



## **SB14-150 CONCERNING THE COLORADO SCHOOL COUNSELOR CORPS GRANT PROGRAM**

Prime Sponsors: Sens. Todd & Zenzinger / Rep. Hamner

### **VOTE YES ON SB14-150**

#### **What does SB14-150 do?**

SB14-150 makes several changes to the existing Colorado Counselor Corps Grant Program, including:

- Extending the eligibility to all Colorado middle and high schools.
- Extending the length of the grant cycle from 3 to 4 years.
- Increasing the total annual grant amount from \$5 million to \$10 million.
- Requiring grantees to use established professional school counselor competencies, guidelines and standards (i.e. American School Counselor Association Model & Colorado School Counselor Evaluation Rubric) to implement a time and effort assessment, postsecondary workforce-ready programming, and social and emotional counseling work.
- Requiring grantees to use state-established and accepted models for accountability (i.e. Colorado School Counselor Evaluation Rubric).
- Increases availability of information related to model professional counselor competencies and duties.
- Codifies the Colorado Counselor Corps Advisory Board in statute and requires CDE to establish guidelines for the Board's duties, membership, and responsibilities.
- Requiring the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) and the State Board of Education to take into consideration recommendations from the School Counselor Corps Advisory Board regarding grant awards.
- Priority in awarding grants will be given to applications that demonstrate:
  - o Higher-than-average remediation rates
  - o Higher-than-average rates of students qualifying for Free and Reduced Lunch
  - o Numbers of first-generation students applying to postsecondary schools
  - o Significant numbers of at-risk students at the school
  - o Significant dropout rates
  - o Underserved geographic locations
  - o Higher than average student-to-counselor ratios

#### **What does SB14-150 NOT do?**

- SB14-150 does NOT impose ANY specific requirements for applicants to qualify for grant funding. NO specific percentage requirements or mandatory qualifications exist that would prohibit the receipt of counselor corps grants.
- SB14-150 does NOT prohibit repeat applicants from receiving grant funds in future cycles.
- SB14-150 does NOT increase the program FTE or grant-related administrative duties of the Department.

*Questions? Contact Stacey Lestina, CSCA Legislative Liaison, at [Stacey@ColoradoConsulting.org](mailto:Stacey@ColoradoConsulting.org)*





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SCHOOL COUNSELOR CORPS GRANT PROGRAM**

Prime Sponsors: Sens. Todd & Zenzinger / Rep. Hamner  
Co-Sponsors: Sens. Crowder, Guzman, Johnston, Kefalas, Kerr, Newell,  
Nicholson, Schwartz, Steadman

**Official Support for SB14-150**

Colorado School Counselor Association  
Colorado Education Association  
Colorado Council for High School and College Relations  
Colorado Association of Career & Technical Education

Colorado Community College System  
Colorado Chapter of TRiO / ASPIRE

Colorado League of Charter Schools  
Adams 12 Five Star Schools  
Adams County School District 14  
Denver Public Schools  
Falcon School District 49  
Mesa School District 51  
Poudre School District

The Bell Policy Center  
Mile High United Way  
Colorado Children's Campaign

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Date: 4/21/2014



# Supporting Colorado's Counselor Corps Grant

## Facts and milestones

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Colorado's School Counselor Corps Grant Program (SCCGP) funding is awarded to eligible school districts, BOCES, charter schools or Institute charter schools. The purpose of this program is to increase the availability of effective school-based counseling within secondary schools. Grant funds are also used to increase the level of school counseling services provided to improve the graduation rate and increase the percentage of students who appropriately prepare for apply to, and continue into postsecondary education.

## Districts and Schools

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- Over the six-year history of the Counselor Corps Grant Program, 126 secondary schools, representing 59 districts have participated, representing all regions throughout Colorado.
- Nearly 150 licensed school counselors have served Colorado schools and districts through the grant.
- Eligible grantees have a higher than average dropout rate and/or free and reduced lunch rate as compared to all other Colorado secondary schools.

## Goals

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- Decrease student/counselor ratios
- Increase graduation rate
- Decrease dropout rate
- Decrease remediation rate
- Increase college matriculation rate

## Outcomes

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### Highlights from Cohorts One and Two (2008 – 2013)

- Comparable non-SCCGP schools showed increasing dropout rates and decreasing graduation rates, while SCCGP schools showed decreasing dropout rates and maintaining graduation rates over the same period of time.
  - Graduation rates increased by 4.2 percentage points
  - Dropout rates at School Counselor Corps secondary schools decreased by 3.4 percentage points from the baseline rate of 7.7 percent.
- Enrollment and completion of academic, postsecondary, and career and technical courses increased by 284 percent or 83,396 students.

