An Unappealing Status Quo: The State of Ohio 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, including nonpartisan analysis, study and research of issues related to college access.

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What Ohio needs is greater advocacy in supporting the value and role of the school counselor. We need to work with state leaders to implement mandates and ratios for school counseling services to ensure all students have access to quality, trained school counselors. We also need greater guidance from the state in the form of school counseling standards that will help guide what we do and create a consistent system of delivery. Standards will also help us justify removing ourselves from traditional roles that deter us from working with students.

– Ohio Counselor

Source: Joyce Ivy Foundation 2014 Counselor Survey
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SECTION 1:
A New Look at College Counseling in Ohio

For the last decade, the Joyce Ivy Foundation has been working to assist Midwestern young women in their pursuit of higher education opportunities. In support of this mission, the Foundation has also sought to research the mechanisms by which Midwestern high schools help students make decisions about their post-secondary options. Chief among these research efforts have been a series of counselor surveys and reports released in both Michigan and Ohio.

In Ohio, the Foundation first surveyed high school counselors during the 2008-2009 school year (2008 Survey). That survey yielded a baseline data against which to gauge a number of aspects of the high school counseling experience: how Ohio counselors use their time, the pressures counselors face, and how counselors perceive the post-secondary options available to their students. The survey results were provided in the 2009 Ohio High School Counselor Report (2009 Report), which included the following major findings: 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.

In Fall, 2014, the Joyce Ivy Foundation again surveyed Ohio counselors asking the same questions as in the 2008 Survey. Results from the Fall, 2014 Ohio High School Counselor Survey (2014 Survey) are reported here in the Foundation’s 2015 Report. In addition to reporting the results of the 2014 Survey, this Report also seeks to evaluate trends in high school counseling that emerge when compared to the 2008 Survey’s baseline.
Major findings that emerged from the 2014 Survey include:

1. **Most aspects of high school counseling remained similar in 2014 to what was reported in 2008.** This implicates the continued systemic problems in the field and also the continued relevance of the Thirty Recommendations to improve high school counseling in the Foundation’s 2009 Report. The entire 2009 Report is available on the Joyce Ivy Foundation website, while the Thirty Recommendations are attached here in Appendix B.

2. **Counselor workloads appear to be increasing in those schools where workloads were already high.** Counselors generally report an increase in workloads, but the impact appears disproportionate. A similar number of counselors reported caseloads lower than 300 students between the 2008 and 2014 Surveys. However, fewer counselors in the 2014 Survey reported caseloads of 300-400 students, while significantly more counselors reported caseloads of 400-500 and over 500 students. This appears to indicate that caseloads for counselors are growing fastest at those schools where caseloads were already high.

3. **Responsive services, such as dealing with crises and other immediate situations, continue to encroach on post-high school planning.** Responsive services, on average, now take a full one-fourth of a counselor’s time and, on average, take almost as much of counselors’ time as post-high school planning. As other aspects of counselors’ jobs are reported as similar to prior survey data, this indicates that responsive services are increasingly the limiting factor on counselors engaging in post-high school planning with students.

4. **The adequacy of resources for post-secondary counseling is slipping.** Fewer counselors expressed confidence in the resources for post-secondary counseling. The slippage does not appear to be at crisis levels—most of the lack of confidence was at the top of the scale—but represents a point of concern worthy of further investigation.
SECTION 2:

Key Findings

Ohio’s counselors and students do not have the resources necessary 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 2015 Survey report the following:

**Counselor duties and tenure**

1. *Counselor grade level responsibilities remain similar.* Counselors continue to primarily describe the grade levels for which they are responsible as being inclusive of 9th through 12th grade (2008: 57%; 2014: 63%) or, alternatively, 10th through 12th grade (2008: 6%; 2014: 5%). Fewer than ten percent of counselors indicated being responsible for any one grade. See 2014 Question 4 (Q4).

2. *Counselor caseloads are on the rise.* In 2008, 34% of respondents indicated that they counseled more students than they did 3 years ago; in 2014, 45% of respondents answered the same. See 2014 Q7.

