

Dear Supporter of Montana Students' Access to Professional School Counselors,

We need your help to maintain the current school counselor to student ratio of 400 to 1. This long standing mandate (known as Rule 10.55.710) is under review this year. In the Spring, the Chapter 55 Negotiated Rulemaking Committee was not able to come to consensus regarding keeping this ratio in place. Montana School Counselor Association's Executive Director at the time, Renee' Schoening, fought tirelessly for this ratio and our members and advocates provided public comment asking to maintain the ratio. The Board of Public Education was presented the OPI's proposed changes (with the ratio removed). The Board of Public Education is now taking public comment about these proposed changes and we need your help.

Rule 10.55.710 sets the minimum standard for the funding of school counselors at 400:1. The American School Counselor Association has recommended a counselor - to - student ratio of 250:1 for over 30 years now. The more students that are on any given school counselor's caseload, the more our most vulnerable citizens could potentially slip through the cracks. With mental health issues, including youth suicide, at an all-time high across Montana, now's the time to improve mental services, not cut them. On top of mental health services, school counselors provide social emotional, career and academic support; preventative curriculum based on school data; short term individual and group counseling, referrals for long-term support and much more. These are just a few examples of services that are at risk if the ratio is removed.

Unfortunately, additional recommendations were made for removing the ratios for superintendents, principals, librarians as well as school counselors. These recommendations could exacerbate the statewide staff shortages rather than provide a solution that will benefit students. All of the proposed changes can be viewed in the [Notice of Public Hearing](#).

With your voice added to the chorus, there is hope. The final say rests with our 9-member state Board of Public Education (BPE). They are receiving public comment at bpe@mt.gov through November 4, 2022. Your comments will become part of the permanent public record. You may also request to testify virtually by zoom during BPE public hearing in Helena, which starts at 9 am, on October 31. Some of you may be able to testify at the state capital in person. The BPE will vote on the various proposed rule changes at a meeting tentatively scheduled in Bozeman on November 17-18. Your input is critical.

A suggested message might read like this. If you or your child has been impacted by a school counselor, please share how they have been a support.

"Dear Board of Public Education,

I am a (job title) at (workplace) in (town). Please retain the 400:1 school counselor-to-student ratio rule in 10.55.710 because (state your reason). Thank you for your service.

*Sincerely,
(Your name)"*