## About Students

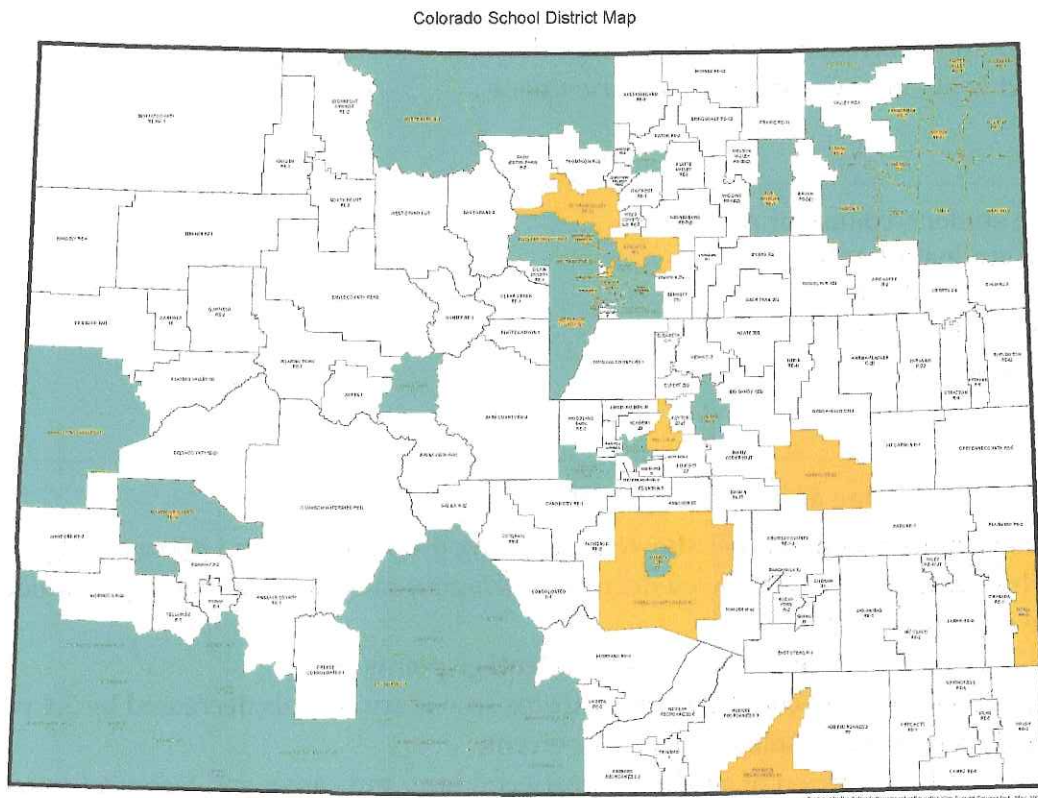
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- More than 100,000 students have been served through the schools and districts represented in the SCCGP cohorts.
- Approximately, 60 percent of these students participate in the free and reduced lunch program.

**School Counselor Research and Promising Practices**

- As found through the Colorado School Counselor Corps efforts, national research reinforces that the presence of effective school counseling has a dramatic impact on the academic success of students.
- Research shows (Belasco, 2013):
  - Low-income students are more likely to attend college if they met frequently with a school counselor who supported their college goals.
  - Students attending high schools with fully implemented school counseling programs earned higher grades and received more college-related information, which improves enrolling and persisting in postsecondary education.
  - School-based college counseling is shown to narrow the college participation gap.

