

Legislation Text

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Recognizing the critical role that guidance counselors and play in meeting students' academic, social, and emotional needs and urging the School District of Philadelphia to devote additional resources to expanding the number of counselors in high schools with the highest needs.

WHEREAS, School counselors are vital to every school community, supporting students in the areas of academic achievement, personal/social development, and career development, and bringing an important perspective to school staff in resolving issues from small to large; and

WHEREAS, The number of counselors working in Philadelphia schools was slashed 30% as a result of budget cuts in 2013, plummeting from 285 to 200 in one year; and

WHEREAS, The School District's decision in 2016 to ensure that each school in the system has at least one counselor has been universally applauded and has been an important step in repairing the net of student support services that was slashed in recent budget cuts; and

WHEREAS, The School District can take important steps to repair the student support services lost during the budget cuts of 2013 by allocating essential resources to the most needy schools; and

WHEREAS, Neighborhood and some citywide high schools are significantly more likely to fulfill their mission of educating all students, regardless of challenges than their special admissions counterparts; and

WHEREAS, Neighborhood high schools on average serve 14% English Language Learners, 22% students with special needs, 22% DHS-involved students, and 95% students who are low-income; and

WHEREAS, Magnet schools on average serve just 1.9% English learners, 4% special education students, 11% DHS involved students, and 69% low-income students; and

WHEREAS, But many district schools that have predominantly minority and low-income student populations have only a single school counselor despite having as many as 949 students, the same as more well-resourced schools one-half or even one-third the size; and

WHEREAS, Allocating counselors on the basis of student needs would provide critical resources where they are needed most, and support students who are more likely to experience lower rates of promotion and credit accumulation, and are at a higher risk of dropping out; and

WHEREAS, The American School Counselor Association recommends a counselor to student ratio of 1 to 250; and

WHEREAS, Despite the 2016 expansion of full-time counselor positions, the counselor-to-student ratio in the school system has not improved from where it was four years ago, before the budget cuts; and

WHEREAS, Like most large school districts in areas with high poverty rates and a majority Black and Latino residents, Philadelphia has more school police officers (351 as of January 2017) than counselors (284); in contrast, districts with wealthier and whiter populations typically spend more on counselors than on security; and

WHEREAS, The level of need of the student body is not currently a factor in the central allocation methodology for distributing counselors to District schools; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That we recognize the critical role that guidance counselors play in meeting students' academic, social, and emotional needs and urge the School District of Philadelphia to devote additional resources to expanding the number of counselors in schools with the highest needs.