

ASCA State of the Profession – District Administrators Summary of Findings

June 2026

Although respondents to the 2026 State of the Profession District Administrators survey point to persistent and emerging challenges, they also indicate that district school counseling programs are even more aligned to the ASCA National Model® compared with 2021 (83% in 2026 vs. 75% in 2021). A majority of district administrators report improved student-to-school-counselor ratios compared with earlier findings, increased use of data-informed decision-making and stronger alignment with the ASCA Student Standards.

However, some districts continue to experience difficulty filling school counseling positions with qualified candidates and cite administrative expectations, caseload size and compensation as key factors affecting retention. Ensuring that administrators, school boards and other education partners understand the appropriate role of the school counselor remains one of the most significant day-to-day challenges. The 2026 data also reflects a complex and shifting policy environment. Nearly half of respondents report that state laws or policies have affected how they oversee school counseling programs, often increasing compliance demands and constraining practice. Districts report varied actions related to diversity, equity and inclusion, underscoring uneven implementation and changing local contexts. Finally, many district administrators report expanded responsibilities and express concern about role sustainability, with a substantial portion anticipating leaving district leadership within the next five years.

Together, these findings illustrate both meaningful advancement and ongoing strain within district-level school counseling leadership. The results underscore the importance of sustained advocacy, clear role definition and systemic support to ensure district administrators can lead comprehensive school counseling programs that promote success for each and every student.

Methodology: The survey was distributed via email using the Qualtrics platform to 448 school counseling district administrators and supervisors. The survey drew 164 respondents for a confidence level of 95% +/- approximately 7.5, based on an estimated population of 5,000 U.S.-based district administrators.

Respondents' job roles: More than nine in 10 respondents are directors/coordinators/supervisors at the district level. Only these respondents were invited to continue to complete the survey, which was targeted specifically to district-level leaders. More than nine in 10 respondents (91%) were employed as a school counselor before becoming a district administrator.

Job role	2026	2021
Director/coordinator/supervisor (district level)	93.3%	89.2%
Director/coordinator/supervisor (building level)	1.8%	2.9%
School counselor	1.8%	2.9%
College/university faculty	0.0%	2.2%
Graduate student	0.0%	0.0%
Other	3.0%	2.9%

District characteristics: About 85% of respondents’ districts are public, noncharter, while 13% are combination public charter/noncharter and 2% are public, charter only. About one-third of respondents’ districts are in suburban areas (35%), 28% are in urban areas, 28% are in a combination (urban, rural and/or suburban) and 7% are in rural areas. Respondents represent a wide range of district sizes. About 11% report enrollments of 6,000 or fewer students, while 18% serve more than 100,000 students.

School type	2026	2021
Public, noncharter	84.5%	81.8%
Public, noncharter and charter	12.6%	13.6%
Public, charter only	1.9%	3.4%
Private/independent/parochial	0.0%	0.0%
Virtual (in a regular school year)	n/a	0.0%
Other	1.0%	1.1%

Location type	2026	2021
Urban	28.2%	33.0%
Suburban	35.0%	51.1%
Rural	6.8%	12.5%
Some combination of urban, rural and/or suburban	28.2%	n/a
Virtual	1.0%	n/a
Other	1.0%	n/a

Student enrollment	2026	2021
1-1,000 students	1.0%	0.0%
1,001-3,000 students	2.9%	2.3%
3,001-6,000 students	6.8%	12.5%
6,001-10,000 students	8.7%	8.0%
10,001-15,000 students	11.7%	8.0%
15,001-25,000 students	19.4%	17.0%
25,001-50,000 students	15.5%	21.6%
50,001-100,000 students	16.5%	18.2%
More than 100,000. Please specify:	17.5%	12.5%

Free/reduced-rate lunch and multilingual learners: About one-quarter of district directors indicate that 45% or fewer of students receive free/reduced-rate lunch: 28% say 46%-60%, 14% say 61%-75%, and 25% say 75% or more. About one-quarter of district directors indicate that 15% or fewer of their students are multilingual learners, 23% say 16%-30%, 15% 31%-45%, and 21% say 46%-plus.

Students receiving free/reduced-rate lunch	2026	2021	Multilingual learners	2026	2021
0%-15% of students	2.9%	6.9%	0%-15%	26.0%	32.2%
16%-30%	9.8%	12.6%	16%-30%	23.0%	28.7%
31%-45%	10.8%	12.6%	31%-45%	15.0%	20.7%
46%-60%	27.5%	21.8%	46%-60%	11.0%	6.9%
61%-75%	13.7%	20.7%	61%-75%	8.0%	5.7%
More than 75%	24.5%	24.1%	More than 75%	2.0%	1.1%
Unsure	10.8%	1.1%	Unsure	15.0%	4.6%

Average student-to-school-counselor ratios: Overall, 44% of district administrators (vs. 29% in 2021) report that school counselors in their districts serve 350 or fewer students each, followed by 351-450 students (30%), 451-550 students (18%) and 551-850 or more students (9%).

