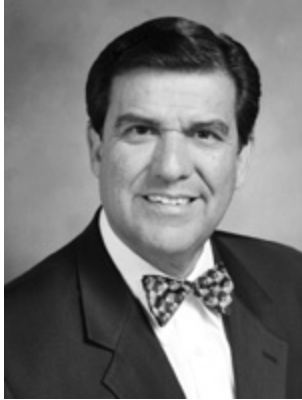


Senator Eddie Lucio, Jr.: District 27

<http://www.senate.state.tx.us/75r/senate/members/dist27/dist27.htm#>



Keynote Speech for the Texas School Counselor Association Luncheon and Business Meeting November 14, 2002 Austin, TX

I am honored to be here today. You, who represent the best and brightest counselors in our State. You, who impact our children from grade school and beyond. You, who do your best to turn our students into productive, happy, responsible adults. **You are my heroes.**

However, one of my heroes is not here today, and I must mention her – my daughter Lynda. She is a counselor at Benevidez Elementary in Brownsville, Texas and is devoted to the children in her care. Her daddy is extremely proud of her. I remember when she was little, she looked up to me as her hero – yes, she was a Daddy’s girl. But now, I look up to her. Lynda is my inspiration, my hero, because of her commitment to her school children. And I know you share that commitment. I applaud you for that devotion.

I want to share with you some thoughts I have about your noble profession. You are the bridge between students, teachers, school staff, parents, and the community. You must be strong enough to carry the burden of all the students who look to you for guidance, yet at the same time, be compassionate enough to really care about their future and their problems.

Have you thought of the impact that you have on our students, not only in furthering their education, but also safeguarding them? Much respect has been given to our fire-fighters, police officers and this is greatly deserved. But you, too, have a role to play. In a way, you are on the front lines during this War on Terrorism. You see, firsthand, the effects that these attacks and

threats of attack have on our vulnerable children. You will be there, to soothe and to help them cope. God willing, we will not have any other attacks on our soil. But, in the event that we do, you will be even more valuable to us parents and to your communities.

On another level, you are also a watchdog for us during these troubled times. The boy who grew up to be one of the nation's most notorious prisoners, John Walker Lindh, was once a trouble young man deeply affected by his parents' divorce. He felt isolated from his community and his school mates. Students like this must be cared for and watched over before tragedies happen. Lindh represents one of many who have felt this way, but because of you, we do not have this situation commonly occurring. Because of you, students know that someone cares.

On April 20, 1999, two angry and alienated young men took out their frustrations and fury on 13 people, murdering them and wounding 20 others. For more than a year before that shooting at Columbine, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold were sending out signals to various people that they were hurting. They were angry. And, they were going to do something about it. But in all the stories I read, no school counselors were aware of how they felt. No school counselors were made aware. We need to recognize that school counselors, such as yourselves, are essential to preventing outbreaks of school violence and that you need the tools and the time to be made aware of the problems of students in your care.

Your duties include bus and lunch duty, discipline, administration, scheduling, and test administration. But academic advising and counseling students must come first.

Dropout prevention is also paramount to ensuring a bright future for our children. During the 2000-01 school year the number of dropouts in Grades 7-12 from Texas public schools decreased by 25.1 percent to 17,563. I attribute this decreasing number to the hard work of school counselors. But, while this news is encouraging, we must continue to support our students, to give them the confidence they need to stay in school. Yet, let's recognize that you counselors need support, too, in order to do your job in the best way possible.

And now, thanks to the study released by Comptroller Ryland, a result of Senate Bill 538, which I was proud to carry, we know how much time you

need to devote to your students. This past Tuesday, I spoke with your Executive Officers, your leadership, and visited with them about this report. Please allow me to relate to you what was discussed.

This report helped identify possible changes needed to provide counselors with the resources and work environment to perform better.

1. Results of Study:
 - a. The average 2001-02 counselor-to-student ration in Texas is 1 to 423. Elementary schools had the highest ratio (1::555). The ratio disparity seemed to increase as the district enrollment increased.
 - b. Counselors spend up to 40% of their time on non-counseling activities such as administrative tasks and administering statewide tests.
2. Recommendations of the Study:
 - a. Each school district should create a policy on the appropriate use of a counselor's time;
 - b. TEA should expand their District Effectiveness and Compliance (DEC) visits to include a review of the district's local guidance and counseling policy;
 - c. Grant counselors file their timesheets electronically so that the information can be analyzed and reported to the State Legislature.

