

#### The School-counselor-to-student ratio: Does having a school counselor matter?

*Translating research to practice may be difficult, yet a better understanding of current research is necessary to ensure child welfare workers engage in best practices when working with children and families. The Minn-Link Discussion Guide is designed to help facilitate thoughtful discussions about the information presented in the research brief in order to inform practice and enhance discussion surrounding meaningful issues.*

*In this issue, we sought to better understand the effect of school-counselor-to-student ratios on academic achievement. Minnesota has one of the largest achievement gaps and worst school counselor-to-student ratios in the nation. In this study, we were interested in understanding whether standardized test scores differed for 8th grade students who had a licensed school counselor compared to students who did not have a licensed school counselor, and the effect of school counselor-to-student ratios on standardized test scores when controlling for individual and school factors. Overall, findings indicated that many 8th grade students, including African American, Native American, and low-income students, lacked access to a licensed school counselor. Students who had access to a licensed school counselor scored significantly higher across all MCA-III subject areas than students who did not have access to a licensed counselor.*

#### Discussion on Practice Implications

1. This study indicates that students with access to licensed school counselors fare better academically than those who do not have access. Yet, the school counselor role can vary tremendously among schools and districts. What is the role of the school counselor in your local school district(s)? In what ways do you work with local school counselors to support student success, especially the success of students with traumatic backgrounds? How might these working relationships be improved?
2. How can schools, and the professionals who work within and in collaboration, meet the needs of students when they lack access to a school counselor? In what ways can you support students who lack access to a counselor in your role?

#### Discussion on Agency- & System-Level Changes

1. Recent legislation requires schools and counties to identify liaisons for particular groups of students, including students who are homeless or highly mobile and students in foster care. In addition, some counties assign social workers as liaisons to schools to form stronger relationships and increase their ability to quickly respond and offer support for students of concern to both institutions. These relationships allow both entities to more clearly understand agency roles and identify ways to productively work together. What formal relationships exist between your local county human service agency and school districts? What additional forms of agency-school relationship make sense for your institution to promote the wellbeing of students?
2. Given the fact that much of the funding for school districts comes from local sources, it may be that decisions about hiring a licensed school counselor are made simply due to availability of funding (or lack thereof). What policy changes are needed at the local, state, or national level to ensure that all students have access to a licensed school counselor?