Program Evaluation Made Easy: Strategies to Get Started & Methods for Finishing Strong

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Defining & Understanding Program Evaluation

- Program Evaluation Involves:
  - Careful review of a school counselor’s guidance program as it aligns with the state guidelines and recommendations of the Comprehensive Guidance Model
    - (See dese.mo.gov, school counseling page, & www.schoolcounselor.org for the national school counseling model and recommendations)
  - An investigative exploration into an aspect or aspects of the school counselor’s guidance program that offers **data to support the effectiveness and benefits of the counseling program** to the students and school
Steps in Success for Completing a Program Evaluation

- Developing an Idea for Your Program Evaluation
- Getting the Pieces in Place
- Creating a Detailed Plan
- Managing the Data
- Using Your Program Evaluation as a Tool
Breaking the Barriers

- What’s Your Barrier?
  - No Idea Where to Start or How to Do It
  - Already Tasked Too Much
  - Overwhelmed with the Idea
  - Fearful of Results
  - Just Doesn’t Seem Important

I SMILE TO HIDE HOW COMPLETELY OVERWHELMED I AM.
Finding Your Idea

- Begin with Your Passion
  - What common themes do you see among students?
  - What problem is perplexing you?
  - What populations do you have available?
  - What resources do you already have?
- Look at Your Needs Assessments
  - What are your students telling you they need?
  - What is the school staff telling you they need?
- What area is being neglected in your program or in your building?
What Do I Do Now?

Getting Organized

• What is the Context of Your Idea?
  • Classroom Guidance
  • Individual Counseling
  • Group Counseling
  • Overall School Environment
  • Specific Aspect of Your Guidance Program
  • Support Services to Parents and/or Staff

• What Ways Can You Assess the Idea?
  • Survey
  • Pre and Post Test of Specific Outcomes
  • Examination of Existing Data
  • Case Example
  • Other Ways?
Collaborate!

- What Ideas are Coming Up?
  - Think about the themes you see in your building, problems that continue to haunt you, populations you have available, and resources you already have at your disposal.
  - Consider your needs assessments.

- What is the context of your Idea?

- How might you develop a way to Assess What is Happening with Your Idea?
Creating a Plan

- What Do You Need?
  - Resources, Supplies, Assessment Tools
  - Population
  - Consent?

- Executing the Plan
  - Create a Timeline
  - Storing Data
  - Noting what is working well and points for growth
Dealing with Data

• Don’t Make It Too Complicated

• Report Straight Numbers

• Provide Percentages that You Already Know (i.e. 70% of referrals for individual counseling are accounted for by children considered ‘at risk’ by school standards.)

• Percentage of scores that improved and/or decreased

• Feeling Ambitious?

• Use Excel to Find Statistically Significant Differences Between Groups using a T-Test (check out YouTube videos like “Pretest and Posttest Analysis Using Excel” by Todd Grande or “T-Test in Microsoft Excel” by Jim Grange)

• Create Graphs and Charts as Visual Depictions of Change
Helpful Ideas in Forming Conclusions

• Remember Your Audience and Stakeholders

• Try Connecting Your Data with Important Stakeholder Values: absence rates, grades, graduation rates, graduation from remedial programs, dollars saved/gained by mitigating some programs and enhancing others

• Highlight Connections and Disparities Between Your Program and State Recommendations for a Comprehensive Guidance Program

• Utilize Your Work as an Advocacy Tool

• Suggest Ideas for Improving Weaker Areas of Your Program

• Offer a Cost/Benefit Analysis of Your Program in Non-Guidance Situations and Tasks
Tell the World!

Now that Your Program Eval is Done, What Can You Do With It?!

