

# OPPAGA Review of School Counselors

March 2015

# OPPAGA Review of School Counselors

## Overview of Research

1

### OPPAGA Survey of School Counselors:

- How much time do school counselors spend on direct and indirect counseling services and non-counseling duties?
- What are their opinions about how their time is allocated and the size of their caseloads?

2

**What is the ratio of students to counselors at schools across the state?**

3

**Is there a relationship between student-to-counselor ratios and how school counselors spend their time?**

4

**Is there a relationship between high school student-to-counselor ratios and student outcomes?**

# Background

## Role and Core Duties of School Counselors in Florida as Defined by Florida's School Counseling Framework, Florida Department of Education

**Florida's School Counseling Framework outlines the role and core duties of the state's counselors. School counselors are responsible for encouraging, supporting, and fostering positive academic, career, social, and personal development for students.**

### **Counselor duties include:**

**providing individual counseling and advising to help students set personal goals and develop future plans**

**providing academic advising to help students with activities such as course selection, graduation requirements, and postsecondary admission requirements**

**consulting with administrators, teachers, and students to meet student needs**

Source: Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services, [\*Florida's School Counseling Framework\*](#), 2010.

# Background

## Direct and Indirect Counseling Services as Defined by the American School Counselor Association

### Direct Counseling Services

**In-person interactions between school counselors and students, which include the following:**

#### **School counseling core curriculum**

structured lessons delivered in the school's curriculum to help students attain desired competencies

#### **Individual student planning**

activities to assist students in establishing personal goals and future plans

#### **Responsive services**

activities designed to meet students' needs, such as counseling in individual or small-groups or crisis response

### Indirect Counseling Services

Provided on behalf of students as a result of the school counselors' interactions with others, including referrals for additional assistance, and consultation and collaboration with parents, teachers, other educators, and community organizations

# OPPAGA Survey of School Counselors

# OPPAGA Survey of School Counselors

## Methodology



OPPAGA surveyed counselors throughout the state during October and November 2014



Survey questions addressed:

- Time spent during the 2013-14 school year on direct and indirect counseling services, and non-counseling duties
- Opinions on whether how they spend their time and the size of their caseloads affects their ability to serve students



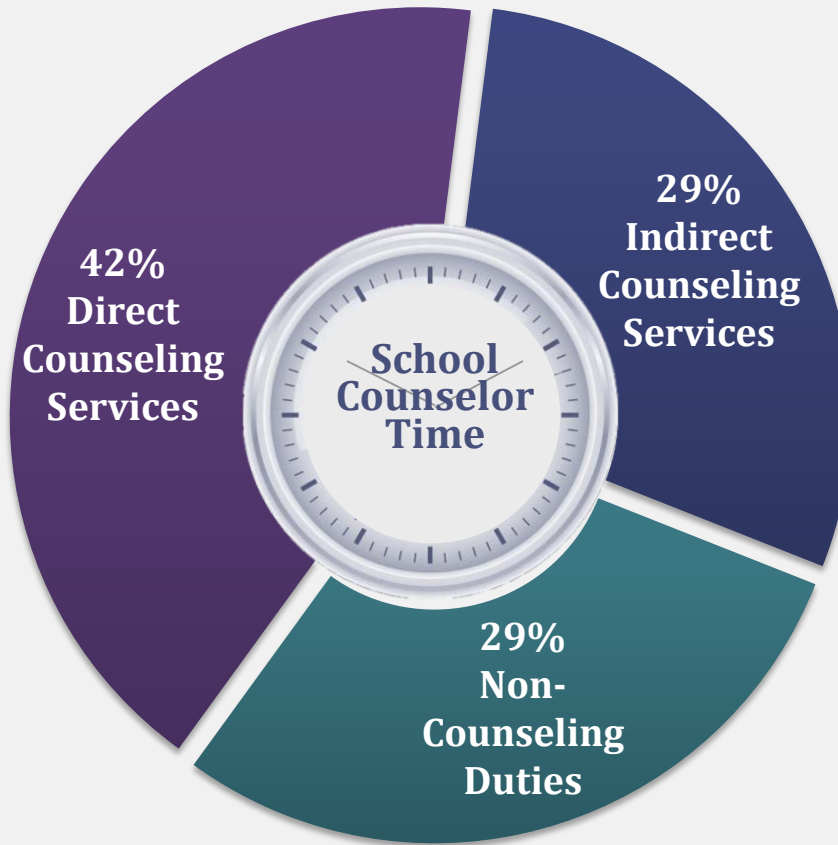
2,857 of the state's 5,110 counselors (56%) responded to the survey

# **OPPAGA Survey of School Counselors: How much time do school counselors spend on direct and indirect counseling services and non-counseling duties?**

# OPPAGA Survey of School Counselors

## How School Counselors Spend Their Time

On average, school counselors reported spending 71% of their time on counseling services (both direct and indirect) and 29% on non-counseling duties<sup>1</sup>



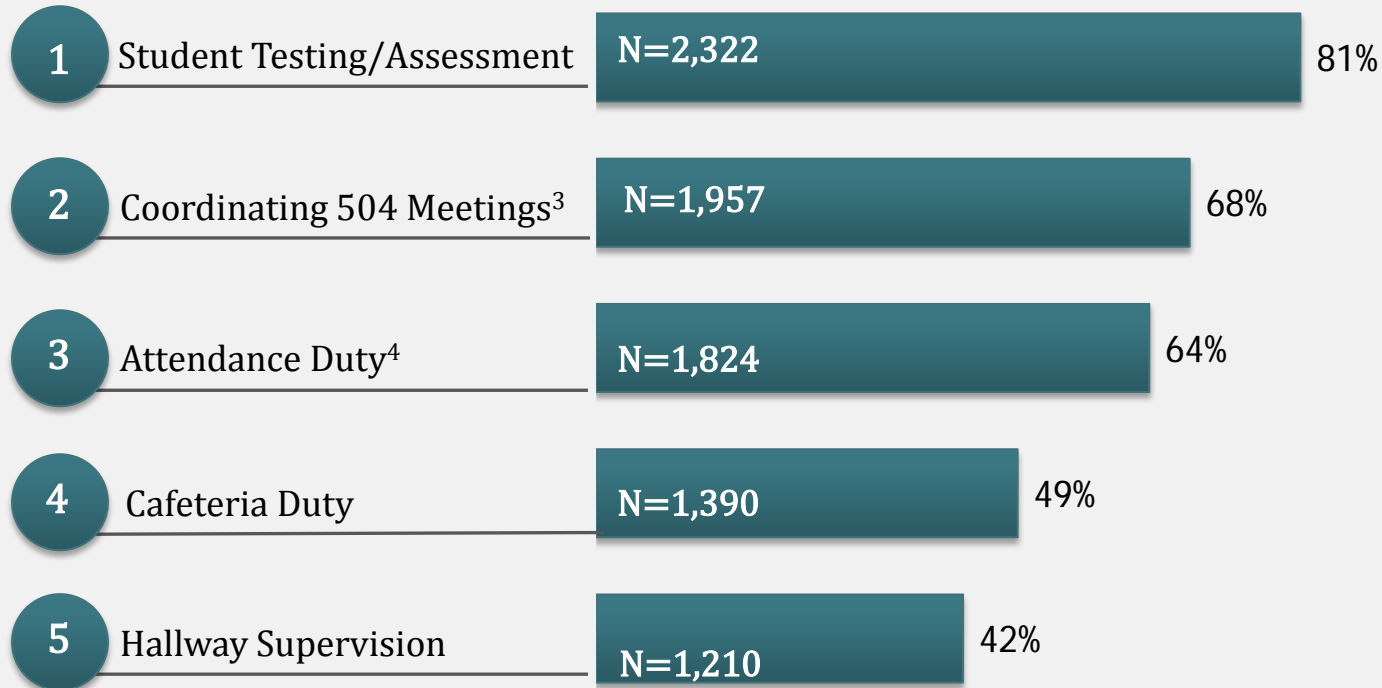
<sup>1</sup> Counselors in elementary, middle, and high schools gave similar responses to our questions on how they spent their time.



