

**S.265 School Counselors
Vermont School Counselors Association
Senate Education Committee – February 26, 2026**

S.265 ensures that at least 80% of a school counselor’s time is spent providing student counseling services. It is a student-centered policy that ensures that students receive the counseling services we are trained, as master-level professionals, to provide.

For many years, the VTSCA heard from school counselors across the state that their time was being spent away from providing counseling services to students. In 2020, the VTSCA released, with support from the VT AOE, the Vermont School Counselor Comprehensive Model (referred to as the “framework”), to further clarify the roles and responsibilities of school counselors. This framework matches the national school counseling standards as outlined by the American School Counseling Association.

The rationale of a comprehensive school counseling framework is student success. The framework’s design, delivery and content are dedicated to the goal of personalized/student centered learning - empowering all students to become highly motivated, self-directed learners by breaking down systemic, interpersonal and intrapersonal barriers, and delivering counseling services designed to address three domains of student development: academic, career and social/emotional, following the American School Counseling Association’s Mindsets and Behaviors for Student Success K-12 and College and Career Readiness Standards for Every Student.

Even after the release of the framework, we continued to hear from Vermont school counselors that their time was not being fully utilized with direct and indirect services. At November's VTSCA (2024) conference, 100% of those present wanted VTSCA to pursue a bill that would require that at least 80% of a school counselor’s working time be dedicated to the student services in which they are trained - it was unanimous to move forward with S.265.

Benefits of S.265

- Prioritize student needs:
 - By dedicating a larger portion of their time to direct student interaction, counselors can better address individual needs, provide more personalized support, and offer timely interventions when necessary.
- Improve access to counseling:
 - With more time dedicated to student services, counselors can see more students and provide a wider range of support, including academic guidance, career planning, social-emotional development, and crisis intervention.
- Allow counselors to address student challenges
 - School counselors are trained professionals with specialized skills to address student challenges, and an 80/20 bill ensures they are utilizing their expertise to the fullest.
- Prevent counselor burnout
 - Many school counselors currently juggle a high caseload with administrative tasks, leading to burnout and reduced effectiveness.

- Promote equity and access:
 - By ensuring that all students have sufficient access to counseling services, S.265 can help address disparities in support for students from diverse backgrounds

S.265 ensures that public funds allocated for school counseling positions are used primarily for student services. It does not interfere with collective bargaining agreements or contract negotiations, prescribe specific daily schedules, eliminate administrative authority, or prevent schools from responding flexibly in emergencies.

National standard

The 80/20 model is not an arbitrary union demand; it is a national standard established by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA). Supporting 80/20 for counselors is about aligning with national accreditation and professional ethics.

Contract negotiations will not address this need

It has been proposed that requirements of S.265 should instead be addressed through local contract negotiations. This is not possible. In practice, collective bargaining agreements are overwhelmingly teacher-centric. Because teachers represent the vast majority of licensed staff in any district, contracts are structured around classroom instruction and teacher-specific duties. School counselors make up a much smaller proportion of district staff, and as a result, counselor-specific responsibilities are almost never defined in negotiated agreements.

In fact, there is only one known school contract in the entire country that contains a provision specific to school counselor role clarity. This underscores the reality that contract negotiations are not an effective or reliable mechanism for defining appropriate counselor duties. Without statutory guidance, school counselors are frequently assigned administrative and non-counseling tasks that diminish their ability to provide essential mental health, academic, and career support services to students.

A statutory framework will establish a clear statewide standard for how licensed school counselors should be deployed—ensuring that students receive the services they deserve and that districts maximize the impact of these highly trained professionals.

Other states

This is not a new concept. Other states that have enacted 80/20 legislation or similar statutory protections to ensure that school counselors are utilized in accordance with their professional training include Maine, Tennessee, Washington, Pennsylvania, Texas, North Carolina, Utah, Virginia, and Alaska. These states recognize that role clarity improves student outcomes, strengthens school climate, and helps address workforce shortages by making the profession more sustainable and professionally aligned.

I would like to leave you with this thought - while S.265 has a specific purpose, it is integral to much of the work of this committee, as well as other committees, as the Legislature grapples with student absenteeism, student mental health, and other student challenges. School counselors play an important role in providing support and guidance in our schools – our time should be focused on providing that support.