Challenge or Opportunity?
Working With Barriers to Full Implementation
Presenters

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Sometimes, no matter how much good intention we have, things just don’t work out as we would like.
Barriers to Fully Implementing a School Counseling Program for Student Success

- Assigning Discipline
- Clerical/Secretarial Duties
- Supervision
- District or Building Assessment Coordination
- Special Education/504 Coordination
- Long-term Counseling or Therapy
School counseling is a program, not a position.

School counselors are not trying to get out of anything...they are trying to get INTO delivering their program.

Research has shown that, when school counseling programs are fully implemented, students report feeling safer, have higher grades, more apply for higher ed, have less absenteeism, and are generally happier at school.
Brand new research from Dr. Rich Lapan, of Amherst University, shows that:

- Ratios result in relationships; higher ratios have the greatest negative impact on students on free/reduced lunch
- Students have more college knowledge and are more committed to graduation
- More student satisfaction
- Higher SAT scores
The Goal:

- It’s highly unlikely these responsibilities will totally disappear from expectations.
- These are responsibilities that must be covered.
- The best person to handle those responsibilities might end up being you.
- So the goal is to reframe the responsibility to address part of your program...OR
- To have the non-school counseling-related responsibilities have as little negative effect as possible.
The Keys Are Communication, Advocacy and Compromise.

Let’s Take A Look At Some Of These Barriers and How Viable Solutions May Be Achieved.
Assigning Discipline

- FACT: School counselors have NO coursework or knowledge about assigning discipline.
- FACT: Serving as a disciplinarian puts the school counselor in a situation where they are breaking their Ethical Code (dual relationship), and it’s possible legal implications could ensue.
- FACT: Sometimes an administrator isn’t present and a situation needs to be handled.
Solution: Advocacy and Compromise

- The school counselor can take notes and get background information on the situation so the administrator knows what the situation entails.
- Set the expectation that the school counselor should only work with the student on problem-solving, conflict resolution, making better decisions.
- All of this can then be shared with the administrator on behalf of the student.
Taking Charge of the Building in the Absence of the Administrator

- **FACT:** Sometimes the administrator must be out of the building.
- **FACT:** There may not be an assistant administrator to take over.
- **FACT:** Someone, with knowledge of the whole building, staff and students, needs to be in charge.
The Administrator and school counselor discuss in detail what is expected in the administrator’s absence. Discipline is not in a counselor’s wheelhouse…but problem-solving is!

With student discipline issues: Counselors are equipped to use problem-solving/conflict resolution strategies from the school counseling curriculum. Counselors will help students focus on what they will do differently next time so they can share that with the administrator upon their return.

With staff or parent issues: Counselors could implement problem-solving strategies to:

- 1) Listen to Show Empathy—understand the issue from all perspectives and how it is impacting the person;
- 2) Ask Probing/Open-ended Questions: ask what they’d like to see done and discuss the pros and cons of the suggestion;
- 3) Negotiate a Solution: seek compromise;
- 4) Document the Meeting: take copious notes and let the person know this will be shared with the administrator;
- 5) Show Gratitude: thank them for their collaboration.
Taking on Clerical/Secretarial Duties

Fact: Support staff may be short-handed or absent from time to time.

Fact: The school counseling program needs to be delivered to 100% of the students.

Fact: Time to serve 100% of the students is precious.

Fact: If the counselor spends time with these duties that time is being taken away from the services to make an impact with students.
Solution: Advocacy and Compromise

- Signing Passes:
  - Pre-print/sign passes and have them in the Main Office where students can sign in and take a pass
  - Signing of passes is a shared duty amongst everyone in the Main Office

- Registering New Students:
  - Create registration packets and have parents complete them before meeting with the school counselor
  - After collecting the registration materials, the school counselor meets with the student and family to welcome them, learn about special needs, set up schedule

- Data Entry:
  - Registration information and other data entry should be done by one consistent person
  - School counselor is responsible for getting registration information to the data entry person
Supervising Classrooms or Common Areas

- FACT: Every area in the school needs to be safe.
- FACT: Most faculty members are assigned or asked to do some extra duty.
- FACT: School counselors are no exception to that.
Solutions: Advocacy and Compromise

- Talk with your administrator and discuss what duty can enhance your program, such as:
  - Classroom coverage can be used to deliver the school counseling curriculum
  - If supervising just a few students, turn it into a small group about what’s going well, what the challenges are…giving students voice.
  - If assigned to a hallway, lunchroom, recess or morning entryway, make that a satellite office. Answer easy questions so the student doesn’t have to be excused from class to do this. Greet students and observe, observe, observe!
Coordinating the School/District-Wide Testing Program

- FACT: School-wide testing is a fact of life in schools
- FACT: Academic testing is not in the wheelhouse of a school counselor
- FACT: Test coordination has the potential of taking the services of a school counselor away from students, staff and parents from March/April to May/June, leaving no one to serve social/emotional or post-secondary needs at the end of the school year
Solutions: Advocacy and Compromise

- If the school counselor is assigned this responsibility:
  - Request clerical help for counting and sorting test booklets, answer sheets, etc.
  - Ask your administrator to make sure that the faculty knows that the school counselor has his/her support, and may delegate responsibilities.
  - Request help from department leads or grade level teachers to assist with the test facilitation of their subject areas.
  - Consult with your administrator to find someone to take over make-up exams and/or set up a schedule of other staff to take that duty when needed; this allows the school counselor time to see students.
  - Present the situation to your school board with the idea to provide a part-time test coordinator (possibly using retired counselors or teachers). Be sure to show data from your time on task for this!!!
FACT: This is not going away.
FACT: There is no one in DESE who oversees 504s; it’s an Office of Civil Rights procedure.
FACT: 504s are not a Special Ed issue; however SPED personnel may have insights into appropriate interventions for 504 students.
FACT: A 504 is not a consolation prize for not qualifying for an IEP.
FACT: A 504 works within the general education program.
Create a team approach to 504s
  ◦ If it’s a medical issue, the nurse is the coordinator of the 504
  ◦ If it’s a behavior issues, the administrator is the coordinator of the 504
  ◦ If it’s an academic or social/emotional issue, the school counselor is the coordinator of the 504

An administrator is critical when assigning school/district funds, facilities and/or personnel
Providing Therapy or Long-Term Counseling

- FACT: School counselors are equipped to provide Tier One services to 100% of the students, and Tier Two services individual counseling (brief/3–6 sessions) and small groups.
- FACT: Although school counselors are the mental health professional in a school setting, they are not Licensed Professional Counselors.
- FACT: Some students need therapy/long-term counseling.
- FACT: The parents’ role must be considered and expected.
Solutions: Advocacy and Compromise

- In IEPs, if school counselors are included for counseling, ask your administrator to insist on the language: “The student may seek the assistance of the school counselor on an as-needed basis.”

- When meeting with parents, have a list of therapists and/or community resources available for them to contact.

- Emphasize the fact that the school counseling program serves the needs of ALL students…not just a select few; this is ethical practice!
When School Counselors and Administrators Communicate, Advocate and Compromise…. It’s WIN–WIN!!
Thank you so much for what you do for your students and staff!