



AMERICAN COUNSELING
ASSOCIATION

Loan Forgiveness/Cancellation For School Counselors April 2005

In an effort to clear up any confusion regarding federal student loan forgiveness/cancellation for school counselors, ACA has developed this document.

Federal Stafford (FFEL and Direct Loan) Programs

- Currently, school counselors ARE NOT eligible for federal student loan forgiveness under the Federal Stafford (FFEL and Direct Loan) Programs.

Loan Forgiveness for Certain Teachers

- Certain **teachers**, however, **MAY** qualify for loan forgiveness: If you received a Stafford Loan on or after October 1, 1998, and you teach full time for five consecutive years in a low-income (i.e., Title I) school, you might be eligible for loan forgiveness of up to \$17,500. This applies to FFEL Stafford Loans, Direct Subsidized and Unsubsidized Loans, and in some cases, Consolidation Loans.
- See the U.S. Department of Education's web site for more information: <http://studentaid.ed.gov/PORTALSWebApp/students/english/cancelstaff.jsp?tab=repaying>

Federal Perkins Loan Program

- Under the Federal Perkins Loan program, a portion of your loan can be cancelled for full-time service as a teacher, including school counselors (see definition of teacher below) in a designated elementary or secondary school (i.e., Title I) serving students from low-income families, special education teacher (includes teaching children with disabilities in a public or other nonprofit elementary or secondary school).
- This program forgives 15% of your loan for the first and second years of teaching service, 20% for the third and fourth, and 30% for the fifth, up to 100%.

- See the U.S. Department of Education's web site for more information: <http://studentaid.ed.gov/PORTALSWebApp/students/english/cancelperk.jsp?tab=repaying>
- **Definition of Teacher**
According to the Department of Education, a teacher is a person who provides students direct classroom teaching, or classroom-type teaching in a non-classroom setting, or educational services directly related to classroom teaching (for example, school librarian or **guidance counselor**). It's not necessary for you to be certified or licensed to receive cancellation benefits. However, your employing school must consider you to be a full-time professional for the purposes of salary, tenure, retirement benefits, etc. If you are a supervisor, administrator, researcher, or curriculum specialist, you are not considered a teacher unless you primarily provide direct and personal educational services to students.

ACA and Student Loan Forgiveness

As part of the Higher Education Amendments of 1998, Congress included a provision establishing loan forgiveness for the teaching profession. ACA is urging the Congress to amend the HEA to expand the loan forgiveness program to include school counselors. Congress intended loan forgiveness program to encourage education professionals to serve in needy areas of the country, and to reward those individuals for their service and commitment to education. ACA believes that limiting eligibility for loan forgiveness to a narrow definition of classroom (certified) teachers would discourage other education professions from serving in schools with a high number or proportion of low-income students.

ACA believes that making school counselors eligible for such assistance in the same manner as full-time classroom teachers would help improve the distribution of school counselors, and increase their ranks in those communities with the greatest need for services. Currently, the U.S. national average student-to-counselor ratio is 478:1. In contrast, ACA recommends a maximum student-to-counselor ratio of 250:1. Sadly, some schools don't even have one full-time counselor on staff.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Contact your Senators and Representatives and urge them to amend the Higher Education Act to expand the student loan forgiveness program to include school counselors. You can reach your Senators and Representative by calling the Capitol Switchboard at 202-225-3121 (or 202-224-3121) and asking for a particular member's office. You can also visit ACA's Legislative Action web page at: <http://capwiz.com/counseling/home/> to find out who your members of Congress are.

MESSAGE

"I urge the Senator/Representative to include loan forgiveness for school counselors in the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act this year. As part of the Higher Education Amendments of 1998, Congress included a provision establishing loan forgiveness for the teaching profession. Congress intended loan forgiveness to encourage education professionals to serve in needy areas of the country, and to reward those individuals for their service and commitment to education. I believe that making school counselors eligible for student loan forgiveness in the same manner as full-time classroom teachers would help improve the distribution of school counselors, and increase their ranks in those communities with the greatest need for services."

Arguments for expanding the student loan forgiveness program to school counselors:

- As part of the Higher Education Amendments of 1998, Congress included loan forgiveness to encourage education professionals (e., teachers) to serve in needy areas of the country, and to reward those individuals for their service and commitment to education.
- Limiting eligibility for loan forgiveness to a narrow definition of classroom (certified) teachers would discourage other education professions from serving in schools with a high number or proportion of low-income students.
- Making school counselors eligible for loan forgiveness the same as full-time classroom teachers would help improve the distribution of school counselors, and increase their ranks in those communities with the greatest need for services.
- Currently, the U.S. national average student-to-counselor ratio is 478:1. In contrast, the maximum recommended student-to-counselor ratio is 250:1. Sadly, some schools don't even have one full-time counselor.
- School counselors and full-time classroom teachers provide similar - and equally valuable - services within schools.
- Counselors typically go into classrooms to teach students regularly scheduled classes on topics such as study skills and conflict resolution.
- School counselors provide services to students on home, academic, career, college placement, emotional, violence and conflict, medication, and drug and alcohol issues, among others.
- Counselors do a great deal to help improve students' readiness to learn, and their consequent educational achievement.
- Counselors and teachers have similar qualifications, and in some cases counselors must pass through a more rigorous licensure and certification processes than teachers.
- School counselors are regulated by state education agencies through certification programs comparable to those used for teachers and other school professionals.
- Historically, the Department of Education has included school counselors in the definition of "teacher." (e.g., Perkins Loan cancellation).

Visit the ACA web site at www.counseling.org.