

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

CASC 2019 - A YEAR IN REVIEW

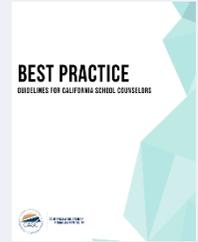


California Association of
School Counselors (CASC)

By: Loretta Whitson, Ed.D.

February 2020

Summary: 2019 was a big year for the [California Association of School Counselors Inc. \(CASC\)](#). We released [Best Practice Guidelines for the School Counseling Profession](#), and a [YouTube video](#) on mental health services. A variety of intensive professional development trainings were held and significant state association partnerships were launched. We hosted two conferences (one in Northern California and another in Southern California) that brought a total of 1,800 people



together. The CASC team began planning for three major events in 2020, which will include for the first time CASC's presence in Central California.

Through multiple invitations to present at events hosted by school administrators, a greater understanding has been gained statewide on the benefits of hiring and allowing school counselors to do the work they were trained to do. School counseling was in the news to a level not seen in the past. The California school counseling workforce has seen a steady increase for nine consecutive years. No longer are California school counselor ratios ranked 50th, 49th or even 48th in the nation!

CASC remains the largest state school counseling association in the nation, averaging just under 2,000 members, with an annual operating budget of \$850,000. CASC's financial structure now includes multiple sources of income, with training and event revenue surpassing income from membership dues. CASC is the only state school counseling association with an office and training center. We operate statewide with a relatively small FTE paid staff of three and are supported by a major California lobbying firm – Capital Advisors. CASC will be celebrating its 20th anniversary as a nonprofit association in 2020.

In addition to the aforementioned strategies applied in 2019, other not-so-evident successes were realized. CASC persistently advocated with state legislators on key issues:

- CASC was actively involved in the passage of the new California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, Pupil Personnel Services Standards and Performance Expectations.
- CASC embarked on a substantial restructuring of the Board of Directors' election process and governance.
- CASC renovated its image, including remodeling its website and creating a new logo, thus rebranding to a more modernized image.

A testament to the strength of CASC is the persistence of board members and CASC members who have continued to speak to school board members and other local leaders throughout California about the value of school counselors. This could be a contributing factor to the reality that California school counselor ratios are now at an all-time low, averaging one school counselor to every 594 students (Dataquest, CDE).

We're excited to continue working with you in 2020 to build schools around the needs and interests of young people. The school counselor's role is critical to the future success of our schools, and CASC will be unwavering in its commitment to supporting your work. I appreciate the opportunity the CASC Board of Directors has provided me to serve school counselors and California students. There is more to come.