**District Map of Counselor Corps Participants 2008-2013 \***



**\* Districts highlighted in blue have schools with an active Colorado Counselor Corps grant for the 2013-14 academic year.**



Colorado Counselor Corps Grant Program	Approx. 150 Counselor Corps grants have been awarded from 2008-2013.	
Region	District(s)	School(s)
East Central	Karval School District RE-23	Karval Jr-Sr. High School
East Central	Karval School District RE-23	Karval Alternative Academy Online School
East Central	Karval School District RE-23	Karval Online School
Metro	ACE Community Challenge School	ACE Community Challenge School
Metro	Adams 12 Five Star School District	Vantage Point High School
Metro	Adams 12 Five Star School District	Northglenn High School
Metro	Adams 12 Five Star School District	Silver Hills Middle School
Metro	Adams 12 Five Star School District	Thornton High School
Metro	Adams County School District 14	Adams City High School
Metro	Adams County School District 14	Lester Arnold High School
Metro	Adams County School District 14	Adams City Middle School
Metro	Adams County School District 14	Kearney Middle School
Metro	Adams-Arapahoe 28J	Gateway High School
Metro	Adams-Arapahoe 28J	Hinkley High School
Metro	Adams-Arapahoe 28J	Rangeview High School
Metro	Adams-Arapahoe 28J	William Smith High School
Metro	Aurora Public School District	Aurora Hills Middle School
Metro	Aurora Public School District	Boston K-8 School
Metro	Aurora Public School District	Clyde Miller School
Metro	Aurora Public School District	Columbia Middle School
Metro	Aurora Public School District	East Middle School
Metro	Aurora Public School District	Mrachek Middle School
Metro	Aurora Public School District	North Middle School
Metro	Boulder Valley School District	Angevine Middle School
Metro	Boulder Valley School District	Arapahoe Ridge High School
Metro	Boulder Valley School District	Boulder Preparatory Charter High School
Metro	Boulder Valley School District	Boulder Universal (online middle-senior high scho
Metro	Boulder Valley School District RE-2	Centaurus High School
Metro	Brighton School District	Brighton Heritage Academy
Metro	Brighton School District	Overland Trail Middle School
Metro	Brighton School District	Vikan Middle School
Metro	Charter School Institute	New America School - Denver
Metro	Charter School Institute	New America School - Lakewood
Metro	Charter School Institute	New America School - Lowry
Metro	Charter School Institute	Early College High School at Arvada
Metro	Cherry Creek School District	Horizon Community Middle School
Metro	Cherry Creek School District	Laredo Middle School
Metro	Cherry Creek School District	Overland High School
Metro	Cherry Creek School District	Prairie Middle School
Metro	Cherry Creek School District	Smoky Hill High School
Metro	Denver Public Schools	Colorado High School Charter
Metro	Denver Public Schools	Contemporary Learning Academy
Metro	Denver Public Schools	Denver North High School

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<b>Region</b>	<b>District(s)</b>	<b>School(s)</b>
Metro	Denver Public Schools	George Washington High School
Metro	Denver Public Schools	Grant Middle School
Metro	Denver Public Schools	John F. Kennedy High School
Metro	Denver Public Schools	Kepner Middle School
Metro	Denver Public Schools	Kunsmiller Creative Arts Academy
Metro	Denver Public Schools	Manual High School
Metro	Denver Public Schools	Martin Luther King Middle College
Metro	Denver Public Schools	Merrill Middle School
Metro	Denver Public Schools	Noel and Noel Community Arts School
Metro	Denver Public Schools	Northeast Academy Charter
Metro	Denver Public Schools	P.S.1 Charter School
Metro	Denver Public Schools	PREP Academy
Metro	Denver Public Schools	Place Bridge Academy
Metro	Denver Public Schools	South High School
Metro	Denver Public Schools	West High School
Metro	Englewood Schools	Englewood High School
Metro	Englewood Schools	Colorado's Finest Alternative High School
Metro	Englewood Schools	Englewood Middle School
Metro	Jefferson County Public Schools	Alameda High School
Metro	Jefferson County Public School District	Arvada K-8
Metro	Jefferson County Public Schools	Arvada High School
Metro	Jefferson County Public Schools	Brady Exploration
Metro	Jefferson County Public School District	Carmody Middle School
Metro	Jefferson County Public School District	Creighton Middle School
Metro	Jefferson County Public School District	Everitt Middle School
Metro	Jefferson County Public Schools	Jefferson High School
Metro	Jefferson County Public School District	Moore Middle School
Metro	Strive Preparatory Schools	SMART: Science, Math, and Arts Academy
Metro	Mapleton Public Schools	Achieve Academy
Metro	Mapleton Public Schools	Clayton Partnership
Metro	Mapleton Public Schools	Global Leadership Academy
Metro	Mapleton Public Schools	Mapleton Early College
Metro	Mapleton Public Schools	Meadow Community
Metro	Mapleton Public Schools	Monterey Community
Metro	Mapleton Public Schools	Valley View
Metro	Mapleton Public Schools	York International
Metro	Pinnacle Charter School	Pinnacle Middle School
North Central	Poudre School District	Blevins Middle School
North Central	Poudre School District	Lincoln IB World Middle School
North Central	Poudre School District	Lincoln Junior High School
North Central	Poudre School District	Polaris
North Central	Poudre School District	Poudre Community Academy
North Central	Poudre School District	Poudre Transition Center
North Central	Poudre School District	Wellington Middle School
North Central	St. Vrain School District	Skyline High School
North Central	Weld County School District 6	Greeley Central High School
North Central	Weld County School District 6	Greeley West High School