# OPPAGA Survey of School Counselors

## The Five Most Frequently Cited Non-Counseling Duties<sup>1,2</sup>

More than half of school counselors reported spending non-counseling time on student testing/assessment, coordinating 504 meetings, and attendance duty



<sup>1</sup> We worked with the Florida School Counselor Association to identify the activities it considered non-counseling duties.

<sup>2</sup> Appendix A provides more detailed information on the types of non-counseling duties counselors cited.

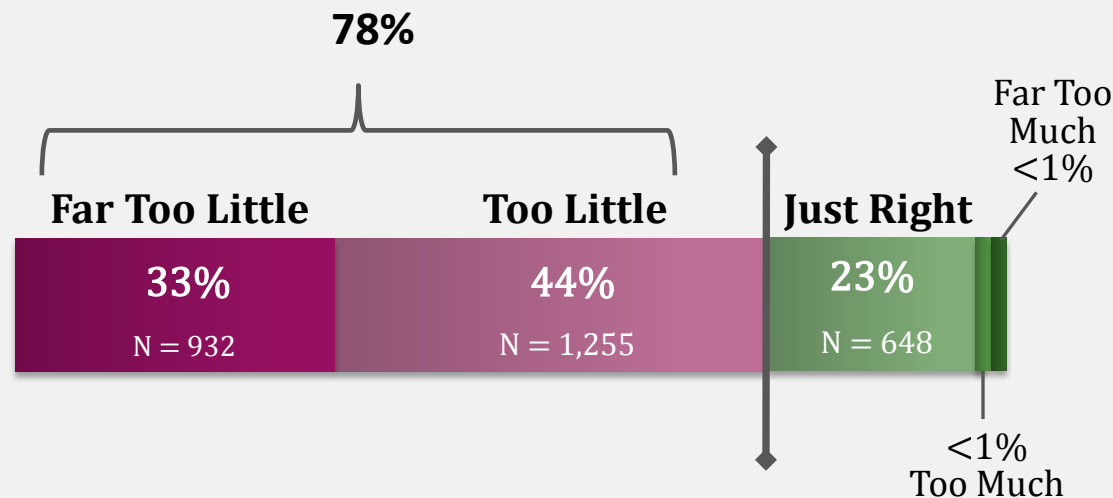
<sup>3</sup> Schools hold "504 meetings" to determine whether a student needs special help due to a disability, and if so, to develop an accommodation plan. According to the Florida School Counselor Association, although counselors should be involved in these meetings to help identify and address student needs, often they perform clerical duties to coordinate the meetings including scheduling, calling participants, and making copies of documentation.

<sup>4</sup> Attendance duty includes contacting parents, preparing documentation, and addressing truancy.

# OPPAGA Survey of School Counselors

## Counselors' Opinions on Time Spent on Direct Counseling Services

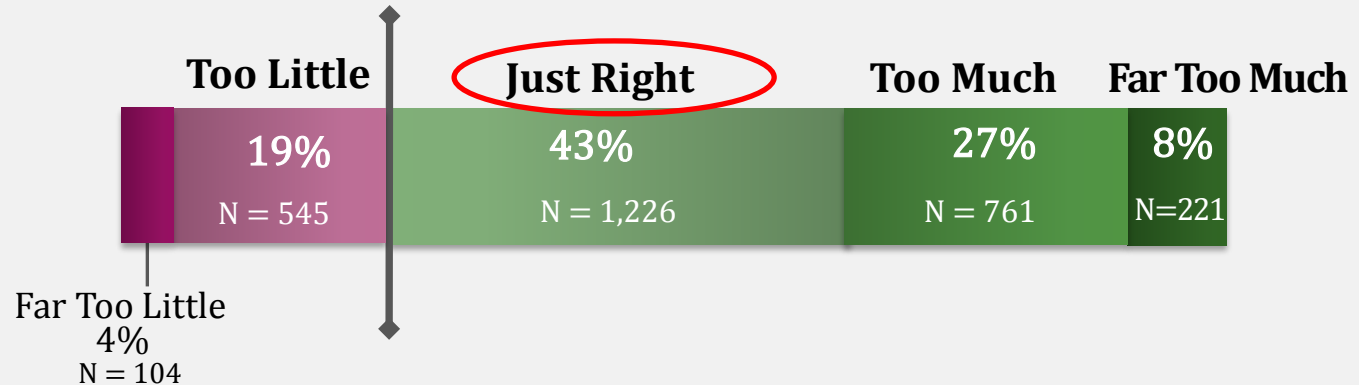
Most school counselors (78%) reported that they either spend too little or far too little time on providing direct services to students



# OPPAGA Survey of School Counselors

## Counselors' Opinions on Time Spent on Indirect Counseling Services

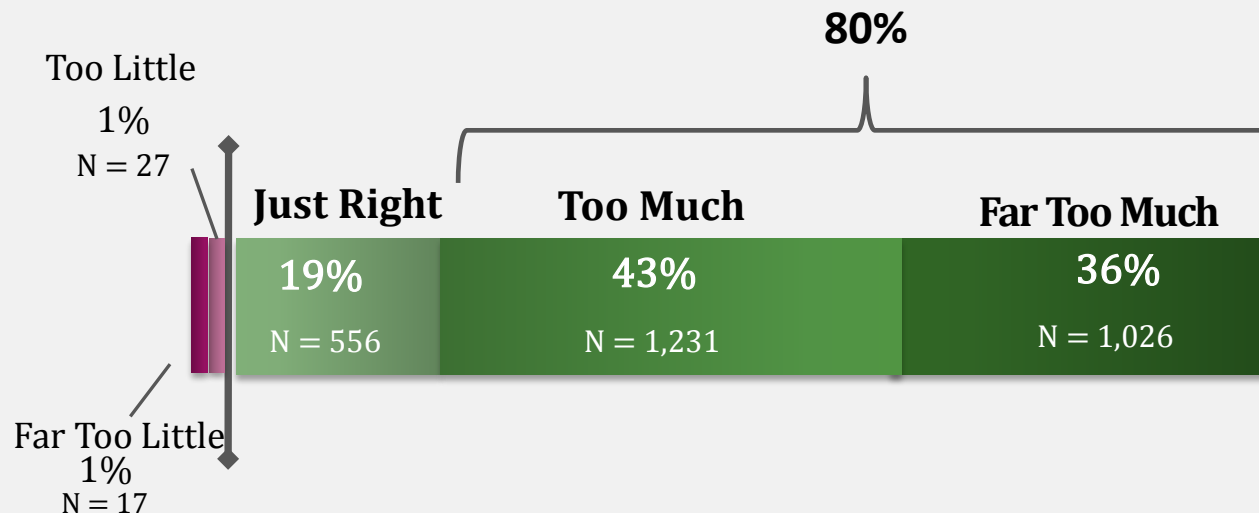
**43% of school counselors reported that they spend the right amount of time providing indirect services to students**