- Dr. Loretta Whitson, Executive Director CASC

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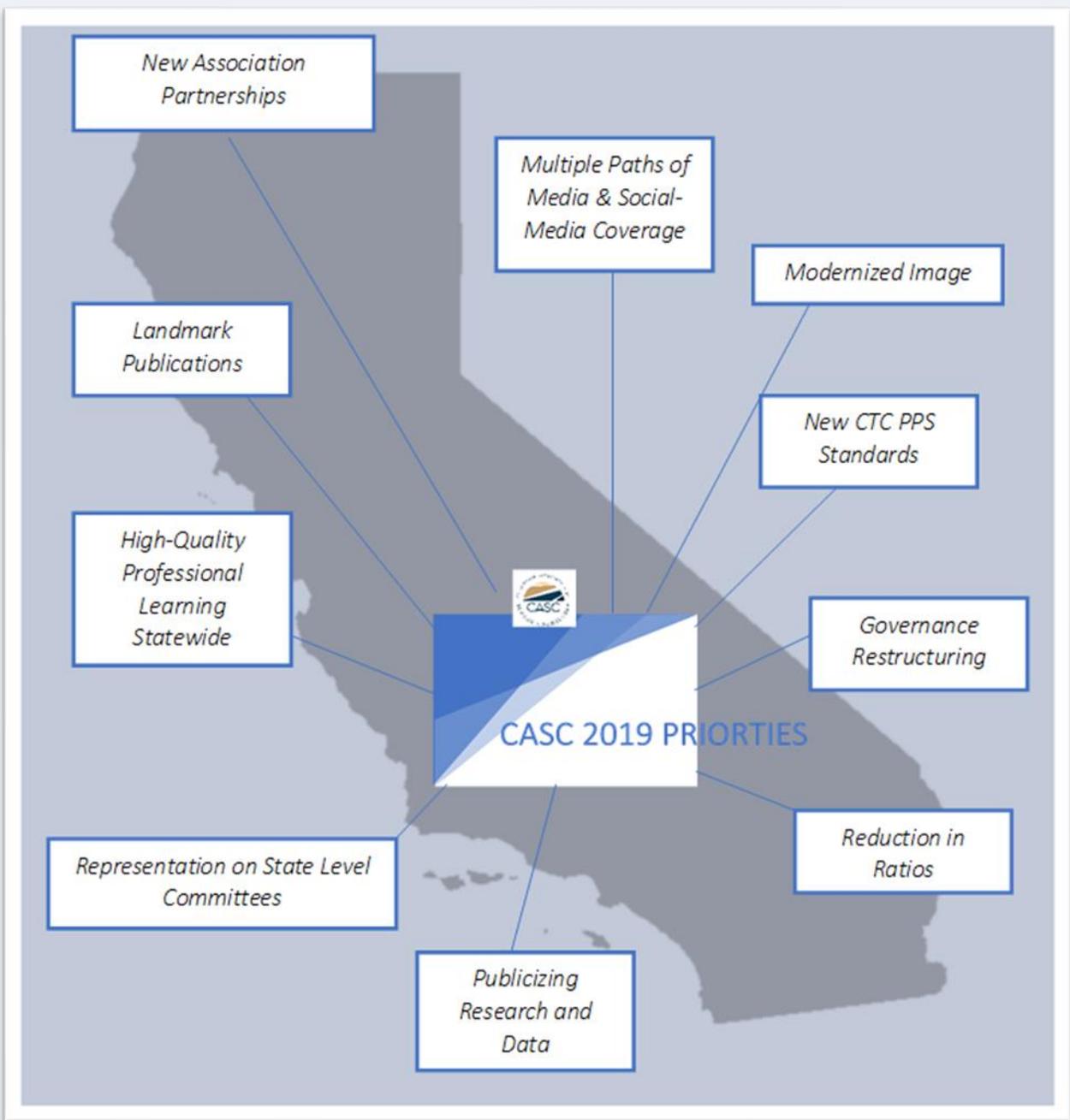
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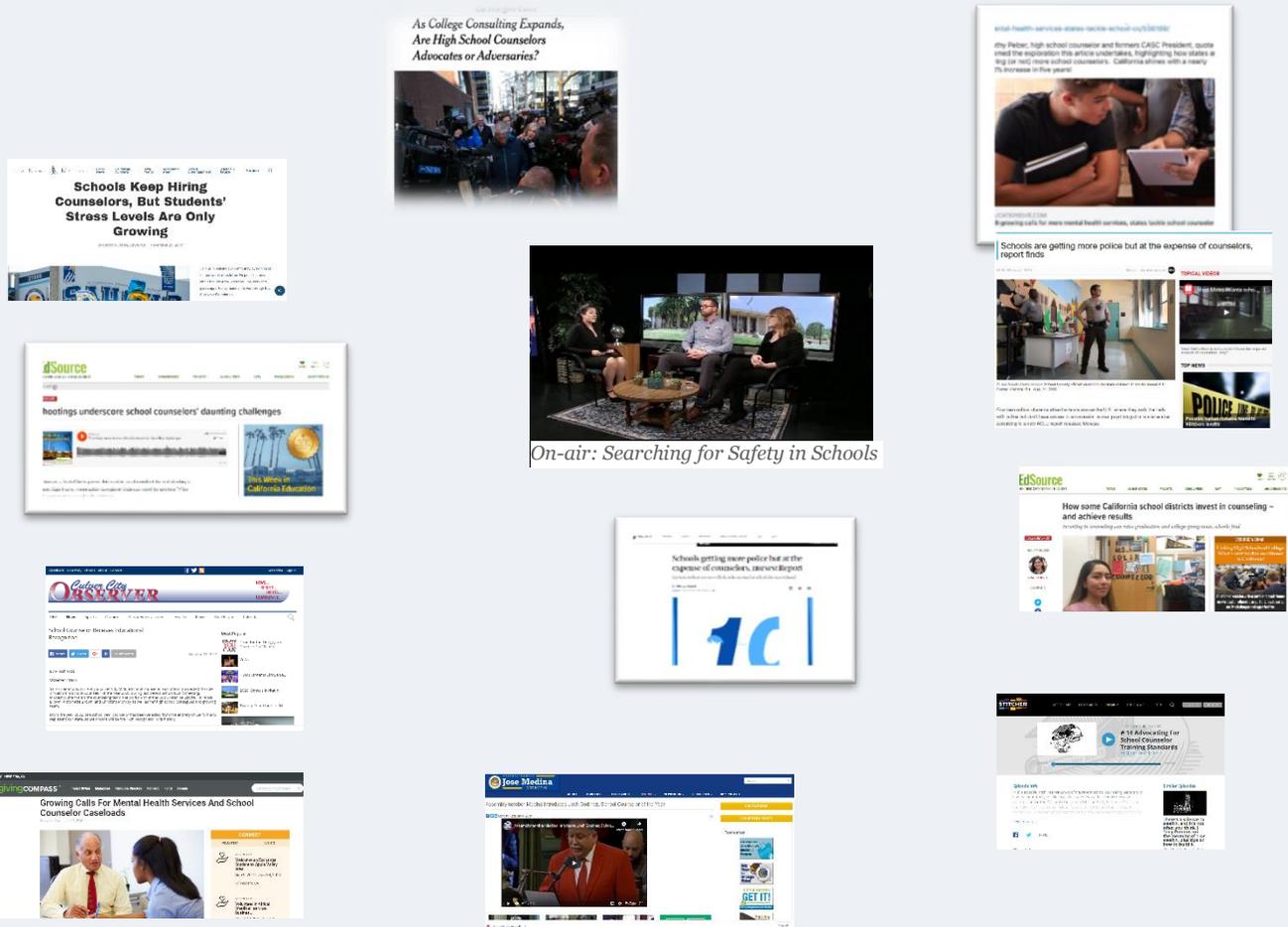
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California Politics: CASC is highly participatory in California political processes and consequently the 2018 state election was watched as substantial changes in California leadership transpired in 2019, markedly impacting CASC sphere of influence. The inaugural year of a new Governor and a new State Superintendent of Public Instruction was both promising and unpredictable. Governor Newsom signed 870 bills into law; almost 100 of which will directly impact public schools. State Superintendent Tony Thurmond took on restructuring of the CDE and hired top department individuals who understand the school counseling profession and the need for increased counseling staff in schools. Thurmond has a background working in mental health and in social services. His support for school counseling services has been addressed in meetings with the Pupil Services

