



Hello my name is Lauren Conti and I am on the Vermont School Counselor Association executive board serving in the role of president. I have worked for 9 years as a Vermont school counselor. Thank you for allowing me to speak on behalf of Vermont school counselors.

We are all reading the newspapers, watching news reports and talking to one another. The challenges are clear and many of the points I will be sharing are not new.

In the fall of 2021 the Vermont School Counselor Association (VTSCA) launched a membership survey to get a global picture of how Vermont school counselors are doing as we entered another pandemic centered school year. Feedback from Vermont school counselors identified the following concerns:

- Intensifying impact of poverty, inequities and family disengagement
- Assignment of inappropriate roles/responsibilities for school counselors
  - 504 Coordination/Case Management
  - Lunch/Recess Duty
  - Testing Coordination
- Increase stress, burnout and a sense of being undervalued and overworked
- Potential staffing crisis as School Counselors considering leaving the profession entirely
- Concerns about safety and wellbeing for the entire school community (adults and students)

As a profession, school counselors noted the importance of their ability to form strong relationships with students, families and colleagues, especially those students most in need. Vermont School Counselors have the ability to make a significant impact on a student's life both in their social-emotional well-being and postsecondary pathway planning. The social & emotional well being of our school communities, inclusive of both students and adults must be a top priority. Our students are struggling, school counselors are seeing:

- Increased levels of depression, anxiety, emotional dysregulation,
- Increase in self-harm and suicidal ideation
  - [YRBS: 2019 data](#)
    - 19% of VT high school students engage in self harm (3% increase)
    - 7% of VT high school students attempted suicide (2% increase)
- Increase in behavioral challenges impacting student's ability to learn.
- Increase in truancy and a lack of student engagement.

To get to the heart of the matter - you asked - What can we do to help? One thing that is clear is the role and responsibilities of a school counselor varies from district to district. Currently VTSCA is working in partnership with the Vermont Agency of Education to adopt the Vermont School Counselor Comprehensive [Framework](#) and we are asking all of you to support us in achieving the adoption of this framework by the Vermont Agency of Education.

***What is the Vermont Framework?*** The “Vermont Framework,” is a tool used to assist school counselors and administrators in building a school counseling program that is comprehensive in scope, preventive in design, developmental in nature, and focused on the three American School Counselor Association (ASCA) domains: academic, career and social/emotional.

By doing so, it allows VT school counselors to help every student succeed and support them in becoming productive classroom and school community contributors, competent and satisfied in their future careers, and socially/emotionally healthy individuals throughout their lifespan. This can lead to a long-lasting, statewide impact in our economy and culture in every region of Vermont.

There is additional information related to the framework below that I am not going to read right now but hope that you will review later.

### **ESSR Funding**

Ask schools to involve their school counselors - at the district level - in the discussions of ESSR funding. We are frontline employees who see day to day the SEL needs of our entire school community - yet, often we've not been invited to the table to discuss.

- Utilize funding to hire more school counselors or remove the inappropriate tasks from school counselor so they can do the work they're qualified to do and hire, for example, non-faculty as a testing and/or 504 coordinator
- Use clear intentions and data in determining the use of this funding - ask, again, for school counselor input

Again, you ask what you can do. Let me be clear - on behalf of VT School Counselors - **Please help us to achieve adoption of the Vermont Comprehensive School Counseling Framework with the Vermont Agency of Education.**

If there are questions, I am happy to address those now.  
Thank you again for this opportunity to testify.

The Vermont School Counselor Association Board & Advocacy Committee

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***What is the Vermont Framework?*** The Developmental Counseling Model for Vermont Schools, hereafter referred to as the “Vermont Framework,” is a tool used to assist school counselors and administrators in building a school counseling program that is comprehensive in

scope, preventive in design, developmental in nature, and focused on the three American School Counselor Association (ASCA) domains: academic, career and social/emotional. The approach described in the Vermont Framework is proactive, emphasizing universal Tier 1 school counseling supports for ALL students and the use of “data identifiers” to actively target students in need of Tier 2 and Tier 3 support. The Vermont Framework outlines how Vermont school counselors work to assess areas of student growth through accountability systems embedded in district improvement to ensure continuous growth in our students and our comprehensive school counseling programs.

The Vermont Framework was developed to support school counselors and administrators in utilizing the ASCA National Model, content specific to Vermont, and other nationwide best practices within Vermont schools, including MTSS and the Vermont School Counseling Association’s Social/Emotional Learning (SEL) Guidelines.

***Who can use the Vermont Framework?*** This document is prepared primarily for school counselors, but is recommended for use by administrators, teachers, school support personnel, parents, community members, and policy makers. Highly adaptable, the Vermont Framework offers Vermont school districts the freedom to collaboratively contribute their own expertise as it relates to the developmental needs of students. To effectively achieve the goals of the Vermont Framework in its fullest sense, all key stakeholders must play a significant role in its implementation, from school staff and community members, to university educators who train school counselors, administrators, and teachers.

Goals of this document are:

1. To establish a **statewide framework** using the ASCA National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs as our springboard, including **defining the roles and responsibilities of a school counselor**, in order to address the specific needs of Vermont students.
2. To **ensure equitable access to a high-quality evidence** and standards-based school counseling curriculum **for all Vermont students and families**.
3. To **partner** with the **Vermont Agency of Education** to publish the Vermont Comprehensive School Counseling Framework, in order **to define our role in schools** and **strengthen programming throughout the state**.
4. To **advocate for a consistent role of the school counselor** through various avenues (e.g., legislature, Agency of Education, Chamber of Commerce, Dept. of Labor, training for VPA and VSA members).