

**The Eleven-Month Challenge:**  
*22 Recommendations for Improving the Transition from  
High School to College*

The Joyce Ivy Foundation  
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The Joyce Ivy Foundation  
P.O. Box 2396  
Ann Arbor, MI 48103  
Ph: 734-661-0229  
[info@joyceivyfoundation.org](mailto:info@joyceivyfoundation.org)

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## **The Eleven-Month Challenge:** *22 Recommendations for Improving the Transition from High School to College*

### **Section 1: Executive Summary**

As any parent of older children knows, high school seniors have decisions to make.

While many are of the “What do I wear to the prom?” variety, some carry longer-term consequences. These more important decisions deserve all the assistance parents can contribute as the very future of their children is at stake. Other adults --teachers, counselors, school administrators-- who touch the lives of high school students also can and do influence many of these choices.

This report addresses perhaps the most important choice a teenager faces in his or her young life: what path to take following high school.

An important fork in the road for every high school senior is the choice between continuing his or her education after graduation and working fulltime. In Michigan, nearly nine of ten choose the path of continuing their educational journey, which in turn only leads to an even more difficult decision: where should I continue my formal education after high school? Unfortunately, not all of them are getting all the help and counsel they need to evaluate their options.

The 87% of Michigan high school students who continue their education after high school all endure the same critical evaluation period: a very short window of approximately eleven months over the second half of their junior year and the first four months of their senior year when they and their families must make choices first about the type and location of postsecondary schools, and, ultimately, the specific educational institution they will apply to and ultimately attend. This report commissioned and prepared by the Joyce Ivy Foundation provides a window into how well Michigan high school students are served during this important period in their lives, and proposes changes to assist students in making better decisions about their future education.

In November and December of 2007, the Joyce Ivy Foundation approached more than 1000 high school guidance counselors in the State of Michigan, asking each of them via survey how well the educational and social systems were helping high school juniors and seniors with their post-high school planning. This resulting Joyce Ivy Foundation 2008 Michigan Counselor Report includes the responses of more than 400 counselors. These counselors report that both the quantity and quality of counseling resources are insufficient, and as a result the quality of post-high school planning decision outcomes suffers. Actions clearly are required to improve the situation.

Based on the input provided by counselors, the Joyce Ivy Foundation believes students, parents, and Michigan secondary and postsecondary educators and administrators must individually and collectively act to improve the quality of, and access to, the information necessary for students to make the best possible choices among their post-high school

options. The decisions taken during this important 11-month period often represent life-changing choices for a student, and yet insufficient resources currently are dedicated to assisting young people in this process. Students, parents, teachers, guidance counselors, high school administrators, colleges and universities, and government officials in the State all share responsibility for improving the quality of decisions made by young people in their post-high school planning process.

### **Twenty-two Recommendations: A Summary**

#### **The State and its public secondary educational institutions should:**

- 1. Mandate a meeting take place no later than February of junior year in high school between the counselor, the student, and the parent/guardian to plan for the student's post-high school education selection process*
- 2. Mandate a post-high school Planning Evening for students and parents in every public high school in the State to be offered every fall of every year*
- 3. Increase the amount of professional guidance counseling resources in public high schools such that over time no individual counselor caseload exceeds 250 students*
- 4. Underwrite a statewide license on behalf of all local school districts of a college admission data collection and planning software tool, to include admission outcome, GPA, and test scores, and a comprehensive course selection and career and postsecondary advising aid; pool and provide public access to school, county and statewide data collected through the tool*

5. *Require all public and private colleges and universities in the State to accept the Common Application or a Michigan-based equivalent; limit all public and private colleges and universities in the State to no more than one supplemental essay and one supplemental question*
6. *Create a statewide database of educational scholarships available for Michigan high school students*
7. *Hire para-professionals in each high school to absorb the testing and administrative responsibilities currently carried out by professional guidance counselors, freeing these same counselors to devote more time to higher value-added counseling activities with their students*

**Counselors should:**

8. *Ensure the broadest range of post-high school options are considered in their initial meeting with student and parent(s) in 11<sup>th</sup> grade.*
9. *Ensure student and parent(s) have ready email access to the counselor*
10. *Evaluate consolidation of, or greater coordination among, the multiple counseling associations in the State to provide a stronger voice to their legislative and funding reform efforts*
11. *Encourage academic programs during the summers following 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade for their most promising students*

**High School teachers should:**

12. *Encourage students to begin preparation for their post-high school decision process early in 11<sup>th</sup> grade*
13. *Orient 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade class assignments to promote post-high school decision-making and planning, particularly taking a lead role in assisting with the assignment of classroom essays that can serve double duty as college application essays.*

**Michigan colleges and universities should:**

14. *Join and support the use of the Common Application or a Michigan-state equivalent*
15. *Introduce in their Schools of Education curricula specific courses on college admission counseling for those studying to become guidance counselors*

**Parents should:**

16. *Provide the necessary encouragement to their child as they tackle this challenging yet impactful eleven-month task.*
17. *Manage the timeline and quarterback the overall process, beginning in January of 11<sup>th</sup> grade and continuing until the final application is submitted.*
18. *Ensure they and their child have email and phone access to their high school counselor*

**Students should:**

19. *Increase the investment of time spent in the second half of their 11<sup>th</sup> grade year and in the summer between 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade exploring post high-school options*
20. *Familiarize themselves with both the Common Application (or Michigan equivalent) website as well as the Statewide data tool prior to the start of their 12<sup>th</sup> grade year*
21. *Investigate spending time at an on-campus academic program at a college or university in the summers following sophomore or junior year*
22. *Review the complete statewide database of scholarships available to high school students*

## **Section 2: Survey and Interview Findings**

The Joyce Ivy Foundation surveyed high school guidance counselors in the State of Michigan in November and December of 2007 via an online survey, and supplemented these surveys with interviews and focus groups. The findings in this report are based on data from surveys filled out by 406 high school guidance counselors in Michigan from more than 350 high schools. These high schools represent more than 50% of the high school population in the State, and include urban, rural, and suburban schools as well as private and public institutions. The Michigan Association for College Admission Counseling (MACAC) and the Association of Michigan School Counselors (AMSC) assisted in the distribution of the survey to their members.

