



Strengthening Students' Pathways to Success

Across Indiana, too many students face limited earning potential and weak prospects for satisfying careers and lives after high school. Many schools are struggling to help them do better because they lack strong counseling programs that integrate social and emotional support with effective academic, college and career counseling.

Believing that school counselors who have the time, resources and training to develop strong, one-on-one relationships with their students can significantly improve their life prospects, Lilly Endowment launched the Comprehensive Counseling Initiative for Indiana K-12 Students. The five-year initiative will help public school corporations and charter schools create new approaches to school counseling that address the academic, college and career, as well as social and emotional counseling needs of their students. The Endowment is allocating up to \$30 million for the initiative, which includes a planning grant phase and a competitive implementation phase.

Comprehensive school counseling includes various approaches to advising and supporting students, including digital exploration of academic and career options (above) and strong one-on-one relationships between school counselors and their students (right).

In September, the Endowment announced the initiative and invited public school corporations and charter schools to submit planning grant proposals to help them assess their current counseling programs, identify and study best practice programs, engage community partners and develop a strategy for improving their counseling programs. They can then seek an implementation grant under the competitive phase of the initiative.



In November, the Endowment, in cooperation with the Indiana Youth Institute (IYI), Indiana Chamber of Commerce, Center of Excellence in Leadership of Learning (CELL) at the University of Indianapolis and Fleck Education, held conferences in Indianapolis, Evansville and South Bend so educators could learn more about the initiative and about available resources to help them prepare proposals.

More than 400 representatives from school corporations and charter schools attended the sessions. Together they discussed the challenges and best practices in the counseling field and shared information about good work already taking place in Indiana.

In December, more than 280 school corporations and charter schools submitted planning grant proposals seeking up to \$50,000 depending on size of enrollment. Although the proposals reflect diverse approaches and concerns, the following themes emerged in several proposals:

- **School counselors want to spend more time one-on-one with students, learning about their needs and developing plans to help meet those needs.**
- **Superintendents, principals, counselors and teachers are motivated to research what is working in school districts and charter schools beyond their communities and explore whether other approaches could work in their own schools.**
- **School leaders want to connect with business leaders, parents, health professionals and others in their communities to learn how school-community partnerships could improve and magnify the impact of their counseling efforts.**

Strengthening school counseling can help more students complete post-secondary degrees, which also is an objective of the annual College Goal Sunday (below), an Endowment-supported program of the Indiana Student Financial Aid Association.

The stakes are high for students and communities across Indiana. The state's current school counseling challenges are part of a larger landscape of lagging indicators of educational attainment and economic prosperity, which jeopardizes long-term quality of life for students, their families and their communities.

Research conducted by the Indiana Chamber, in partnership with CELL, in 2014 found that too few schools in Indiana use a best practices comprehensive counseling model to prepare students for successful lives beyond high school. Among the findings: school counselors often are burdened with large caseloads, which limit their ability to help students. According to the National Association of College Admission Counseling, Indiana ranks 45th among the 50 states and the District of Columbia in the number of



K-12 students per counselor, with an average of one counselor for every 620 students.

The Indiana Chamber's research also found that Indiana school counselors often are assigned noncounseling responsibilities – such as administering state tests or Advanced Placement exams – that further limit their availability to provide academic, college, career, and social and emotional counseling.

In addition, students in Indiana struggle with mental health issues at a higher rate than their peers in most other states, which negatively affects their ability to learn and thrive. According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation's 2016 Kids Count Profile, Indiana ranks 30th in the nation in the overall well-being of children and youth. And in its 2014 *Issue Brief*, IYI reported that in a national survey of 43 states, Indiana ranked first in the percentage of high school students who had considered attempting suicide and second in the percentage of high school students who attempted to take their own lives.

According to U.S. Census data, in 2014 Indiana ranked 43rd in the nation in the percentage of adults, ages 25 to 64, with at least a bachelor's degree. In 2015, a U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis report ranked Indiana 39th in the nation in per capita income, having slipped from 29th in the nation since 1995.

Tami Silverman, president and CEO of IYI, which has consulted with scores of Indiana public school corporations and charter schools in connection with the Endowment's counseling initiative, says that stronger, more comprehensive counseling programs can help to reverse Indiana's negative trends.



“Enabling more students to develop nurturing, one-on-one relationships with their counselors or other school personnel or community partners in a best practice counseling program is key to putting Indiana students on pathways to success. The current average ratio of students to counselor, however, makes it very difficult for counselors to have an effective one-on-one relationship with their students,” Silverman says. “It’s encouraging, though, to see the overwhelming response to this initiative from schools across Indiana. Superintendents, principals, counselors, teachers and community partners are working hard to re-imagine their approach to helping their students thrive.”

The Endowment plans to make grants under the competitive, implementation grant phase of the initiative in the fall of 2017. Public school corporations and charter schools can request grants ranging from \$100,000 to more than \$3 million, based on a formula of \$100 per student enrolled. The grants can be used during a four-year period.

Under the initiative, the Endowment in 2017 also will offer grant opportunities to Indiana colleges and universities to enhance their counselor education programs so that their



graduates are better prepared to work in a comprehensive counseling program and to enhance their principal education programs so their graduates are prepared to supervise and support comprehensive counseling programs in their schools.

The counseling initiative is encouraging schools to partner with community organizations, such as the Center for Leadership Development (above).