



## Mountainland Region Youth Advisory Council: K16 Conference Panel Summary

March 26, 2025

Summary Provided By: Amy Mielhoff; UVU WFA Student Intern

On March 26, the Youth Advisory Council attended the Mountainland Region's K-16 Alliance Counselor Conference. The council members had the unique opportunity to facilitate a meaningful discussion with school counselors in attendance, focusing on how they can better support students in making informed decisions about their education and future careers.

### **The Role of Counselors in College and Career Readiness**

One of the key questions posed during the discussion was how counselors can effectively support students in navigating college and career choices. The student representatives shared their experiences, highlighting that there is a strong emphasis on career exploration in 8th grade, when students are often required to take Career Aptitude Tests and begin thinking about potential career paths. This topic resurfaces again in 11th grade, when students are encouraged to solidify their post-secondary plans. However, students noted a noticeable gap in career-related discussions during 9th and 10th grade.



They expressed that during these critical years, when students are selecting courses and electives, they receive little guidance on how their class choices align with their future aspirations. Many students find themselves unsure of what direction to take and wish they had more opportunities to discuss their interests, strengths, and potential career paths with their counselors. By the time they reach 11th grade, some students feel it is too late to make meaningful changes to their academic trajectory. The student representatives emphasized that more frequent and structured check-ins during 9th and 10th grade could help bridge this gap and provide students with the confidence and clarity they need to make informed decisions about their future.

## **Understanding the Challenges Counselors Face**

The students also expressed their awareness of the challenges counselors face, particularly in managing large caseloads. They recognized that in schools with smaller student populations, counselors may have more opportunities to provide individualized attention. However, in larger schools, many students only meet with their counselors once a year—typically during course selection—and may not be fully aware of the wide range of support services available to them.

The student representatives shared that they and their peers often do not realize that counselors can assist with more than just class scheduling. Many students are unaware that counselors can provide valuable guidance on scholarships, financial aid, extracurricular involvement, mental health resources, and career planning. The students expressed a desire for greater awareness and education about the role of school counselors and the many ways they can help students navigate their academic and career journeys.

## **The Importance of Educating Parents**

Another key topic discussed was the role of parents in supporting students' education and career planning. Several students shared that they were fortunate to have parents who worked in the education field, making them valuable sources of information and guidance. However, other students, particularly those from first-generation college-going families, faced additional challenges in navigating the process.



One student shared her experience as a first-generation college student, explaining how she and her parents had to learn about post-secondary options together. She emphasized that because her parents were unfamiliar with the system, they were unable to provide the same level of guidance as parents who had already navigated the college and career process. The student representatives reflected on how increased efforts to educate parents—through workshops, informational meetings, and accessible resources—could greatly benefit students. By equipping parents with knowledge about college applications, financial aid, career pathways, and technical education options, counselors could create a stronger support network for students outside of school.

## **Exploring All Post-Secondary Pathways**

When the discussion shifted to what students wished they had known earlier, the topic of technical schools emerged as a key point. The students expressed that while traditional



four-year colleges are often presented as the primary path to success, technical schools and vocational training programs offer valuable and viable career opportunities that are sometimes overlooked.

The student representatives emphasized that not every student wants or needs to attend a traditional university, and it is important to highlight alternative options, such as trade schools, apprenticeships, and certification programs. They shared that learning about these options earlier in their high school years could have helped them make more informed choices about their education.

Additionally, they noted that visiting college campuses and technical schools helped them visualize their futures and gave them a sense of excitement and motivation. They encouraged counselors to promote more opportunities for school visits and career exploration activities.

### **Addressing Student Anxiety About the Future**

As the conversation neared its conclusion, the students shared an important message with the counselors: many students feel anxious and overwhelmed about their future. They explained that uncertainty about post-secondary education and career paths can be a major source of stress, causing some students to shut down or avoid making decisions altogether.

They expressed that having access to clear, reliable information and supportive guidance can significantly reduce this anxiety. Counselors play a crucial role in helping students break down their fears, understand their options, and make confident choices about their futures. The students emphasized the importance of not only providing resources but also fostering an environment where students feel comfortable asking for help and discussing their concerns.

### **Bridging the Gap Between Students and Counselors**

This discussion provided an invaluable opportunity for students to voice their experiences and concerns directly to counselors, and for counselors to gain deeper insight into the perspectives of the students they serve. The Youth Advisory Council included students from both charter and public schools, each offering unique perspectives on their interactions with counselors.

By the end of the conversation, both students and counselors left with a renewed sense of collaboration and understanding. The students reminded the room that, despite differences in school settings and experiences, everyone shares the same goal: ensuring that students have the resources, guidance, and support they need to build successful futures.

We are deeply grateful for the student representatives and the counselors who took the time to engage with them and listen to their perspectives. Their participation was invaluable, and we look forward to creating more opportunities like this in the future to continue fostering meaningful dialogue and collaboration.



Stefanie D. Adams  
MYAC Coordinator & Governing Committee Member  
Director-Regional Pathways; Mountainland Region  
[stefaniea@uvu.edu](mailto:stefaniea@uvu.edu)  
801.863.5746

[Mountainland Region Youth Advisory Council | Pathways | Utah Valley University \(uvu.edu\)](https://uvu.edu/pathways/mountainland-region-youth-advisory-council/)