# OPPAGA Survey of School Counselors

## Counselors' Opinions on Time Spent on Non-Counseling Duties

Most school counselors (80%) reported they spend too much or far too much time on non-counseling duties

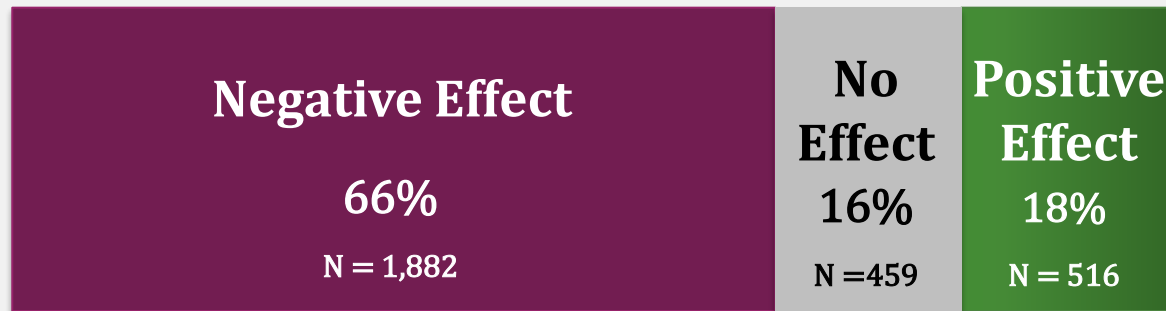


# **OPPAGA Survey of School Counselors: What are their opinions about how their time is allocated and the size of their caseloads?**

# OPPAGA Survey of School Counselors

## Counselors' Opinions on the Extent to Which How They Spend Time Affects Their Ability to Serve Students

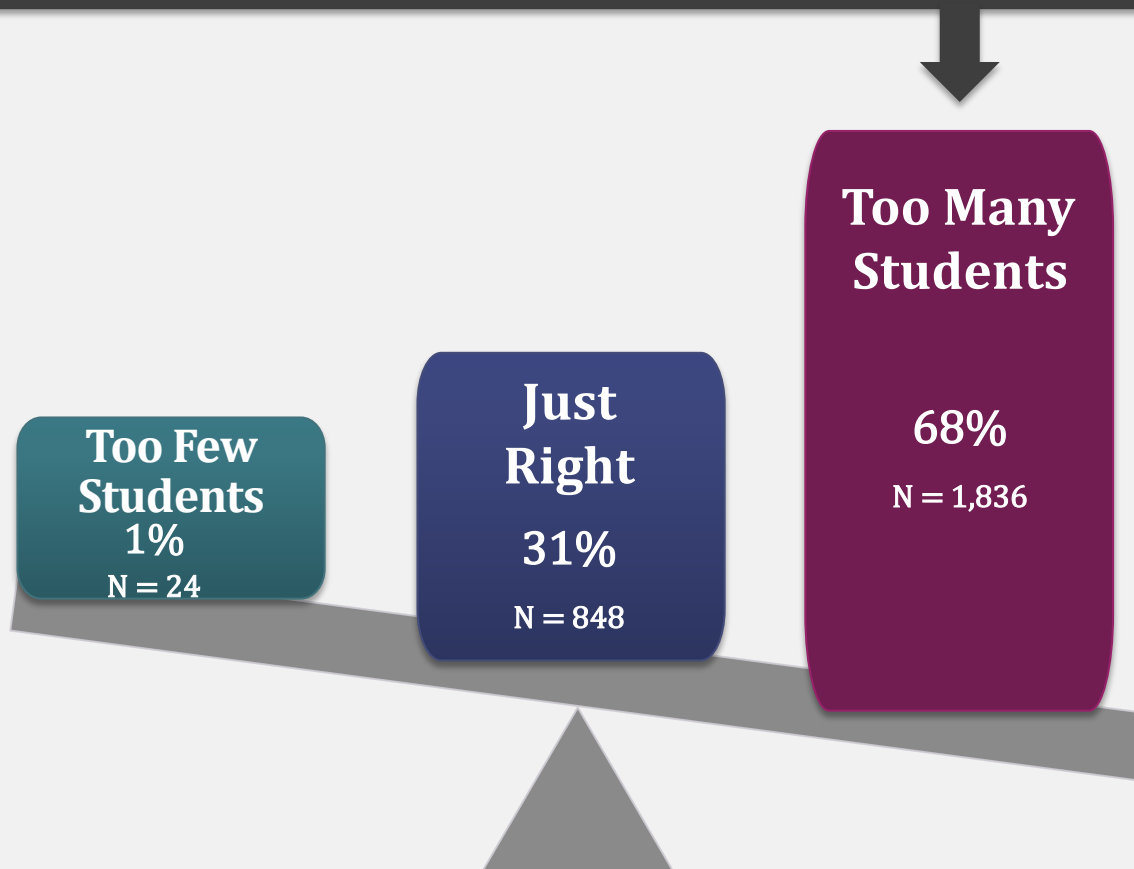
Two-thirds of school counselors (66%) reported that how they spend their time negatively affects their ability to serve students



# OPPAGA Survey of School Counselors

## Counselors' Opinions on the Size of Their Caseloads

Two-thirds (68%) of school counselors reported that they had too many students in their caseloads



# OPPAGA Survey of School Counselors

## Counselors' Opinions on the Effect of Their Caseload Size on Their Ability to Serve Students

Nearly two-thirds of school counselors (63%) reported that their caseload size negatively affects their ability to serve students





# OPPAGA Survey of School Counselors

## Counselors' Comments on the Effects of Their Time Allocation and Caseload on Their Ability to Serve Students

**Some counselors mentioned that due to the time spent on non-counseling duties and/or the size of their caseloads, they do not have enough time to meet with all students who need them**

### **Examples of the types of comments provided on this issue:**

They only have time to focus on students in crisis and/or seniors

A paraprofessional could do much of the work to which they are assigned

They were particularly concerned about the amount of time they were required to spend on duties related to student assessments

Duties related to 504 meetings take up too much time

**What is the ratio of students to  
counselors at schools across the  
state?**

# Student-to-Counselor Ratios

## Methodology

### To calculate student-to-school counselor ratios we:

✓ Used 2013-14 student enrollment data and district employee data from the Department of Education

- Included district employees categorized as “guidance counselors”

✓ Limited calculations to traditional public schools because DOE employee data included few charter schools and the data appeared incomplete for these schools

✓ Excluded schools from which we did not receive any survey responses

✓ Excluded 221 counselors from the analysis because DOE data showed that they were assigned to district offices, not specific schools

