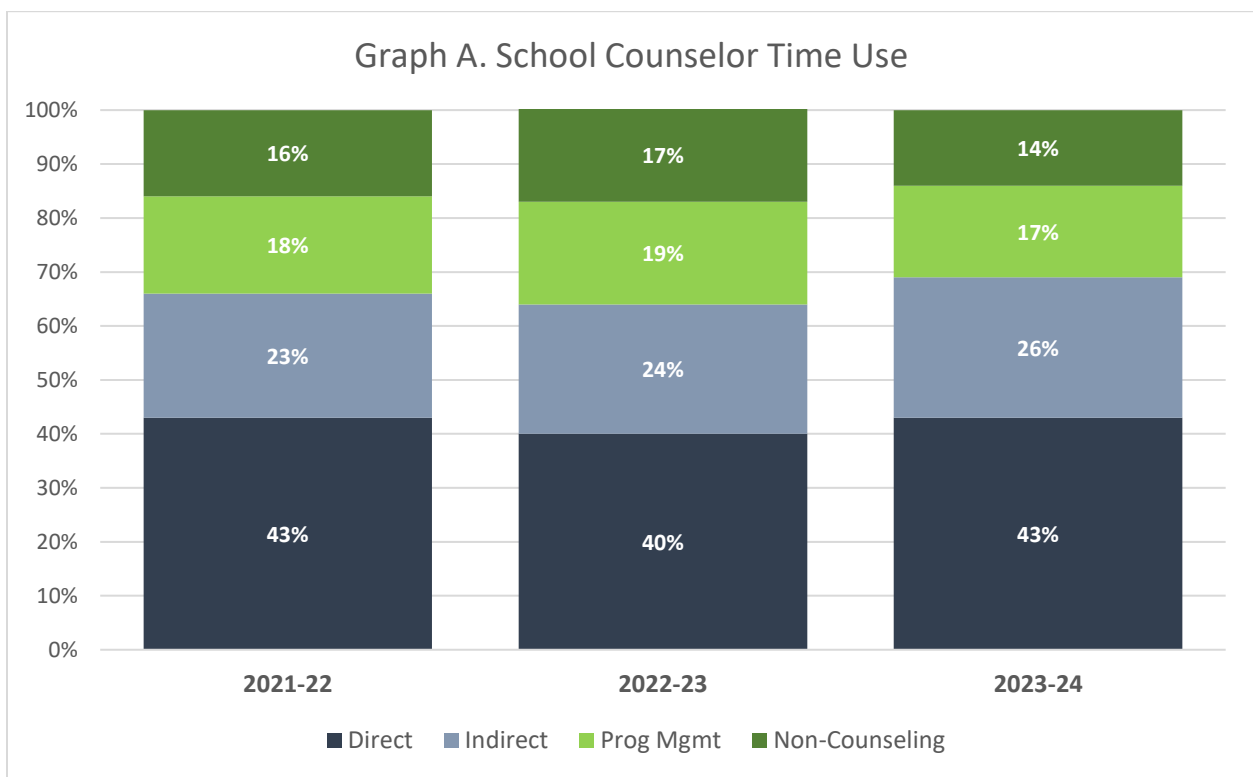
Though a majority of school counselor survey respondents (84.6%) indicated that their school has an agreement or a memorandum of understanding with a local community mental health partner, more than half (62.6%) indicated that **the availability of local mental health specialists is not sufficient**.

- *The one thing that would help me be a more effective school counselor is having more mental health support for our students to help them through the various issues they are going through.*
- *We need more availability of mental health resources to assist students outside of school, particularly for students whose primary language is not English.*
- *We have to find more community based mental health services for elementary age children. As well as better communication between agencies and school counselors.*

SURVEY RESPONSES – THE STATE OF SCHOOL COUNSELING

TIME WITH STUDENTS

After declining the last two years, this year's survey indicates a small increase in the percentage of school counselors' time spent with students in providing "direct" (face to face) and "indirect" (behind the scenes) services from 66% last year to 69% this year (Graph A., blue and gray components) as well as a small decrease in the percentage of time reported in "non-counseling" tasks from 17% to 14% (Graph A, dark green components).