- Offer an annual detailed summary to your Principal and District Representative
- Create a summary of highlights for teachers and parents in a newsletter
- Offer a presentation of the benefits of counseling and the duties of the school counselor to school staff
- Present your findings at MSCA
- Use your findings to apply for grants and funding
- Write an article
- Share it with your other district counselors and collaborate
- Use it to inform your program evaluation for next year
Content Ideas for an Annual Program Evaluation Report

- Provide Psychoeducation (remember your audience and purpose of the document)

- Utilize data from your Time and Task

- Discuss each aspect of your Guidance Program (Classroom Guidance, Responsive Services, Individual Student Planning, System Support, & Non-Guidance Tasks)

- Provide data and descriptions of your student population

- Highlight your professional development

- Provide self-evaluation on your compliance with the recommended tasks/goals of the Comprehensive Guidance Program (refer to the IIR and MSIP-5 Checklist)

- Identify goals for upcoming academic year
Collaborate!

- What tools can you use to evaluate outcomes connected with your idea?
  - What kind of data will you use?
  - How will you analyze your data?
- What is your Timeline?
  - What do you need to do immediately to get prepared?
  - When when you start gathering your data?
  - When will you finish up to start writing your report?
- How do you envision using your Program Evaluation?
- What do you anticipate will be your greatest challenges?
  - How can you get in front of these problems?
--- Elementary Year ---
K – 2nd Grade Counseling Program Report

--------, Professional School Counselor

The mental and emotional health needs of the students at Elementary are especially great with a 79% free-and-reduced lunch rate, 10% of the total number of students are homeless, and 34% of students are considered to be at-risk by district standards.

Research shows that when a child’s mental energy is devoted to resolving his/her personal problems, the child’s school performance and attendance significantly decline.

Through guidance curriculum, responsive services, system support, and individual planning, the School Counselor helps these children address their personal needs so that they are better able to grow, learn, and succeed as a student in the classroom.

Benefits of the Comprehensive Guidance Program

The Comprehensive Guidance Program provides a powerful and extremely beneficial contribution to the district schools. From the elementary to high school levels, a fully-implemented Comprehensive Guidance Program has been shown through research to dramatically improve the overall environment of the school as well as the personal and educational success of individual students. Studies have shown that counselors who work under a fully-implemented Comprehensive Guidance Program contribute to schools in the following areas:

- Students have increased scores on standardized tests
- Students have improved academic success and higher grades
- Decreased drop-out rates
- Decreased school violence
- Increased student attendance
- Students display a greater ability to concentrate and study
- Decreased classroom disturbances and discipline problems
- Decreased bullying incidents
- Increased acceptance of diversity
- Early warning signs in at-risk students are detected and addressed
- Students who are in danger from themselves or others are appropriate helped
- Students are better able to positively cope with difficulties and problems
- Students experience a greater feeling of belonging in school
- Students and staff feel safer at school
- Increased positive feelings surrounding school
- Students have greater social success
- Students believe they are cared for

Classroom Guidance:

- The Missouri Comprehensive Guidance Program has been shown through research to promote social, emotional, academic, and mental health of students.

- The counselor visited **15 classrooms** (Kindergarten through 2nd grade) for **30 minutes once weekly** for classroom guidance.

- Over the course of the year, the counselor **delivered 26 guidance lessons to each classroom** (10 lessons were given in the fall semester and 16 lessons were given in the spring semester). This is 13 hours in each classroom over the course of the school year.

- Guidance lessons are designed around the Missouri Comprehensive Guidance Program Content Standards and Grade Level Expectations.

- Guidance lessons **addressed 100% of the Content Standards and Guidance GLE’s**, which can be specifically identified.

- Guidance lessons covered topics such as careers, diversity, identity awareness, personal safety, coping strategies, responsibility, bullying, character education, conflict resolution, life transitions, personal roles, feelings, decision making, substance abuse awareness, friendship, anger management, attitude, and self-esteem.

Individual Counseling Services:

- Individual counseling can be defined as a **service provided for an individual child who’s mental and emotional health needs are significant enough to disrupt the child’s ability to function and perform in the classroom to his/her highest potential**. The counselor tailors the counseling sessions to meet each child’s unique needs and consults with parents and teachers to help the child in the most effective way possible.