- Less than 5% of counselors statewide; approximately two-thirds of these counselors were in Broward (80 counselors) and Miami-Dade (65 counselors)
- Broward questioned the accuracy of the number; Miami-Dade described several uses of these positions that may not involve routinely providing school counseling services at school

# Student-to-Counselor Ratios

## Districts' Student-to-Counselor Ratios

### Statewide

#### Average:

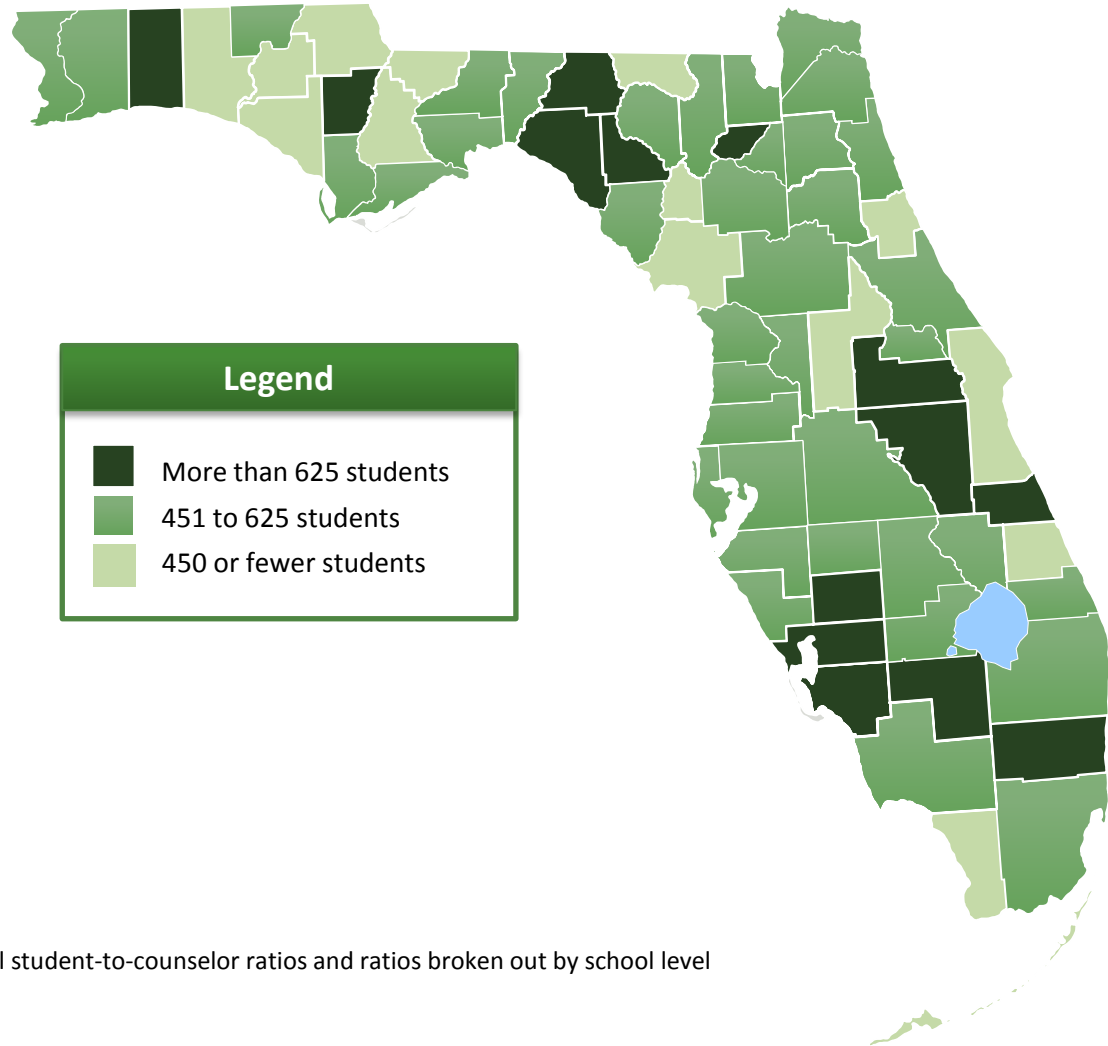
531 students per  
counselor<sup>1</sup>

Five districts with the  
highest number of students  
per counselor

Madison (857)  
Calhoun (833)  
Taylor (800)  
Okaloosa (723)  
Indian River (711)

Five districts with the  
lowest number of students  
per counselor

Gilchrist (356)  
Hamilton (356)  
St. Lucie (368)  
Liberty (373)  
Brevard (390)

