

# Reimagining School Counseling in Long Beach

For years, Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD) has disinvested in its school counselors. In 2022, several organizations including the Children's Defense Fund-CA, California Association of School Counselors, Public Advocates, and the ACLU of SoCal sent a [letter](#), which highlighted the historic, collective concerns about school counseling and mental health access for students in the district. In October, the organizations convened a community [townhall](#) to discuss the district's failure to provide students with adequate mental health services and provide recommendations and solutions. TALB School Counselors Organizing Committee participated and presented the findings from "**Reimagining School Counseling in the Long Beach Unified School District**," a report published in Fall 2022.

In a previous LBUSD Family Needs Survey, many low-income parents said that "opportunities to talk to a counselor" are among the social-emotional supports that their children need. This fact sheet highlights some of the school counseling issues in LBUSD along with findings from the counselors' recent report.

- **Student access to counselors in LBUSD has always been *significantly* behind** other large California districts and the national average.
- In 2022, **84% of LBUSD counselors report spending more than 25% of their time on non-counseling duties**, which is double the amount for counselors statewide.
- Currently, **LBUSD counselors have 2x to 5x as many students as the recommended ratio of 1:250.**
- There were **20% fewer counselors in 2022 in the district than in 2008**. Students need mental health and social-emotional support now more than ever to address the trauma of the pandemic years.

## LBUSD Community Demands More Counselors

- A 2009 [LBUSD survey](#) of over 6,200 parents and community members found **counseling services to be the third most valued program offered by the district**. Student, parent, and community voices have continued the demand to increase counseling services over the years.
- "Full-time counselors are desperately needed." - Budget Priority #1, 2022-23 LBUSD LCAP
- "As part of LBUSD's holistic approach to wellness, counselors play a pivotal role in coordinating social emotional support and mental health referrals for families." 2022-23 LBUSD LCAP
- "[Students need] people who we can reach and talk to about how we are feeling, especially since counselors aren't always available." 2022-23 LBUSD LCAP

## STUDENT-TO-COUNSELOR RATIO IN LARGE CA DISTRICTS (2019/LATEST AVAILABLE)

- Long Beach Unified: 1-to-578
- Los Angeles Unified: 1-to-401
- San Bernardino Unified: 1-to-412
- San Diego Unified: 1-to-488
- San Francisco Unified: 1-to-467
- National Average: 1-to-424

## THE ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF SCHOOL COUNSELORS

- Provide school-wide prevention and intervention strategies and counseling services
- Support the academic, career, personal, and social development growth and goals of students
- Support positive school climate while addressing absenteeism, behavioral and social-emotional issues
- Support the mental health and wellness of general education and special needs students
- State law calls for school counselors to “[promote and maintain a safe learning environment for all pupils by providing restorative justice practices, positive behavior interventions, and support services... [i]ntervene to ameliorate school-related problems, including issues related to chronic absences [and] [i]mprove school climate and pupil well-being.”

## LBUSD SCHOOL COUNSELORS ARE FORCED TO SPEND TOO MUCH OF THEIR TIME ON NON-COUNSELING DUTIES RATHER THAN WORKING WITH STUDENTS

- In LBUSD, **85% of counselors are spending over 25% of their time on non-counseling duties.** This is more than 2X the state average.
  - Statewide, 40 % of school counselors reported spending over 25 % of their time on non-counseling duties.
- A high percentage of non-counseling and administrative/clerical tasks such as supervision, test coordination, and/or scheduling, deprives students of the social-emotional and mental health support that they desperately need.
- **In August 2022, Governor Newsom signed AB 2508 into law to urge school districts to provide access to a comprehensive educational counseling program for all students enrolled in the district, which includes restorative justice practices, positive behavior interventions, and mental health services. This bill was necessary to accurately reflect the role and duties of school counselors and address the inappropriate assignment of administrative tasks to counselors.**
- Of the many inappropriate duties delegated to school counselors, being assigned non-intervention discipline is the most detrimental. Elementary, K-8, and middle school counselors are often tasked with non-intervention discipline, which impedes the development of a positive relationship between counselors and students, as well as the relationship between counselors’ parents/guardians.

## EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION OF COUNSELORS IS NEEDED IN LONG BEACH (2021-22)

- Many counselors in LBUSD have 2 to 5 times as many students as the recommended *minimum* staffing (one counselor for every 250 students)
- Most of these schools have a ratio exceeds 1-to-500, and Franklin, Jefferson, and Washington middle schools all have ratios approaching or exceeding 1-to-1000
- It is common for elementary schools in the district—like Fremont elementary— to have one counselor only one or two days a week to serve students. What does this mean? Fremont has one counselor, one day a week to serve 449 students (1 to 2,245 ratio)
- Middle schools—where social emotional support is developmentally most critical— have some of the highest ratios between counselors and students.. Most of these schools have a ratio that exceeds 1-to-500.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Commission an independent study of support services in LBUSD that examines caseloads and duties.
- Implement a comprehensive school counseling program that adheres to the law to prioritize the academic and social emotional well being of our students.
- Work towards achieving a 250:1 student to counselor ratio, while prioritizing high-needs schools
- Prioritize hiring Black counselors; engage with the community quarterly on these issues.

**WE NEED YOU! SIGNED THE PLEDGE AT [WWW.TINYURL.COM/SCLBUSD](http://WWW.TINYURL.COM/SCLBUSD)**

## RESOURCES AND REFERENCES

- [Best Practices: Guidelines for California School Counselors](#)
- [Pupil Personnel Services Credential For Individuals Prepared In California \(CL-606C\)](#).
- [This resource](#) by the American School Counselors Association (ASCA)
- [Reimagining School Counseling in the Long Beach Unified School District](#)