Average number of students served by school counselors in district	2026	2021
150 or fewer students	1.0%	0.0%
151-250 students	5.8%	3.4%
251-350 students	36.9%	25.8%
351-450 students	30.1%	28.1%
451-550 students	17.5%	31.5%
551-650 students	1.9%	5.6%
651-750 students	4.9%	2.2%
751-850 students	1.9%	1.1%
851-950 students	0.0%	0.0%
951-1,050 students	0.0%	0.0%
More than 1,050 students	0.1%	2.2%

School counselor district workforce: The largest percentage of respondents (37%) report there are 50 or fewer school counselors in their district. Nearly 20% have 51-100 school counselors in the district, 21% have 101-200, 6% have 201-300 and 17% have more than 300, a notable increase over 2021. Respondents indicate their districts employ an average of 11 people in non-clerical roles to support school counseling (vs. 10 in 2021).

School counselors in the district	2026	2021
0-50	36.9%	37.1%
51-100	19.4%	22.5%
101-200	21.4%	27.0%
201-300	5.8%	4.5%
More than 300	16.5%	9.0%

When they began the 2025-2026 school year, most district administrators experienced vacancies for roles, as the chart indicates.

Number of school counselor vacancies in district	2026
0	25.7%
1-2	33.0%
3-5	16.5%
More than 5	24.8%

About one-quarter of district administrators find it extremely difficult or difficult to fill vacancies with qualified school counselors, and 34% find it somewhat difficult. Asked how many vacancies remained at the time of the survey, most respondents report no current school counselor vacancies, but a substantial minority report ongoing shortages – usually small (1-5 positions), with a few districts experiencing significant staffing crises and some responses indicating instability that could not be numerically quantified.

Difficulty in filling vacancies in district with qualified school counselors	2026
Extremely difficult	9.3%
Difficult	14.8%
Somewhat difficult	34.3%
Not difficult	41.7%

School counselor retention: The most critical factors in school counselor retention, according to district administrators, include administrative expectations (63%), caseload size (43%) and compensation (41%). Other issues include the district’s location, 504 responsibilities and school climate.

Factors affecting retention	2026
Administrative expectations	62.9%
Caseload size	42.9%
Compensation	41.0%
Working conditions	25.7%
Professional support	7.6%
Other	36.2%

Supporting the district’s school counselors: A number of factors have an impact on district administrators’ ability to effectively support school counselors in the district, especially competing responsibilities (52% to a great extent or adequately) and limited time (49%). District administrators mention policies that affect their ability to support their school counselors, including outdated practices that create confusion and limit school counselors’ effectiveness, high workloads, restrictive policies, unclear role expectations and added duties from multiple departments. They also indicate that leadership and supervision often lack alignment with school counseling expertise and standards.

Factors limiting ability to a great extent/adequately	2026
Competing responsibilities	52.1%
Limited time	49.0%
Budget constraints	41.8%
Insufficient staffing	39.6%
District-level policies	17.5%

About school counseling programs: School counseling program alignment with components of the ASCA National Model® have improved since 2021. Today, 87% say their programs incorporate data-informed decision-making, followed by result in improved student achievement, attendance and discipline (85%), incorporate the ASCA Student Standards (83%), are based on the ASCA National Model® (83%), close achievement and opportunity gaps (78%), include developmentally appropriate instruction focused on the mindsets and behaviors all students need (72%) and are delivered to all students systematically (62%).

School counseling programs... (Strongly agree/Agree)	2026	2021
incorporate data-informed decision making	86.7%	80.8%
result in improved student achievement and contributing factors to achievement, such as attendance and discipline	85.1%	77.4%
incorporate the ASCA Student Standards	82.6%	n/a
are based on the ASCA National Model®	82.6%	74.5%
close achievement and opportunity gaps	77.7%	69.1%
include developmentally appropriate instruction focused on the mindsets and behaviors all students need for postsecondary readiness and success	71.9%	79.8%
are delivered to all students systematically	61.9%	71.0%

Among those whose programs are not based on the ASCA National Model®, district administrators say it’s due to inconsistent leadership, limited buy-in or understanding from district administrators, competing state or local models, and structural barriers such as school-based autonomy and competing departmental roles. Among those whose programs don’t incorporate the ASCA Student Standards, district administrators say it’s because of competing state or district models, lack of districtwide counseling leadership and intentional planning, limited training and buy-in, high caseloads and competing duties for school

counselors, and building-level autonomy that defines school counselor roles inconsistently.

