

Comprehensive School Guidance Programs in the United States

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A description of comprehensive school guidance programs in the United States is provided. This description is followed by a presentation of the steps school districts in the United States go through to develop and implement such programs. The next section describes the three kinds of evaluation being used to assess the impact of these programs on students' academic, career, and personal-social development. The last section provides some research evidence of the impact of comprehensive guidance programs on students in the schools of the United States.

School guidance in the United States “is in the period of renewal and revitalization, where theory and practice have evolved from traditional organizational models to the widespread implementation of developmental comprehensive guidance and counseling programs” (Sink & MacDonald, 1998, p. 89). Why are developmental comprehensive guidance programs being developed and implemented with increasing frequency today? Two reasons. First, our society is changing, creating increased challenges for students and their parents. Second, the traditional ways of organizing and

implementing guidance in the schools, while useful in their times, are no longer adequate.

As the 21st Century unfolds, the United States continues to undergo substantial changes in its occupational, social, and economic structures. Occupational and industrial specialization continues to increase dramatically. Increasing company size and complexity is the rule rather than the exception. This often creates job invisibility and makes the transition from school to work, and from work to further education and back to work again, more complex and difficult.

Social structures and social and personal values also continue to change and become more diverse. Emerging social groups are challenging established groups, asking for equality. People are on the move too, from rural to urban areas and vice versa, and from one region of the country to another in search of economic, social, and psychological security. The United States is becoming increasingly diverse.

All of these changes are creating substantial challenges for students as they anticipate the future. A rapidly changing work world and labor force; violence in homes, schools, and communities; divorce; teenage suicide; substance abuse; and sexual experimentation are just a few examples of the complex challenges students face today. They are not abstract aberrations. They are real and have and will continue to have substantial impact on the personal/social, career, and academic development of students (Gysbers & Henderson, 2000).

As these and other changes are taking place in our society, many organizations and groups of interested and involved individuals are providing programs and services at national, state, and local levels to help students deal effectively with these challenges. Within the education community in the United States, school counselors have been and continue to be in the forefront of efforts to assist students to respond to these challenges through their work within the structure of comprehensive guidance programs in school districts across the country (Gysbers & Henderson, 2000).

What is a comprehensive school guidance program? The first section

of this article answers this question by describing the basic elements of a program. Next, attention is given to the steps involved in developing and implementing a program in the schools. The next section focuses on evaluation with special attention given to program evaluation, personnel evaluation, and results evaluation. Finally, the last section presents evidence of the impact of comprehensive guidance programs.

What is a Comprehensive School Guidance Program?

The comprehensive guidance program currently being used by many states and school districts in the United States consists of three elements: content, organizational framework, and resources (Gysbers & Henderson, 2000). The content element identifies competencies considered important for students to master as a result of their participation in a comprehensive guidance program. Competencies are usually organized by grade level (kindergarten through grade twelve) or grade level groupings (elementary, middle, and high school). They are often grouped by domains such as career, academic, and personal/social.

The first section of the organizational framework element contains three structural components (definition, rationale, assumptions). The program definition includes the mission statement of the guidance program and focuses on its centrality within a school district's total educational program. The rationale discusses the importance of guidance as an equal partner in the educational system and provides reasons why students need to acquire the competencies that will accrue to them as a result of their involvement in a comprehensive guidance program. Finally, assumptions are the principles that shape and guide the program. They include statements regarding the contributions that school counselors and guidance programs make to students' development, the premises that undergird the comprehensiveness and the balanced nature of the program, and the relationship between the guidance program and the other educational programs.

The second section of the organizational framework element consists

of the four program components including guidance curriculum, individual planning, responsive services, and system support. These four program components are the delivery system for all of the guidance and counseling activities and services provided to students and their parents.

The guidance curriculum component contains structured activities from kindergarten to grade twelve that provide all students with opportunities to master guidance competencies drawn from the content element of the program. The guidance curriculum typically consists of competencies (organized by domains) and structured activities presented systematically from kindergarten to grade twelve.

To accomplish the purposes of the individual planning component of the comprehensive guidance program, activities and procedures are provided to assist students in understanding and periodically monitoring their career, academic, and personal/social development. Students learn about their goals, values, abilities, aptitudes, and interests (competencies) so they can continue to progress educationally and occupationally. Individual planning focuses on assisting students, in close collaboration with parents, to develop, analyze, evaluate, and carry out their educational, occupational, and personal goals and plans.

Problems relating to academic learning, personal identity issues, drugs, and peer and family relationships are increasingly a part of the educational scene. Individual counseling, small group counseling, consultation, and referral are included as ongoing services of the responsive services component of the comprehensive guidance program. The responsive services component organizes guidance techniques and methods to respond to individual concerns and needs; it is also supportive of the guidance curriculum and individual planning components. Although school counselors have special training and possess skills to respond to students' current needs and concerns, the co-operation and support of parents and the entire faculty are necessary for this component's successful implementation.