Coalition and with CASC Executive Director. The California Assembly, for the first time, honored both the school counselor of the year and the school counseling profession during the 2019 National School Counseling Week. Legislative Analysis Office and other legislative staff regularly sought CASC’s advise on matters related to student wellbeing, college and career preparation and mental health.

Publications, Podcasts and Televised Programs (Links): CASC Board of Directors and staff were quoted in a number of publications and broadcasts throughout 2019. Links to several of these publications are below.



CASC Locally: CASC has consistently made the case that California schools need to invest more resources to support students and reduce school counselor ratios. We correlate the message of addressing student needs and meeting LCAP and LCFF requirements to the work of school counselors. A number of local school district-level victories have been realized, as many school districts strengthened and expanded their school counseling workforce. Districts across the state have identified school counselors within their Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP), allocating funds to expand their school counseling workforce. However, through volunteer efforts and CASC funded research, CASC now has a deep reservoir of district- and school-level data which reveals

pockets of concern pointing to school districts who still maintain caseloads two and three times the recommended maximum. On the upside, district-level structural changes are being realized with greater district-level school counselor supervision, coordination and the collection of data. In partnership with the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), it was learned that many district LCAP Plans did not comply with state law and designated funds were being used inappropriately. Educating district leadership and putting pressure for justifiable expenditures are tactics we are undertaking in the 2020 campaign. Many school superintendents and administrators have been educated by CASC on the important role school counselors play in schools.

