Searching for Progress:
The State of Michigan College Counseling
Six Years Later

The Joyce Ivy Foundation
This report was researched and prepared by The Joyce Ivy Foundation, a 501(c)(3) non-profit, tax-exempt organization dedicated to the advancement of post-secondary opportunities for young women.
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I have over 400 students on my caseload and find it impossible to meet the needs of all of them with the other duties I am required to do. I am at school working from 6:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. and then take work home (answering emails, and phone calls, writing recommendations, etc.) and I can only scratch the surface of what I would like to do for my students.

Source: Joyce Ivy Foundation 2014 Counselor Survey
Searching for Progress: The State of Michigan College Counseling 6 Years Later

SECTION 1:

A New Look at College Counseling in Michigan

This report provides a summary of results from the 2014 Michigan High School Counselor Survey conducted by the Joyce Ivy Foundation. The Foundation first surveyed Michigan high school counselors in the fall of 2007 with the intent of providing a baseline against which to gauge how Michigan counselors use their time, the pressures counselors face, and how counselors perceive the post-secondary options available to their students. The Joyce Ivy Foundation released the findings in the 2008 Michigan High School Counselor Report, which included findings that counselor services in the state were substantially underfunded; counselors endured workloads higher than the national average; and students typically received less assistance from counselors in assessing post-secondary school educational options than students in other states.

After posing the same survey questions to counselors six years later, in the fall of 2013, the Joyce Ivy Foundation concludes: Significant progress has not been achieved and current counselor workloads remain untenable.

Counselors report caseloads of students that are too high and general workloads that are too broad, including duties that routinely pull them away from counseling students. To address these persisting issues, the Joyce Ivy Foundation believes school administrators and state policy makers should:

1. **Reverse the trend and increase the number of counselors available to students.** Lower student to counselor ratios would create the opportunity for more individualized approaches to one-on-one and small group counseling.

2. **Reduce counselor duties that do not directly pertain to counseling.** Counselors reported that other duties, such as administering standardized tests, monitoring lunchrooms, and completing secretarial duties are increasingly consuming their workdays. Temporary staff, parent volunteers, and undergraduate or graduate students with an interest in education could better perform these duties, allowing counselors to focus their time on valuable counseling.
activities.

3. **Expand opportunities for professional development.** Increased funding for on-going professional development and increased time to participate in free regional or online workshops would provide counselors with the information and knowledge they need to best advise students on their post-secondary options.

4. **Supplement school counselors with online tools.** The use of free and commercial online tools, such as Naviance, ConnectEDU, BigFuture by The College Board, has become more widespread, and these tools can be leveraged even further to extend the reach of counselors.

5. **Clarify the counselor role, and establish clear expectations and metrics for evaluation.** The counselor role varies significantly from school to school and district to district. Individual counselors would benefit from a clearly established set of expectations. A clearly defined set of metrics would also support counselors, schools, and future research.

Since the 2008 Report, the college application process, as well as the choices presented to graduating high school seniors, has grown more complex. Early decision and early action programs have regained favor at elite institutions. Non-binding early action programs have been instituted at public flagship institutions. For-profit institutions have extended their reach even as the return on investment for some programs is questioned. All the while, a fragile economy has made higher education all the more important for graduating high school students. High school students today need even more guidance to sort through their post-secondary options than they did just a few years ago.

"We have to fully fund guidance offices. The guidance personnel must be available to students and not conducting the rounds of seemingly endless testing."

*Source: Joyce Ivy Foundation 2014 Counselor Survey*
SECTION 2:

Key Findings

Michigan’s counselors and students do not have the resources to keep up with the changes in admissions and, in many cases, counselors and students are falling further behind the 2008 Survey baseline results because of a lack of resources.

