

NEWS RELEASE

REPORT CALLS FOR FUNDING CHANGES FOR GUIDANCE COUNSELLORS

New data reveal gaps in students' access to guidance

For immediate release

TORONTO (January 23, 2018) – A new report from People for Education shows a disconnect between the roles that guidance counsellors are expected to fill and the amount of time they are available to fill those roles.

The report, *Guidance counsellors: expanding roles, limited access*, is based on results from the 1,244 Ontario schools participating in People for Education's 2018 Annual Ontario School Survey. It shows that the majority of elementary schools have no guidance counsellors at all, and that the ratio of students to guidance teachers in secondary schools is very high.

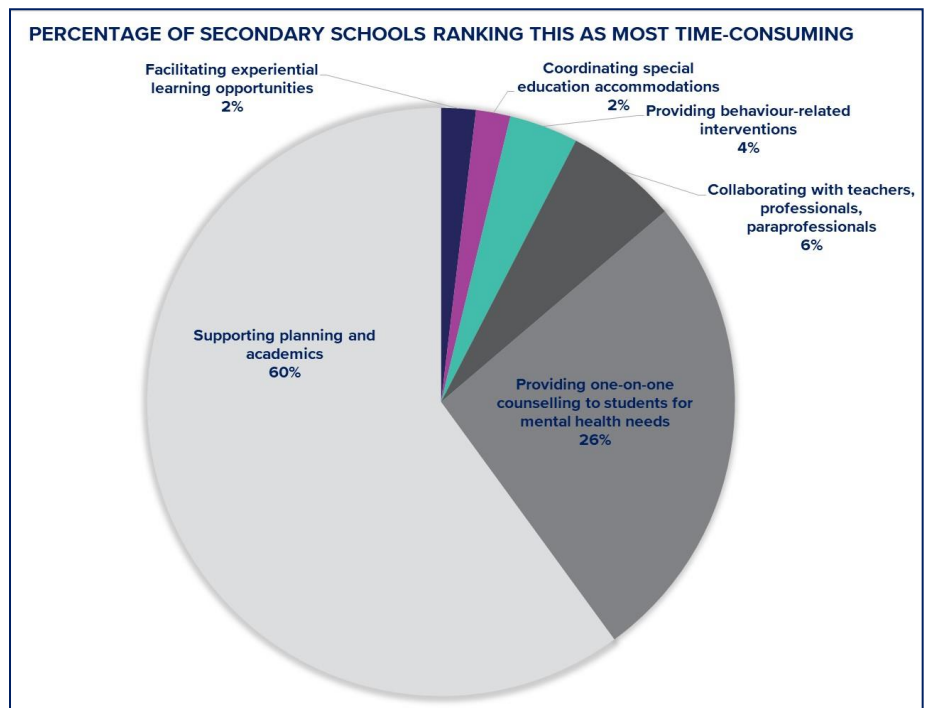
Mental health needs adding to expanding role of guidance counsellors

According to the report, guidance counsellors' roles vary between schools, depending on student needs, staffing, and board/school priorities. While many of Ontario's education policies describe counsellors' role as helping students with transitions and academic programming, the schools that participated in the survey report that counsellors are also involved in a wide range of other areas including special education support, discipline proceedings, and supporting students with mental health issues.

Principals were asked to rank guidance counsellors' activities in terms of which were most-time consuming. While the majority of schools ranked supporting students with academic and transition planning first, supporting students' mental health needs was the second-highest choice.

Twenty-six percent of secondary and 20% of elementary schools indicate that the most time-consuming part of the guidance counsellor's role is providing one-on-one counselling to students for mental health needs.

In their survey responses, many high school principals pointed to the challenge of meeting students' mental health needs. According to one principal, *"Mental health needs are increasing at an alarming rate and we do not have access to the professional services to truly help these students."*



Per pupil amounts in funding formula limit access to guidance staff

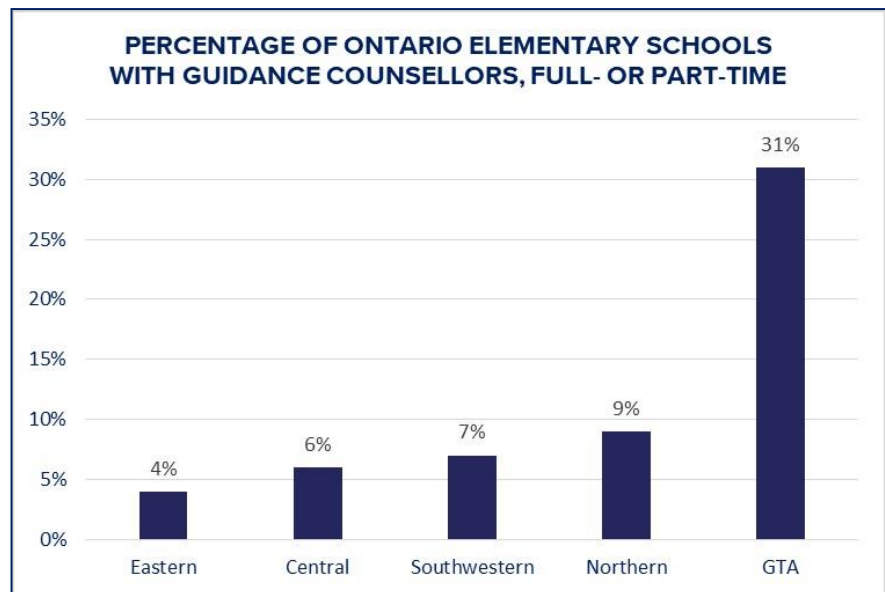
School boards receive funding from the province for guidance counsellors based on their enrolment. Boards get funding for one full-time secondary guidance counsellor for every 385 high school students, and one elementary guidance counsellor for every 5,000 elementary students.

Findings from the report show that while the average ratio across the province of secondary guidance counsellors to students is 396 to 1; in 10% of high schools that average grows to 826 to 1.

For elementary schools, the numbers are much smaller.

Only 14% of elementary schools have guidance counsellors, and among those that have them, they are only available for an average of 1.5 days per week. Even in schools with grades 7 and 8 – where students are going through emotional and educational transitions as well as making decisions about high school courses – the survey results show that there are very few guidance counsellors, with only 20% of schools with grades 7 and 8 having guidance staff either full- or part-time.

Because funding for guidance counsellors is based on enrolment, access to these staff in elementary schools also varies markedly across the province. In the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), 31% of elementary schools have guidance staff, compared to an average of 6% across the rest of the province.



Report recommends changes to funding and policy

According to Annie Kidder, Executive Director of People for Education, guidance counsellors have a vital role to play in the province’s renewed vision for education.

“This fall, the province announced plans to increase the system’s emphasis on equity and well-being and on ‘transferable life skills that can help students of all ages meet the changing demands of today and tomorrow.’”

“In order to achieve these goals, we are recommending that the province clarify the role of both elementary and secondary school guidance counsellors in a way that recognizes the breadth of their responsibilities, and that the province change the funding formula so that per-pupil funding for guidance counsellors is provided for students in grades 7 and 8 at the same rate as it is for secondary school students.”

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