- **64% of students who received individual counseling are at-risk** according to district standards.
Presenting Problems/Issues addressed in counseling with children ages 5 – 8 years old (some children presented with more than one issue)

- Anxiety/Depressive Symptoms (18 students)
- Significant Behavior Problems- aggression, defiance, impulsivity (11 students)
- Exposure to Domestic Violence (6 students)
- Sexual/Physical Abuse (5 students)
- Suicidal Ideation/ Self-Harm (3 students)
- Grief- death of a parent, sibling, or other close loved one (3 students)
- Divorce/Custody Dispute/Parental Relationship Problems (3 students)
- Post-traumatic stress (2 students)
- Psychiatric Hospitalization (1 student)

- On average, the counselor conducted between 8 - 13 individual, 30 minute, counseling sessions per week. (This number is only for scheduled sessions and does NOT include crisis counseling sessions throughout the week.)

- Over the course of the year, 30 students out of the 275 students (about 11%) of counselor's case load received scheduled, individual (22) or group (8) counseling services for 30 minutes once weekly or biweekly. (This number does NOT include the percentage of students who utilized the counselor for crisis counseling sessions.)

- 15 out of 22 (32%) referrals for individual counseling came from parents/guardians.

- 7 out of 22 (68%) referrals for individual counseling came from teachers or the counselor.

- 100% of these students have signed informed consents from parents/guardians on file.

- The number of counseling sessions a student received ranged from 2 sessions to 15 sessions- this being 1 hour to 7.5 hours of class time over the course of the entire treatment time.

- The average number of counseling sessions a student received was 8 sessions, or 4 hours of class time.

- 19 out of 22 (86%) of students had a checklist completed by the teacher at the start and end of counseling services, which served as a method to monitor the student’s progress and changes.

- 16 out of 19 students, or 84%, of students who received individual counseling showed improvement and/or no decline in emotional, social, academic, somatic, and behavioral problems.
- On average, a student who participated in individual counseling had a rate of 21% improvement in his/her checklist scores (improvements in scores ranged from 91% improvement to no change).

**Group Counseling Services:**

- Group counseling can be defined as a service provided to a small group of students who share a similar experience in which the individual student will be most effectively aided by the group process of identifying and growing with others like him/her.
- 38% of students who received group counseling are considered at-risk by district standards.
- The counselor conducted 2 groups (Kindergarten Grief Group and an At-Risk Group) over the course of the year with 3 and 4 members in each group. The counselor also maintained an ongoing bullying group for students who engaged in frequent bullying behaviors.
- 4 out of 4 (100%) of the referrals for the Kindergarten Grief Group came from parents and/or counselor suggestion. 4 out of 4 (100%) of the referrals for the At-Risk Group came from data collected for at-risk students in the building.
- 100% of these students have signed informed consents from parents/guardians on file.
- 5 out of 8 (63%) of group members had a checklist completed by the teacher at the start and end of the group, which served as a method to monitor each member’s progress and changes.
- 4 out of 5, or 80%, of students who participated in a counseling group showed improvement in emotions, social skills, academics, and behavior as documented through checklist scores.
- On average, a student who participated in a group had a rate of 50% improvement in his/her checklist scores.

**Crisis Counseling**

- Crisis counseling can be defined as an emergency situation in which the child, a teacher, or a parent asks the counselor to meet with the child regarding a troubling situation presently taking place.
- On average, the counselor conducted between 5 – 10 crises counseling sessions per week.
- Crisis counseling referrals consisted of family issues, a safety concern, bullying problems, grief work, anxiety, or friendship difficulties. 3 crisis counseling sessions also led to physical and sexual abuse disclosures that were hot-lined and investigated.
- The counselor did not have direct crisis counseling contact with a student regarding a social, emotional, or behavioral issue more than 3 times without an informed consent from the parent/guardian.

**Student/Parent Contacts:**

- Over the course of the school year, the counselor documented over 500 direct student or parent contacts. These contacts include having a significant conversation with a student’s parent, crisis contact with a student, or individual or group counseling with a student.