Counselors in the 2014 Survey report the following:

Counselor workload

1. Counselor caseloads of students have increased 3% or more in the past six years. In schools with more than 1,000 students, which represent more than three-quarters of all students in the state, the average counselor carries a caseload of 402 students; in 2007, the average caseload was 388 students. Based upon other publicly available data of counselor caseloads, the Joyce Ivy Foundation estimates Michigan counselor caseloads are 40 to 60% above the national average. (Exhibit 1)

2. Overall counselor workloads have increased. 63% of high school guidance counselors report heavier workloads than three years ago; in 2007, the same percentage of counselors indicated having heavier workloads in 2007 than in 2013, documenting a decade-long trend of ever-increasing workloads for counselors.

3. Average time counselors devote to post-secondary counseling has fallen slightly. In 2007, 29% of counselor time was devoted to post-secondary counseling; in 2013, that fell to 27%. Other responsibilities continue to crowd counselors’

Exhibit 1
Michigan counselor caseloads are high and increasing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Counselor Caseloads</th>
<th>Schools with more than 1,000 students (Student / Counselor)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005 ASCA estimate</td>
<td>351</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008 Joyce Ivy</td>
<td>388</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014 Joyce Ivy</td>
<td>402</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Joyce Ivy Foundation 2008 & 2014 Counselor Surveys
schedules. Almost three-quarters of counselors spend less than 40% of their time working with students on selecting a four-year college. The demands of administrative duties (such as test monitoring), crisis counseling, and larger student caseloads all contribute to less time dedicated to post-secondary planning. (Exhibit 2)

Students

4. More students are continuing their education after high school. In 2013, 8% of Michigan high school students began full-time work following high school, down from 11% in 2007. Students matriculating at two-year or four-year colleges increased from 82% in 2007 to 88% in 2013. Possible explanations may include fewer job opportunities in the fragile economy or a greater national focus on college accessibility and affordability.

5. Of Michigan high school students matriculating to a four-year college, a higher percentage of students are remaining in state than in 2007, according to counselor survey respondents. Counselors reported in 2013 that 73% of Michigan high school graduates matriculated at in-state four-year colleges; in 2007, only 64% of counselors reported this gender imbalance.

6. The gender gap in matriculation to four-year colleges is increasing. In 2013, 75% of counselors reported a greater percentage of female students matriculating to four-year colleges than male students; in 2007, only 64% did so.

Counseling resources and time allocation

7. Counselor access to resources for post-secondary education counseling has held steady. In 2013, 81% of counselors reported adequate resources for post-secondary education counseling; in 2007, 80% reported adequate resources.
8. **Counselors do not have time to help students find adequate summer academic programs.** Only 21% of counselors believe they have adequate time to assist students with summer academic programs, a similar response to 2007 when 22% said the same.

9. **Fewer counselors report adequate time to work with the most gifted students seeking to attend selective colleges than in 2007.** In 2013, 47% of all counselors reported they had adequate time to assist their most gifted students; in 2007, only 41% reported so. (Exhibit 3)

10. **More counselors report adequate time to work with their lowest performing students than in 2007.** In 2013, 41% reported adequate time to work with lowest performing students; in 2007, 35% reported so. (Exhibit 3)

### Adequacy of counseling provided

11. Despite the increasing workloads for counselors, the percent of counselors who believe their students receive adequate counseling for post-secondary education plans is up slightly at 63% in 2013 compared to 60% in 2007.

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### Exhibit 3
Counselor time shifting away from top students to lowest performing students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Counselors reporting adequate time for... (Percent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>... lowest performing students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008: 35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014: 41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... highest performing students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008: 47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014: 41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Joyce Ivy Foundation 2008 & 2014 Counselor Surveys
12. **Students receive adequate information about in-state college options.** 89% of counselors perceive students have adequate information about in-state options compared to 92% in 2007.

13. **Students are receiving less information about out-of-state college options.** 52% of counselors believe students get adequate information about out-of-state options; in 2007, 59% of counselors said the same. The implications here are troubling: many students do not have adequate information with which to evaluate their out-of-state college options, including top students who would be competitive candidates in highly selective applicant pools and likely recipients of scholarships and need-based financial aid.

