13877 Hubbard Street

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 September 22, 2009

Mr. Alex Padilla

California Senator

6150 Van Nuys Blvd. Suite 400

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Dear Mr. Padilla:

Mr. Padilla, the fundamental role of all school systems is to create and provide its community of learners with the best educational environment to help them succeed both socially and academically. However, as a result of the recent district-wide budget cuts that have affected the state of California, many schools have limited or altogether eliminated the support services that their students regularly need. Unfortunately, large student populations find themselves without the professional knowledge of school counselors, school psychologists, and school social workers. Instead of minimizing these advisory roles, schools need to fulfill their obligation and increase the counseling services to help support their students.

The overall importance of school counselors at school sites has been widely undervalued. School counselors are increasingly viewed as an unnecessary and disposable school commodity. Meanwhile, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) recommends that schools have a counselor-to-student ratio of 1:250, to maximize student support efforts. Sadly, the California Association of School Psychologists (CASP) reported that in 2008 the state of California had a 1:686 counselor-to-student ratio, which was the lowest in the entire nation. These statistics suggest that many California school children are unjustifiably forced to self-support, be without aid or reinforcement. Yet, many of these individuals come from broken and unstable homes where they do not have the benefit of a role-model to steer them in the right direction. Rather than facilitate matters, schools perpetuate this chain of unmet youth needs (“Increased Student Achievement,” 2009) by removing school counselors from their campuses.

Ironically, counselors provide minors with a voice that gives them hope. Most notably, counselors provide a safe and dependable support system for youngsters to deal with personal, social, and emotional issues (“Role of the Professional,” 2009). In essence, school counselors assume a multi-layered role that is highlighted by their ability to guide and mentor students on basic life-skills. Generally, school counselors aim to setup pupils with post-secondary options, so that they can become educated and successful people. As part of this process, school counselors search for grants and scholarships that will connect students to the colleges and universities of their choice (“Pupil Services Coalition,” 2009).

Moreover, research suggests that when school counseling support is present, students tend to become much more motivated and engaged in the learning process (“Increased Student Achievement,” 2009). Simultaneously, the counselor-and-student interactions lead to a higher level of academic achievement. Not surprisingly, the opposite is true when these leadership roles are not available to students in the school setting. Seemingly, there is a negative scholastic effect that results from the absence of school counselors. Often times, the students who feel neglected go on to exhibit disruptive behavior and emotional distress at school. Consequently, they are more likely to drop out of school, as well as turn to drugs and alcohol to resolve their day-to-day problems.

Additionally, school counselors are a major component in the unification of all comprehensive and intervention support programs for students (Allen, 1994). In fact, school counselors build collaborative relationships with teachers, school psychologists, school social workers, and other school personnel to help students thrive in all areas of their life. By joining their efforts with other school support staff, school counselors promote a “healthy school climate” that allows students to feel more connected to their educational community. Under these circumstances, students are more willing to build friendships and become involved in school conventions and activities. More importantly, school counselors extend their support services beyond the reaches of the school barriers. School counselors are responsible for opening communication between the schools, parents, and the community. Ultimately, they strive to establish a “culture of communication” (Allen, 1994) that helps those involved more effectively identify and understand student needs.

Other instrumental members of the school student support team that are vastly underrepresented are school psychologists and school social workers. Consensually, national organizations recommend a 1:1,000 psychologist-to-student ratio and a 1:800 social worker-to-student ratio, as the standard for proper school services. However, there is a huge disparity between what the national organizations propose and what the state of California provides its students. Incredibly, in 2008, California schools had a putrid psychologist-to-student ratio of 1:1,328 and a social worker-to-student ratio of 1:15,650 (“Pupil Services Coalition,” 2009). These numbers reflect the missing link in the movements by schools to improve student learning (“Role of the Professional,” 2009). Clearly, more school psychologists and school social workers are needed because they monitor student issues that emerge in their respective specialized field areas and they strengthen the coalition of pupil services.

School psychologists are agents who regulate the mental and emotional healthcare of all students. Typically, psychologists work to accommodate a wide range of child needs, from those who have a learning disability to those who are highly-gifted, and everyone in-between. Accordingly, psychologists extend a helping hand to educators, parents, and other school professionals to reinforce the school-and-home dynamics that help sustain the mental well-being of students. Specifically, school psychologists actively participate and provide assistance to classroom teachers in the development of effective classroom management strategies and behavioral plans, as well as use interventions to give families pointers on effective parenting techniques (“Pupil Services Coalition,” 2009).

Similar to school psychologists, school social workers cross-over into the frameworks of the home, school, and community to guarantee student achievement. Relatively speaking, social workers devote much of their time to identify the various home risk factors that may impede student learning. Professionally, they are obligated to keep the best interest of students in mind, at all cost. Whenever there are signs of poor living conditions and poor health, evidence of domestic trouble, and low school attendance (“Student Support Services,” 2009), social workers must act as the students’ agent to provide them with the appropriate shelter to be able to succeed in school.

Mr. Padilla, as an educational practitioner, I implore you and all California state legislators to comprise an economic plan that will increase the number of counseling services to support students. The professional skills of school counselors, school psychologists, and school social workers are all part of the solution to generate higher academic achievement. In order to reach out to the “whole” student, these leadership roles must be in place to provide academic, social, mental, and emotional support in each of their environmental settings: school, home, and the community. Without these vital support counseling services, student achievement hits a major road block and the risk of failure is much more prevalent. Moving forward, we need to take the initiative and empower students by rewarding them with the support services that they deserve.

 Sincerely,

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