### Overall Findings

Counselors report that their students are continuing with educational programs after high school: 52% of Michigan high school students matriculate to four-year programs, 28% continue on to two-year programs or community colleges, and 7% pursue a trade school program after high school. Only 13% of Michigan high school students forego any education after high school, and instead choose to enter the workforce.

Of those students who continue on to four-year programs, 63% remain in-state and attend Michigan colleges and universities.

The dominant counseling model for high school guidance counselors in the State is a generalist model. Only 5.5% of counselors specialize in counseling seniors or juniors and seniors. Seventy percent of all counselors are responsible for 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grades in their high school.

Michigan high school guidance counselors are experienced, averaging a little more than ten years of counseling experience; nearly one in four has more than 16 years counseling experience.

Counselor workloads are high and growing. The average high school guidance counselor in Michigan is currently responsible for 362 students. Among the State's largest high schools, those with over 1200 students, the average counselor is responsible for 390 students. More than one out of every three guidance counselors in Michigan carries a workload of more than 400 students; one out of every twelve counselors serves more than 500 students. In Nebraska, where the Joyce Ivy Foundation is conducting similar analysis, the average high school counselor is responsible for 265 students, 27% fewer than their Michigan counterparts.

This survey data from the Joyce Ivy Foundation 2008 Michigan Counselor Survey comports with 2005 survey data published by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA), drawing on data compiled by the National Center for Education Statistics. In 2005, the ASCA estimated the average student caseload of a Michigan high school counselor to be 351.

If the significant current workloads were not already enough, the trend is upward. Fifty-seven percent of Michigan counselors today report a higher student workload than three years ago, confirming today's higher workloads than the 2005 ASCA data. Only 7% report a reduction in the number of students counseled relative to three years ago.

With the ASCA data as a starting point, the Joyce Ivy Foundation data indicates a 1.0% per annum increase in average counselor workload over the past three years. More concerning, of course, is Michigan's perpetually weak showing in its investment in counseling resources compared with the rest of the United States. The 2005 ASCA data ranks Michigan 47<sup>th</sup> out of 50 states in average high school counselor workload.

Economic conditions provide little excuse for these higher workloads: other Midwest/industrial states such as Ohio, Indiana, Pennsylvania, and Illinois all enjoy much lower student-to-counselor ratios than does Michigan, as do states with much lower income per capita.

These workloads often prevent counselors from playing a primary role in helping students decide whether and how to pursue further education after high school. A 2005 survey of young adults in Michigan commissioned by the Your Child organization found that only 16% of recent high school graduates said they were helped by a guidance counselor in their postsecondary decision (EPIC-MRA/Your Child Survey of Post High School Experience: First 12 Years, Fall 2005).

A shockingly small percentage of guidance counselor time is devoted to post-high school planning for individual students: counselors report spending an average of 29% of their time working on post-high school plans with individual students and their families. Instead, what the profession labels “responsive services,” which includes reacting to incidents and immediate needs among their student caseload, consume 25% of counselor time. Another 30% of a counselor’s time is absorbed with administration and paperwork, much of it attributable to their increasing role and duties in administering tests and curriculum changes. The remainder of their time is consumed by broad-based guidance (e.g. group counseling) at 9%, and other activities at 7%.

Not surprisingly, when all these activities are taken into account, only one in twelve Michigan counselors report spending more than 60% of their time counseling students on their plans to attend four-year universities or colleges. The vast majority, more than 75% of counselors, spend less than 40% of their time counseling students on their plans to attend four-year colleges or universities.

Counselors believe students at both ends of the spectrum suffer from lack of attention to post-high school plans. Forty-five percent of all counselors disagree with the statement that “I have adequate information and time to work with the most gifted students as they apply to the most selective colleges and universities in the United States.” Forty-seven percent of counselors disagree with the statement that “I have adequate information and time to work with the least talented students” on their post-high school plans.

In their efforts to catch students earlier in their high school careers, just 28% of all counselors agree with the statement “I have adequate information and time to work with sophomores and juniors to find summer academic programs if they are so interested.”

Most counselors also state the time-intensive needs of seniors cannibalize counselor time that might instead be devoted to the important early-stage planning needs of sophomores and juniors.

Confirming state and national statistics that point toward higher matriculation rates for female students to four-year colleges and universities, 32% of counselors report that greater proportions of their female students continue on to four-year programs than do male students. Only 1% of counselors report higher matriculation rates for males.

Counselors feel their students are well informed about higher education choices within the State of Michigan, but these same counselors struggle when trying to provide information about colleges and universities outside Michigan. Only 10% of all counselors disagree with the statement “Students in our high school have access to adequate information about colleges and universities throughout the state of Michigan.” But for schools outside Michigan, only 56% feel their students are adequately informed about educational options outside the State. Given that nearly one in five Michigan seniors matriculates to a postsecondary institution outside Michigan, this information gap is likely impairing the quality of decisions made by these students.

Yet, for all of their current challenges, when asked about the longer-term trends in Michigan, high school counselors are more upbeat. Forty-three percent of all counselors believe the quality of high school counseling in Michigan has improved over the past decade, 30% believe it has stayed the same, while 27% feel the quality of counseling has deteriorated.

The Joyce Ivy Foundation Counselor Survey also captured differences in counselor responses among suburban, urban, and rural schools; between private and public schools; and between small and large schools. The survey also identified several important differences in high school guidance counseling among these populations.

#### Rural Schools Lag Urban and Suburban Counterparts in Some Areas

There are slight, though surprising, differences in high school guidance counseling between Michigan's urban, suburban, and rural schools.

To begin with, workloads are highest for rural school counselors and lowest for urban counselors. The average counselor in a rural school is responsible for 383 students, versus 361 students for counselors in suburban schools, versus 341 in urban schools.

Workloads are increasing across all three types of schools, and at approximately the same rate.

Counselors in urban, suburban, and rural schools spend their time in similar proportions. The average counselor in all three of these categories spends between 27 and 30% of his or her time on post-high school planning for individual students.

But rural students continue onto four-year colleges at a lower rate than the 52% state average and lower than their suburban and urban counterparts. Rural counselors report just 43% of their students continue on to four-year postsecondary programs, compared to 50% of students at urban schools, and 59% at suburban schools. Conversely, fully 26% of rural students wind up working or in trade school after high school, versus 22% of urban students, and just 15% of suburban students.