Use of time: About two-thirds of district administrators (65%) track school counselors’ use of time. Across districts, school counselors primarily track use of time and services using the ASCA Use of Time template, SCUTA, student information systems (e.g., Synergy, Infinite Campus), and locally developed Google/Microsoft forms, spreadsheets or calendar-based tools, often aligned with MTSS and state models. Collection is most commonly required once or twice per year (fall/spring), though some districts collect quarterly or monthly data, with submissions used for district review, state reporting and ASCA National Model implementation and accountability.

Among those who track use of time, 51% are satisfied with the process and 36% are somewhat satisfied.

Satisfaction with Process to Track School Counselors’ Use of Time	2026
Extremely satisfied	9.7%
Satisfied	47.2%
Somewhat satisfied	36.1%
Not satisfied	6.9%

Day-to-day challenges: Majorities of respondents indicate they are most challenged by ensuring administrators understand the school counselor role (71%) and advocating for school counselors to be removed from inappropriate duties (71%).

Extremely Challenging/Challenging Issues	2026	2021
Ensuring building-level administrators understand the school counselor role	71.1%	72.7%
Advocating for school counselors to be removed from inappropriate duties (coordinating any of the following: schoolwide individual education plans, 504 plans, student study teams, response to intervention plans, MTSS and school attendance review boards) (Being assigned inappropriate duties in 2021)	70.7%	63.9%
Ensuring district administrators and the superintendent's leadership team understand the role of the school counselor	63.9%	n/a
Ensuring school board members understand the role of the school counselor	61.4%	n/a
Advocating for appropriate caseload/number of students per school counselor (Managing high caseload/number of students in 2021)	59.8%	67.0%
Influencing the superintendent's leadership team on school counseling and student success issues	56.5%	n/a
Informing and influencing the school board on school counseling and student success issues	54.1%	n/a
Ensuring all school counselors in the district design, implement and assess a comprehensive school counseling program in their school (Implementing a school counseling program based on the ASCA National Model in 2021)	53.7%	46.4%
Presenting school counselors' work and impact at districtwide principal meetings	52.0%	n/a
Ensuring an appropriate budget for the district school counseling	46.8%	n/a

program/department		
Access to appropriate clerical support for the district school counseling department	45.1%	n/a
Addressing district policies that create barriers for students (Addressing racism and bias through practices/pedagogy/curriculum in the school counseling program in 2021)	39.3%	57.3%
Ensuring all school counselors in the district practice professional competencies and standards (ASCA Ethical Standards and ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards and Competencies)	38.5%	n/a
Providing evidence-based curriculum to all school counselors in the district	32.8%	n/a
Collaborating with district-level department administrators on issues related to student success	31.2%	n/a
Supporting school counselors in adjusting practice after new laws or policies are enacted	28.7%	n/a
Providing professional development for all school counselors in the district (Participating in professional development appropriate to school counseling in 2021)	22.1%	18.1%
Understanding the professional development needs of all school counselors in the district	15.6%	n/a
Responding to crisis events	14.6%	n/a
Responding to day-to-day questions from school counselors in a timely manner	9.0%	n/a

Crisis planning: Overall, 80% of district directors are part of a crisis planning and response team, similar to 2021 findings. Among those who are involved, district administrators provide leadership in crisis planning and response by guiding district teams, coordinating preparedness efforts, and ensuring clear procedures are in place. During crises, they activate and deploy multidisciplinary teams that center school counselors, along with social workers, psychologists, and other mental health staff, to support students, staff and families. They also oversee training, reunification processes and collaboration across schools to ensure consistent, effective responses. Those who report not being involved describe being notified or trained to help but largely excluded from district crisis planning because responsibility is housed in separate departments (often led by social workers, psychologists or safety teams), with unclear role definitions and inconsistent inclusion of school counselors.

Involved in crisis planning	2026	2021
Yes	80.4%	83.5%
No	19.6%	16.5%

Asked about their level of confidence in their district’s crisis response protocols, 73% of respondents indicated they are extremely confident or confident, while 23% are somewhat confident and 4% are not confident.