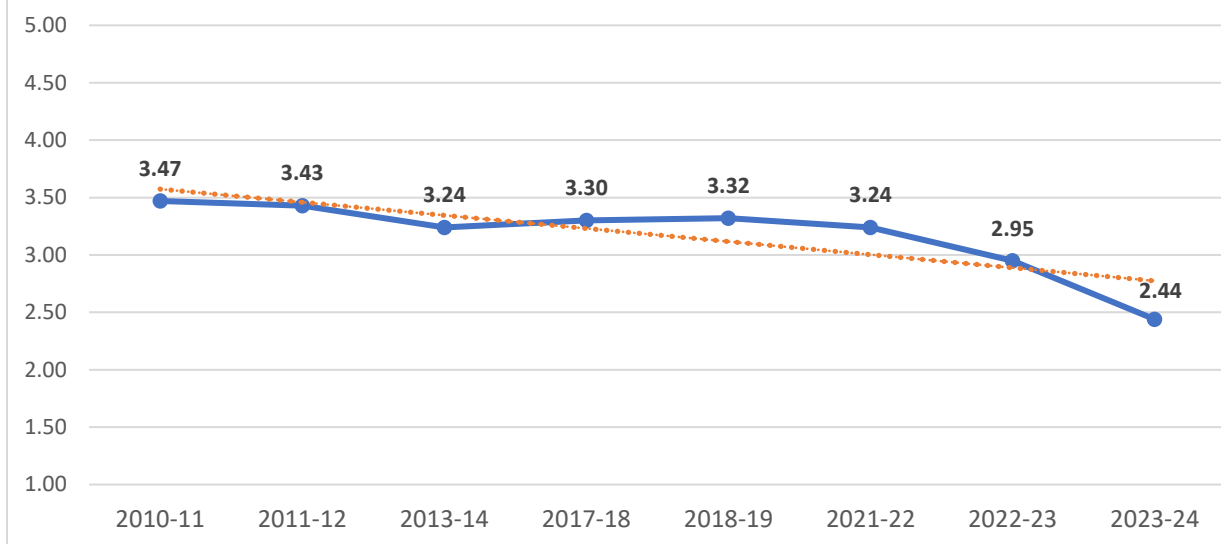


Nevertheless, the increased percentages do not reach the 80% minimum percentage of time recommended to be spent providing direct and indirect support to students by the American School Counselor Association.

Perhaps the most surprising facet of this year's survey is the continued downward trend in the number of Indiana school counselors reporting that they have enough time to meet with students. The figure has dropped every year since 2010 but never as precipitously as in the current year's survey (Graph B).

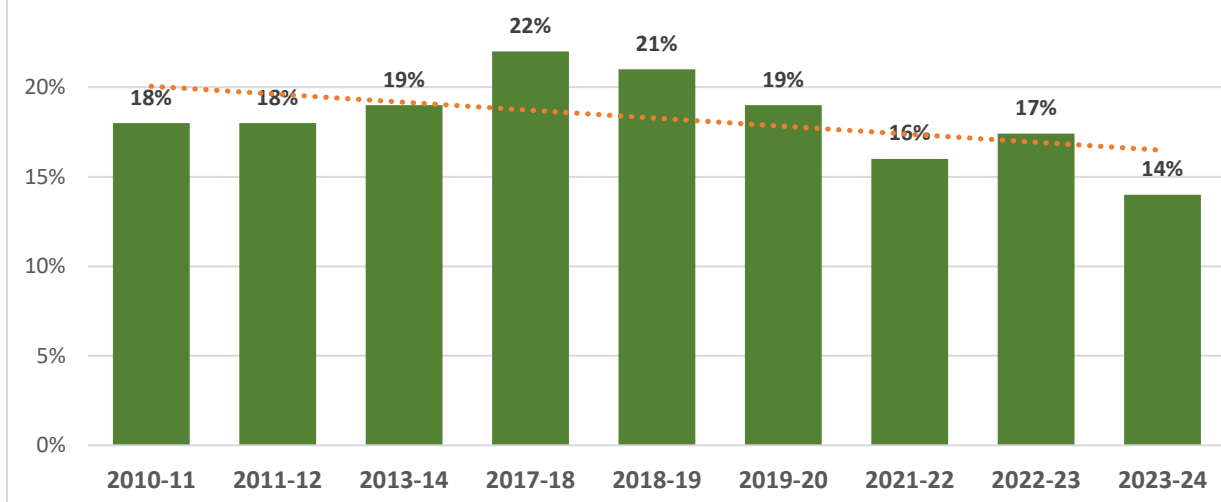
Graph B. "I have enough time to meet with students"