Are rural students so less academically qualified to justify these lower rates of matriculation to four-year colleges? Lower perceptions of the affordability of postsecondary education on the part of rural students and their families as well as stronger ties to agricultural careers that do not necessarily demand postsecondary education may explain lower matriculation rates, but lower investment in guidance counseling in rural schools may also suppress the number of rural students pursuing postsecondary education.

There is little difference across these three categories of schools as to whether counselors believe they have adequate resources to allow them to sufficiently counsel students on their post-high school education plans, or in their ability to counsel sophomores and juniors about summer academic programs. Between 75 and 80% of counselors in each

category believe they have access to adequate resources to counsel students. Likewise, there is little difference among these types of schools with respect to whether counselors believe that students overall receive adequate counseling: 68% of urban counselors, 63% of suburban counselors and 63% of rural counselors believe their students receive adequate counseling.

While the vast majority of counselors feel they have adequate information about in-state colleges and universities, there are differences in the degree to which counselors believe students have adequate information about out-of-state colleges and universities. Fifty-eight percent of urban counselors and 57% of suburban counselors believe they have adequate information about out-of-state options for their students, but only 50% of rural counselors feel the same way.

The most gifted students appear to get more attention in urban schools. Fifty-six percent of urban counselors believe they have adequate information and time to work with the most gifted students as they applied to the most selective colleges and universities in the U.S., while only 44% of suburban counselors share that opinion. Only 33% of rural counselors believe they are providing adequate information and time to their most gifted students.

Counselors in urban schools are the least experienced, although the experience gap is small. Urban counselors average 10.1 years versus 11.4 years for suburban counselors and 11.2 years for rural counselors.

Overall, rural students receive less guidance counseling than other students in the state, and may be suffering the consequences in lower matriculation rates to two-year and four-year postsecondary programs.

### The Advantage of Private High School Counseling

Private high schools in the State perform better on every dimension of guidance counseling than public high schools. To begin with, private schools in the State provide their students with more counseling resources: guidance counselors in public high schools on average are responsible for 376 students. Guidance counselors in private schools carry a workload of just 250 students. The difference in this ratio is significant: each student in a private high school in the State receives 50% more time and attention from counselors than does a student in a public high school in the State.

But when it comes to post-high school planning for individual students, this 50% gap widens even further. Burdened with greater administrative and incident-response duties, public school counselors devote just 27% of their time to postsecondary counseling as compared to 44% for their private school counterparts.

Thus, the combination of these two factors --50% greater available time, and fewer administrative and incident-response duties-- allow *private school counselors to commit*

*two and half times as much time to the postsecondary planning process for each student as do public school counselors.* This private school versus public school college planning gap in the State inevitably and invariably leads to less informed and lower quality decision-making on the part of public school students and their families.

Not only do private school guidance counselors have more time to devote to each student, they are also more experienced with an average of 14 years of experience compared with 11 years for public school counselors.

When asked directly whether they have adequate resources to counsel students on post-high school plans, 93% of private school counselors say they do versus only 76% of public school counselors. Sixty-two percent of private school counselors in the State report having enough time to work with sophomores and juniors to find summer academic programs; only 25% of public school counselors agree they have enough time to do so.

The gap is also wide for the most gifted students in Michigan schools. In private schools, 69% of counselors report having adequate time and information to help gifted students to gain admission to the most selective colleges and universities in the United States. For gifted students in public schools, only 40% of counselors report having adequate time and information to work with their best students. For the least talented students in their schools, the gap is even wider: 76% of private school counselors report having adequate time for these students versus only 38% for public school counselors.

While equal proportions of public and private school counselors believe that students are adequately informed about colleges and universities in Michigan, private school counselors feel much more comfortable that they are providing adequate information to their students about opportunities outside the State of Michigan.

In summary, 86% of private school counselors believe their students receive adequate counseling about post-high school education plans; only 62% of public school counselors make the same statement.

Increasing workloads are also a greater problem in Michigan's public schools than in private schools: 59% of public school counselors report increasing workloads, while only 37% of private school counselors report increasing workloads. Thus, the gap between public and private school guidance counseling will likely widen in the future.

However, these public school-private school counseling differences should be evaluated in the context of the differing student populations in these two types of schools. Eighty-seven percent of private high school students continue on to four-year colleges or universities with less than 2% choosing work or a trade-school, allowing private high school counselors to devote greater time and attention to the specific task of sorting and providing advice on four-year options. Public school counselors face a more significant and diverse challenge: 14% of their students choose to enter the workforce directly from high school, 37% a trade school or community college, and only 50% continue on to a

four-year postsecondary institution. Thus, the public school counselor is required to develop expertise on a wider variety of postsecondary paths than his or her private school counterpart.

#### The effect of high school size on Counseling

Smaller high schools produce a better counseling environment according to responses in the survey.

Counselors in high schools with more than 1000 students have an average workload of 393 students; counselors in high schools with fewer than 1000 students have an average workload of 335 students.

Workloads are increasing most rapidly in high schools with more than 1400 students as 69% of counselors in these schools say they counsel more students than they did three years ago, versus only 50% of counselors in high schools with fewer than 1400 students.

Counselors in small high schools devote slightly more time to post-high school planning. Counselors in high schools with fewer than 1000 students devote 31% of their time to this activity; counselors in high schools with more than 1400 students devote 27% of their time to this activity.

In general, there is little difference across school size as to how counselors feel about the adequacy of time and information to work with their students. However, 47% of

counselors from high schools with less than 1000 students agree they have adequate time to work with their least gifted students; only 35% of counselors at high schools with more than 1000 students feel the same.

#### Counselor comments on High Workloads and Their Causes

Michigan guidance counselors assert one factor dominates in preventing high school students from receiving the best possible post-high school counseling: workloads, and the resulting lack of available time to spend with students. “High numbers of student/counselors ratio,” “too many students per counselor” and “insufficient time” are nearly universal feelings among counselors surveyed. (Appendix A contains the verbatim responses of all survey respondents to this survey question)

“Time is the biggest barrier. I am one person to 450 students, their parents and their step parents, and their guardians,” wrote one counselor. Another states “Counselors have too large a student load that prevents communication with their entire case load.”