CASC Marketing: CASC introduced a landmark document in 2019, [*Best Practice Guidelines for California School Counselors*](#), the first document of its kind in the nation, and an advocacy tool available on the CASC website. It aligns the work of school counselors within state strategic focus areas (i.e. chronic absenteeism, equity and access, student behavior and safety, school climate, staff consultation, career and college readiness, mental health, special needs, and parent involvement). It also defines the difference between school-based mental health service providers and community-based service providers. This is a big deal. Role confusion and the outsourcing of school counseling jobs has been of great concern to CASC over the years. The sharing of this document and the clear defining of school counselor role has been attributed by California leaders as a mass rebranding effort. The document has been districted to over 200 California Superintendents statewide. In addition, a [*short promotional video*](#) was created to summarize the important work of school counselors in the area of mental health services.

Trends in California Education Impacting School Counseling: The current momentum at the state level, building around the issues of student mental health and college and career readiness presents a unique opportunity for substantial and sustainable reform within the current education system. This, combined with rising state revenues, and 2019 legislation that aimed to provide additional funds to hire more mental health-related school staff, is a perfect storm of opportunity and challenges for the school counseling profession. The opportunities far exceed the challenges; however, the challenges are important to consider, too. CASC has begun to provide a number of in-depth, professional development certificate programs aimed at all-level of experienced school counselors to ensure school counselors are well-trained in evidence-based strategies to address student mental health issues. The trainings are designed to match current areas of need, voiced by school administrators and others who want school counselors to be the go-to experts on their school campuses in mental health and college and career readiness.

Another area bubbling up for lawmakers is California's pressing concern of inequity within California's educational system. It is a compelling issue and worrisome given that high-poverty schools continue to have

inadequate school counseling staff to meet the growing needs of their students. Many lawmakers see the hiring of more school counselors is one way of addressing the problem.

The underused Prop 63 funds became a front and center topic in 2019. In particular, state officials look to ways to reallocate underutilized Prop 63 funds originally designated for children/youth. To that end, the Executive Director met with the CEO of the Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission, Toby Ewing, to discuss ways to increase collaboration and understanding. She also attended a number of hearings and spoke on behalf of increased funding for credentialed mental health service (PPS) providers.

The Mental Health Service Act (Prop 63) established in 2002 designated funds from a tax on the wealthy for mental health services. The Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission created by the act, oversees the funds in five component areas: Community Services and Supports (CSS), Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI), Innovation, Workforce Education and Training and Capital Facilities and Technology Needs. The distribution of designated PEI funds has been a point of consternation and debate with a new 2019 bill that requires partnerships to be established with county departments of education and county mental health through a 5-year grant-funding program to begin in 2020. CASC and ACLU representatives attended open forums to influence grant requirements.

State Influence: Several PPS-focused standing committees met regularly in 2019 and are very important to the profession of school counseling in California. The Pupil Services Coalition represents a number of state professional associations, including but not limited to School Psychologist, School Social Workers, School Nurses, California Teachers Association and Child Welfare and Attendance. County Offices of Education Leadership in School Counseling (COELSC) is a newly formed group which meets quarterly to strengthen the school counseling profession at the county level. The Student Mental Health Policy Workgroup is a committee overseen by the California Department of Education staff. Each of these committees has representation from CASC.

Alliances & Partnerships: Two significant organizational alliances emerged in 2019. A strong partnership with the Small School District Association and their Executive Director, Tim Taylor, has resulted in four keynote addresses at regional conferences and a keynote address at the California School Board Association. The second significant partnership is with the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Southern California, which is investing time and resources to influence school-based credentialed mental health staffing structures in school districts throughout California. Their work is focused on “Counselors not Cops,” aimed at reducing the number of police officers in California schools and at the misuse of LCFF funds. Their message is clear - there are limited funds for schools in California and they should be reprioritized towards more mental health services. They have collected significant data that has pointed to such things as the fact that 450,000 California students have policing staff in campus, yet have no school counselors.

The ACLU in partnership with CASC representatives meet monthly to disaggregate data, share resources, develop strategies and compile research. Over the past year, campaign components have been developed, including campaign materials, shared legislative proposals, and campaign protocols, all directed at supporting a vast statewide campaign to be launched in 2020.

Other partnerships and spheres of influence in 2019 included meetings with leadership from the College Boards, California Army National Guard, and ACT Inc. CASC is also actively involved on the Design and Advisory state-level committees tasked with developing and evaluating Multi-Tiered Systems of Support best practice protocol in California.

