

# SCHOOL GUIDANCE

This report is an excerpt from the 2015 Annual Report on Ontario's Publicly Funded Schools.

Ontario's Pupil Foundation grant provides funding for one elementary guidance counsellor for every 5,000 elementary school students. For secondary schools, the province provides funding for one guidance counsellor for every 384 students.

The funding formula states that, "Guidance teachers at the elementary level are those providing guidance primarily to Grade 7 and 8 pupils."

In 2013, the Ministry of Education introduced a comprehensive approach to career and life planning: *Creating Pathways to Success*. The policy requires elementary schools to have a process for documenting student learning and career and life planning from kindergarten through grade 12.<sup>1</sup> The process includes reviews with teachers, guidance counsellors and parents.<sup>2</sup> In addition, *Creating Pathways to Success* describes a strategy to enhance collaboration between school guidance staff, support staff, and other community stakeholders.

## ACCESS TO GUIDANCE IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

*Creating Pathways to Success* identifies guidance counsellors as having a "strategic role" in ensuring the success of career and life planning.<sup>3</sup> However, in this year's survey, only 14 percent of Ontario's elementary schools report having a guidance counsellor, and among that small minority, only 10 percent have counsellors that are full-time.

In grades 7 and 8, students make important decisions about secondary school course selection, and often face a range of issues related to adolescence.<sup>4</sup> Because guidance counsellors can interact with students regularly, they have the opportunity to get to know individual students over time, and can provide effective one-on-one support. But only 20 percent of schools with grades 7 and 8 report having guidance counsellors, and the vast majority of these counsellors are part-time.

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**It would be wise if grade 8 teachers could communicate with high school principals or guidance. With such strict privacy issues, we have less communication of vital student data, especially for at-risk students/families.**

*Secondary school, Grand Erie DSB*

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## QUICK FACTS

- Only 14% of Ontario's elementary schools have at least one guidance counsellor, and in these schools, only 10% are full-time.
- 99% of secondary schools have at least one guidance counsellor. Of these schools, 88% are full-time.
- The average ratio of students to guidance counsellors per secondary school is 391 to 1.

Some schools attempt to increase access to guidance expertise by organizing visits and activities with high school guidance counsellors. However, it is unclear how systematic these links are, or how much they mitigate the effects of not having an elementary school guidance counsellor.

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**Guidance counsellors from the local high school visit twice a year with Grade 8 students to inform them about course selection. Grade 8 students also have the opportunity to spend a morning at the high school to experience what a typical day in high school is like. These practices support the transition to high school.**

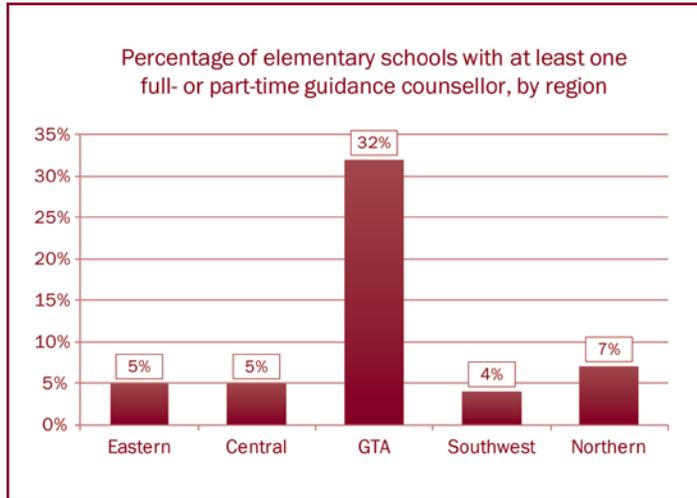
*Elementary school, Simcoe Muskoka Catholic DSB*

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## REGIONAL DIFFERENCES

Across the province, guidance counsellors are much more likely to be found in urban schools. This difference may be partly attributed to the provincial funding formula, which allocates the majority of funding to school boards based on the number of students enrolled.<sup>5</sup> Greater Toronto Area (GTA) elementary schools are approximately 3 times more likely to have a guidance counsellor than other less densely populated regions of the province. (see Figure 1 for comparisons by region).

Figure 1



## SECONDARY SCHOOLS

In contrast to elementary schools, secondary schools in the province are much more likely to have guidance counsellors:

- 99% of secondary schools report having at least one guidance counsellor; and in 88% of these, at least one counsellor is full-time.
- The average ratio of students to guidance counsellors is 391 to 1.
- Secondary schools report that the two areas where guidance counsellors spend most of their time are “supporting social-emotional health and well-being” and “supporting student development and refinement of their Individual Pathway Plans.”

## SOCIAL WORKERS IN SCHOOLS

The government has aimed for greater integration of youth supports throughout the province.<sup>6</sup> Social workers can be an important component of this support by serving students that require ongoing, intensive social-emotional support and helping to facilitate coordination between school guidance counsellors and external clinical professionals.

In schools where they are regularly scheduled, social workers have more opportunities to get to know school staff and students, and, consequently, to form collaborative relationships with school personnel.

- 75% of secondary schools have at least one regularly scheduled social worker, a steady improvement since 2002 when 46% of schools had them.
- 45% of elementary schools have at least one regularly scheduled social worker, a fairly steady improvement since 2002 when 35% had them.
- 16% of elementary schools in the province have no access to a social worker and no guidance counsellor.
- 28% of elementary schools in northern Ontario have no access to a social worker and no guidance counsellor.

## NEXT STEPS

Students need a wide range of skills, information and support to realize their long-term goals. The Ministry of Education has developed ambitious policy that outlines how students should be supported to plan for the future, but there is a gap between the policy goals and the resources on the ground. The high ratios of students to guidance counsellors in elementary and secondary schools make it difficult for staff to provide students with the one-on-one attention that they need to both support students' well-being and help to ensure students can realize their goals for the future.

# NOTES

- 1 Ministry of Education, Ontario. (2013). *Creating pathways to success: An education and career/life planning program for Ontario schools*. Link: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/policy/cps/creatingpathwayssuccess.pdf>. Accessed May 28, 2015.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ministry of Health, Ontario. (2011). *Open minds, healthy minds: Ontario's comprehensive mental health strategy*. Link: [http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/common/ministry/publications/reports/mental\\_health2011/mentalhealth.aspx](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/common/ministry/publications/reports/mental_health2011/mentalhealth.aspx). Accessed May 28, 2015.  
Tilleczek, K., Laflamme, S., Ferguson, B., Edney, D.R., Girard, M., Cudney, D., & Cardoso, S. (2010). *Fresh starts and false starts: Young people in transition from elementary to secondary school*. Report prepared for Ontario Ministry of Education, Toronto, ON.
- 5 Ministry of Education, Ontario. (2014) Education funding: Technical paper 2014-15. Link: [http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/funding/1415/Technical14\\_15.pdf](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/funding/1415/Technical14_15.pdf). Accessed May 28, 2015.
- 6 Ministry of Education, Ontario. (2013). *Creating pathways to success: An education and career/life planning program for Ontario schools*. Link: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/policy/cps/creatingpathwayssuccess.pdf>. Accessed May 28, 2015.  
Ministry of Children and Youth Services, Ontario. (2012). *Stepping Stones: A resource on youth development*. Toronto: Author. Link: [http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/documents/topics/youth\\_opportunities/steppingstones/SteppingStones.pdf](http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/documents/topics/youth_opportunities/steppingstones/SteppingStones.pdf). Accessed May 28, 2015.



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