



March 4, 2024

S.F. No. 1275

Letter of Concern- Minnesota School Counselor Association

Minnesota school counselors understand national, state and local requirements and programs that may affect future opportunities for college and career readiness and therefore play a critical role in academic and career planning. The school counselor takes a proactive role in assisting students, families and staff as they assess student strengths and interests and encourage the selection of a rigorous and relevant educational program supporting all students' college and career goals.

Minnesota school counselors recognize the importance of students and families understanding the variety of financial considerations and options available when pursuing post-secondary education, however, oppose adding FAFSA completion or Dream Act completion as part of the graduation requirements for students to earn their high school diplomas even with the understanding there may be some "waivers" and professional judgements that can be utilized within the current bill language.

Work-load burden and lack of school counselor positions

Minnesota school counselors already face a heavy burden with supporting students in our current reality. Minnesota is ranked 48th in the nation for student to counselor ratios with only 390 school counseling positions to serve over 280,000 students (over 700 students per school counselor position) in grades 9-12. The recommendation from the American School Counselor Association is one counselor for every 250 students based on best practice and evidence from various replicated and validated research studies. The current bill language puts the majority of direct service responsibility on Minnesota school counselors to ensure students and families are meeting the graduation requirement.

Privacy

Minnesota school counselors are experts in navigating professional ethics in regards to confidentiality and privacy laws consistent with local, state, and federal levels. Many students and families maintain a right to privacy when it comes to their financial information and data. Requiring families to submit this information as part of their graduation requirement removes their right to privacy and decision making agency students and families expect and deserve.

Equity

Minnesota school counselors recognize that not all students and families have the resources and access to successfully navigate a process like the FAFSA or Dream Act and attaching such a requirement to graduation may further complicate a student's ability to graduate high school. Minnesota students from financially disadvantaged backgrounds already face lower graduation rates compared to their peers.



(SF 1275 – Letter of Concern, Continued)

Root Causes

Minnesota school counselors recognize the many existing obstacles students and families face with obtaining a post-secondary education with the understanding that many occupations require some level of education post high school graduation.

Factors such as:
Immigration status
English fluency and comprehension
Financial literacy
Loan concerns
Cost of college attendance
Career Education
Transportation

Requiring FAFSA completion or Dream Act does not address enough of the barriers to outweigh the other concerns raised.

Suggestions

All graduation requirements at the state level in Minnesota are around academic standards and learning. Minnesota school counselors would support academic standard graduation requirements, to be included in the recent personal finance graduation requirement, providing students with knowledge to afford college covering topics such as the FAFSA, Dream Act, Scholarships, Grants, 529 plan, loan forgiveness, apprenticeships, and other alternative college financing options for students. This proposal would be more consistent with current practices and language around graduation requirements and in alignment with the purpose of education, to learn. Students can be expected to learn about these programs and options including practice applications, research, and more.

Minnesota school counselors value, understand, advocate, and support students and families in their pursuit of post-secondary education. We remain committed to finding a better solution to increase FAFSA completion rates but are adamant it cannot be attached to graduation requirements.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kelsey Dray". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

President, Minnesota School Counselor Association