14. **Counselors perceive students as less able to attend a four-year college of the students’ choice:** 25% of counselors believe that students are able to attend the four-year college of the students’ choice; in 2007, 32% of counselors held that belief. This perception may indicate that, despite Michigan’s economic rebound, students and their families still feel constrained in their ability to attend the college of their choice.

15. There is **increased pessimism in the counselor ranks.** In 2007, 27% disagreed with the statement, “Michigan high school counseling has improved in the last decade.” In 2013, 38% of counselors disagreed with the statement. *(Exhibit 4)*

"Please advocate for public school funding and for increased awareness of the value of guidance counseling in public school districts. This would help properly staff schools so that we can reach students more effectively and provide our communities with the services we truly intend to provide.*

**Counselor tenure and assignments**

16. The average tenure of counselors in the state is up slightly (10.8 years in 2013; 10.4 years in 2007).

17. Most counselors are assigned to students in 9th through 12th grades, as opposed to being assigned students in a particular grade.

Source: Joyce Ivy Foundation 2014 Counselor Survey
When asked what the top three barriers are to Michigan students receiving the best possible counseling, the top three responses, in order, were:

1. **Counselor caseloads are too high;**

2. Other duties routinely **detract from counseling time** (administering standardized tests, monitoring lunchrooms, substitute teaching);

3. Counselors do not have enough **information, knowledge, training** and/or opportunities to participate in **professional development.**

Other barriers that were mentioned, but ranked low on the list, include: a lack of student motivation and lack of family support.

* * *

While no significant improvement has been made to college counseling for Michigan students since our first report, we believe that substantive gains can be made immediately by addressing the barriers outlined above. Reducing extraneous duties and granting counselors the time to participate in professional development opportunities are initial steps that require very little additional financial investment. To reverse the trend of increasing counselor caseloads, Michigan needs to increase the number of counselors and effectively utilize counseling technologies. Post-secondary planning is only growing more complex, and students need the best information and counseling possible.
SECTION 3:
Survey Methodology

The Joyce Ivy Foundation conducted the 2014 Survey of Michigan High School Counselors in October and November of 2013. The survey was sent electronically to a list of 1,818 high school counselors via an online survey platform (SurveyMethods). The Foundation invests in maintaining a list of high school counselors in the state of Michigan, collected from websites, professional association lists, and school district information. This list is updated annually and in comparison to other available lists, the Foundation has determined that producing and maintaining its own list has proved to be the most comprehensive and reliable. In addition to emailing the survey link directly to all 1,818 counselors, the Foundation asked Michigan counseling associations to promote the survey opportunity to their memberships. In total, 683 counselors (38%) responded to the survey. This marked an increase over the 406 responses received for the 2008 Survey. The 2008 Survey was also issued electronically during the months of October and November (2007). The 2008 Report can be found online at www.joyceivyfoundation.org. See Appendix for the full set of 2014 Survey questions.

“Students today need more time from caring, interested adults to help them maximize their potential to get into a good college.”

Source: Joyce Ivy Foundation 2014 Counselor Survey
2014 Michigan Counselor Survey Questionnaire

Part 1: Your high school
1. I am a counselor at a:
   - Public high school
   - Private high school
   - If other, please specify

2. Please describe the location of your high school:
   - Urban
   - Suburban
   - Rural

3. What is the total number of students in grades 9-12 in your high school?
   - Fewer than 200
   - 200-400
   - 401-600
   - 601-800
   - 801-1000
   - 1001-1200
   - 1201-1400
   - More than 1400

Part 2: Your counseling role
4. What best describes the grade level(s) you are personally responsible for counseling?
   - 9th-10th
   - 9th-11th
   - 9th-12th
   - 10th-11th
   - 10th-12th
   - 11th-12th
   - 12th only
   - Other

5. How many students are you personally responsible for counseling?
   - Fewer than 100
   - 101-200
   - 201-300
   - 301-400
   - 401-500
   - More than 500

6. How long have you been a high school counselor?
   - Less than a year
   - 1-3 years
   - 4-6 years
   - 7-9 years
   - 10-12 years
   - 13-15 years
   - 16-18 years
   - More than 18 years

7. Which best describes the number of students you counseled three years ago compared with today?
   - I counsel more students than I did 3 years ago.
   - I counsel the same number of students as I did 3 years ago.
   - I counsel fewer students than I did three years ago.