1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree



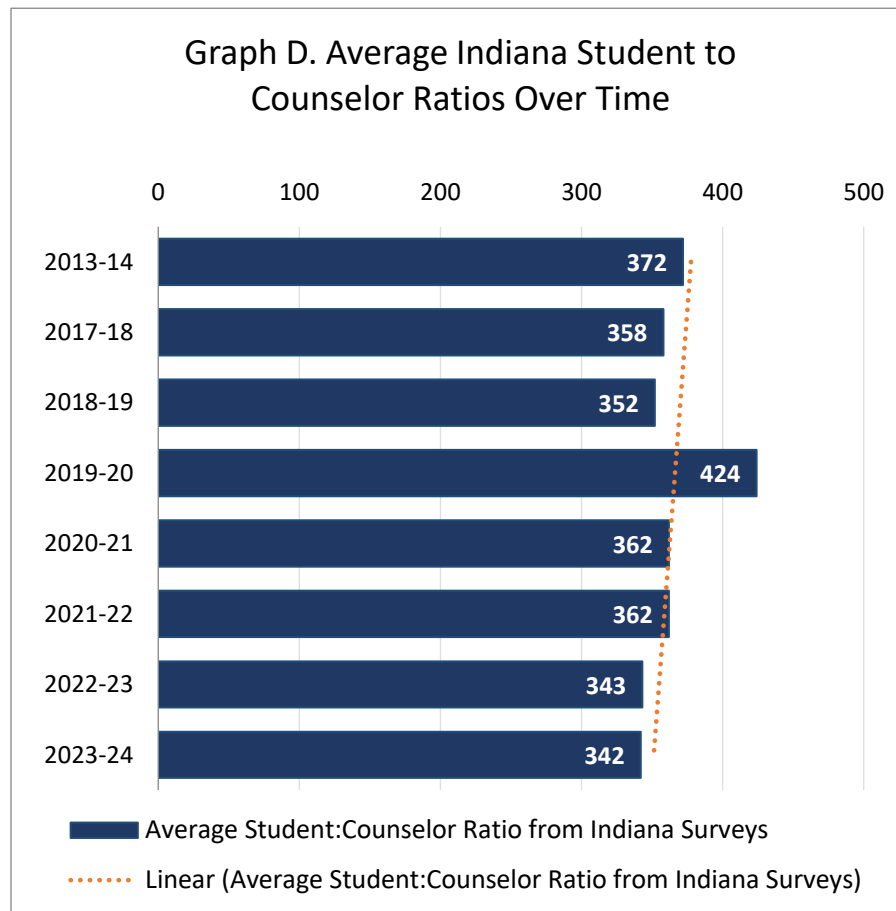
The trend highlighted in Graph B. contrasts a decrease in the percentage of time counselors reported spending this year in “non-counseling” tasks such as test administration and test proctoring (Graph C), tasks that are frequently mentioned as obstructing counselors’ ability to address higher priority student needs. Said one respondent, *“Testing MUST come off of the school counselor’s plate. This was 270 hours of my time and I know other counselors’ time as well. It is not an effective use of counseling skills.”*

Graph C. Non-Counseling As a Percentage of Counselor Time Use



STUDENT TO COUNSELOR RATIOS

Though national figures indicated a dramatic rise in the student to counselor ratios in Indiana in the 2022-23 school year, annual Indiana school counselor survey data trends have shown narrow yet nearly continuous improvements over time.



