

School Counselor

Course choices, college applications, crises and everything in between, for hundreds of students at once.

TYPICAL PAY

\$64,330

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$45k to \$105k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

6 to 7 years

after high school

DEMAND

Moderate

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

Yes

regulated job

WHERE YOU WORK

Elementary, middle and high schools, community colleges, car...

How you get there

- 1 High school** Grades 11 and 12
Psychology and sociology if offered. Peer mentoring, tutoring and camp work all count later.
- 2 Bachelor's degree** 4 years
Psychology, education, sociology or social work are the usual majors. Any major is accepted by most graduate programs.
- 3 Master's in school counseling** 2 to 3 years
Usually 48 to 60 graduate credits. Look for accreditation by CACREP (the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs).
- 4 Practicum and internship** Inside the master's
Hundreds of supervised hours inside real schools, most of them with actual students, before you can be certified.
- 5 State exam and certificate** A few months
Pass your state's school counselor exam, clear a background check and apply for the certificate.

Pros and cons

- + You change specific young people's paths, and you get to see it
- + A real pension and a lighter summer schedule
- + Public Service Loan Forgiveness genuinely applies here
- Caseloads are far above what the profession recommends
- Two years of graduate school, with an unpaid internship year
- You carry other people's crises home with you

Optional boosts

College and career advising. Crisis and trauma training. Bilingual counseling. Special education knowledge.

Good to know

The recommended caseload has not changed since 1965

ASCA (the American School Counselor Association) has recommended 250 students per counselor since 1965. The national average for the 2024 to 2025 school year was 372 to 1.

Only four states hit the target

Vermont at 172 students per counselor, New Hampshire at 186, Hawaii at 243 and Colorado at 247 were the only states meeting the recommended ratio. Everywhere else, counselors carry more.

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Educational, Guidance and Career Counselors and Advisors (21-1012.00)

American School Counselor Association: school counselor roles and ratios

CACREP: accreditation of counseling programs

Texas Education Agency: educator certification

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/school-counselor>



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