3. *Counselor caseloads appear to be on the rise, especially for those counselors who already had large caseloads.* There appears to be a trend toward counselors having more students for which they are personally responsible. While there is a decrease in the number of counselors reporting a student caseload of 300-400 students (2008: 40%; 2014: 33%), more counselors report a caseload of...
401-500 students (2008: 17%; 2014: 22%) and more than 500 students (2008: 7%; 2014: 10%). As counselors with 300 or fewer students reported almost identical caseloads between 2008 and 2014, it appears that the greatest workload growth is for those counselors that already had relatively large caseloads in the 2008 Survey—those in the 300-student range and above. See 2014 Q5.

4. Counselors spend more time on responsive services and less time on post-high school planning. Counselors also appear to spend more time on responsive services, such as dealing with crises and other immediate situations (2008: 21%; 2014: 25%), and somewhat less time assisting with post-high school planning for individual students (2008: 29%; 2014: 26%). In other categories—administrative work, broad-based guidance activities, and the catch-all "other" category—counselors appear to spend their time in much the same fashion as six years ago. See 2014 Q8.

5. Counselor tenure appears mostly unchanged, but with notable exceptions for the least- and most-experienced counselor groups. The tenure of counselors appears unchanged in most categories with two notable exceptions. First, there was a significant drop in the number of counselors with over 18 years of experience (2008: 20%; 2014: 15%). Second, there was a significant drop in the new-to-the-profession category of "less than a year" in the field (2008: 6%; 2014: 2%). See 2014 Q6.

6. Counselors most commonly spend 21-40% of their time counseling students to attend four-year universities. Most counselors report spending 21-40% of their time counseling students on their plans to attend four-year universities or colleges (2008: 38%; 2014: 45%). Interestingly,
fewer counselors reported spending 0-20% of their time (2008: 32%; 2014: 29%) and 41-60% of their time (2008: 19%; 2014: 16%) on such counseling. See 2014 Q11. This appears to indicate that the 21-40% time allocation is increasingly the amount of time counselors have to spend on four-year college counseling, a norm that represents a loss of such counseling time for some counselors and a gain for others.

7. Fewer counselors believe they have adequate resources for post-secondary counseling. There is slippage in the number of counselors that believe they have adequate resources to sufficiently counsel students on their post-high school education plans (counselors indicating "somewhat agree" in 2008: 37%; 2014: 42%; counselors indicating "strongly agree" in 2008: 42%; 2014: 35%). See 2014 Q14.

8. Counselors’ working relationship with gifted and lowest performing students remains constant. Counselors reported largely the same relationship to adequacy of information and time for working with gifted students in applying to the most selective colleges and universities as they

Exhibit 3
Counselor confidence in having adequate resources is slipping

Counselor response to having "adequate resources to counsel students on post-second plans"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2014</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Joyce Ivy Foundation 2008 & 2014 Ohio Counselor Surveys
indicated five years ago. See 2014 Q16. Similarly, counselors reported largely the same relationship to the adequacy of information and time for working with the lowest performing students in the school on their post-high school plans as they indicated six years ago. See 2014 Q17.


10. Counselors express maintenance of status quo, and some optimism, on the long-term trajectory of counseling in Ohio. An increasing number of counselors "strongly agree" that counseling in Ohio has improved over the past decade than six years ago, while there was little indication of a growth in the number of counselors believing counseling in the state had not improved ("strongly disagree" in 2008: 5%; 2014: 7%; "somewhat disagree" in 2008: 11%; 2014: 12%; "neither disagree nor agree" in 2008: 36%; 2014: 28%; "somewhat agree" in 2008: 32%; 2014: 33%; "strongly agree" in 2008: 15%; 2014: 19%). See 2014 Q22.

Counselors’ perceptions of students

11. Counselors’ perceptions of students’ post-secondary career paths remain constant.
12. **Increasing number of counselors report high rate of in-state college matriculation.** There was a notable rise in the number of counselors reporting that 81-100% of students matriculated to in-state colleges (2008: 32%; 2014: 42%). See 2014 Q12.

13. **Counselor perspectives on the role of gender in college matriculation remain constant.** Counselors were largely unchanged in their perspectives on whether gender played a role in students' matriculation to a four-year college (counselors indicating a greater percentage of males than females attend a four-year college or university in 2008: 2%; 2014: 1%; counselors indicating a greater percentage of females than males attending a four-year college or university in 2008: 28%; 2014: 29%; counselors indicated males and females matriculating to four-year colleges and universities at approximately the same rate in 2008: 70%; 2014: 69%). See 2014 Q13.

