Strengthening School Guidance and Counseling Programs in Missouri in the 21st Century: The Problem and Impact of Non-Guidance and Counseling Duties

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 and counseling 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 1990s has shown that when certified, professional school counselors have the time, the resources and the structure of a comprehensive guidance and counseling 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.

The Problem
Too often, certified, professional school counselors in Missouri are assigned duties that take them away from the required tasks necessary to fully implement comprehensive guidance and counseling programs in the schools of Missouri. Often they spend up to 20 percent or more of their time performing “off task” duties such as coordinating the school testing program, testing for special education, serving as coordinator/manager for 504 files, maintaining permanent records, and building the master schedule. As a result, they have less time to provide direct guidance and counseling services to students, parents, and teachers. No other content teachers are asked to spend as much time “off task” as are school counselors.

The Impact
What is the impact of professional school counselors spending 20 percent of their time on “off task” duties? Based on 180 seven-period days in a school year, school counselors would lose 36 days or 252 clock hours of time providing direct guidance and counseling services to students and their parents. Imagine what might happen if science or math teachers were taken away from teaching science or math for 36 days or 252 hours to perform “off-task” duties.

For school counselors, what direct guidance and counseling services could be provided to students if they had 36 more days or 252 more hours available in the school year?
Elementary school students could receive
- 200 more 30 minute classroom guidance units on academic, career, and personal/social issues
- 100 more hours of individual and small group counseling

Middle school students could receive
- 75 more classroom guidance units on academic, career, and personal/social issues
- 50 more hours to develop and begin to use personal plans of study
- 88 more hours of individual and small group counseling

High school students could receive
- 50 more classroom units on academic, career, and personal/social issues
- 88 more hours to plan for the future using their personal plans of study
- 75 more hours of individual and small group counseling

A Recommendation
It is important to remember that school counselors have a comprehensive guidance and counseling program with a mandated guidance curriculum to deliver that is part of the Missouri School Improvement Program (MSIP). To ensure the program is fully implemented, school counselors and building principals should conduct Internal Improvement Reviews of their guidance and counseling programs along with time/task analyses of school counselors’ tasks to determine the amount of time they spend on “off task” duties. The data can then be used to identify and remove “off task” duties allowing school counselors to spend full time on delivering direct services to students and parents to ensure the full implementation of districts’ comprehensive guidance and counseling programs.

Useful References

Website: mcce.org. Click on Guidance eLearning Center for a copy of the above manual plus many other relevant and useful resources.

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