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<b>Region</b>	<b>District(s)</b>	<b>School(s)</b>
North Central	Weld County School District 6	Northridge High School
Northeast	Morgan County Re-3	Ft. Morgan High School
Northeast	NE BOCES	Akron High School
Northeast	NE BOCES	Buffalo High School
Northeast	NE BOCES	Frenchman High School
Northeast	NE BOCES	Haxtun High School
Northeast	NE BOCES	Holyoke High School
Northeast	NE BOCES	Julesburg High School
Northeast	NE BOCES	Lone Star High School
Northeast	NE BOCES	Otis High School
Northeast	NE BOCES	Plateau High School
Northeast	NE BOCES	Platte Valley High School
Northeast	NE BOCES	Wray High School
Northeast	Yuma School District 1	Yuma High School
Northeast	Yuma School District 1	Yuma Middle School
Northwest	Lake County School District	Lake County School District
Northwest	North Park School District	North Park Jr/Sr High 6-12
Pikes Peak	Atlas Preparatory School	Atlas Preparatory School
Pikes Peak	Calhan School District	Calhan Middle School
Pikes Peak	Colorado Springs District 11	Bijou Alternative Program
Pikes Peak	Colorado Springs District 11	Bijou School
Pikes Peak	Colorado Springs District 11	Galileo School of Math and Science
Pikes Peak	Colorado Springs District 11	Irving Alternative Education Campus
Pikes Peak	Colorado Springs District 11	Life Skills Center
Pikes Peak	Colorado Springs District 11	Mann Middle School
Pikes Peak	Colorado Springs District 11	Mitchell High School
Pikes Peak	Colorado Springs District 11	North Middle School
Pikes Peak	Colorado Springs District 11	Palmer High School
Pikes Peak	Colorado Springs District 11	Russell Middle School
Pikes Peak	Colorado Springs District 11	Sabin Middle School
Pikes Peak	Colorado Springs District 11	Tesla Education Opportunity Center
Pikes Peak	Colorado Springs District 11	Wasson High School
Pikes Peak	Colorado Springs Early College	Colorado Springs Early Colleges
Pikes Peak	Cripple Creek-Victor School District RE-1	Cripple Creek-Victor Jr./ Sr. High School
Pikes Peak	Falcon School District 49	Falcon High School
Pikes Peak	Falcon School District 49	Falcon Middle School
Pikes Peak	Falcon School District 49	Horizon Middle School
Pikes Peak	Falcon School District 49	Sand Creek High School
Pikes Peak	Falcon School District 49	Skyview Middle School
Pikes Peak	Falcon School District 49	Vista Ridge High School
Pikes Peak	Harrison School District # 2	Carmel Middle School
Pikes Peak	Harrison School District # 2	Fox Meadow Middle School
Pikes Peak	Harrison School District # 2	Harrison High School
Pikes Peak	Harrison School District # 2	Mountain Vista Middle School
Pikes Peak	Harrison School District # 2	New Horizons High

