

# PRIORITIZING HEALTH & WELL-BEING

## School Counselor Corps

Ensuring Oklahoma PK-12 students have the academic and mental health supports needed to be successful

### WHY IS THIS INITIATIVE NEEDED?

The COVID-19 pandemic has adversely impacted students' academic, social and emotional needs, a situation that has been [most pronounced](#) for students who are members of [federally protected student groups](#). Additionally, Oklahoma's current student-to-school counselor ratio of 411:1 is significantly higher than the recommended ratio of 250:1.

[School counselors](#) and [school-based mental health professionals](#) play an integral role in helping students build academic, college and career, and social and emotional skills, thus positively impacting student mental health and well-being.

In partnership with Oklahoma school districts, the Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE) will invest in a School Counselor Corps of approximately 300 new counselors and school-based mental health professionals to help address students' academic and social-emotional needs caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This effort will begin in summer 2021 and continue through summer 2024.

### HOW WILL THIS INITIATIVE WORK?

This grant will provide approximately 50% of the funds needed from the state ESSER set-aside for districts to hire school counselors and school-based mental health professionals. Awards will be granted for a three-year cycle.

Districts can consult [curated guidance](#) from the OSDE regarding the roles and responsibilities of school-based mental health professionals.

### WHAT IS THE RESEARCH BASE FOR THIS INITIATIVE?

- Lower student-to-school counselor ratios contribute to a host of [improved student outcomes](#), including higher graduation rates, fewer disciplinary incidents, higher SAT scores and graduation rates and more.
- [Numerous research studies](#) have quantified the impact of school counselors on student development and success, school climate and PK-12 education in general.
- [Schools are the most common way students access mental and behavioral health services](#).
- The [American Institute for Research](#) found that school and district leaders should honor the professional knowledge and expertise of school counselors and school-based mental health professionals in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

### WHAT IS THE OSDE'S TOTAL INVESTMENT IN THIS INITIATIVE?

The OSDE will use approximately **\$35 million** of its federal relief funding on grants to districts and professional development and support for members of the School Counselor Corps.

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## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### How can schools apply for this grant?

Districts can apply for the grant in the Grants Management System's School Counselor Corps application in Single Sign-on. Applications are due by **3 p.m. on Friday, June 11**.

### How will this grant impact Oklahoma students?

Research indicates that lower student-to-counselor ratios result in better student outcomes (see research base section on previous page). Additional school counselors and school-based mental health professionals can also assist with student needs caused by the [high incidence of childhood trauma](#) in Oklahoma and the impact of the pandemic on students.

### What types of positions can be funded through the School Counselor Corps grant?

- School Counselors
- Licensed Professional Counselors (LPCs)
- Licensed Alcohol and Drug Counselors (LADCs)
- School Psychologists
- Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists (LMFTs)
- Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSWs)
- Licensed Recreational Therapists (CTRS/L)

### How will grant recipients be determined?

Priority consideration will be given to districts that demonstrate a need for the school counselor/school-based mental health professional based on current capacity to support students and student-to-school counselor/mental health professional ratio.

### Are there limits to how many positions districts can apply for?

Grants will be awarded based on the strength of the application. Large or high-need districts that can demonstrate the need for more than one position may do so.

### Can districts use the 50% funding on contracted mental health?

Yes, as long as the district provides 50% of the funding. For example, if a district applies for a \$30,000 grant, the district must agree to provide \$30,000 to enhance the contracted services to an investment of \$60,000 total.

### How can schools effectively utilize a school counselor or school-based mental health professional?

School counselors are trained to design and deliver school counseling programs that improve student academic, attendance and discipline outcomes. They are equipped to lead, advocate and collaborate to promote equity and access for all students by connecting their school counseling program to the school's academic mission and school improvement plan. Please consult the American School Counselor Association's list of [appropriate and inappropriate school counseling activities](#). Districts must ensure that members of the School Counselor Corps work only in roles that reflect their professional expertise and have been proven to positively impact student outcomes.

*For questions, contact Dr. Shelly Ellis, Deputy Supt. of Student Support, at [Shelly.Ellis@sde.ok.gov](mailto:Shelly.Ellis@sde.ok.gov).*

*For information about federal relief funding, please see the [American Rescue Plan FAQs](#).*