In addition to the high student to counselor ratios, many counselors cite the increased administrative burden placed on their doorsteps by an educational system that has not been able to offload this work to para-professionals. “I have too much paperwork, too many duties assigned,” says one counselor. “This year there are no office assistants to help run (hall) passes,” says another. “In a building of over 2200 students, it is becoming nearly impossible to even get students to our offices.”

“We are swamped by testing, organizing testing, and administering testing,” wrote one counselor. Another states “Testing is my biggest barrier. I spent the whole month of October testing, reading rules, pre-filling forms and actual testing, boxing and sending them back; (I spend time on) MEAP, PSAT, MME, PLAN, EXPLORE and ACT on a Saturday. I will need to review these results quickly with all 450 students (assigned to me). It is challenging to do this and everything else.”

“With case loads far exceeding the recommended 250 to 1 ratios and the ever-increasing duties being added to counselors – MME, Michigan Merit Curriculum and Personal Curriculum all being added on the shoulders of school counselors- it is unreasonable to expect that counselors can provide the type of service outlined in a comprehensive guidance and counseling program,” says a high school counselor.

“Anything that does not fit anywhere else is given to the counselors,” observes one counselor. “We have too many responsibilities that take away from counseling students.”

One counselor summarized the barrier this way: “There is a lack of awareness of the importance of guidance (counseling) by the administration and by the public.”

Most worrisome are the counselors who say they have become disillusioned: “(There is no) public awareness of the need for counselors in the high school. Due to budgetary constraints, our high school never replaced one counselor who retired, leaving one counselor for almost 500 students.

“Then, the new graduation requirements were implemented along with the new personal curriculum requirements, each of which falls into the counselor’s arena of responsibility. To top it off, in order to meet the new requirements, many Michigan high schools are switching to trimesters, which have resulted in even more scheduling work for the counseling office.

“Because of this, my position has become that of a glorified clerk for schedule changes (and testing). My job has changed drastically over the past five years leaving me disillusioned with a job I used to love because of what I was able to do to help students. As a result, I am retiring much sooner than I had originally planned.”

“No one understands my job,” says another counselor, “(and) because no one understands my job, they keep dumping more unnecessary jobs my way or cutting guidance staff. I have been a guidance counselor for 30 years. Twenty years ago, we saw each junior and senior individually to plan their future goals and assist them in making their plans. (Today) there is no time allowed for that anymore because now I have been told to coordinate and administer all of the testing programs, the EDPs, and now we change schedules three times a year!”

### The Counselor Voice and its Impact

In its work to conduct the survey and evaluate the survey results, the Joyce Ivy Foundation found a concerned, yet fragmented counselor community with several

different organizations attempting to represent the counselor community in Lansing and with other governmental entities. As a result, the lobbying voice for the counselors is muted relative to other interest groups with simpler and more unified organizations representing their interests.

Among the organizations representing and/or assisting high school counselors in improving counseling are: the Michigan Association for College Admission Counseling (MACAC), the Association of Michigan School Counselors (AMSC), the Michigan School Counselor Association (MSCA), and the North Central Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES), and the Michigan Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (MACRAO).

While each of these organizations provides some unique services and information, because they operate autonomously their voices are fragmented, and so the influence of the State's 1000-plus high school guidance counselors remains muted.

### **Section 3: Recommendations**

High school counselors in the State of Michigan clearly state the need for an overhaul of the approach to guidance counseling in the State. The changes required to provide better advice and guidance to high school seniors are varied, interrelated, and involve change among multiple parties in the state.

The Joyce Ivy Foundation recommends that the participants in this process take action on several fronts.

#### **The State and its public secondary educational institutions should:**

1. *Mandate a meeting take place no later than February* of junior year between the counselor, the student, and the parent/guardian to plan the path that will lead to the student's post-high school path. At this meeting, the counselor needs to facilitate an open and honest dialogue with the student and parent(s) about the realistic post-high school options for the student, taking into consideration finances, location, and possible areas of academic or work interest. The counselor needs to outline a clear eleven-month game plan for the student to follow. This plan should include a schedule of the tests (ACT, SAT, and SAT II) that will need to be taken by the following December, the in-person visits that should be made to colleges of interest, and the application schedule and application strategy the student should follow during fall of senior year. (E.g.

whether to apply “early decision” at schools, when to apply during rolling admission cycles, when to have essays, recommendations, and applications completed). Every student in Michigan deserves a thorough individual conference by February with a qualified guidance counselor who has prepared an eleven-month plan for the balance of the calendar year. Without this meeting, time and resources are likely to be wasted and opportunities missed by the student and his or her parents. The meeting should result in completion of a mandated eleven-month work plan for the student.

2. *Mandate a post-high school Planning Evening* for students and parents in every public high school in the State to be offered every fall of every year to educate parents and students on the planning process and create awareness of available resources including area and regional college fairs. Students and parents need to be stimulated ahead of the crucial February meeting, and every public high school in the State should be required to hold a Planning Evening in the fall during which the guidance staff and other school administrators provide both panel discussions regarding the upcoming eleven-month planning cycle, as well as invite college admissions officers to participate.

In addition, both MACAC and MACRAO sanction and support several dozen area college fairs throughout the State that offer “one-stop shopping or browsing” in many cases for parents and students alike, providing opportunities to speak to dozens of college representatives in one evening. Yet another organization, the National Association of College Admissions Counselors, hosts

two large national college fairs in Michigan that offer yet another day for families to access information about in-state and out-of-state postsecondary institutions. School administrators should vigorously promote attendance at these fairs, including organizing school-sponsored trips to these fairs. In particular, public high schools should strengthen their ties to MACRAO and MACAC so that forums and fairs sponsored by these organizations are better attended.