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Pikes Peak	Harrison School District # 2	Panorama Middle School
Pikes Peak	Harrison School District # 2	Sierra High School
Pikes Peak	Harrison School District #2	Carmel Middle
Pikes Peak	Harrison School District #2	Fox Meadow Middle
Pikes Peak	Harrison School District #2	High School Preparatory
Pikes Peak	Harrison School District #2	Mountain Vista Community
Southeast	Branson Reorganized 82	Branson Alternative School
Southeast	Branson Reorganized 82	Branson Undivided High School
Southeast	Charter School Institute	GOAL Academy
Southeast	Holly School District Re-3	Holly High School
Southeast	Karval School District RE23	Karval Jr/Sr High School
Southeast	Karval School District RE23	Karval Online
Southeast	Pueblo City Schools D60	Cental High School
Southeast	Pueblo City Schools D70	Futures Academy
Southeast	Pueblo School District #60	Centennial High School
Southeast	Pueblo School District #60	East High School
Southeast	Pueblo School District #60	South High School
Southwest	Alamosa RE 11J	Alamosa High School
Southwest	Center Consolidated Schools, 26JT	Academic Recovery Center of the San Luis Valley
Southwest	Center Consolidated Schools, 26JT	Center High School
Southwest	Center Consolidated Schools, 26JT	Skoglund Middle School
Southwest	Crestone Charter School	Crestone Charter School
Southwest	Del Norte School District	Del Norte Middle School
Southwest	Montezuma Re-1	Southwest Open School
Southwest	Montezuma-Cortez Re-1 School District	Cortez High School
Southwest	Montezuma-Cortez Re-1 School District	Cortez Middle School
Southwest	Montrose County School District	Centennial Middle School
Southwest	Montrose County School District	Columbine Middle School
Southwest	Montrose County School District	Montrose High School
Southwest	Montrose County School District	Olathe High School
Southwest	Mountain Valley Re-1	Mountain Valley School
West Central	Mesa Country Valley School District	Grand Junction High School
West Central	Mesa County Valley District 51	Central High School
West Central	Mesa County Valley District 51	Palisade High School
West Central	Mesa County Valley District 51	R-5 High School

Source: [Colorado Department of Education](#)

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# School Counselor Corps Advisory Board

## 2013-14 School Counselor Corps Advisory Committee

Student Retention	<b>Paul Thayer</b> , Colorado State University (Chair)
Community Colleges	<b>Tracy Thompson</b> , Retired School Counselor & Colorado Community College System (Vice-Chair)
HS Counselor	<b>Lisa Moore</b> , Jefferson County Public Schools
MS Counselor	<b>Jennifer Quintana</b> , Scott Carpenter Middle School
Counselor Master Practitioner	<b>David West</b> , Aurora Public Schools
Counselor Ed	<b>Rhonda Williams</b> , University of Colorado – Colorado Springs
CTE	<b>Darrell Green</b> , Colorado Association of Career & Technical Education
Student Support	<b>Deb Suniga</b> , Arapahoe Community College, TRIO Talent Search
Career Planning /DHE	<b>Gully Stanford</b> , Colorado Department of Higher Education, College In Colorado
Pre-Collegiate	<b>Rana Tarkenton</b> , Denver Scholarship Foundation
CASE	<b>John Simmons</b> , Executive Director of Student Services in Denver Public Schools
College Admissions	<b>Andrew Burns</b> , Fort Lewis College

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## Student-to-counselor ratios bring challenges for mental health support

By Zahira Torres *The Denver Post* *The Denver Post*

Posted:

DenverPost.com

Mental health services provided by school counselors, psychologists and social workers are a key line of defense against school violence, experts say.

But some of the biggest school districts in the Denver metro area don't meet the national recommendations for employing enough of those specialists.

In districts such as Denver Public Schools and Douglas County, the ratio of students to counselors exceeds 900 to 1, more than three times the national recommendation of 250 to 1. And counselors working in schools are stretched thin with multiple responsibilities that divert attention away from mental health.

"As a counselor, and all of us in education, you join the field because you have a passion for kids. But when counselors have so many expectations and they are working 70-hour weeks making sure they complete everything asked of them and all student needs are met, inevitably something may be missed," said Samantha Haviland, president of the Colorado School Counselor Association.

She said a counselor's duties include scheduling classes to keep students on track for graduation, providing career and college plans for students, engaging parents, and offering attendance, behavioral and crisis intervention.

Last month, Haviland testified before a state legislative committee in response to safety concerns after a December shooting at Arapahoe High School. The shooting was one of two startling episodes of student violence over the past two months. A Standley Lake High School student last week set himself afire in a suicide attempt.

Haviland, who was a student at Columbine High School during a shooting that left 13 people and the two gunmen dead, said discussions around school safety often miss a key component in preventing violence — mental health support.

"When you are talking impact and where do we prioritize in order to prevent school violence — we have the drills in place, we have the locked doors in place, but we do not have the mental services in place," she said. "School violence has a correlation to mental health. It's not a logical response for a kid, when they are suicidal or angry, to go on this mass killing. That's not a logical thing."