8. Which statement best describes the amount of time you spend counseling students on financial aid?
   - I spend more time counseling students about financial aid than I did 3 years ago.
   - I spend about the same time counseling students about financial aid as I did 3 years ago.
   - I spend less time counseling students about financial aid than I did 3 years ago.

9. What percentage of your time do you devote to the various aspects of counseling? Please ensure that the values entered total up to 100.
   - "Responsive services" (e.g. dealing with crises, immediate situations)
   - Post-high school planning for individual students
   - Broad-based guidance
activities (e.g. group counseling, group workshops)
  Administrative/paperwork activities
  Other

Part 2: Your college counseling experience
10. What percentage (approximate) of your students pursues the following paths after high school? Please ensure that the values entered total up to 100.
  Work
  Trade school
  Community college or 2-year college
  Four-year college or university (public)
  Four-year college or university (private)
  Total

11. What percentage of your time do you devote to counseling students on their plans to attend four-year universities or colleges?
  0-20%
  21-40%
  41-60%
  61-80%
  81-100%

13. If you counsel both male and female students, which statement best describes your experience?
   A greater percentage of females than males attend a four-year college or university.
   A greater percentage of males than females attend a four-year college or university.
   Males and females matriculate to four-year colleges and universities at approximately the same rate.

Part 4: Resources
14. I have access to adequate resources to allow me to sufficiently counsel students on their post-high school education plans.
   Strongly disagree
   Somewhat disagree
   Neither disagree nor agree
   Somewhat agree
   Strongly agree

15. I have adequate information and time to work with students to find summer academic programs, if they are so interested.

16. For the most gifted students in my school, I have adequate information and time to work with them to ensure they apply to the most selective colleges and universities in the United States.
   Strongly disagree
   Somewhat disagree
   Neither disagree nor agree
   Somewhat agree
   Strongly agree

17. For the lowest performing students in my school, I have adequate information and time to work with them to ensure they have appropriate post-high school plans.
   Strongly disagree
   Somewhat disagree
   Neither disagree nor agree
   Somewhat agree
   Strongly agree

18. The students in our high school receive adequate counseling regarding their post-high school education plans.
   Strongly disagree
Somewhat disagree
Neither disagree nor agree
Somewhat agree
Strongly agree

19. The students in our high school have access to adequate information about colleges and universities throughout the state of Michigan.

Strongly disagree
Somewhat disagree
Neither disagree nor agree
Somewhat agree
Strongly agree

20. The students in our high school have access to adequate information about colleges and universities OUTSIDE of the Midwest.

Strongly disagree
Somewhat disagree
Neither disagree nor agree
Somewhat agree
Strongly agree

21. The students in our high school find it financially feasible to attend the four-year college or university of their choice.

Strongly disagree
Somewhat disagree
Neither disagree nor agree
Somewhat agree
Strongly agree

22. The quality of high school counseling in Michigan has improved over the past decade.

Strongly disagree
Somewhat disagree
Neither disagree nor agree
Somewhat agree
Strongly agree

23. Female high school students in the state of Michigan receive less encouragement from parents and the community to attend four-year colleges or universities than their male peers do.

Strongly disagree
Somewhat disagree
Neither disagree nor agree
Somewhat agree
Strongly agree

Part 5: Barriers & best practices

24. Please list the top three barriers or challenges Michigan high school students face with respect to receiving the best possible counseling.

First
Second
Third

25. Are there programs or initiatives you have seen or used to assist high school students in applying to the most selective colleges and universities?

26. What suggestions do you have for the Joyce Ivy Foundation and/or other community-based organizations in assisting in improving high school guidance counseling in Michigan?