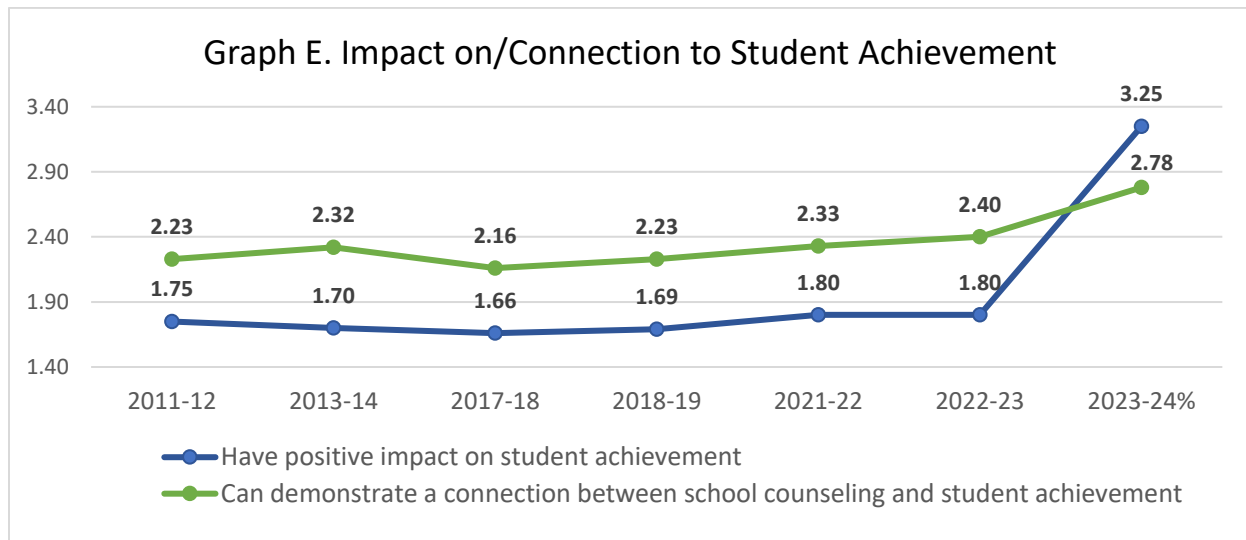
Average student to counselor ratios reflected in Indiana's 2023-24 survey results are almost identical to the previous year (Graph D). Caution should be taken when reviewing the data since 1) the number of survey respondents was smaller this year compared to previous years, and 2) results may skew toward school counselors with lower ratios and therefore more time to complete the survey.

Average student to counselor ratios do not account for the fact that some Indiana school counselors have caseloads of 600 or more students and the recommendation of the American School Counselor Association that school counselors work with no more than 250 students.