California Ratios: 2019 was the ninth consecutive year of increases in the hiring of school counselors statewide. This resulted in a significant reduction in student ratios for California school counselors. The draconian school counselor to student ratios of over 1:1000 just a decade ago to now 594:1 speaks volumes to the successful advocacy efforts undertaken by CASC (*See Chart I Below*). Currently the reported number of school counselors working in California PreK-12 schools is 10,416 ([DataQuest 2018-19](#)). This is an increase of 2,517 new school positions since 2011-12 school year when 7,899 positions were reported statewide. The aforementioned campaign is tasked with examining school counselor hiring practices and disaggregating data by region and level. This data is scheduled to be revealed in the Spring 2020. The ability to track school counselor employment patterns by region and level will have a significant impact on the joint campaign undertaken with the ACLU. Recent figures comparing ratios by level in schools across California demonstrates the high elementary school counselor ratios. (*See Chart II Below*). CASC will be targeting interventions to strengthen elementary school counseling in 2020.

Chart I

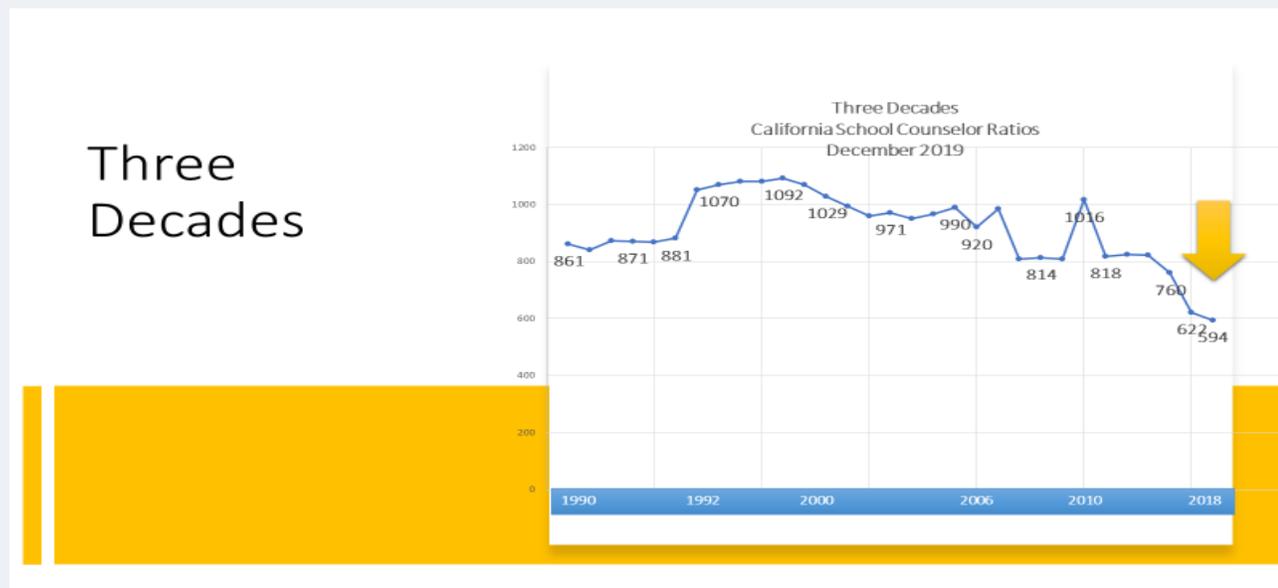
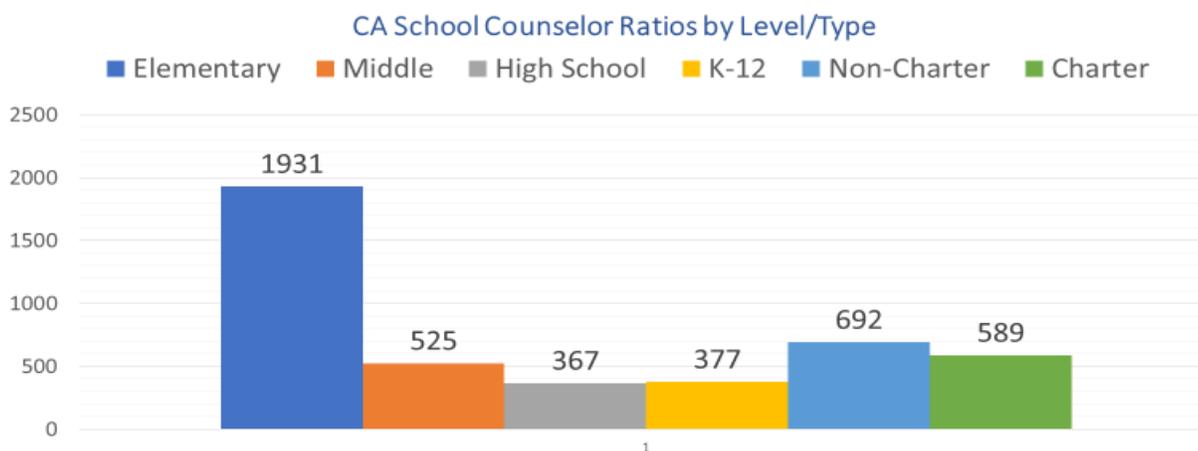