The administration and management of a comprehensive guidance program requires an ongoing support system. That is why system support is

a major program component. Without continuing support, the other three components of the guidance program are ineffective. Research and development activities, school counselors' professional development, staff/community public relations, community outreach, and program management are examples of the many activities school counselors are involved in to support the comprehensive guidance program as well as the other educational programs in school.

The third element of the comprehensive guidance program is resources. Three kinds are required: personnel, financial, and political resources. Personnel resources include school counselors, teachers, administrators, parents, students, community members, and business and labor personnel. While school counselors are the main providers of guidance activities and are the co-ordinators of the program, the involvement, co-operation, and support of teachers, administrators, parents, and community members is necessary for the program to be successful. In addition, for a guidance program to function effectively, adequate financial support is crucial. This means that there is a budget for the program to provide for materials and equipment. This also means that appropriate facilities are provided by the district to house the personnel of the program. Finally, the mobilization of political resources is the key to a successful guidance program. Full endorsement of the guidance program by school district policy makers as an official "program" or a "framework" of the district is one example of mobilizing political resources. Another example are clear and concise educational policies that highlight the integral and central nature of comprehensive guidance programs in school districts (Gysbers & Henderson, 2000).

What Steps are Involved in Developing and Implementing a Program?

It is not possible to wish a comprehensive guidance program into place. We have found that hard work is necessary to move from the way guidance

was provided based on traditional approaches to the program concept. Gysbers and Henderson (2000) identified five steps in developing and implementing a comprehensive school guidance program. The five steps include planning, designing, implementing, evaluating, and enhancing. Usually it takes three to five years in the schools of the United States to fully operationalize a complete program.

The first step, *Planning*, has a number of substeps. The first substep involves getting organized and dealing with possible barriers and constraints that may impede change. The second substep focuses on choosing the basic structure that will be used to organize the program. The third substep is assessing what is currently being done so that the new program can be built on the successes of current guidance activities and services.

Designing is the next step. It involves dealing with selecting the desired program structure. It also involves planning for the transition from the traditional structure currently being used for guidance to the new program approach.

The third step is called *Implementing*. It deals with beginning the new program. It also focuses on the details of managing and maintaining the program.

The last two steps are *Evaluating* and *Enhancing*. What involved in Evaluation are program evaluation, personnel evaluation, and results evaluation. Data from these sources plus other evaluation data is used for the last step called Enhancement. The enhancement process redesigns the program based on evaluation data following the steps listed above to make it even more effective than before.

How are Comprehensive School Guidance Programs Evaluated

Three kinds of systematic evaluation are required to achieve accountability for guidance programs. Personnel evaluation, the first kind of evaluation, describes the procedures used to evaluate school counselors and other personnel who may be assisting school counselors in implementing

guidance program. Program evaluation (program audit), the second kind, reviews the status of a guidance program against a set of established program standards. Sometimes the word formative is used to describe this type of evaluation because it looks at the degree to which a program is being implemented and on ways to improve program delivery based on the findings of the evaluation. Results evaluation, the third kind, focuses on the impact that guidance activities and services in a program is having on students, the school, and the community (Gysbers, Hughey, Starr, & Lapan, 1992). It is often called summative evaluation because it assesses program outcomes and impact.

Each type of evaluation is important. Equally important however is how they relate to and interact with each other. To express this relationship the following formula is used.

$$\text{Personal Evaluation} + \text{Program Evaluation} = \text{Results Evaluation}$$

The personnel of a program need to be doing the work of the program and the program elements need to be fully in place and functioning the way they should in order to achieve the desired results.

Program Evaluation

Program evaluation is conducted by using standards derived from the structure of a comprehensive program. Standards are acknowledged measures of comparison used to make judgments about the size, nature, and structure of the program. Enough standards are required to ensure that judgments can be made as to whether or not a complete comprehensive guidance program is actually in place and functioning to a high degree to fully benefit all students, parents, teachers, and the community.

Once a sufficient number of program standards are written to represent a comprehensive guidance and counseling program, the next step is to write criteria for each standard. Criteria are defined as statements that specify important aspects of the standards; thus enough criteria need to be written for each standard to provide evaluators with the confidence that each standard

is in place and functioning. Then a five- or six- point scale is usually created for each criterion allowing for the quantification of data.

How frequently a district conducts program evaluation depends on the purposes to be achieved. If it is being done for self-study, the American School Counselor Association (2003) recommends that program evaluation be conducted when a program is being designed and then yearly thereafter. Whether it is done once a year, every other year, or periodically, the self-study process provides school counselors with the opportunity to determine if the written district program is the actual district implemented program. The results of program evaluation can reveal where progress has been made or progress is lacking in program implementation. This allows school counselors, working closely with administration, to establish goals to ensure that the written district guidance program actually becomes the district's fully implemented program.