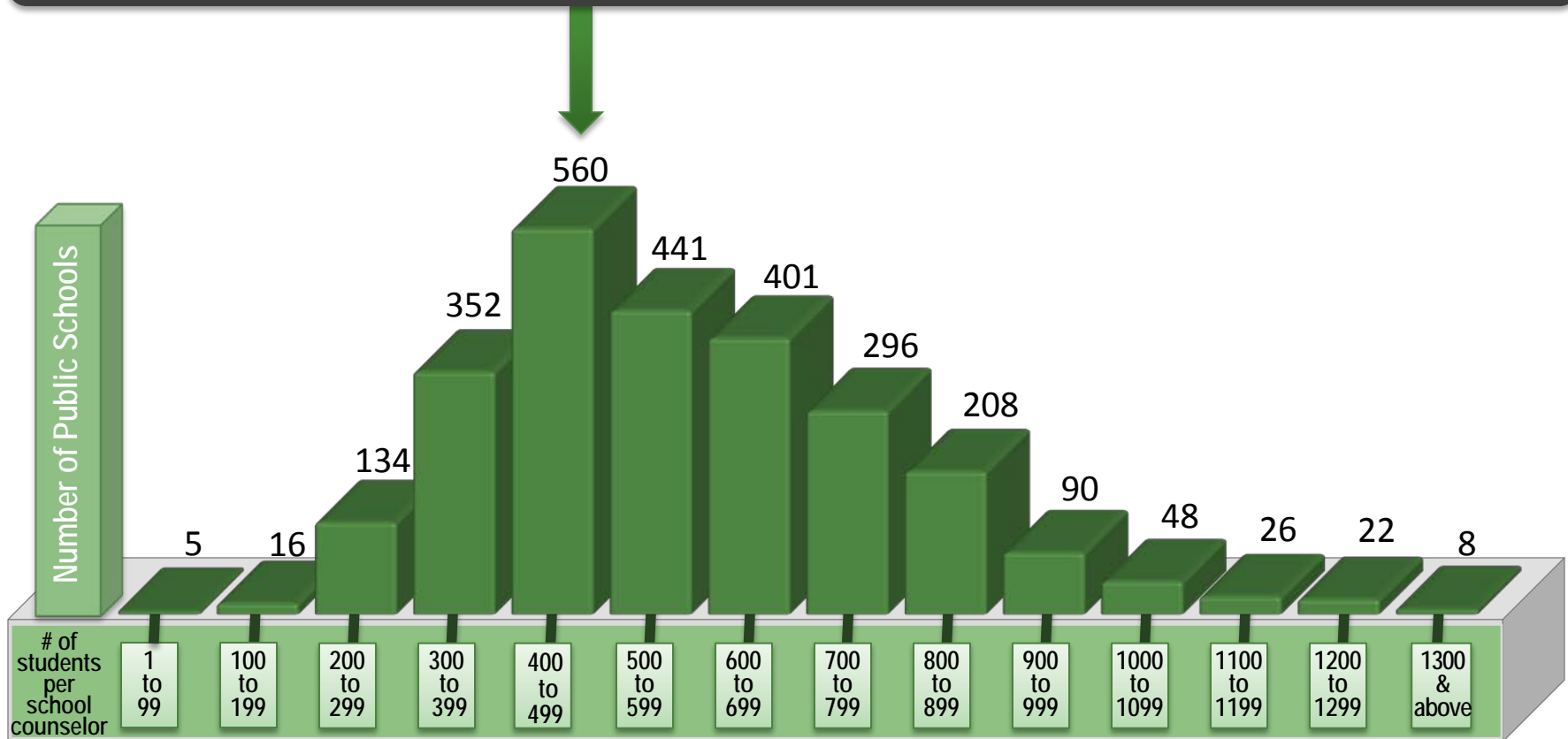


<sup>1</sup> Appendix B-1 provides overall student-to-counselor ratios and ratios broken out by school level for each school district.

# Student-to-Counselor Ratios

## All Schools: Distribution of Student-to-Counselor Ratios

The most common student-to-counselor ratios (at 560 schools) were between 400 and 499 students per counselor<sup>1</sup>

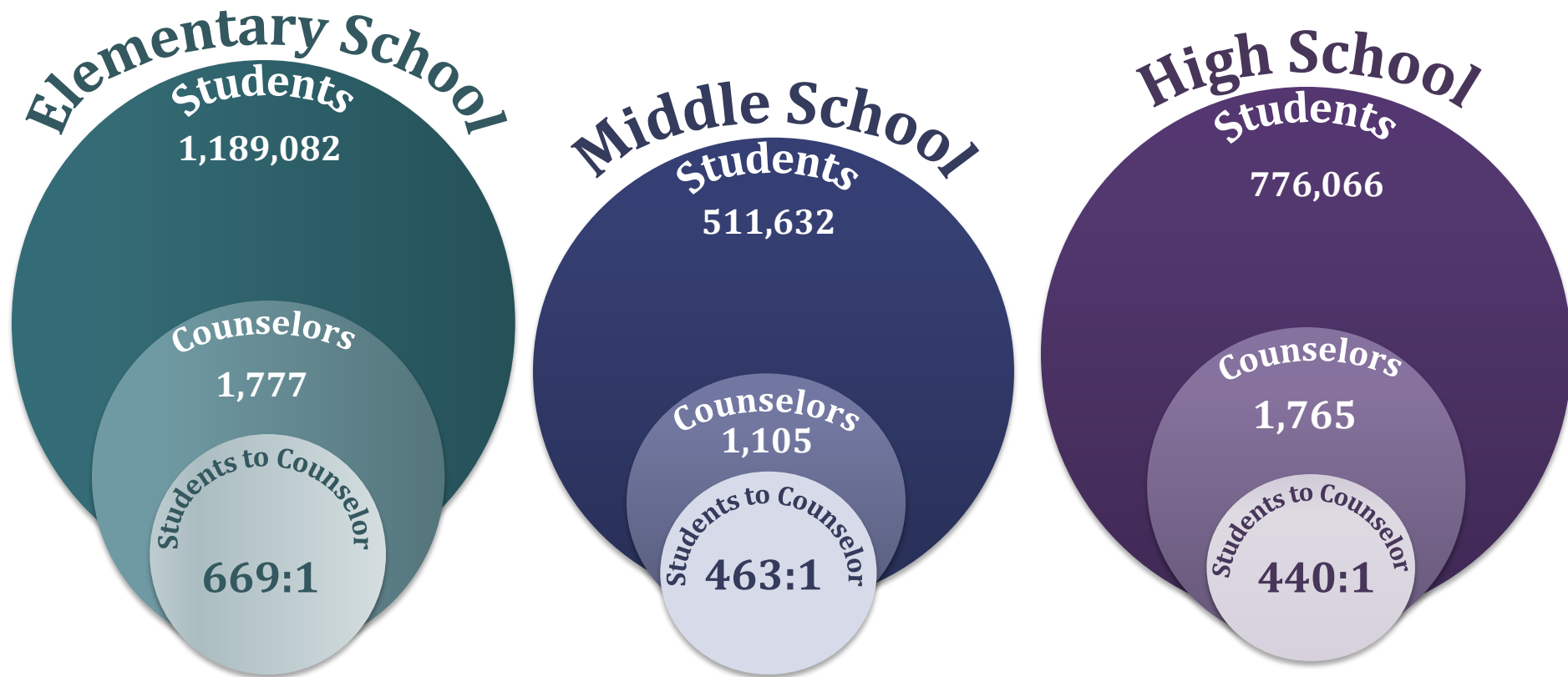


<sup>1</sup> According to DOE data, 194 schools had no assigned counselors. The 194 schools comprised 173 elementary schools (10% of all elementary schools), 6 middle schools (1.2% of all middle schools), 6 high schools (1.4% of all high schools), and 9 combination schools (7.3% of all combination schools).

# Student-to-Counselor Ratios

2013-14 Statewide Ratios by Type of School: Elementary, Middle, and High Schools

Elementary schools had the highest average number of students per counselor at 669 while high schools had an average of 440 students per counselor



**Is there a relationship between student-to-counselor ratios and how school counselors spend their time?**

# Relationship of Ratios to Time Spent

## Methodology

To determine if there was a relationship between student-to-counselor ratios and the time counselors spent on direct services, indirect services, and non-counseling duties, we



Grouped schools into three categories based on the magnitude of student-to-counselor ratios



Examined whether there were differences among the three groups in the counselors' survey responses about how they spent their time



Excluded schools from which we did not receive any survey responses



For schools from which we had survey responses from some but not all counselors, assumed that the survey responses we received represented the time allocation for all counselors at the school

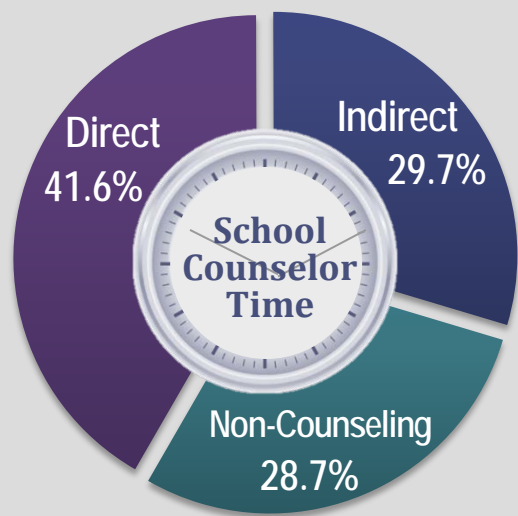


# Relationship of Ratios to Time Spent

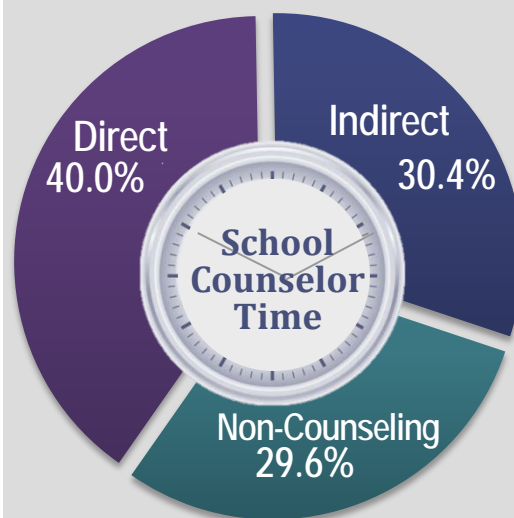
## Summary of Results: All School Types

Counselor responses on how they spent their time in 2013-14 were similar regardless of how many students they served