Chart II

CA School Counselor Ratios by Level/Type 2015-16



Professional Development: Multiple professional development programs were premiered in 2019, with many being hosted in the two-year-old CASC Training Center. CASC held an average of one professional development event or meeting every month. CASC has set the ambitious goal of providing school counselors with numerous high-quality continuous learning opportunities in multiple geographical areas to make professional development access easier for our members. Topics included: Creating LGBTQ Inclusive Schools, Graduate Students Resume & Interviewing Skills, Mental Health First Aid, Solution Focused Certificate, Restorative Practices, Marijuana and its Effects on Youth, Managing your Caseload, Surviving and Thriving – Supporting Underserved Students’ College Persistence and Completion, Leadership Development Institute and two large venue conferences in Northern and Southern California. CASC also co-sponsored a conference at Stanford University with the H.B. McDaniel Foundation.

Recognitions: CASC recognizes excellence in the school counseling profession through both awarding graduate student scholarships and distinguishing excellence by honoring those that have contributed to the school counseling profession. The School Counselor of the Year 2019 awardee was Josh Godinez from Corona-Norco School District. Other honorees included Rebecca Piñata as Advocate of the Year; Dr. Traci Miller, Administrator of the Year; and Megan Bier as Legislative Staff Member of the Year. At CASC annual state conference in Riverside, we publicly recognize ASCA RAMP recipients from California. We also provide an online portal featuring a number of School Counseling School Profiles.

Campaign 2020: In the development phase of the up and coming campaign, barriers to the hiring of school-based mental health service providers were identified. The ACLU and CASC team determined strategies for reducing these obstacles. The campaign includes grassroots advocacy targeting school districts and regions which have maintained high ratios. Material is being finalized to use in this effort, including interactive maps, logos, lesson plans, talking points for legislative visits, sign-on letters and informational presentations for board members and teachers. Foundational marketing materials were developed in 2019. As aforementioned, materials produce include the landmark *Best Practice Guidelines for California School Counselors* report. Best Practice for two school districts were created (Stockton USD and Hemet USD). A one-minute video featuring the role of school counselor providing mental health services in California has been viewed numerous times with other associations, including other state school counseling associations promising to follow suit.

The grassroots core message to school district leaders in 2020 will be to stop misusing funds designated for unduplicated youth and to use those funds to hire more school counselors. CASC has proposed three separate sponsored legislations for 2020. We are waiting for bill authorship and bill numbers.

- 1) Designate the first week in May as California Student Mental Health Week
- 2) Allocate emergency funds for mental health services in the aftermath of a natural disaster or school shooting.
- 3) Designate funds to educate school staff on Trauma Informed Care.

This strategic focus on CASC sponsored legislation in 2020 is to offset the well-circulated misconceptions suggesting that school counselors are only “academic counselors” and have no background or training in counseling theory and mental health services. Consequently, by advocating for greater mental health services for students, which is a tremendous need recognized by those within and outside of the school system, CASC can point to the important work being done every day by school counselors to address these needs.

Another culminating campaign activity will be held on May 15 at the San Joaquin Office of Education in Stockton, California. The *School-Based Mental Health Symposium* will host 400 individuals from throughout California who have an interest in exploring solutions to the mental health crises facing students today, with one in every five students identified as struggling with a mental health issue. CASC is in the initial phases of requesting sign-on letter by association partners and to also host a follow-up event at the capitol in Sacramento.

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