

Connecticut School Counselor Association (CSCA) Testimony for the Legislative Sandy Hook Task Force – Mental Health Services Working Group Hearing 1/29/13

My name is Jennifer Parzych. I am a school counselor and the Middle-Level Vice President with the Connecticut School Counselor Association (CSCA). CSCA is a division of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) which has a membership over 25,000 across the country. First, it is important to realize that unlike school social workers and school psychologists who work with targeted populations, school counselors are charged with the “responsibility to ensure the academic, career and personal/social development of **ALL** students” (ASCA, 2009).

According to the Collaborative for Social Emotional Learning (CASEL)’s 2013 Guide highlighting programs that improve school outcomes and climate,

“Recent research has shown that explicit instruction in social and emotional skills does more than improve behavior and reduce bullying. It can also help students make significant gains in academic achievement — on average, a gain of 11 percentile points, according to a recent review of more than 200 studies published in the journal *Child Development*” (2013).

In ASCA’s report titled *The Professional School Counselor and Student Mental Health* (2009), they provide the following rationale in regards to student mental health,

“Schools are often one of the first places where mental health crises and needs of students are recognized and initially addressed (Froeschle & Meyers, 2004). Research indicates that 20% of students are in need of mental health services, yet only one out of five of these students receive the necessary services (Kaffenberger & Seligman, 2007). Furthermore, students of color and those from families with low income are at greater risk for mental health needs, but are even less likely to receive the appropriate services (Panigua, 2005; Vera, Buhin, & Shin, 2006). Students with untreated mental health issues can develop significant barriers to learning, with nearly half of these students eventually dropping out of school (Erford, Newsome, & Rock, 2007).”

ASCA summarizes, stating:

“... Because of professional school counselors’ training and position, they are uniquely qualified to provide education, prevention, intervention and referral services to students and their families... As a part of this component of the [comprehensive] program, professional school counselors collaborate with other educational professionals and community service providers to assist with the mediation of student mental health issues and to promote healthy lifestyle choices [for all students]” (2009).

In Connecticut, there is a scarcity of elementary and middle level counselors. Right now, an average of only 1 in 4 elementary schools employs a school counselor. This means that the majority of students in Connecticut do not have access to a school counselor until the age of 13! We at CSCA believe this is detrimental to students’ personal, social and academic development.

In accordance with the American School Counselor Association, we also believe in a K-12 comprehensive, developmental school counseling program. We respectfully request that the task

force recommend an increase in the number of certified professional school counselors, especially at the elementary and middle level, in order to provide equitable access to personal/social and academic services for all students.

Thank you.

Jennifer Parzych

[www.ctschoolcounselor.org](http://www.ctschoolcounselor.org)