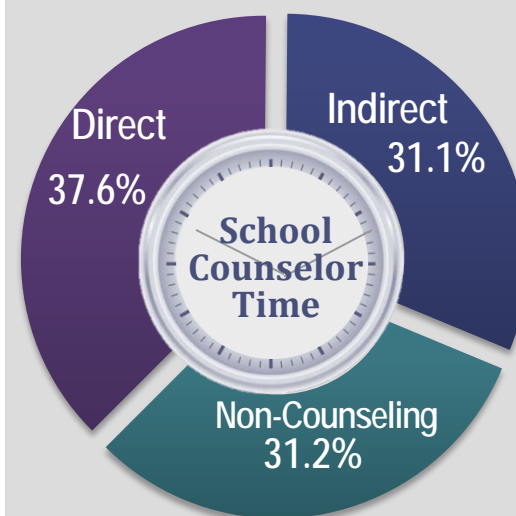
Schools with 450 or Fewer Students per Counselor



Schools with Over 450 and Up to 625 Students per Counselor



Schools with Over 625 Students per Counselor



Appendix B-1 shows the relationship between ratios and time spent for high schools only

**Is there a relationship between  
high school student-to-counselor  
ratios and student outcomes?**

# Relationship of Ratios and High School Student Outcomes

## Methodology

To determine if there was a relationship between high school counselor ratios and student outcomes we



Used a regression analysis to assess the statistical relationship between student-to-counselor ratios at traditional public high schools and

- Postsecondary attendance rate
- Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion rate
- Scholarship attainment
- Grade point average
- Graduation rates
- Drop-out rates
- Percentage of students at or above grade level on the 10th grade FCAT reading exam
- Percentage of students at or above grade level on the 10th grade FCAT math exam

Appendix C provides more information on our methodology

# Relationship of Ratios and High School Student Outcomes

## Statistically Significant Effects<sup>1</sup>



### Positive Effect

The number of students per counselor had a small but statistically significant positive effect on

FAFSA completion rate

Scholarship attainment

Grade point average

Postsecondary attendance rate

This effect occurred as the number of students per counselor **decreased from 800 to 450**

(Except for FAFSA completion rates, the effect was not consistent when ratios dropped below 450)

### No Effect



Our analysis did not show a statistically significant relationship between the current student-to-counselor ratios and

Dropout rate

Graduation rate

10<sup>th</sup> grade FCAT math scores

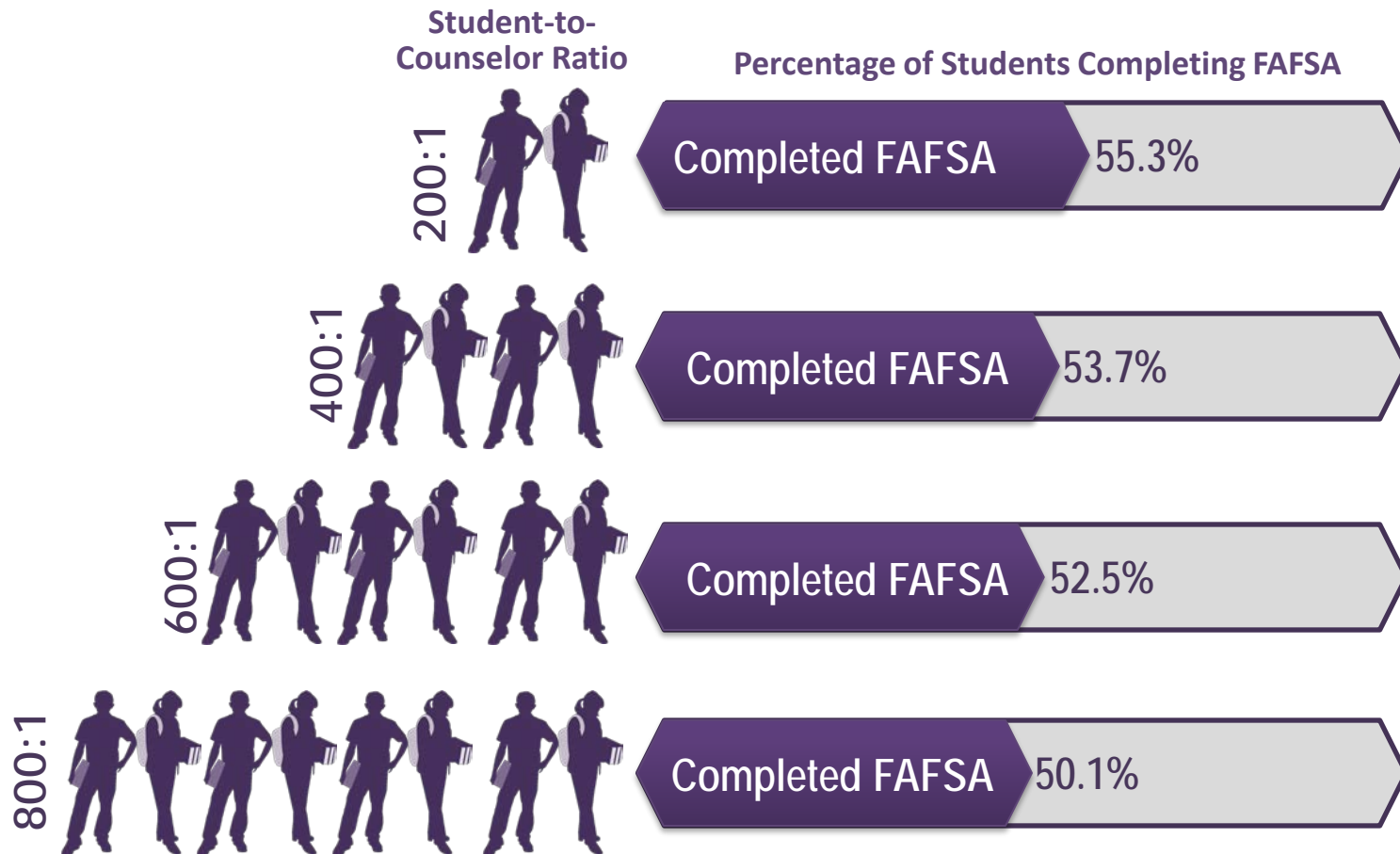
10<sup>th</sup> grade FCAT reading scores

<sup>1</sup> Statistically significant at the 0.05 confidence level.