### Staffing guidelines

Counselors are the first stop for students who need help with academics and basic social and behavioral problems. Social workers and psychologists work with students who have more intense needs — special education, drug and alcohol counseling, pregnancy and truancy.

Recommended staffing guidelines are 250 students to one counselor, 1,000 students for every psychologist and 400 students per social worker, according to the health policy database for the National Association of State Boards of Education.

At Arapahoe High in Centennial, the ratio of students to school counselors is 568 to 1, an increase from the

450 to 1 during the 2009-10 school year. The campus — part of Littleton Public Schools — has one psychologist who serves its nearly 2,300 students and no social worker, according to data obtained by The Denver Post through an open-records request.

Standley Lake High School in Westminster, where a 16-year-old set himself on fire last week, has 337 students for every counselor. The number is below the national average of 471 students for every counselor, but is higher than the recommended ratio. The campus, part of Jefferson County Public Schools, has one social worker and no psychologist.

Finding the money to reduce the high number of students served by mental health personnel is an issue.

Administrators of cash-strapped Colorado school districts say years of budget cuts have left them struggling to pay for necessary mental health staff and services that could help curb violence. Since the 2009-10 school year, districts across the state have lost more than \$1 billion in state funding.

Cindy Stevenson, Jefferson County Public Schools superintendent, said funding has decreased as the number of students with mental health needs has grown at the district.

State budget cuts have left the district with fewer dollars than it had four years ago. The district gets \$6,485 per student, a decrease from the \$6,906 per student that it received in 2009-10.

"I don't know that we've ever been staffed adequately, but I would say the reduction in resources has made a big difference," Stevenson said. "It becomes a matter of where you put your resources. We've chosen academics, but we also certainly believe that mental health is important."

Jefferson County Public Schools has about 597 students for every counselor, more than 1,300 per psychologist and nearly 1,100 for each social worker.

The school district has a \$164,000 contract with Jefferson County Mental Health to provide a school-based counseling program and prevention specialists at 11 campuses. But Stevenson said the district would like to do more.

Littleton Public Schools, where Arapahoe High student Karl Pierson killed himself and senior Claire Davis, has 687 students per counselor, 831 for every psychologist and about 1,380 for each social worker. No one at Littleton Public Schools was willing to comment for this story.

Stevenson said appropriately addressing mental health needs requires a two-tiered approach: maintaining an adequate number of qualified staff such as counselors, psychologists and social workers, and training all employees in identifying and helping students with mental health needs.

### **Training, services**

Districts across Colorado have programs on bullying and suicide prevention, and some offer training for teachers and staff on identifying mental health needs. Others work with community partners that offer counseling services for students.

The state does not specifically provide districts money for mental health services, but instead funds them based on student enrollment. School districts then divvy up the money to pay for programs and staff.

State lawmakers passed a nearly \$20 million mental health package in May in response to the Aurora theater

shooting that killed 12 people in July 2012. The package focused on community programs and did not directly provide money to school districts.

Nationally, President Barack Obama presented his proposed budget to reduce school violence after the Sandy Hook shooting that caused the deaths of 20 children and six adults. The budget proposal includes \$130 million to train teachers and staff at schools to recognize early signs of mental illness and get students help.

But politically charged debates over the president's call for gun control as part of his plan to improve school safety have often overshadowed discussions about mental health.

David Esquith, director of the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Healthy Schools, said more mental health services are needed within schools as well as training for additional personnel.

"It's a resource issue in terms of funding to support the delivery of services," Esquith said about the challenges of offering mental health services. "I think we're finding that traditional outpatient settings are not as effective as school-based mental health services."

Experts say that providing mental health support should be a routine measure, not just one that is looked at as a possible fix to school violence. Adequate mental health support improves a child's ability to learn, educators said.

Nationwide, almost one in four children ages 9 to 17 has a diagnosable mental or addictive disorder, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness.

Psychologist and school-violence expert John Nicoletti warns that while some school shooters have mental illnesses, the vast majority of people with mental illnesses are not violent.

"Ninety-nine percent of the individuals who have some type of mental health issue aren't going to become violent," Nicoletti said. "We can't start stereotyping and discriminating against mentally ill people."

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# Legislators want to expand a grant for school counselors

## More of a good thing

by J. Adrian Stanley

Asked what difference school counselors can make, Nola Thomasson recalls a student who could have become a statistic.

