

COUNSELOR AVAILABILITY

EXAMINING POLICY LEVERS FOR ENGLISH LEARNER COURSE ACCESS

Exploring school counselor availability as a policy lever in Oregon

School counselors support students' academic, career, and social-emotional development. As part of this work, school counselors may impact course access and enrollment for students classified as English Learners (ELs).

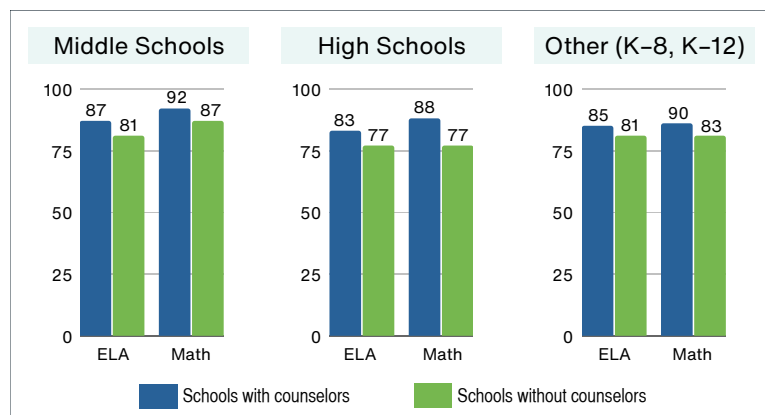
This brief explores the role of **school counselor availability** for Oregon EL-classified students enrolled in middle and high school.

Although counselor caseload is a measure that is used more widely than counselor availability, there are many Oregon schools for which counselor caseload cannot be calculated because the schools have no counselors (see p. 2 of this brief). Therefore, when conducting analysis at the school (rather than state) level, counselor caseload is problematic.

To allow for analysis at the school level, this brief uses a measure of school counselor availability that consists of the counselor full-time equivalent (FTE) available per 100 students at a particular school. For example,

- 0.2 FTE means a school has a counselor available for 8 hours per week per 100 students and
- 0.5 FTE means a school has a counselor available for 20 hours per week per 100 students.

Percentages of Oregon EL-Classified Students at the Secondary Level Enrolled in ELA and Math, by Counselor Availability and School Type



Data: Oregon Department of Education, 2014/15 – 2018/19

Secondary EL-classified students in schools with some counselor FTE versus those with none show higher enrollment in ELA and mathematics

Among Oregon middle and high school EL-classified students, those in schools with any counselor FTE are more likely to be enrolled in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics courses than their peers in schools without counselors. The greatest difference is in math courses at high schools, where 88 percent of EL-classified students in high schools with counselors are enrolled in a math course, compared to 77 percent of EL-classified students in high schools without counselors. Though not shown above, these patterns are similar for science and social studies.

Among schools with any counselor FTE, a higher FTE was not associated with higher rates of core content enrollment for EL-classified students at the secondary level.

School counselors may help ensure students are enrolled in the courses they need to graduate. On the other hand, schools with counselors are larger (see p. 2 of this brief) and may simply have more robust content course offerings.

Why do some schools in Oregon have no school counselors?

Oregon requires that all districts and schools have a comprehensive school counseling program (OAR 581-022-2060). However, this policy allows a variety of people, such as social workers and interdisciplinary teams, to implement the counseling program and does not require the presence of a licensed school counselor.

In addition, there is a shortage of counselors across the country and in Oregon. The counselor shortage is particularly pronounced in rural areas, and individuals preparing to become school counselors frequently get hired by districts on emergency licenses.

The overall student-to-school-counselor ratio has dropped in Oregon in recent years from 511:1 in 2015/16 to 374:1 in 2020/21, but this is still well above the 250:1 ratio recommended by the American School Counselor Association.

Many schools that EL-classified students attend have no counselors, but most EL-classified students do attend schools with counselors

Among schools attended by EL-classified students at the secondary level, there are substantial percentages that have no school counselors: 13 percent for middle schools, 17 percent for high schools, and 47 percent for other schools, such as K-8 and K-12 schools. However, the vast majority of secondary EL-classified students do attend schools with counselors. This seeming paradox is because schools without counselors are much smaller, on average, than other schools.

High schools attended by EL-classified students tend to have somewhat higher counselor FTEs than middle schools or other types of schools for secondary students (e.g., K-8 or K-12).

Counselor Availability for Schools Attended by Secondary EL-Classified Students

	Middle Schools	High Schools	Other (K-8, K-12)
Schools with no counselors	13%	17%	47%
EL students in schools with no counselors	5%	4%	26%
Average counselor FTE per 100 students	0.25 (10 hours/week)	0.31 (12.4 hours/week)	0.26 (10.4 hours/week)

Data: Oregon Department of Education, 2014/15 – 2018/19

Key Takeaways

- From 2014/15 to 2018/19, rates of course enrollment in math and ELA were higher for secondary EL-classified students who attended schools with counselors, compared with students who attended schools without counselors.
- Many schools serving secondary EL-classified students, particularly K-8 and K-12 schools, had no counselors. However, schools with no counselors tended to be small. Most EL-classified students attended schools with counselors.
- While schools and districts in Oregon must have a comprehensive school counseling program, they are not required to have licensed school counselors on staff.