- As a mandated reporter, the counselor made 4 hotline calls over the course of the school year. 4 out of the 4 hotline calls were investigated.

**System Support:**

- In addition to the district Guidance Advisory Council meeting, the counselor organized a local Building Guidance Program Advisory Council. The council included a teacher from each grade level, principal, and behavioral interventionist. The building advisory council met and provided feedback for ways to improve the counseling program.

- The counselor also created a staff newsletter to help educate other school professionals on mental health issues and how these issues affect children in the classroom. The counselor created 3 newsletters over the course of the year, addressing the role of the school counselor in the building, red flags in a child’s behavior that may reflect emotional or mental health problems, and strategies for helping a disempowered child in the classroom.

- The counselor developed character education in daily announcements and maintained the building’s Kid’s with Character board, which also provided character education.

- The counselor refined the student checklist used in gathering data from teachers regarding students who were referred for individual or group counseling.

- The counselor was available for consultation with parents and teachers regarding individual children, and the counselor held numerous meetings to help aid the adults in the child’s life.

- The counselor created several working documents to give to teachers and parents for how to help a child, including “Empowerment Statements”, “Suicidal Red Flags”, “Anger Choices”, and an outside counseling referral list with detailed information.

- The counselor provided a brochure describing the counseling program and how to utilize the counseling resources that was sent home to all parents.
- The counselor provided an additional brochure that describes and explains “Counseling through Play”, which is the therapeutic model the counselor follows for individual and group counseling. This brochure was given to parents at the start of counseling to help answer questions about how counseling works and what the counselor does with the child during the session.

- The counselor maintained a birthday program in which every student had the opportunity to come to the counselor’s office on or near the time of their birthday to receive a birthday sticker. The counselor met with each student for less than five minutes, but it allowed the counselor to have individual contact with every student and also give students an opportunity to visit the counseling office in a non-threatening way. This also promotes client confidentiality and normalizes other students’ visits to the counselor’s office since every student has visited at least one time as a result of this program.

- The counselor worked with other district counselor’s to develop a consistent, monthly character words as well as the K-12 district guidance curriculum and overview of counseling services.

- The counselor made 3 professional state presentations over the course of the year: two presentations at the Missouri School Counselor’s Conference (“Creating and Utilizing Therapeutic Stories in Counseling” and “Play Therapy with Sexually Abused Children”) and one for the Missouri Association for Play Therapy (“Grief and Trauma in the Playroom”).

- The counselor submitted 2 publications, which were accepted: a book chapter (“Using Metaphor in Facilitating Self-Awareness” in Integrating Expressive Arts into Theory-Based Counseling) and a journal article (“Facilitating Therapeutic Story Writing in Counseling” in The Counselor Interviewer).

If you have any questions regarding this program evaluation or would like to talk further about how mental and emotional health needs directly affect a child’s performance at school and what School Counselors can do to help, please feel free to contact me.
Corie Schoeneberg, EdS is a Licensed Professional Counselor (MO & VA), Registered Play Therapist-Supervisor, and Nationally Certified Counselor, and she is a doctorate student in the Counselor Education and Supervision PhD program at Regent University. Corie specializes early childhood mental health with an emphasis in trauma and attachment problems. She has provided counseling services for children and their families in the public school system, private practice, and youth home settings. Corie is an adjunct instructor in the CACREP accredited clinical and school counseling program at the University of Central Missouri, teaching a variety of courses, including Introduction to Play Therapy. She is the author of several book chapters and journal articles as well as a Past President of the Missouri Association for Play Therapy. Corie provides consultation services and interdisciplinary trainings for Pediatricians and Head Start programs regarding childhood mental health, and she is a research team member of Regent University’s Center for Addictions and Offender Research, targeting adjudicated adolescents with sexual behavior problems. Corie is a faculty member and supervisor for the Ukraine Cross-Cultural Supervision Project with Regent University.

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