

## RESEARCH BRIEF

# SCHOOL COUNSELORS AND SCHOOL SAFETY

### INTRODUCTION

Responding to the unprecedented wave of student activism in the wake of repeated school shootings, NACAC included questions on its 2017–18 *Counseling Trends Survey* (CTS) to further the association’s understanding of the attitudes and experiences of school counselors on the topic of gun violence.

The findings, included in the following pages, confirm that school counselors are firmly opposed to the recent proposal of arming educators. School counselors also note that the prospect of more gun violence has increased student anxiety and added to the workload of counselors who are already-overburdened as they seek to provide comprehensive counseling services amid high student-to-counselor ratios.

### ABOUT THE SURVEY

In May 2018, NACAC distributed the 2017–18 *Counseling Trends Survey* to a school counseling office staff member at 16,252 secondary schools ending in 12th grade. NACAC preference for respondents at each school started with the school counseling department chair, followed by school counselor, college placement adviser, and college adviser. The list of counselors was purchased from MCH Strategic Data. The survey was administered online using SurveyMonkey. Responses were collected through the middle of June 2018.

NACAC received 2,251 responses to the survey. The following table provides a comparison of the characteristics of NACAC CTS respondents to those of all public and private secondary schools in the US (ending in grade 12). NACAC survey respondents were 68 percent public, 18 percent private non-parochial, and 14 percent private parochial, making the sample under-representative of public schools in favor of private, non-parochial schools. Among public schools, NACAC respondents were similar to the larger population in the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. NACAC survey respondents reported larger enrollments compared to all secondary schools.

**NACAC 2017–18 Counseling Trends Survey Sample Compared to the National Secondary School Population<sup>1</sup>**

	NACAC Survey Respondents	All Secondary Schools	NACAC Public School Respondents	All Public Schools	NACAC Private Non-Parochial Respondents	All Private Non-Parochial Schools	NACAC Private Parochial Respondents	All Private Parochial Schools
<b>N</b>	<b>2,251<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>32,881</b>	<b>1,510</b>	<b>26,398</b>	<b>403</b>	<b>1,996</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>4,487</b>
% of schools			68.2	80.3	18.2%	6.1	13.6	13.6
Mean enrollment	787	570	905	650	514	214	553	286
% of students eligible for FRPL	37.3	—	49.4	51.5	8.2	—	12.6	—

—Not available for private schools.

<sup>1</sup> Includes schools ending in grade 12.

<sup>2</sup> The number of public and private NACAC respondents does not add to the total because 38 schools did not report school type.

SOURCES: NACAC Counseling Trends Survey, 2017-18.

US Department of Education. National Center for Education Statistics. (2015-16). The Elementary/Secondary Information System (EISI) web application was used to download data from the Common Core of Data (CCD) and Private School Survey (PSS) for the 2015-16 school year. Calculations performed by authors.

# SURVEY RESULTS

## Concealed Weapons in Schools

In response to the recent school shootings, some policymakers have proposed the idea of arming professional educators (including teachers and counselors) with concealed weapons in schools. Survey respondents were asked to describe the degree to which they support or oppose this proposal, with the majority of counselors stating they were “strongly opposed” to the idea.