- 3. Increase the amount of professional guidance counseling resources in public high schools such that over time no individual counselor caseload exceeds 250 students.* The State of Michigan invests far too much in the education and preparation of students over a 13-year period to shortchange the investment in the critical final step of a public school student's educational career. Counselor workloads are simply too high in the State of Michigan, and are among the highest in the United States. The State should move to immediately increase the investment in guidance counseling by first recommending, and then mandating if necessary, that every public high school in the State lower the average caseload in public high schools from the current levels of 376 down to 250. This would be a modest goal. At a caseload of 250 students per counselor, Michigan would rank just 30th among all States in the U.S. Assuming the full cost for one guidance counselor (compensation, benefits, office space and support) at \$100,000 per year, the guidance counseling expenditure for a high school of 1000 high school students would need to increase \$134,000 to lower the average

caseload from 376 to 250, or an additional \$134 per high school student (\$41 per student on a K-12 measured basis). For this amount, Michigan public high school counselor caseloads would match those of private high schools in the State. With approximately 600,000 public high school students in the State, the total cost of this reallocation of funds for the entire state would be \$80 million, before taking into account efficiencies outlined in a later recommendation. The Joyce Ivy Foundation believes that most local school budgets offer opportunities to reallocate funds from other areas to increase the guidance-counseling budget by \$134 per high school student without additional revenue-raising. This reallocation of resources would be among the most impactful changes local school districts could make to improve the outcomes and future success of their high school students.

4. *Underwrite a statewide license on behalf of all local school districts of a college data collection and software planning tool, to include admission outcome, GPA, and test scores, and a comprehensive course selection and postsecondary advising aid; pool and provide public access to school, county, and statewide data collected through the tool.* The college admissions process is remarkably opaque, with limited data provided by colleges and universities as to how particular cohorts and populations of students fare in the admissions process. This lack of data has given rise to imperfect and controversial college ratings compiled by publications like U.S. News and World Report. High schools themselves can and should compile admissions data, based on the college admissions experience of their own students. This data (admissions success,

GPA, test scores) can be collected and collated without tying it to an individual student's name, and will provide a more precise guide of admission success rates for students of various profiles at different schools. Sophisticated commercial software data tools that collect and analyze the application outcome allow counselors, students, and parents to assess likely outcomes for different application strategies. The State of Michigan should develop a data collection protocol that would mandate collection of GPA, test score, and admissions success data, and then aggregate this data by school, county, and state to aid guidance counselors in their counseling, and parents and students in their decision-making.

5. *Require all public and private colleges and universities in the State to accept the Common Application or a Michigan-based equivalent; limit all public and private colleges and universities in the State to no more than one supplemental essay and one supplemental question.* Most of the highly selective colleges and universities in the United States use what is known as the Common Application, and some require minimal use of supplemental forms. For example, Dartmouth College and Williams College, two of the most selective higher educational institutions in the United States, distinguish among thousands of applicants based on the Common Application form, with no required supplemental essays. Most colleges and universities in Texas, both public and private, use a common application, called ApplyTexas, which greatly simplifies the task of applying to multiple schools in Texas.

The University of Texas website states the case for a common application clearly: “The ApplyTexas Application makes it easier for applicants to apply to more than one Texas university. When you start an application online, you’ll be assigned a username that connects you to the site for all the universities you apply to. If you apply to two universities..... for example, the information you enter as part of (one) application will be shared with your application to (a second school).”

The ApplyTexas website states it even more clearly: “ApplyTexas was created through a collaborative effort between the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and the colleges and universities represented on the site. The goal of the project is to offer a centralized means for both Texas and non-Texas (high school) students to apply to the many outstanding postsecondary institutions available in Texas.” ApplyTexas is a straightforward tool, easy to conceptualize, and even easier to execute in today’s Internet age.

The college application process is arduous enough for Michigan high school students without requiring them to navigate the myriad different applications that exist among Michigan institutions of higher learning. Many high school students applying to the largest two postsecondary institutions in Michigan who have wrestled with the cumbersome 21-page University of Michigan application and the separate 8-page counterpart for Michigan State University think the same thought: why can’t the colleges and universities in the State collaborate

and cooperate and make the application, and application process, easier for high school seniors to navigate?

Though Michigan colleges and universities defend the unique needs of their programs and the accompanying complexity in forms, in reality common application forms that are good enough for Dartmouth and Williams (and for that matter Albion College and Kalamazoo College, which also utilize the Common Application) and private and public colleges and universities in Texas should be more than adequate for every college and university in Michigan. (Postsecondary educational institutions in Michigan which currently have very simple applications and for which the full Common Application would increase the burden placed on students could elect to use a subset of the information on the Common Application for their admissions process.)

6. *Create a statewide database of educational scholarships available for Michigan high school students.* Today, every high school does its best to provide a list of the many local, state, and national scholarships available for summer study and post-high school study. There are literally hundreds of these scholarships available throughout the State of Michigan. The market for these scholarships today is very inefficient, with information available only to those students and parents who invest significant time in research. As a result, some scholarships go unfilled every year and deserving students also head off to college unaware of scholarship funds that might have defrayed their college expenses. The State

of Michigan should take the lead in creating a comprehensive database of all scholarships available to Michigan high school students and make this database available on the Internet, complete with links to the sponsoring organizations where available. These resources are important sources of support for high school students and they languish in an inefficiently traded marketplace.

- 7. Hire para-professionals in each high school to absorb the testing and administrative responsibilities currently carried out by professional guidance counselors, thereby freeing counselors' time to more for more impactful counseling activities with their students.* In addition to the need to reduce guidance counselors' student workloads, counselors today are simply burdened with activities that should be shifted to lower-cost resources. Borrowing from a common private sector tool, the jobs of guidance counselors need to be redefined to focus their energies on higher-value activities while removing testing, scheduling, and other administrative activities; lower-salaried para-professionals can assume many of these duties. This role redefinition would reduce by 20% the average guidance counseling increase of \$134,000 in a high school of 1000. At the same time, particularly if para-professional ranks expand, school districts should be vigilant to prevent untrained, non-certified staff from beginning to assume guidance counseling activities that they are not prepared to deliver.