Smart and hard-working, he was living in a single-parent household with little means. He wanted to participate in a Colorado Springs School District 11 program that would allow him to graduate from high school with college credits without having to pay college tuition. But that required him to pay fees and purchase books that he couldn't afford, despite working a part-time job. He was beginning to wonder what the point of concentrating on education was.

Thomasson, who is one of two grant-funded D-11 school counselors, says her office was able to help: The boy received a scholarship for his books, a reduction in fees, and a small loan to cover the rest of his school-related expenses. Today he's still in school, and planning to attend a four-year university after he graduates. He's also mentoring younger kids in D-11 with similar challenges. "He just is a fantastic role model," Thomasson says.

The School Counselor Corps Grant Program, which pays most of Thomasson's salary via annual appropriations by the state legislature, began helping schools in the 2008-09 school year. Administered through the Colorado Department of Education, the program gives schools money to hire middle- and high-school counselors, even as the recession has eaten away budgets.

The numbers suggest the program is working. Now legislation is in play that could expand it.

### Hints of promise

The counselor grant program, which funds districts for three school-year cycles, is based on the belief that with more school counselors, Colorado will see increased graduation rates and more teens in colleges and job training programs. While the state has improved its dropout rate in recent years, in 2012-13 the rate still stood at 2.5 percent, or 10,664 kids.

Counselors, some say, have simply been outnumbered. In the 2010-11 school year, the average ratio for counselors to students in schools that were about to receive grant funding was 363 to 1. The American School Counselors Association recommends a ratio of 250 to 1. After grant funding arrived the ratio dropped to an average of 261 to 1. Locally, schools in D-11, Harrison School District 2 and Falcon School District 49, plus a few charter schools received funding under the program.

A 2013 state report found that schools participating in the program saw an annual increase of 4.2 percent in their graduation rate after their first year of funding. Over four years, the

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Courtesy Harrison School District 2

D-2 counselors help with everything from apprenticeships to college visits.

funded high schools also saw a reduction in their dropout rate that outpaced that of unfunded schools. (The state's graduation rate has increased 1.5 percentage points annually since 2009–10.) Funded middle schools increased their attendance rates.

Senate Bill 14–150, sponsored by Democratic Sens. Rachel Zenzinger and Nancy Todd, expands the grant program.

"The School Counselor Corps bill will have a huge, beneficial impact on students' success — especially the students who are considered 'at risk,'" Zenzinger tells the *Independent* via email. "In recent years, most schools made their deepest cuts in the school-counselor departments, and kids suffered by failing to graduate high school and failing to progress into college."

SB150 has passed through the Senate Committee on Education. If it passes both houses and is signed by Gov. John Hickenlooper, it would double grant funding for the program, to \$10 million, and increase the grant cycle from three to four years.

Stacey Lestina, contract lobbyist for the Colorado School Counselors Association, which brought the legislation, says schools that have previously received funding would be eligible to reapply. Schools considered to have higher-risk populations — determined by a variety of factors — would get priority.

## Lots to do

School counselors say their jobs are at times overwhelming.

Part of the job is helping with students' emotional and personal issues like poverty, suicidal thoughts, mental illness, death and domestic abuse. They're also expected to run prevention programs, like anti-bullying initiatives.

Thomasson, who works in D–11's six Title One middle schools, notes that counselors also help students identify their skills and career paths, fill out complex paperwork, and oversee standardized tests, like the Transitional Colorado Assessment Program, the SAT and ACT, which eat away time.

That's where the grant comes in — funding counselors who can focus solely on specific goals like drop-out prevention and career readiness.

Chrissy Fly, who holds one of 2.5 grant-funded counselor positions in D–2, says she helps kids at Harrison High School with internships, job-shadowing opportunities, part-time jobs and college visits. She's able to work with kids one-on-one to help them address whatever is holding them back.

Fly recalls one student who was the valedictorian of his class. Because his parents brought him to the country illegally as a young child, he didn't think he'd have a shot at college. He needed loans, and wasn't eligible. Counselors helped the boy get enough scholarships to go to the University of Colorado at Boulder, and the university's staff helped him again when the bills became too much to handle.

Now, she says, he mentors other kids in Harrison who face barriers to higher education.

— [stanley@csindy.com](mailto:stanley@csindy.com)