Counselor perception of whether female high school students in Ohio were receiving less encouragement from parents and the community to attend four-year colleges or universities than their male peers was largely unchanged from six years ago ("strongly disagree" in 2008: 35%; 2014: 39%; "somewhat disagree" in 2008: 35%; 2014: 33%; "neither disagree nor agree" in 2008: 23%; 2014: 23%; "somewhat agree" in 2008: 5%; 2014: 4%; "strongly agree" in 2008: 1%; 2014: 1%). See 2014 Q23.

14. **Student knowledge about Ohio colleges and universities slips.** Fewer counselors "strongly agreed," but more counselors "somewhat agreed,"
that students have access to adequate information about colleges and universities in Ohio ("strongly agreed" in 2008: 58%; 2014: 51%; "somewhat agreed" in 2008: 31%; 2014: 39%). As other responses to this question remained largely the same, this change in response indicates a perceived slippage in the understanding of Ohio's colleges and universities. See 2014 Q18.


16. **Counselor perception of student access to financial resources to attend a four-year college rises.** There was a significant reduction in the number of counselors that "strongly disagree" with the proposition that students in their high school would find it financially feasible to attend the four-year college or university of their choice (2008: 24%; 2014: 17%), while other categories of responses remained largely unchanged from six years ago ("somewhat disagree" in 2008: 38%; 2014: 37%; "neither disagree nor agree" in 2008: 10%; 2014: 16%; "somewhat agree" in 2008: 26%; 2014: 27%; "strongly agree" in 2008: 3%; 2014: 2%). See 2014 Q21.

**Barriers to success**

Counselors listed two main factors that act as barriers to success in offering better counseling to students about their post-secondary education options.

1. **Caseloads are too large.** Counselors phrased this in various ways: ratios were too high, they felt “outnumbered,” there weren’t enough counselors in the building given the number of students. The point that clearly emerges is that counselors believe they could deliver a higher quality of college counseling if they had smaller caseloads.

2. **Time.** Counselors also expressed this
barrier in various ways: they do not have adequate time to meet with students, other duties and administrative tasks reduce the time they are able to spend on counseling, students do not have enough time in their schedules to seek out counseling, large caseloads mean there is little time to spend getting to know each student. Counselors reported that they did not have adequate time to engage in professional development to stay current on policies, practices, and resources related to the college admissions and financial aid process.

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The findings of the 2014 Survey lead the Joyce Ivy Foundation to conclude that little progress has been made over the last six years since the 2008 Survey. It appears that the state of college counseling in Ohio has largely been to maintain the status quo, with a few signs of unfavorable trends emerging in particular areas, such as the size of counselor caseloads, the amount of time available for post-secondary counseling, and counselor confidence in the adequacy of the resources available.

The status quo, unfortunately, still leaves Ohio trailing national benchmarks and providing less assistance to students in assessing post-secondary school educational options than students, counselors, parents and the broader education community all agree is necessary.

In reviewing the data from the 2008 Survey and 2014 Survey, we believe the thirty recommendations made by the Joyce Ivy Foundation in the 2009 Ohio Counselor Report are as relevant as ever.

See Appendix B for the full set of recommendations from the 2009 Report.
Both the 2008 and 2014 Surveys were distributed to high school counselors through the assistance of the Ohio School Counselors Association (OSCA), the Ohio Association for College Admission Counseling (OACAC), and through use of the Foundation’s own database of Ohio high school counselor contact information, which is believed to be the largest such database of its kind. There were 630 survey responses in 2008 and 541 survey responses in 2014. The division between survey responses from counselors at public (87%) and private (13%) schools was identical in both the 2008 and 2014 surveys. See 2014 Q1. The division between survey responses from counselors at urban (2008: 18%; 2014: 17%), suburban (2008: 46%; 2014: 47%), and rural (2008: 34%; 2014: 36%) schools was also statistically similar. See 2014 Q2. There were slightly fewer very large schools represented in the 2014 Survey (schools over 1400 students in 2008: 24%; 2014: 19%) and slightly more smaller schools in the 2014 Survey (schools with less than 400 students in 2008: 13%; 2014: 19%), while most other school size ranges remained similar. See 2014 Q3. The overall similarity of response rates and demographics indicates that the 2008 and 2014 Surveys are suitably similar to permit comparisons and discuss trends over time.