**Beyond actions by the State and by local school districts, counselors themselves should pursue several steps to improve the quality of their counseling:**

8. *Ensure the broadest range of post-high school options are considered in the initial meeting with student and parent(s) in 11<sup>th</sup> grade. Most students and their families have scant idea of the wide variety of post high-school options available for every student. Good and average students can choose among a wider range of colleges and universities than ever before, both in-state and out-of-state. Top students' access to colleges and universities is increasing even more quickly, with many of these institutions now providing significant financial aid to lower, middle, and even upper income families. For these students, the recent market for college admissions is a changing and dynamic one, and counselors must stay abreast of these changes. Harvard, Princeton, Yale, and Dartmouth all recently enacted what amounts to significant reductions in fees and tuition for virtually all high school seniors that might apply from a State like Michigan. Dartmouth, for example, reduced the price of its education to zero for all families with adjusted gross income below \$75,000. With median family income in the Michigan of approximately \$57,000, Dartmouth is essentially providing a free service to nearly 75% of students in the State. Harvard is going one step further, providing both free educations to students from low and middle income families and heavily subsidized educations for families earning up to \$180,000. Thus, because of policies like these, highly selective colleges and universities have removed financial barriers for virtually*

every Michigan family. But it remains for counselors to educate and orient students and their families to these ever-changing financial aid policies and opportunities. More importantly, it remains for counselors to help students sort out the application processes at the most selective postsecondary institutions.

Overall, counselors must assist families in researching the best possible options for each student and then helping them narrow down the choices and strategizing the approach to applying to specific colleges.

9. *Ensure student and parent(s) have ready email access to the counselor.* We have fully entered the online age. Guidance counselors must ensure they are accessible to students and families online. Counselors should provide their email address to every student and every parent no later than the first meeting of junior year.
10. *Evaluate consolidation of, or greater coordination among, the multiple counseling associations in the State to provide a stronger voice to their legislative and funding reform efforts.* The Michigan Association for College Admission Counseling (MACAC), the Association of Michigan School Counselors (AMSC), and the Michigan School Counselor Association (MSCA) all are active in promoting the value high school guidance counselors provide to the State's high school students. While the individual actions and initiatives are commendable, the missions of these organizations overlap: MACAC seeks to "support and advance the work of college admissions counseling professionals," AMSC "provides leadership and support for the profession of counseling in K-

12 education through advocacy and professional development,” and MSCA seeks to “promote excellence in professional school counseling by strengthening the identity and competencies of professional school counselors.” In addition, the activities and mission of the North Central Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES), and the Michigan Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (MACRAO) also at times overlap those of MACAC, AMSC, and MSCA. The leadership of each of these organizations should convene a joint working group to evaluate critically whether the goals of their respective organizations could be better met either through consolidation or through better coordination of all lobbying, education, training activities undertaken by each organization.

11. *Encourage academic programs during the summers following 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grades* for their most promising students. The most promising and highest-achieving high school seniors in the State face an even tougher task than other students. As a result of their achievements in high school, they face a dizzying array of alternatives after high school. The most selective colleges and universities in the United States, not just Michigan, represent legitimate alternatives for these students, and are increasingly affordable to all comers. Michigan’s best students will compete for spots at highly selective colleges and universities with other students with outstanding credentials. Michigan guidance counselors should encourage these students to pursue summer programs following their sophomore and junior years at college campuses that will provide these students a flavor of life at a particular college or university.

Numerous scholarships are available for summer academic programs, and counselors should work to assist these students in getting a head start on what will be a more complex college search process than for lower-achieving students.

**High School teachers should:**

12. *Encourage students to begin preparation for their post-high school decision process* early in 11<sup>th</sup> grade. While the focus of this report has been on high school counselors, teachers, in fact, are also significant sources of influence on post-high school planning. High school teachers in Michigan should reinforce to students in the fall of junior year that in a few months they will begin an important process that will require time, energy, and teamwork between the students, their parents and their counselor. Teachers should encourage students to take the planning process seriously and to prepare for their college search with appropriate commitment.
13. *Orient 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade class assignments* to promote post-high school decision-making and planning, particularly taking a lead role in assisting with the assignment of classroom essays that can serve double duty as college application essays. Many postsecondary institutions require essays and writing samples. The most selective colleges and universities require multiple essays. Teachers can gear class assignments, particularly writing projects, to double as

essays to be submitted on college applications, all without the loss of the normal pedagogical value of classroom instruction.

**Michigan colleges and universities should play a role in improving the quality of decision-making by Michigan high school students:**

14. *Join and support the use of the Common Application or a Michigan-state equivalent.* As detailed above in the recommendations for state government action, Michigan high school students deserve a common application. The largest and most influential postsecondary institutions in the State should initiate action in this area, and move to quickly adopt either the Common Application used by every Ivy League college and university, or a version of ApplyTexas, used by the largest and most prestigious Texas postsecondary institutions. The failure of Michigan's largest institutions to take the lead in this area represents their vote against helping Michigan high school seniors free up valuable time as they make their most important decision.
15. *Introduce in their Schools of Education and in their curricula specific courses on college admission counseling for those studying to become guidance counselors.* High school guidance counselors enter their profession with little formal training in their core task of post-high school career planning. As the world grows more complex, this guidance task requires more sophisticated knowledge, tools, and techniques to discharge the counseling responsibility. Michigan postsecondary institutions can help better prepare the high school

guidance counselors of tomorrow with more and better courses targeted on this subject. Postsecondary institutions in the state should also evaluate whether they can play a greater role in boosting the continuing education of the State's 1000-plus current professional high school guidance counselors.

**Parents should not be left off the hook; they are the natural fulcrum among all of the adults involved in a high school senior's decision-making. In the 2005 survey of 18-30 year olds in Michigan commissioned by the Your Child organization, young adults in the State cited parents as the #1 resource for help on whether to pursue more education after high school. Parents are not professionals, however, and should not be expected to provide technical assistance. Instead, parents should:**

16. *Provide the encouragement and support to their child necessary to tackle this challenging yet impactful eleven-month task.*
17. *Manage the timeline and quarterback the overall process, beginning in January of 11<sup>th</sup> grade and continuing until the final application is submitted. This quarterback role includes ensuring that their child is registered for standardized tests well in advance, is prepared to take those tests, is visiting colleges and universities prior to November of senior year, and is completing the various applications by the end of December of their senior year.*

18. *Ensure they and their child have email and phone access to their high school counselor. The guidance counselor is the professional in this process. Parent and student alike should have ready email and telephone access to the counselor, and should not hesitate to ask for professional assistance including seemingly less important questions. High-performing professional counselors will appreciate the parent's attention to detail.*

