



Greetings to Seattle School Board members:

I am writing to you on behalf of all the students, families and school staffs served by Seattle School District's elementary counselors. I am speaking from my role as president of the Washington School Counselor Association. I know that these are very difficult times for school boards and superintendents all around our state as they wrestle with severe budget cuts and increasing needs. I also believe that the decision to eliminate school counseling positions in the Seattle schools was taken with serious consideration and much agonizing on your parts as those who hold fiduciary responsibility for all of your programs. Nevertheless, I am personally and professionally distressed with the decision to single out a particular category of professional educators for reduction in force, rather than making proportional cuts to many programs.

There are several reasons for my concern. First of all, there is now an increasing body of research that demonstrates that a fully implemented comprehensive K-12 guidance and counseling program results in better attendance, reduced dropout rates, higher academic performance in the classroom and on standardized tests, and improved school climates. Isn't it ironic that a significant amount of that peer-reviewed research has been done right here in Seattle by Drs. Christopher Sink of SPU and Chris Wood of SU? Second, I have seen first-hand the impact that a comprehensive elementary counseling program can have in schools that serve students of poverty. Since the implementation of an elementary counseling grant in our area, we have seen significant reductions in office discipline referrals, significant improvement in school attendance, and reports from classroom teachers that they are spending much less class time dealing with behavior issues. Third, the Seattle School District, due to its size and prominence, is in a position to be a leader in our state. To take this particular action as a solution to budget woes may start a state-wide trend that will be hard to undo. So far, I have seen few districts take this drastic a step, and I serve many small rural districts who are suffering greatly, but have still found a way to preserve their elementary counseling programs because they have seen the benefits.

School counselors in the Seattle School District and across Washington State have made significant strides in recent years in professionalizing their programs, implementing national and state standards of performance for students and counselors, and developing comprehensive programs based on assessed needs. By summarily reducing your number of school counselors, you could have a far-reaching impact, not just on the lives of those counselors, but on the quality of the programs they have worked so hard to implement. Ultimately, students and families will suffer. Counseling programs benefit ALL students these days, not just those with learning or behavior problems. A well-managed counseling program facilitated by ESA certified school counselors is central to the school improvement process. I would bet that if you polled your school counselors, you would find many of them taking leadership positions in their schools in the school improvement effort. What a loss it would be to not have them.

I respectfully ask that you reconsider the decision to eliminate elementary counseling positions in Seattle. Thanks for all you do on behalf of children and youth in our state.

Sincerely yours,

Norm Walker

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