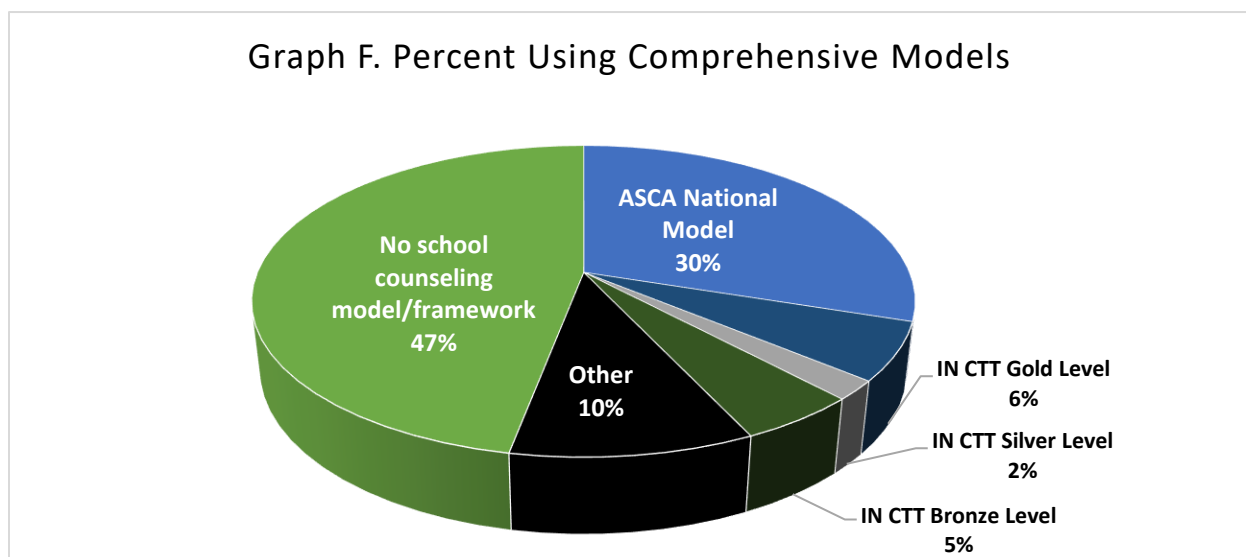
One school counselor survey respondent noted, "I fully believe that schools need to follow the school counselor-to-student ratio [recommendation] better and have school counselors doing tasks that are appropriate as much as possible. As a school counselor, I understand that there are times that we may have to do fair-share duties, but ... this could impact our ability to be there for more students in need."

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

The introduction of a new state-supported comprehensive school counseling initiative in the previous school year called Carrying the Torch to Student Success may have contributed to a significant jump in school counselor responses regarding their impact on and connection to student achievement (Graph E).



More than half (53%) of the Indiana school counselor respondents report having a comprehensive school counseling program in place (Graph F). A third (30%) report implementing the national model from the American School Counselor Association (ASCA), while 13% have implemented one of the levels of the Carrying the Torch (CTT) to Student Success model, and 10% report using another model.



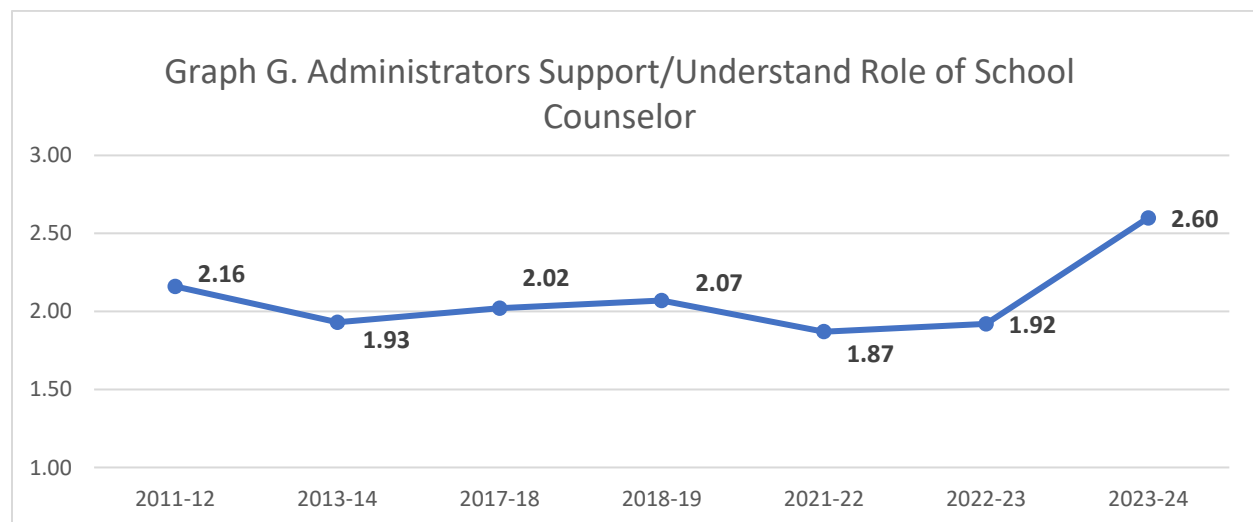
While 47% of respondents said their school has no school counseling model in place, 80% indicated that they use professional standards for students to guide their work and nearly half agreed that they set annual student outcome goals, collect student data, use lesson plans, and have a school counseling program mission statement in place.