**Students, of course, must retain primary responsibility for a successful post-high school career or education search. Inattention to the task early in the eleven-month process results in poor options and even poorer choices prior to their high school graduation. The student should accept responsibility for this decision and should:**

19. *Increase the investment of time spent beginning in January of their 11<sup>th</sup> grade year and in the summer between 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades exploring post high-school options. Specifically, they should work with their counselors and parents to develop a clear timeline that they own and understand.*

20. *Familiarize themselves with either the Common Application or Michigan equivalent website as well as the Statewide data tool prior to the start of their 12<sup>th</sup> grade year. For high-performing students shooting for the nation's most selective colleges and universities nearly all of whom accept the Common Application, students should familiarize themselves with the Common Application form and website no later than the start of their senior year. For*

students applying to colleges that do not utilize the Common Application, they must familiarize themselves with the individual applications of each institution to which they will apply. Should Michigan adopt a statewide data tool, students must familiarize themselves with the tool.

21. *Investigate spending time at an on-campus academic program at a college or university in the summers following sophomore or junior year.* Many postsecondary institutions throughout the United States offer academic programs ranging in length from one week to eight weeks. These programs offer quick and easy access to these colleges and universities and allow students to experience whether or not they enjoy a particular campus. The shorter summer programs allow for students to sample more than one campus, or to simply augment a summer job or sports experience that may be the main focus for the student.

22. *Review the complete statewide database of scholarships available to high school seniors.* The financial burdens of attending postsecondary educational institutions are significant. Students should take it upon themselves to review the full offering of scholarships in the State of Michigan.

Taken together, these actions can materially improve the quality of the decisions high school seniors and their families make. Most of these actions do not require significant financial investment but rather appropriate reallocation of resources and selected statewide investments in several of these programs. Along with the dominant theme of excessive counselor workloads, there is also one other underlying theme present in these

recommendations but not explicitly addressed. The world in which counselors, students, and their parents exist is increasingly technology-intensive. All participants in Michigan involved in the process to assist its high school students must reorient the system and establish a protocol to take advantage of the significant advances in technology to ensure that the resources and tools available to its high school students are as modern as those in any other state. Regrettably, today in Michigan, they are not, and must therefore be brought up to those standards that exist elsewhere in the United States.

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*The Joyce Ivy Foundation is a non-profit public charity, incorporated in the State of Michigan with tax-exempt status under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, dedicated to the improvement of educational opportunities for young women. The Joyce Ivy Foundation's mission is to encourage, support and motivate young women to realize their educational dreams. Its current scholarship programs focus on assisting high school students in their transition to higher education. More information is available at [www.joyceivyfoundation.org](http://www.joyceivyfoundation.org) or by calling (734) 661-0229*

## Appendix A

The following list includes the verbatim survey responses of high school counselors when asked to identify the top barrier or challenge that prevents Michigan high school students from receiving the best possible counseling with respect to their post-high school education plans (one response per counselor):

- No organized high school program
- Time for one on one help
- Scheduling, the MME and other testing responsibilities take too much of our time
- Administrative/scheduling duties
- Students lack initiative to avail themselves of resources
- High numbers of student/counselor ratio
- Administrative/secretarial duties
- Counselors are too busy to adequately help students
- MME
- Lack of funds
- Funding for programs
- Counselors must spend too much time testing
- Kids do not come to the office for assistance
- Time!!! I am 1 person to 450 students, their parents and their step parents, and their guardians.
- Time
- Time-Administrative Paperwork
- Time
- Counselor has insufficient time to give best information
- TIME - I do not have enough of it!
- Increased paperwork for counselors
- Too many students to counselor ratio
- Lack of interest until senior year
- Not enough staff to work with students
- They start looking too late
- Too many students per counselor
- State and local testing requirements that takes my time to schedule and administer
- Counselors who don't do it
- Counselor case loads are too high
- Time
- Too many student assigned to me - should be 300 or less
- Case load size
- Insufficient time
- Counselor Student Ratio
- Large caseload for counselors
- Student-counselor ratio; too high
- Counselor - student ratio too high
- Counseling doesn't begin until 11/12th grade-needs to begin in middle school getting students to think about their future
- Home environment
- Time constraint of the counselor

Appendix A – *continued...*

- Too few counselors
- Too much time spent on testing and administrative work by the counselor
- Too much paperwork, too many duties assigned
- Student motivation
- Time
- Lack of preparation/ plan for it at an earlier age
- Ability to visit interested colleges
- Parent information
- Lack of time, too many state mandates, too many behavioral, special ed. and mental illness cases that take/demand time
- Lack of time
- Lack of time for counselors to meet with them due to the following
- Apathy at the 9th and 10th grade level
- Lack of time
- Time
- Too many students per counselor
- Counselors have been given too many non counseling jobs to complete
- Access to their school counselor
- High counselor/student ratios
- Counselor to student ratio
- High number of students per counselor
- Lack of student expectation
- Time
- Too many students
- Too much time on administrative/data entry/paperwork
- Number of students to counselor
- Lack of time due to other responsibilities
- Students and parents need to become aware earlier.
- Time - Too many administrative duties -- i.e. Testing
- Realization that all can attend college
- Not enough time/counselors
- Cuts in Counseling Departments Staff
- Too many students on a caseload
- Student to counselor ratio too high
- Not enough time
- Too many students, too few counselors
- Too many students on my caseload!
- Busy responding to crisis situations
- Time
- Lack of counselor time
- Insufficient time to work with my population of seniors
- Money Cuts
- Counselors' time
- Too many students on our caseloads!!!!
- caseload sizes
- Time in school day to address resources
- Counselor time