# Relationship of Ratios and High School Student Outcomes

## Summary of Results: FAFSA Completion Rates

The largest effect was for FAFSA completion rates, which decreased by five percentage points as the number of students per counselor increased from 200 to 800<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> The effect was positive and statistically significant at the 0.05 confidence level.

# Appendix A

## Appendix A: Non-Counseling Duties Reported by School Counselors

# Appendix A

## Non-Counseling Duties Reported by School Counselors

Type of Non-Counseling Duty	Number of Counselors Who Reported Spending Time on This Duty	Percentage of Counselors Who Reported Spending Time on This Duty
Student testing/assessments <sup>1</sup>	2,322	81%
Coordinating/conducting 504 meetings <sup>2</sup>	1,957	68%
Attendance (e.g., parent contact, documentation, truancy)	1,824	64%
Cafeteria duty	1,390	49%
Hallway supervision	1,210	42%
Paperwork for registration of new students	1,170	41%
Perform duties of a school registrar (e.g., maintaining records or processing transcript requests)	1,043	37%
Disciplinary duties (e.g., supervising in-school suspensions)	1,012	35%
Coordinate/conduct student study teams	973	34%
Data entry (such as test scores) or other technology implementation (such as the school website)	964	34%
Coordinate/conduct ESOL screening <sup>3</sup>	780	27%
Student drop-off/pick-up or bus duty	762	27%
Assist with or conduct non-counseling related classroom instruction	757	26%
Academic intervention pullout programs	644	23%
Substitute in the classroom	602	21%
Answering phones or manning the front desk (e.g., receptionist duties)	564	20%
Coordinate/conduct IEP meetings <sup>4</sup>	558	20%

<sup>1</sup> Student testing/assessments includes any activities related to standardized or classroom testing, such as coordinating or conducting tests, proctoring tests, and identifying students to be tested.

<sup>2</sup> Section 504 of the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities. Schools hold “504 meetings” to determine whether a student needs special help due to a disability, and if so, to develop an accommodation plan.

<sup>3</sup> ESOL is the abbreviation for English for Speakers of Other Languages.

<sup>4</sup> IEP is the abbreviation for Individual Education Plan. District and school instructional personnel work with parents to determine the needs of individual students in Exceptional Student Education (ESE) programs and how the school will provide the needed services, which are addressed in an IEP.

Source: OPPAGA survey of school counselors.

# Appendix A

## Non-Counseling Duties Reported by School Counselors (continued)

Type of Non-Counseling Duty	Number of Counselors Who Reported Spending Time on This Duty	Percentage of Counselors Who Reported Spending Time on This Duty
Medical screening and care	477	17%
Fundraising activities	381	13%
Tutoring	217	8%
Other duties related to ESOL, students with disabilities, ESE, or gifted students <sup>5</sup>	181	6%
Student activities/events coordination <sup>5</sup>	171	6%
General secretarial and administrative duties <sup>5</sup>	162	6%
Attend or provide non-counseling related professional development/training	117	4%
Volunteer coordination	97	3%
Social service provision or coordination <sup>5</sup>	86	3%
Recess duty	84	3%
Miscellaneous other non-counseling duties <sup>5</sup>	80	3%
Master schedule/class leveling <sup>5</sup>	56	2%
Other student supervision duties <sup>5</sup>	34	1%
Other types of meetings <sup>5</sup>	29	1%
Other program coordination/implementation <sup>5</sup>	28	1%
Translating <sup>5</sup>	27	1%
Student recruitment <sup>5</sup>	18	1%
Announcements and other student body communication <sup>5</sup>	18	1%
Drug testing	7	Less than 1%
Resource coordination (e.g., provision and access to school supplies and equipment) <sup>5</sup>	7	Less than 1%

<sup>5</sup> The survey gave counselors a list of possible non-counseling duties to select and also gave them an option to provide information on other non-counseling duties they performed that were not listed in the survey. This duty was provided by survey respondents as another non-counseling duty not listed in the survey.

Source: OPPAGA survey of school counselors.



# Appendix B

Appendix B-1: Student-to-Counselor Ratios for all Districts, Districtwide and by School Type

Appendix B-2: Relationship of Ratios to Time Spent: High Schools Only

# Appendix B-1

## Student-to-Counselor Ratios by District

District	Number of Counselors	Number of Students	Number of Students per Counselor Districtwide	Number of Students per Counselor at Elementary Schools	Number of Students per Counselor at Middle Schools	Number of Students per Counselor at High Schools
GILCHRIST	8	2,848	356	480	No Applicable Schools	281
HAMILTON	5	1,780	356	362	No Applicable Schools	347
ST. LUCIE	109	40,131	368	737	257	282
LIBERTY	4	1,490	373	No Assigned Counselors	No Applicable Schools	353
BREVARD	182	70,977	390	487	352	307
JACKSON	18	7,150	397	448	352	417
GADSDEN	15	6,028	402	689	284	254
WASHINGTON	8	3,494	437	468	521	350
BAY	57	24,983	438	470	423	365
WALTON	19	8,345	439	428	666	351
LAKE	88	38,832	441	512	383	412

# Appendix B-1

## Student-to-Counselor Ratios by District (continued)

District	Number of Counselors	Number of Students	Number of Students per Counselor Districtwide	Number of Students per Counselor at Elementary Schools	Number of Students per Counselor at Middle Schools	Number of Students per Counselor at High Schools
LEVY	13	5,727	441	446	482	512
FLAGLER	29	12,996	448	434	522	439
MONROE	17	7,637	449	605	No Applicable Schools	298
CLAY	82	37,337	455	478	458	423
HOLMES	8	3,750	469	632	586	292
HERNANDO	50	23,489	470	767	332	422
NASSAU	25	11,769	471	484	407	500
PALM BEACH	367	173,323	472	567	477	374
ALACHUA	58	27,517	474	593	463	363
GLADES	3	1,443	481	488	No Applicable Schools	365
POLK	185	89,881	486	612	383	428

# Appendix B-1

## Student-to-Counselor Ratios by District (continued)

District	Number of Counselors	Number of Students	Number of Students per Counselor Districtwide	Number of Students per Counselor at Elementary Schools	Number of Students per Counselor at Middle Schools	Number of Students per Counselor at High Schools
SUMTER	12	5,858	488	622	432	377
VOLUSIA	130	63,461	488	642	384	423
ESCAMBIA	84	41,062	489	576	460	390
PUTNAM	23	11,489	500	630	413	390
GULF	4	2,008	502	542	No Applicable Schools	462
PASCO	139	69,734	502	632	428	437
CITRUS	33	16,602	503	718	466	355
PINELLAS	197	99,216	504	628	386	465
HILLSBOROUGH	391	198,362	507	655	379	449
SARASOTA	69	34,981	507	550	489	460
LEON	63	32,215	511	509	566	462

