



## **Texas Must Increase the Presence of School Counselors in Public Schools**

**IDRA Testimony for Senate Bill 178: Relating to the employment of certified school counselors by school districts. Presented by Christina Quintanilla-Muñoz before Senate Committee on Education on March 18, 2021**

Dear Chairman Taylor and Honorable Members of the Senate Education Committee:

My name is Christina Quintanilla-Muñoz, and I serve as an Education Policy Fellow at IDRA (Intercultural Development Research Association). We are an independent, non-partisan, education non-profit committed to achieving equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college. We are in support of maximizing school counselors' capacities and increasing students' access to on-campus professional school counselors in our public schools across the state of Texas.

We greatly appreciate Senator Lucio's leadership in SB 178 and in responding to the growing need for accessible and effective counseling support in schools, particularly in response to the impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on student's mental health and wellness. This legislation would work to incrementally reduce student to counselor ratios in Texas public schools over the course of nine academic school years to reflect one school counselor for every 300 students by the 2029-30 academic school year.

Mental health and wellness are topics of great relevance and prioritization for our K-12 students experiencing higher levels of anxiety, depression, and trauma than ever before. In the early months of the pandemic, mental health-related visits for children in the United States age 5 to 11 years increased 24%. For those 12 to 17 years old, it increased 31% compared to 2019 trends (CDC, 2020). The need for increased school mental health resources is urgent.

The American School Counselor Association recommends a ratio of one school counselor to 250 students, and Texas demonstrates above recommended levels with one counselor for every 423 students (TEA, 2018-19). These ratios must decrease to maintain healthy, safe, and supportive learning environments. In addition to a shortage of school counselors in Texas public schools, many of these professionals are strained to deliver critical social-emotional and academic support for students through the COVID-19 pandemic with inadequate funding and overextended work capacities.

An overwhelming workload that includes academic counseling, post-secondary guidance and planning, and other administrative responsibilities prevents school counselors from effectively delivering essential mental health and social-emotional support to students. Reduced student to counselor ratios would help make trained counselors available to our students.

In our research, IDRA has found increased access to school counselors and other on-campus professionals, including social workers, school psychologists, and other specialized instructional

supports is a vital solution to school safety. More trained counselors improve campus climate, promote student safety, and ensure student academic and life success . SB 178 addresses parents, teachers, and school leaders' recommendations to increase access to school counselors in order to promote healthy and sustainable learning environments.

## **Recommendations**

IDRA recommends the committee:

- Establish a student-to-counselor ratio within the recommend guidelines established by the American School Counselor Association.
- Commit to strategic resource allocation in order to better meet the mental health and social-emotional needs of students during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond, including hiring more school counselors, psychologists, and social workers.
- Maximize the capacity of school counselors by increasing the allocation of their work schedule to the direct interactions with students to deliver comprehensive school counseling programs.
- Support policies that promote healthy, safe, and enriching school environments.
- Support policies that foster student mental health and wellness ensure student and family needs are identified, addressed, and met.
- Support policies that promote robust social and emotional learning to help children learn how to appropriately manage their emotions, regulate behaviors, and cope with various life stressors.

IDRA is available for any questions or further resources that we can provide. Thank you for your consideration. For more information, please contact Chloe Latham Sikes, Ph.D., IDRA Deputy Director of Policy, at [chloe.sikes@idra.org](mailto:chloe.sikes@idra.org).

*IDRA is an independent, non-profit organization led by Celina Moreno, J.D. Our mission is to achieve equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college. IDRA strengthens and transforms public education by providing dynamic training; useful research, evaluation, and frameworks for action; timely policy analyses; and innovative materials and programs.*