Confidence in Crisis Response Protocols	2026
Extremely confident	27.7%
Confident	45.5%
Somewhat confident	23.2%
Not confident	3.6%

About half (52%) said the district regularly provides crisis-response training for school counselors, while 34% provide such training occasionally and 12 percent do not provide training. Across districts, crisis response training is provided regularly – most often annually at the beginning of the school year – with additional or more intensive training for counselors serving on crisis or emergency response teams. Training commonly covers suicide prevention and risk assessment, threat assessment, trauma-informed response, and district crisis protocols, using models such as PREPaRE, ASIST, QPR, CSTAG, NOVA, CPI, and Mental Health First Aid, and is delivered through a mix of district PD, outside providers, train-the-trainer models, and refresher sessions. While many systems report strong protocols and recurring training, consistency and systematic implementation vary, with several districts noting the need for more standardized, ongoing, and comprehensive approaches.

Supporting and promoting DEI: Over the past two to three years, districts represented by respondents have taken actions that both increase and hinder access to diversity, equity and inclusion. For example, while 18% have required diversity, equity and inclusion training for all faculty, 16% have discontinued it. Additionally, 15% have incorporated diversity, equity and inclusion in student curricula and 10% have removed it. Full details follow.

Actions taken	2026	2021
Required diversity, equity and inclusion training for all faculty	18.2%	41.7%
Created positions for diversity, equity and inclusion specialists	7.3%	38.5%
Incorporated diversity, equity and inclusion in student curriculum	14.5%	31.3%
Changed policies and procedures for students	7.3%	29.2%
Changed policies and procedures for faculty	7.3%	14.6%
Eliminated/modified school resource officer position(s)	1.8%	14.6%
Discontinued diversity, equity and inclusion training for all faculty	15.5%	n/a
Removed diversity, equity and inclusion from the student curriculum	10.0%	n/a
Removed positions for diversity, equity and inclusion specialists	14.5%	n/a
Added school resource officer(s)	8.2%	n/a
Other	14.5%	28.1%
No actions taken	30.0%	17.7%

RAMP status: About one third of district administrators say their schools have a current RAMP designation, up from 28% in 2021.

Schools with RAMP	2026	2021
Yes, schools have current RAMP designation	32.7%	28.0%
Have received RAMP in the past but no current designations	14.5%	9.7%
Have never received RAMP	49.1%	62.4%
Unsure	3.6%	n/a

Understanding of the school counselor role: District directors are most likely to say school counselors in their districts best understand the role of school counselors (93% say they understand to a great extent or adequately), followed by students (60%), teachers/school staff (42%), building-level administrators (36%), district staff (35%) and parents/families (34%).

Constituency (To a great extent/Adequately)	2026	2021
School counselors in your district	92.6%	90.6%
Students	59.8%	47.4%
District staff	34.6%	36.5%
Teachers/school staff	41.7%	31.3%
Building-level administrators	36.1%	31.3%
Parents/families	34.3%	23.7%
School board members	22.5%	17.7%
State-level legislators/policymakers/decision-makers	12.9%	20.0%
General public	4.6%	5.2%

Impact of state laws or policies: District administrators are divided regarding the impact of state policy with 53% indicating state laws or policies have not affected how they oversee school counseling programs and school counselors in the districts while 47% say they have. For example, new and shifting legislation around parent rights, consent, surveys, gender and SEL, accountability mandates and funding has significantly constrained and reshaped school counselors’ roles, often limiting alignment with ASCA standards, increasing oversight and administrative burden, and redirecting time toward compliance, crisis response, and navigating legal boundaries rather than comprehensive school counseling services.

District administrators appear to experience some challenges in navigating legal/policy conflicts affecting school counseling. For example, 60% feel extremely prepared/prepared to discuss school safety or security; 54%, limits on topics school counselors can discuss with students; 43%, curriculum or book restrictions; and 42% restrictions on gender/sexual identity discussions.

Extremely prepared/prepared to discuss	2026
Limits on topics school counselors can discuss with students	54.2%
Restrictions on gender/sexual identity discussions	42.8%
School safety or security laws/policies and requirements	60.3%
Curriculum or book restrictions	42.9%

Professional development interests: District administrators are most interested in receiving professional development about evaluating school counseling outcomes across schools (87% extremely interested/interested), closing gaps through districtwide initiatives (86%), improving data literacy among school counselors (83%), effective supervision models for school counselors (80%), leadership development (79%), communicating data to administrators, school boards, etc. (79%), and process improvement and workflow automation across schools (78%). Other topics of interest mentioned include MTSS implementation, and compliance with state and education laws.