Many survey respondents also reacted positively to the state's new Carrying the Torch to Student Success Initiative saying:

- *The 'Carrying the Torch' program has given me renewed inspiration and support.*
- *Through Carrying the Torch, I have recently learned there are things I can do to implement a counseling program without the participation of the administration. I look forward to working towards those and earning a Bronze (recognition) Level in the coming year.*

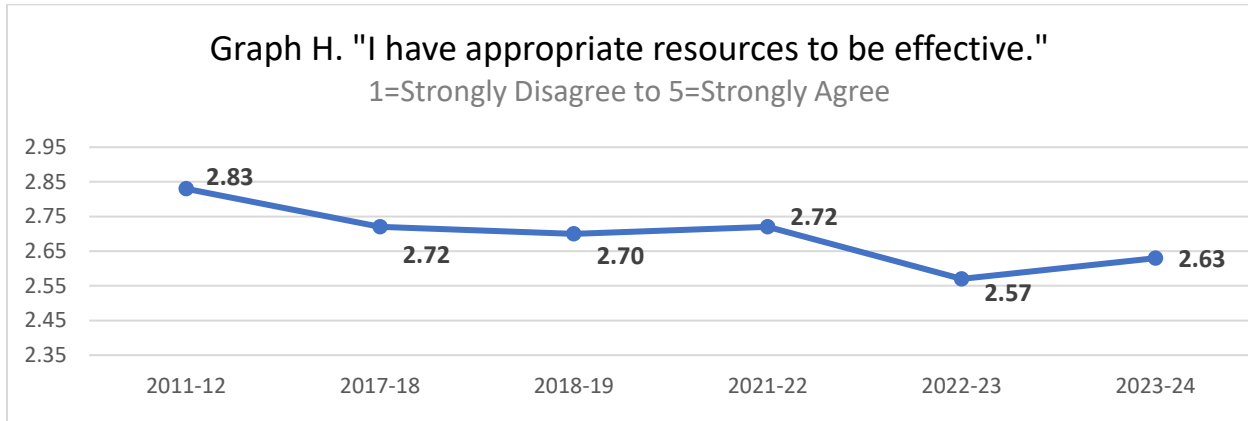
ADMINISTRATOR SUPPORT

In contrast to previous years, this year's survey respondents indicated sharp increases in administrator understanding and support of K-12 school counselors' roles (Graph G). A majority of school counselor respondents agreed that their principal/school leader *"is supportive of the mission and goals of the school counseling program"* even though just half believe their administrator had *"received training about & understands the appropriate role of a school counselor."* One respondent said, *"administrators who understand our role and stop handing us meaningless tasks"* was the biggest challenge of their counseling program.



PROGRAM RESOURCES AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The availability of professional development and other resources to support the work of school counselors remains at a 10-year low (Graph H) with mixed responses to the question "I have appropriate resources to be effective."



The percentage of school counselors who reported participating in professional development rose 10% over the previous year (from 82.5% to 92.8%) but survey respondents said they could "use more training/resources" to help students in the following categories:

To improve their social-emotional well-being, motivation, and/or self-efficacy.	81.9%
To succeed academically.	76.9%
To understand the various postsecondary education and training options, in addition to four-year college, and to help them prepare for a career.	71.9%
To prepare to succeed in college and other postsecondary education/training programs.	68.5%

More than one school counselor asked for workshop instruction on trauma-informed practices, effectively working with apathetic students, addressing attendance issues, and school counselor compassion fatigue.