The Problem: This bill does not mandate school districts to come up with guidelines for school counselor's time. It suggests that school districts heed the recommendations of the report but it does not require them to do so.
Some school districts have already come forward and said they will not enact the Comptroller's recommendations. We have to make a law that will require that school districts implement these recommendations while still being mindful of local control concerns.

3. Possible legislation that I'm considering includes:
 - a. I support the findings of the Comptroller's study and will author legislation to ensure they are implemented.
 - b. Counselors need to spend less time on non-counseling activities
 - c. Public schools must pass policies that guide proper use of school counselor's time.
 - d. TEA should expand District Effectiveness and Compliance (DEC) visits to include reviews of school policies on counselor's use of time.
 - e. Enact data collection methods so that the State can monitor counselors' use of time.

4. I value local control and local input, but it is imperative that school districts develop some guidelines on counselors' duties, so that counselors across the state can spend their time productively on students.
5. I would like to see some sort of uniform system or uniform guidelines regarding the use of your time.
6. These legislative ideas are in the planning stages, as I am still in discussion with Dr. Alanis on these important issues.

I know that you need to devote more time to your students, you want to devote more time to your students, and we need to allow that to happen.

I'm extremely elated that this report finally recognizes public school counselors in Texas. The importance of their jobs cannot be overstated. I believe counselors can serve as the catalyst to bring together school officials, teachers, parents and students to strengthen the public schools. I am confident in the training of public school counselors and feel they can help students address their problems/concerns more effectively because of their training.

I want to speak with you about another bill which I authored, Senate Bill 518. The intent of Senate Bill 518 was to provide counselors with a clearer job description in order to allow them to spend more time with students. It asks school counselors to work with the school faculty and staff, students, parents, and the community to plan, implement, and evaluate a developmental guidance and counseling program.

Included in this bill are:

1. A guidance curriculum to help students develop their full educational potential, including the student's interests and career objectives.
2. A responsive services component to intervene on behalf of any student whose immediate personal concerns or problems put the student's continued educational, career, personal, or social development at risk.
3. An individual planning system to guide a student as the student plans, monitors, and manages the student's own educational, career, personal, and social development.
4. A system supporting the efforts of teachers, staff, parents, and other members of the community in promoting the development of students.
5. Senate Bill 518 extended the Texas Education Code to all public school counselors (K-12), not just those in schools that receive funding under

the Comprehensive Elementary Grant Program (from the compensatory education allotment).

6. A TEA report indicated that school counselors who are employed under these guidelines dealt with less administrative and clerical tasks unrelated to guidance and counseling and were able to focus more on counseling students.
7. And it requires that all school counselors assume responsibilities for working with students, faculty, parents, and community to plan, implement and evaluate a comprehensive developmental guidance program for all students.

Although this bill is not a mandate to local school districts, the GOOD news is that the Texas Association of School Boards, which issues policy manuals to all school districts in Texas, has adopted this bill as part of their policy (*which went into effect for the school year 2001-02*). Since 98% of school districts adopt TASB policy as their own, I am confident that change for the better is in store for our counselors.

I'd like to speak to you about this upcoming Legislative Session. This is a new world for Texas government. We must be willing to work together with the new leadership, yet at the same time be vigilant with the issues that we hold dear. Because of the projected budget shortfall of \$5-12 billion, we must prioritize and be willing to make hard decisions.

I am willing to work to help you during this upcoming session, however, the best way you can help me and yourselves is to speak with every legislator. Make your case with them. Bring you input in writing and provide related materials or research if at all possible.

Keep in touch with my office during the legislative session to keep informed of legislation of interest or with impact to you. We must work together, through the process, to make changes happen.

I will say it again and again: you are the heroes, the first persons that our children are exposed to on a daily basis outside of home. You have such a tremendous impact on their lives. Children may first realize their potential when a counselor tells them of it. You may be the first of even the only person to give a child encouragement. You have a duty to them that transcends your job description.

A child may first contemplate going to college because her counselor told her that she was capable. Students learn that they can aspire to greater things because their counselors urged them to reach for their dreams. Continue to be the catalyst for these students, continue to push them along the path to greatness. Our future depends on you. I thank you for your perseverance and your devotion to our children. Thank you for allowing me to honor you today.