Strengthening School Guidance Programs in the 21st Century

The Need
In the 21st century, the United States and the state of Missouri continue to undergo changes industrially, occupationally, socially and economically. These changes are creating challenges for students in Missouri. 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 these challenges. These challenges are real and they are having substantial impact on the personal/social, career and academic development of students.

A Response
Comprehensive school guidance programs in Missouri, implemented by certified, professional school counselors, in collaboration with parents, teachers and administrators, are effective in assisting students to respond to these and similar challenges. Empirical research conducted in the state of Missouri since the 1990’s has shown that when certified, professional school counselors have the time, the resources and the structure of a comprehensive guidance program to work in, they contribute to positive student academic and career development as well as the development of positive and safe learning climates in schools.

- Students (22,964) in 236 small, medium and large size high schools in Missouri with more fully implemented guidance programs as judged by school counselors reported that:
  - they had earned higher grades.
  - their education was better preparing them for the future.
  - their schools had a more positive climate (Lapan, Gysbers & Sun, 1997).

- When middle school classroom teachers in Missouri (4868) in 184 small, medium and large size middle schools rated guidance programs in their schools as more fully implemented, seventh graders (22,601) 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.
  - they felt safer in school (Lapan, Gysbers & Petroski, 2001).

- When school counselors in Missouri work in schools that have more fully implemented guidance programs, they make significant contributions to overall student success including student academic achievement.
  - Students had higher 10th grade MAP mathematics scores.
  - Students had higher 11th grade MAP communication arts scores.
  - More students are likely to attend school.
  - Fewer students have discipline problems.
  - Fewer students receive out-of-school suspensions (Lapan, Gysbers & Kayson, 2006).

This brief has been provided by the Missouri School Counselor Association (MSCA). For more information on this topic, contact MSCA at 1.800.763.MSCA (6722).
The Keys
The keys to the development and implementation of effective comprehensive school guidance programs in Missouri include:

- a written district-wide K-12 guidance program and a district-wide policy for guidance that has been adopted by the board of education.
- a written district-wide guidance program that is fully implemented by certified, professional school counselors K-12 spending 100 percent of their time working with students, parents, teachers and administrators carrying out the preferred tasks of the program.
- strong state guidance leadership that provides regular ongoing training, resources and technical support.
- a strong statewide professional association, the Missouri School Counselor Association.

The Problem
Too often, certified, professional school counselors are assigned duties above and beyond their fair share that take them away from the preferred tasks required to fully implement comprehensive guidance programs in the schools. Often, they spend time performing clerical duties, carrying out administrative tasks and being totally responsible for special education case management and assessment work. As a result, they have limited time to provide services to students, parents and teachers derived from a comprehensive guidance program framework.

Recommendations
When certified, professional school counselors in Missouri are able to devote full time to implementing comprehensive guidance programs in their schools, research has documented that they contribute to positive student academic and career development as well as the development of positive and safe learning climates in schools. Therefore, we urge boards of education to:

- adopt district-wide comprehensive guidance programs as official educational programs in their districts.
- adopt policies for guidance that support guidance as an official program in their districts.
- encourage and support the full implementation of comprehensive school guidance programs in their districts.

References


(Prepared by Norman C. Gysbers, 2007)