	Strongly Support	Somewhat Support	Neither Support nor Oppose	Somewhat Oppose	Strongly Oppose	Unsure
<b>All Survey Respondents</b>	5.5%	11.4%	7.2%	8.8%	64.0%	3.2%
<b>by School Type</b>						
Public	6.1	12.8	7.5	9.1	61.3	3.1
Private, non-parochial	2.4	7.5	3.6	6.6	77.3	2.7
Private, parochial	6.4	9.2	10.0	10.4	59.4	4.4
<b>by School Enrollment</b>						
Fewer than 500 students	7.5	12.3	7.6	9.8	60.1	2.7
500 to 999	4.2	12.1	8.2	9.1	62.2	4.2
1,000 to 1,499	4.9	11.1	4.9	6.6	69.5	3.1
1,500 to 1,999	2.3	5.5	5.5	5.5	78.9	2.3
2,000 or more students	2.9	10.0	5.7	7.1	70.7	3.6
<b>by Free and Reduced Price Lunch (FRPL)</b>						
0 to 25% of students eligible	3.0	7.3	5.2	8.1	73.5	2.9
26 to 50%	7.3	12.4	5.7	9.9	60.3	4.4
51 to 75%	8.6	18.7	11.2	8.3	50.0	3.2
76 to 100%	5.2	13.8	9.0	11.2	58.2	2.6
<b>by Students per Counselor</b>						
100 or fewer	4.8	9.0	3.4	9.3	71.7	1.7
101 to 200	3.8	7.8	6.0	8.9	70.0	3.5
201 to 300	5.7	14.3	9.0	6.4	62.0	2.6
301 to 400	8.4	11.6	6.7	10.9	57.5	4.9
401 to 500	8.0	16.8	8.8	8.8	52.2	5.3
More than 500	6.4	23.4	17.0	9.6	41.5	2.1

Correlations (Spearman's Rho) with opposition = enrollment (.111); FRPL (-.136); students per counselor (-.167),  $p < .01$

## Attitudes about Gun Control

Survey respondents were asked to describe their views on current gun control measures as “too strong,” “too weak,” or “about right.” The majority of counselors said they thought the current measures were too weak.

	Too Strong	About Right	Too Weak
<b>All Survey Respondents</b>	1.3%	25.2%	73.5%
<b>by School Type</b>			
Public	1.5	28.6	69.9
Private, non-parochial	0.3	13.3	86.4
Private, parochial	1.6	23.4	75.0
<b>by Free and Reduced Price Lunch (FRPL)</b>			
0 to 25% of students eligible	1.3	17.7	81.0
26 to 50%	0.7	29.3	70.0
51 to 75%	2.2	39.9	58.0
76 to 100%	1.9	25.2	72.9
<b>by Students per Counselor</b>			
100 or fewer	1.0	15.4	83.6
101 to 200	1.0	19.0	80.0
201 to 300	1.3	29.5	69.2
301 to 400	1.4	32.9	65.7
401 to 500	1.8	37.8	60.4
More than 500	3.3	35.6	61.1

Correlations (Spearman's Rho) with weakness = FRPL (-.123); students per counselor (-.192),  $p < .01$

## Changes to Counselor Responsibilities

In response to recent school shootings, counselors may find themselves with additional responsibilities or demands for their time. Counselors were asked to indicate any changes in the past three years related to their responsibilities communicating with parents about safety concerns, assessing potential threats, and providing mental health/social-emotional counseling. In each area, sizable numbers of counselors reported changes, with more than half of all respondents noting their responsibilities related to assessing potential threats had either increased or greatly increased.

### Communicating With Parents About Safety Concerns

	Greatly Increased	Increased	Neither Increased or Decreased	Decreased or Greatly Decreased
<b>All Survey Respondents</b>	7.2%	40.0%	52.5%	0.3%
<b>by School Type</b>				
Public	8.7	44.4	46.5	0.4
Private, non-parochial	3.0	27.4	69.6	0.0
Private, parochial	5.6	34.3	60.1	0.0
<b>by School Enrollment</b>				
Fewer than 500 students	6.0	36.9	56.9	0.2
500 to 999	5.7	40.2	53.9	0.2
1,000 to 1,499	7.5	43.6	48.5	0.4
1,500 to 1,999	11.7	46.1	42.2	0.0
2,000 or more students	15.7	47.1	36.4	0.7
<b>by Free and Reduced Price Lunch (FRPL)</b>				
0 to 25% of students eligible	5.8	38.5	55.6	0.0
26 to 50%	8.0	46.2	45.3	0.5
51 to 75%	7.2	41.3	50.7	0.8
76 to 100%	10.5	44.2	44.9	0.4