Personnel Evaluation

A key to the successful implementation and management of a comprehensive guidance program is a school counselor's performance evaluation and improvement system. Such a system helps school counselors define their jobs, provides professional supervision, conducts fair performance evaluation, and sets goals for school counselor professional development (Henderson & Gysbers, 1998).

The purposes of evaluating school counselors' performance are to improve the delivery to and impact of the program on the students it serves and to provide for communication among school counselors, guidance program staff leaders, and school administrators. For school counselors, evaluation specifies contract status recommendations and provides summative evaluation as to their effectiveness. For the school district, evaluation defines expectations for counselors' performance and provides a systematic means of measuring their performance relative to these expectations.

The three facets to the performance evaluation component of a counselor

performance improvement system are: (1) self-evaluation, (2) administrative evaluation, and (3) assessment of goal attainment. The self-evaluation and administrative evaluation focus on job performance competencies and represent data-supported professional judgments as to individuals' proficiency in using the skills and commitment levels required on their jobs. The assessment of goal attainment focuses on individuals' program and professionalism improvement efforts.

For performance evaluation to be done fairly, many data sources are used as each component of a performance improvement system is implemented. Specific examples of typical behaviors of individual school counselors are gathered throughout the year and documented. These patterns of behavior are then compared and contrasted with clearly stated professional standards.

Results Evaluation

School counselors in the United States, working within the framework of a comprehensive guidance program, are increasingly focusing their attention on demonstrating that their work is contributing to overall student success, including student academic achievement. They are developing results evaluation plans based on their school district's goals and school improvement plans. Since comprehensive guidance programs have substantial contributions to the achievement of such school goals, specific student outcomes within these goals that are believed to result from student participation in guidance program activities and services are identified. They become the outcomes that school counselors focus on in their results evaluation plans.

Four types of data are used by school counselors in their evaluation plans. The first type includes data that identifies student achievement, progress, and behavior. The second type is called process data while the third type is labeled perception data. The last type is results data.

Student achievement, progress, and behavior data include standardized test scores, grade point averages, course enrollment patterns, discipline

referrals, suspension rates, attendance rates, and homework completion rates. Process data is used in program evaluation but it also can be used in results evaluation. Remember, process data describes what guidance and counseling activities and services took place and for whom. It provides evidence that guidance and counseling activities actually were provided. Perception data tells us what students, parents, teachers, administrators, or others think about guidance and counseling activities and services and the work of school counselors. Results data consists of scores on knowledge tests or improvement on such variables as attendance rates, discipline referral rates, grade point averages, and achievement test scores. Something has changed in outcomes such as these as a result of students' participation in the guidance program.

What Has Been the Impact of Comprehensive School Guidance Programs in the Schools of the United States

In a study conducted in high schools in Missouri, Lapan, Gysbers, and Sun (1997) found that students in high schools with more fully implemented guidance programs were more likely to report that they had earned higher grades, their education was better preparing them for their future, their school made more career and college information available to them, and their school had a more positive climate. In Utah, Nelson and Gardner (1998) found that students in schools with more fully implemented guidance programs rated their overall education as better, took more advanced mathematics and science courses, and had higher scores on every scale of the American College Test.

Studies conducted in first years of the 21st century, focusing on the results of comprehensive guidance programs, demonstrated outcomes similar to studies conducted in the 1990s. For example, Lapan, Gysbers, and Petroski (2001) found that when 4,868 middle school classroom teachers in Missouri in 184 small, medium, and large size middle schools rated guidance programs in their schools as more fully implemented, 22,601 seventh graders in these

schools reported that they earned higher grades, school was more relevant for them, they had positive relationships with teachers, they were more satisfied with their education, and they felt safer in school. Sink and Stroh (2003), in a comparison of elementary students (grades 3 & 4) enrolled for several years in well-established comprehensive school guidance program schools with students enrolled in schools without such programs, found that students enrolled in schools with the well-established programs has significantly higher achievement test scores on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills-Form M and the Washington Assessment of Student Learning.

Concluding Remarks

In the United States, we have found that when guidance in schools is conceptualized and implemented as a program, it places guidance conceptually and structurally in the center of education. It becomes an integral and transformative program, not a marginal and supplemental activity. While the research evidence so far supports this contention, it is clear we are only at the very beginning and much more must be done to implement and evaluate school guidance programs in the United States.

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美國的全方位學校輔導計劃

摘要

本文首先介紹何謂美國的全方位學校輔導計劃，接著闡明美國校區在發展及推行上述計劃要經過的步驟。文章再以三項評價標準，評估計劃對於學生在學業、事業、個人及社會發展方面的影響。最後，就全方位學校輔導計劃對美國學生的影響，提供研究實證的資料。

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