# Appendix B-1

## Student-to-Counselor Ratios by District (continued)

District	Number of Counselors	Number of Students	Number of Students per Counselor Districtwide	Number of Students per Counselor at Elementary Schools	Number of Students per Counselor at Middle Schools	Number of Students per Counselor at High Schools
MARTIN	37	18,893	511	618	394	491
BAKER	10	5,226	523	548	599	430
COLUMBIA	19	10,035	528	583	563	443
JEFFERSON	2	1,056	528	685	No Applicable Schools	371
MARION	84	44,422	529	626	541	417
COLLIER	84	44,705	532	685	475	413
HIGHLANDS	25	13,370	535	837	429	367
HARDEE	11	5,898	536	616	658	376
SUWANNEE	12	6,455	538	804	558	354
FRANKLIN	2	1,078	539	No Applicable Schools	No Applicable Schools	No Applicable Schools
DADE	592	319,490	540	638	479	478

# Appendix B-1

## Student-to-Counselor Ratios by District (continued)

District	Number of Counselors	Number of Students	Number of Students per Counselor Districtwide	Number of Students per Counselor at Elementary Schools	Number of Students per Counselor at Middle Schools	Number of Students per Counselor at High Schools
SANTA ROSA	50	27,104	542	633	603	435
DIXIE	4	2,172	543	572	481	547
MANATEE	80	43,454	543	705	414	453
DUVAL	229	128,675	562	598	497	561
WAKULLA	9	5,124	569	652	616	429
BRADFORD	6	3,424	571	594	753	445
OKEECHOBEE	12	7,021	585	836	586	384
SEMINOLE	114	67,167	589	715	775	416
ST. JOHNS	57	34,082	598	782	530	472
BROWARD	360	229,038	636	811	511	563
CHARLOTTE	26	16,543	636	1491	436	430
UNION	4	2,549	637	558	751	682

# Appendix B-1

## Student-to-Counselor Ratios by District (continued)

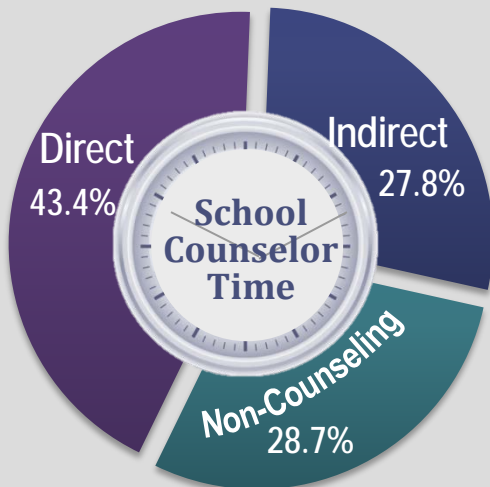
District	Number of Counselors	Number of Students	Number of Students per Counselor Districtwide	Number of Students per Counselor at Elementary Schools	Number of Students per Counselor at Middle Schools	Number of Students per Counselor at High Schools
OSCEOLA	81	52,357	646	883	677	479
DESOTO	8	5,175	647	915	583	422
LAFAYETTE	2	1,299	650	669	No Applicable Schools	630
HENDRY	12	7,816	651	666	824	543
LEE	119	78,107	656	829	634	513
ORANGE	269	185,270	689	1405	462	464
INDIAN RIVER	23	16,344	711	No Assigned Counselors	418	349
OKALOOSA	41	29,652	723	791	726	589
TAYLOR	4	3,201	800	No Assigned Counselors	336	329
CALHOUN	3	2,498	833	No Assigned Counselors	No Assigned Counselors	No Assigned Counselors
MADISON	3	2,571	857	No Assigned Counselors	No Applicable Schools	318

## Appendix B-2

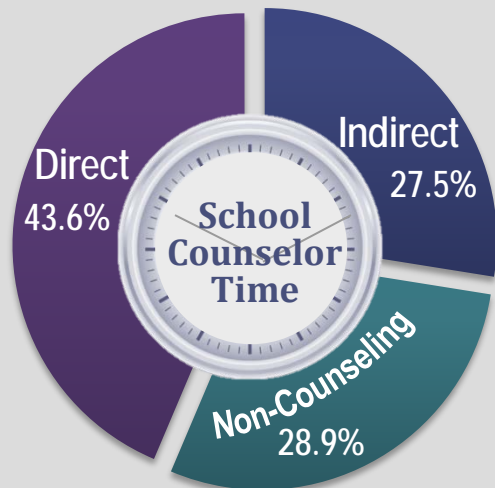
### Relationship of Ratios to Time Spent: High Schools Only

High school counselor responses on how they spent their time in 2013-14 were similar regardless of how many students they served

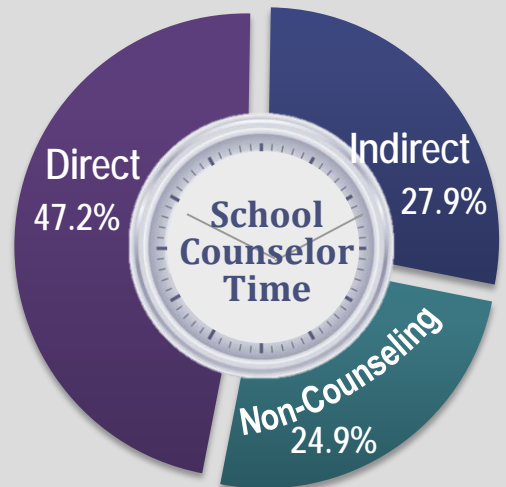
High Schools with 400 or Fewer Students per Counselor



High Schools with Over 400 and Up to 500 Students per Counselor



Schools with Over 500 Students per Counselor





# Appendix C

Appendix C: Additional Information on Methodology for Measuring Student Outcomes

# Appendix C

## Additional Information on Methodology for Measuring Student Outcomes

- ▶ We tracked a ninth grade cohort from 2009-10 to 2013-14
- ▶ We had a large enough number of students and sufficient data to include 421 schools in the analysis
  - For a school to be included in the analysis, the ninth grade cohort must have had at least 25 students at the school and each student must have been enrolled for the majority of the ninth grade year at one particular school
  - If a student transferred to another school after ninth grade, we excluded the student from the cohort
  - The analysis included variables to control for the effects of race, poverty, disabilities, limited English proficiency, and reading and math proficiency prior to entering ninth grade
- ▶ Statistical significance was determined at the .05 level, indicating less than a 5% chance of reporting a false relationship

# Appendix C

## Additional Information on Methodology for Measuring Student Outcomes (continued)

- ▶ We defined graduation rates as the percentage of students receiving a standard diploma within four years
- ▶ If a student did not achieve one of the following outcomes, we considered the student as dropping out
  - received a standard diploma
  - received a GED
  - received a special diploma or certificate of completion
  - were still in school
  - enrolled in a postsecondary institution

# Contact Information

## **Becky Vickers**

Chief Legislative Analyst

(850) 717-0515

[vickers.becky@oppaga.fl.gov](mailto:vickers.becky@oppaga.fl.gov)

## **David Summers**

Staff Director, Education Policy Area

(850) 717-0555

[summers.david@oppaga.fl.gov](mailto:summers.david@oppaga.fl.gov)

THE FLORIDA LEGISLATURE'S  
OFFICE OF PROGRAM POLICY ANALYSIS & GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

---

OPPAGA supports the Florida Legislature by providing data, evaluative research, and objective analyses that assist legislative budget and policy deliberations.