

# SCHOOL COUNSELOR: A Title that Matters

South Dakota school counselors are trained to help students succeed in school and plan their career. They play an essential role in the overall school system and as part of the leadership team by creating a culture of success for all students.

Historically, they were called “guidance counselors” because their job focused primarily on guiding students to careers. As society and students’ needs have changed, the role has become more holistic. The title “school counselor” is a more accurate reflection of the work, which now encompasses three domains: academic, career, and social/emotional.

## Why does the title matter?

- In South Dakota, anyone employed as a school counselor must have the proper training and credentials to be certified as a school counselor through the South Dakota Department of Education (SDCL 13-10-17).
- Research has shown that individuals with the title “guidance counselor” are perceived as less competent than those with the title “school counselor,” (Zyromski et al., 2018) thereby devaluing their contributions to the school setting.

SCHOOL COUNSELOR	VS	GUIDANCE COUNSELOR
Employed across all grade levels, K-12		Employed mainly at the high school level
Serves all students, meeting their individual needs		Served some students with the most need
Proactive, preventative, and data-informed counseling		Reactive counseling
Focuses on providing supports within three domains (academic, career, and social/emotional) to impact student achievement		Focused mostly on mental health
Clearly defined role within a comprehensive school counseling program		Loosely defined role with no guiding program
Spends most time providing universal support for all students through classroom instruction, schoolwide programs, and individual student planning		Spent most time providing individual counseling, small group counseling, and crisis response
Integral member of the school leadership team		Ancillary support role in the school
Advocates for students (and policy change when needed) so all students receive the necessary supports to achieve success		Maintained status quo of policies and procedures, regardless of their impact on students
Advocates for all students to have access to rigorous courses		Gatekeeper of which students took rigorous courses
Advises students on multiple postsecondary pathways		Mostly helped four-year university-track students plan for college
Impact is measured via achievement, attendance, and discipline data		Impact was measured by feelings and perceptions reported by stakeholders
<b>“School Counselor” more accurately reflects these professionals’ roles, responsibilities, and training.</b>		

For more information, visit the [SD Department of Education School Counseling webpage](#) or the [School-Based Mental Health Providers in South Dakota online document](#).

Adapted from: American School Counselor Association. (n.d.). *Guidance counselor vs. school counselor*. Retrieved from: <https://schoolcounselor.org/About-School-Counseling/School-Counselor-Roles-Ratios>.  
Hatching Results. (n.d.). *What's the difference between "guidance counselors" and "school counselors"?* [Training Session Topic]. The Use of Data for Student Success, South Dakota.

References: American School Counselor Association. (n.d.). *Embrace the past, welcome the future: A brief history of school counseling*. Retrieved from: <https://schoolcounselor.org/About-School-Counseling/School-Counselor-Roles-Ratios>. American School Counselor Association. (n.d.). *Guidance counselors or school counselors: How the name of the profession influences perceptions of competence*. Retrieved from: <https://schoolcounselor.org/About-School-Counseling/School-Counselor-Roles-Ratios>. Zyromski, B., Hudson, T.D., Baker, E., & Granello, D.H. (2018). *Guidance counselors or school counselors: How the name of the profession influences perceptions of competence*. *Professional School Counseling*, 22(1), <https://doi.org/10.1177/2156759X19855654>.