See Appendix A for the full set of 2014 Survey questions.

“If the administrative duties of the counselors will continue to increase, we need to have a smaller student/counselor ratio so students still get the attention they need. Information needs to get to the public regarding how the needs of our students are not being met.”

– Ohio Counselor

Source: Joyce Ivy Foundation 2014 Counselor Survey
### 2014 Ohio 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

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.

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

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.

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

   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 Ohio 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 Ohio 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 Ohio 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?
Appendix B

2009 Ohio Counselor Report: Thirty Recommendations

The State and its public secondary educational institutions should:

1. Require professional school counseling resources in public high schools, and maintain individual counselor caseload at or below 250 students.

2. Create a liaison between the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) and school counselor professionals and organizations to include the school counselor perspective in policy and communicate more effectively with the counselor community.

3. Further define the school counselor role, including credentialing, a career ladder, clear responsibilities, accountability, and rewards/ penalties based on performance.

4. Implement a statewide comprehensive school counseling program based on the American School Counselor Association National Model or a similar state-developed model that clearly outlines the expectations of a school counseling program.

5. Hire para-professionals in each high school to assist with non-counseling, administrative responsibilities currently carried out by professional school counselors, thereby freeing counselors’ time for more impactful counseling activities with their students.

6. Evaluate the benefits of a more specialized school counselor model, such as focusing some school counselors on providing career/college counseling and others on providing social and emotional needs counseling.

7. Mandate an individual meeting take place no later than February of junior year between the counselor, the student, and the parent/guardian to plan the path that will lead to the student’s postsecondary decision.

8. Mandate a post-high school Planning Evening is offered for students and parents in every public high school in the State every fall.

9. Create a volunteer program to mobilize the power of retired school counselors and private school counselors.

10. Expand on The Ohio Career Information System (OCIS) database to include Ohio students’ college admission data collection.

11. Create a statewide database of educational scholarships available for Ohio high school students.

12. Require schools to offer an elective (or mandatory) class focused solely on SAT/ACT test preparation, the college admissions process, college application / financial aid form completion, and college survival skills.
13. Require all public and private colleges and universities in the State to accept the Common Application or an Ohio-based equivalent; limit all public and private colleges and universities in the State to no more than one supplemental essay and one supplemental question beyond those on the Common Application.

Counselors should:

14. Ensure student and parent(s) have ready email access to the counselor.
15. Ensure the most appropriate range of post-high school options are considered.
16. Provide parents and students an estimate of the true net cost (i.e. total cost to attend minus typical grant money received) of various colleges to enable a fair comparison between public and private college options.
17. Encourage academic programs during the summers following 10th and 11th grades for the most promising students.
18. Seek to provide opportunities for students to visit college campuses, and bring back young alumni who are attending college to speak to current students about their experiences.
19. Evaluate greater coordination among the multiple school counseling and postsecondary associations in the State to provide a stronger voice for legislative and reform efforts.

High School teachers should:

20. Encourage students to begin the post-high school decision process no later than fall semester of their junior year.
21. Orient class assignments to promote post-high school decision-making and planning, particularly taking a lead role in assisting with the assignment of classroom essays that can serve double duty as college application essays and encouraging students to take Advanced Placement and SAT Subject Tests immediately after relevant classes have been completed.

Ohio colleges and universities should:

22. Join and support the use of the Common Application or an Ohio-state equivalent.
23. Introduce in their Schools of Education curricula a greater emphasis on college admission counseling for those studying to become school counselors, and require continuing education credits in changes to college admissions, standardized testing, and financial aid processes for secondary school counselors.
Parents should:

24. Manage the timeline and assume a quarterback role in the overall process, beginning no later than January of 11th grade and continuing until the final application is submitted.

25. Ensure email and phone access to their child’s high school counselor.

26. Understand the true net cost of various colleges and universities, and be open-minded about potential opportunities and choices for their children.

Students should:

27. Develop a college-going mentality starting in 9th grade.

28. Familiarize themselves with both the Common Application (or Ohio equivalent) website as well as the Statewide data tool (currently the OCIS database).

29. Investigate spending time at an on-campus academic program at a college or university in the summers following sophomore and/or junior year.

30. Review the Ohio state database of scholarships available to high school seniors.