Extremely interested/interested in topic	2026
Evaluating school counseling outcomes across schools	86.7%
Closing gaps through districtwide initiatives	85.5%
Improving data literacy among school counselors	82.9%
Effective supervision models for school counselors	79.8%
Leadership development	79.1%
Communicating data to administrators, school boards, etc.	79.0%
Process improvement and workflow automation across schools	78.1%
Designing systems for equitable service delivery	72.4%
School climate improvement	72.1%
Incorporating AI technologies	71.4%
Compliance with legal and ethical guidelines, IDEA, FERPA, Title IX, Section 504, etc.	70.5%
Cross-departmental collaboration with school psychologists, school social workers and health services	70.1%
Trauma-informed district systems and crisis response	69.5%
Building postsecondary readiness strategies	69.2%
Culturally responsive school counseling practices	64.7%
Implementing career pathway frameworks with CTE departments	63.8%
Suicide prevention, intervention and postvention	60.0%
School counselor recruitment and retention strategies	55.2%
Implementing ASCA National Model programs	54.8%
Other:	37.5%

Role change over time: Asked how their role has changed in the past year, 59% of district administrators indicate their responsibilities have increased, while 39% say they have experienced no major change. Only 3% have experienced decreased responsibilities. Among those whose responsibilities have expanded, district administrators point to staffing cuts, leadership changes, increased student needs, and new legislative and compliance demands. Many administrators report taking on additional roles beyond school counseling—such as crisis response, threat assessment, Title IX, 504s, curriculum development, budgeting, scheduling, and cross-department initiatives – often shifting time away from direct support of counselors and comprehensive school counseling programs, resulting in heavier workloads and reduced capacity to provide high-level, ASCA-aligned support.

Satisfaction with role: Overall, 69% of respondents are extremely satisfied or satisfied with their current school counseling district administrator role. Another 36% are somewhat satisfied and 5% are not satisfied with their current role.

Asked if they expect to be working as a district administrator in the next five years, 61% said yes and 39% percent said no. Many district and coordinator-level leaders are nearing retirement or actively planning to retire within the next one to five years, while others are uncertain about staying due to workload, understaffing, legislative pressures, and diminished capacity to influence systems. Several are considering transitions out of district roles – including returning to school sites, higher education, private practice or non-district positions – seeking work that better aligns with their values, sustainability, and ability to meaningfully support students and counselors.

Respondent demographics: Respondents are largely female (88%), while 7% are male, one percent are nonbinary and four percent prefer not to say. In terms of race/ethnicity, 52% of respondents are white, 32% are Black/African American, and 5% are Hispanic or Latino. Nearly 90 percent of respondents are heterosexual. About 6% of respondents are younger than 40, 52% are 41-50, 35% are 51-60 and 5% are 61-plus.

	2026	2021
Female	88.3%	89.8%
Male	6.8%	6.8%
Nonbinary	1.0%	1.1%
Transgender	0.0%	n/a
Prefer not to say	3.9%	2.3%

	2026	2021
30 or younger	0.0%	0.0%
31-40	5.9%	14.8%
41-50	52.0%	46.6%
51-60	35.3%	26.1%

61-70	4.9%	9.1%
71-plus	0.0%	0.0%
Prefer not to say	2.0%	3.4%

	2026	2021
White	52.4%	65.9%
Black or African American	32.0%	18.2%
Latinx	4.9%	3.4%
Two or more races	1.9%	2.3%
Asian	0.0%	1.1%
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific island	1.0%	1.1%
American Indian or Alaska Native	1.0%	0.0%
Prefer not to say	6.8%	8.0%

	2026	2021
Heterosexual or straight	88.3%	89.7%
Gay or lesbian	2.9%	3.4%
Bisexual	0.0%	1.1%
Prefer not to say	8.7%	5.7%
Different identity	0.0%	0.0%

Respondents' education and experience: About 55 percent of respondents have a master's degree in school counseling, 16% have a master's degree in another discipline and 30% have doctorate degrees. Nearly two thirds hold the NCC certification, while 32% have the NBCT and 5% are NCSC holders.

Highest level of education	2026	2021
Bachelor's degree	0.0%	1.1%
Master's degree in school counseling	54.9%	59.1%
Master's degree in other discipline. Please specify:	15.7%	19.3%
Doctorate degree in school counseling or school counseling supervision and training	3.9%	3.4%
Doctorate degree in other discipline. Please specify:	25.5%	17.0%

Certifications	2026	2021
ACSC	3.9%	n/a
NBCT	12.7%	31.6%

Nine percent of district administrators have served in their roles for two or fewer years, while the largest percentage have served as a district administrator for 3-5 years (38%), as the chart that follows shows.

Years of experience as a district administrator	2026
0-2	8.8%
3-5	38.2%
6-10	24.5%
11-15	10.8%
16-20	6.9%
20+	10.8%