Appendix A – *continued...*

- Economics
- Time
- Counselors are often also MME, MEAP and other test coordinators.
- High student to counselor ratios
- Counselors have too many students
- Time limits of the HS counselor--for students and parents
- Too many students on caseload
- Time with the Counseling staff
- Time
- Students are not proactive in seeking help
- Time
- New state initiatives that tie counselors' hands. Includes new "Personal Curriculum" requirement mandated for sp ed students that will be a huge unfunded mandate and tie counselors up with the students that already receive the most services from staff.
- Student to Counselor ratio
- Too few counselors (counselor: student ratio)
- Large caseloads
- Number of students on counseling caseloads
- Lack of counselor time
- Time--hard to get them out of class
- Not enough time to give individual attention to all students.
- Lack of counselor's time
- Time
- The case load is to large
- Not enough time with their counselor
- Too many students on a caseload
- Time
- Time
- Minimal one-on-one time with each student
- Caseload
- Students following thru with visiting the counselor or career center.
- Time- counselors loads are too large
- Counselor to student ratio to high
- Time
- Time to meet with counselors in the school day.
- Too many administrative duties
- Lack of structured post-HS education programs
- Counselors have too large a student load that prevents communication with their entire case load
- Need to hire more counselors
- Counselors are stretched for time
- Time
- High counseling caseloads
- Paper work
- Family Interest in Higher Education for student
- Inability to meet with student without taking out of class
- Counselors given too much paperwork

## Appendix A – *continued...*

- Too Many students
- Time available
- Counselor/student ratio is too high. Should be no higher than 250.
- Scheduling & Administrative duties assigned to counselors
- Time
- Time
- Time
- Adequate time to meet with each student or even to schedule group meetings
- Administrative whims: "make this your top priority" and spend all of your time doing what I say
- Number of students on case load
- Counselors are given too many non-guidance tasks
- Time to fit career education in with all of their required classes.
- Doing to many non counseling tasks
- Other non related Counseling duties
- Time
- Curriculum is "tight" and most do not have extra time to meet with counselor individually or in small groups
- Individual student/parent initiative
- No family support
- College expectations/emphasis on grades and test scores
- Not enough time to meet
- Time available
- My time is spent pushing papers
- Lack of time
- Time
- Lack of student motivation
- Lack of adults in their lives who can help and encourage them
- Too many students on case load
- Students asking the right question
- Financial
- Lack of time to provide services to them
- Lack of Time to counsel
- Lack of parental support
- Counselors do to much administrative and scheduling duties
- Time
- High student to counselor ratios
- More paperwork and less time to counsel students
- Time limitations
- Counselor load/time
- Other ongoing demands of the job
- Too many students assigned to each counselor
- Too many counselees
- Not enough time
- Student to counselor ratio is to high
- Students are not willing to fully engage in process
- Too few counselors, too many students

Appendix A – *continued...*

- Time to personally meet with counselor
- This year there are no office assistants to help run passes; in a building of over 2200 students, it is becoming nearly impossible to even get students to our offices
- Counselors are asked to deal with testing i.e. MME, MEAP, etc.
- Time
- High student to counselor ratio
- High student-counselor ratio-----but not in my case
- Funding
- Attitude of students
- Student initiative
- Large case loads
- Sufficient amount of counselors available
- Not enough time
- Limited financial resources
- Too many students on caseload to give proper counseling to all students
- Case loads too high in most schools
- Too much time spent on mandated state testing
- Student to counselor ratio too high
- Too many students to see in too little time
- Counselors have too many students
- Counselor grad programs in MI don't offer or require a course in post-high school planning to counselors. Counselors only learn how to do college counseling via on the job training.
- Numbers of students
- Large counseling caseloads
- Caseload numbers 400 to 1 ratio
- Counselor/student ration way too high
- Time restraints due to other non-counseling duties
- Too large a student:counselor ratio
- Ration of counselors to students
- Size of class-student counselor ratio
- Too high of counselor:student ratio
- No parental support
- Counselors expected to complete other duties.
- Families not seeking information in time appropriate manner
- Not being able to visit those schools due to finances, time, etc.
- # Caseload: 475:1
- Student -counselor ratio is high
- Too many students to counsel
- No time to meet with students.
- Caseload size
- Numbers of students counselors have to work with
- Counselors typically have no specialized training regarding the college process
- Counselors have too many other duties; i.e. Scheduling classes
- Lack of counselors
- Lack of interest

Appendix A – *continued...*

- Counselors have too many students
- Too large of a caseload - counselors have no time
- Lack of updated data
- Too many students per counselor
- Lack of student motivation to seek help.
- Parent lack of involvement (support/encouragement)
- Time
- Caseloads too high
- Their own initiative
- Counselor time needed on other tasks
- Counselor doesn't have enough time to spend with them
- Available time for counselors to assist students
- Manpower
- Don't take advantage of the services offered
- Number of students on my caseload
- Too many students per counselor ratio
- Counselor caseloads are too high
- Time
- The time I have to meet with them
- Lack of time to work with individual students
- Not enough time--Students need class time to prepare academically
- Paperwork
- Time
- Money
- Limited time of counselors
- Counselors have too much paperwork
- Student apathy
- Testing consumes us!
- Counselors have too many students not enough time to meet individually
- Time for both the counselor and the student
- Testing; organizing testing; administering testing
- Poor Counselors
- Counselors administering Standardized Tests
- Too many students, not enough counselors
- Counselor time
- Lack of time
- Counselor caseloads too high
- Not seeking assistance from their high school counselor
- Lack of counselor time
- School Counselors do not have enough time
- Counselors too busy to learn adequately about colleges
- Too much other work to do
- Time for counselor to work one-on-one with students
- Not enough time to work with each student in selection process
- Having to chase SB CEU's to maintain certification
- Increasing amount of time working on schedules
- Parental support
- Case load

## Appendix A – *continued...*

- Too much paper work for the counselor
- Limited Time
- Counselors have limited amount of time
- Student counselor ratio too high
- The counselor(s) have too large of a caseload.
- Time constraints
- Administrative Duties of Counseling
- School funding from the state
- Counselors responsible for too many students
- Inadequate or overbooked counselors
- Time constraints/number of student caseload
- Financial
- Counselor's lack of time
- Too many students for the counseling staff to serve.
- Built in time through school programs
- Limited time available for counselors to spend on this task (counselors are responsible for too many students and too many duties)
- Lack of information available
- Not enough time
- Time to meet with counselors
- HS counselor too busy
- Too many other non related counseling duties
- Counselor time
- Financial constraints
- Lack of adequate time by the counselors
- Ratio of students to counselors
- Too many students to service
- Counselors have too many students on their caseload
- The counselor and student ration
- Time
- Too many students on a caseload