Correlations (Spearman's Rho) with increased responsibilities = enrollment (-.113); FRPL (-.112),  $p < .01$

### Assessing Potential Threats

	Greatly Increased	Increased	Neither Increased or Decreased	Decreased or Greatly Decreased
<b>All Survey Respondents</b>	9.9%	41.5%	48.3%	0.3%
<b>by School Type</b>				
Public	11.5	47.2	40.9	0.4
Private, non-parochial	3.9	29.9	66.3	0.0
Private, parochial	9.7	28.6	61.7	0.0
<b>by School Enrollment</b>				
Fewer than 500 students	8.6	38.5	52.7	0.2
500 to 999	8.3	41.5	50.2	0.0
1,000 to 1,499	14.1	46.7	38.8	0.4
1,500 to 1,999	13.3	45.3	40.6	0.8
2,000 or more students	13.6	48.6	37.1	0.7
<b>by Free and Reduced Price Lunch (FRPL)</b>				
0 to 25% of students eligible	6.7	40.4	52.8	0.2
26 to 50%	11.0	47.4	41.4	0.2
51 to 75%	12.3	46.9	40.1	0.8
76 to 100%	12.7	42.9	44.0	0.4

Correlations (Spearman's Rho) with increased responsibilities = enrollment (-.113); FRPL (-.137),  $p < .01$

## Mental Health, Social/Emotional Counseling

	Greatly Increased	Increased	Neither Increased or Decreased	Decreased or Greatly Decreased
<b>All Survey Respondents</b>	31.5%	41.1%	27.0%	0.3%
<b>by School Type</b>				
Public	38.5	42.1	18.9	0.5
Private, non-parochial	13.4	37.5	49.1	0.0
Private, parochial	20.1	41.4	38.6	0.0
<b>by School Enrollment</b>				
Fewer than 500 students	24.2	42.2	33.3	0.3
500 to 999	31.0	42.4	26.1	0.6
1,000 to 1,499	38.3	40.1	21.6	0.0
1,500 to 1,999	49.2	40.6	10.2	0.0
2,000 or more students	50.0	32.1	17.9	0.0
<b>by Free and Reduced Price Lunch (FRPL)</b>				
0 to 25% of students eligible	28.1	42.3	29.5	0.2
26 to 50%	40.9	42.1	16.3	0.7
51 to 75%	33.7	42.0	23.9	0.4
76 to 100%	32.8	41.4	25.4	0.4
<b>by Students per Counselor</b>				
100 or fewer	23.5	42.6	33.9	0.0
101 to 200	29.4	38.8	31.4	0.4
201 to 300	31.9	41.8	26.2	0.2
301 to 400	41.1	40.0	18.2	0.7
401 to 500	42.0	41.1	16.1	0.9
More than 500	29.0	47.3	23.7	0.0

Correlations (Spearman's Rho) with increased responsibilities = enrollment (-.206); FRPL (-.143); students per counselor (-.129),  $p < .01$

## Hiring Additional Staff

Counselors were asked if their schools had hired any additional staff in the past three years to address concerns related to gun violence or other school safety issues. Roughly a quarter of counselors said yes.

	Yes
<b>All Survey Respondents</b>	20.6%
<b>by School Type</b>	
Public	16.9
Private, non-parochial	27.7
Private, parochial	30.1
<b>by School Enrollment</b>	
Fewer than 500 students	16.7
500 to 999	21.7
1,000 to 1,499	27.9
1,500 to 1,999	23.4
2,000 or more students	23.6
<b>by Free and Reduced Price Lunch (FRPL)</b>	
0 to 25% of students eligible	25.3
26 to 50%	17.3
51 to 75%	14.8
76 to 100%	17.2

Correlations (Spearman's Rho) with additional staff = FRPL (-.119),  $p < .01$