- *We could use more training and brainstorming on being able to provide Tier 1 supports to students around their already vigorous academic schedules so that I can be a support and not a hindrance to their learning and to the teachers.*
- *We need continued education on how to prepare students for postsecondary education opportunities.*

SURVEY RESPONSES – FINAL COMMENTS

A final question included in each annual school counselor survey asks what ONE change Indiana school counselors would like to see in order to be more effective. The most frequent responses in this year's survey were additional support staff (schoolwide), smaller student caseloads, and greater support from leadership (local and state level). Listed below are selected quotes from the open-ended question. Additional comments may be viewed in Appendix A.

Additional Support Staff

- *If we had more teachers, then I would be able to better perform my duties as a school counselor.*
- *I wish our school had a social worker that met with the students for their social/emotional needs. I need to focus on their academics, and especially with all of the Graduation Pathway requirements, tracking and changes to the Diplomas and Grad Pathways that dominate my time.*
- *More support/staff for our high need students so I am not constantly on-call for crisis situations (pulling me from students and preventing me from confidently scheduling activities with students).*
- *[We need] a registrar or secretary to help with all the administrative items like sending and receiving records and reporting.*

Smaller Caseloads

- *A smaller caseload of students. I do not have enough time to meet with each student for SEL [social-emotional learning] or academic needs.*
- *Lessening my caseload to be closer to the national recommended average.*
- *Have a manageable caseload! I have 506 seniors!*

Support from Leadership

- *Funding for school counselors so that we can gain access to more evidenced-based curriculum.*
- *Advocacy for my role and for my role to be taken seriously. I am the only elementary school counselor in my district. No one understands my role and I don't have time or energy to keep advocating.*

- *Support from leadership in the aspect of allowing the school counselors to have a "voice" instead of being "told" how to do certain things. Collaboration as a department and being acknowledged as a department.*
- *Administrator buy in and commitment to a comprehensive, data based program.*
- *Time and funding to attend professional development opportunities.*

It is important to note that many survey respondents also mentioned considerable frustration with state legislators for passing legislation that takes effect immediately upon passage and for not providing guidance or additional information regarding implementation of the new state mandates.

- *It is important that we have more communication and understanding on federal and state education law and updates. I just learned on Thursday that the State Board of Education is going to release new graduation requirements that will go into effect for the 2024-25 school year. It is unbelievable to me that I had to read that in a newspaper article before hearing about any specifics from our leaders.*
- *We need clear guidance from state [leaders] on how to handle certain legislation in schools.*

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, Indiana School Counselor Association, and Inspire Success whose mission is to help those who help students succeed.

Appendix A

Additional School Counselor Survey Comments

- *We are under constant "threat" of cuts due to the budget. We are lucky enough to finally have small caseloads, but we may not even have the chance to see the benefits of our work if they move to cut the number of counselors. I struggle with working in a setting where I have to worry about things that are not within my control.*
- *Overwhelmed.*
- *The amount of time that we are spending on non-counseling tasks has exploded over the past couple of years, and we are working to advocate for ourselves and our roles. We need help separating the secretarial/record-keeping tasks from the work we are truly trained to do.*
- *Our county needs more counseling services for youth. We have a saturation of mental health help for adults particularly with substance abuse. We need help with students that are having a crisis (suicidal) and do not have transportation to our closest [mental health] hospital. Families are going to the ER and waiting for 4+ hours.*
- *Our country's mental health crisis has been detrimental for not only the students we serve but also staff members - teachers and even professional school counselors. What incentives are being offered to college students wanting to get into the human service field of study?*
- *I work at a small school and the delineation between the counselor and administration is not clearly defined. I find that I end up carrying many administrative responsibilities which hinder my ability to fulfill my role as a counselor.*
- *I have such a fantastic, supportive administrative team at my building!! The job is still overwhelming and worrisome with the current atmosphere where society seems to mistrust educators rather than seeing us as professionals and partners in their child's educational journey. It's a huge, discouraging weight.*
- *It would be very helpful to have a state-led meeting every month regarding school counseling changes and better practices.*
- *Like every other school, we feel that we could use more resources to assist with student needs.*