Implementation of the Missouri Comprehensive School Counseling Program

A Position Paper of the Missouri School Counselor Association

Comprehensive school counseling programs are a vital component in the educational process as they assist all students in developing knowledge and skills to achieve success and complete a college and career readiness program that prepares them for the multiple opportunities awaiting them after high school. When implemented by certified school counselors in collaboration with parents/guardians, teachers, and administrators, comprehensive school counseling programs are effective in improving student achievement, supporting student development and assisting students to respond to life’s challenges.

The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education states that the comprehensive school counseling program is an integral part of a school district’s total educational program. It is developmental by design and includes sequential activities organized and implemented by school counselors with the active support of parents/guardians, teachers, administrators, and the community. It addresses the needs of all students by facilitating their academic, career, and social/emotional development as well as helping create positive and safe learning climates in schools. At the same time, the program assists students as they face issues and resolve problems that may prevent their healthy development.

Its characteristics are similar to other programs in education and include the following: student grade level expectations (GLEs) (academic, career, and social/emotional development), activities and processes to assist students in achieving these grade level expectations, professionally certified personnel, materials and resources, program, personnel, and results evaluations.

The keys to the development and implementation of an effective comprehensive school counseling program in Missouri include:

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

A comprehensive school counseling program positively impacts many factors which contribute to student success. Schools with a fully implemented comprehensive school counseling program have a more positive climate where students feel safer (Lapan, Gysbers & Petroski, 2001). This climate helps students to build more positive relationships with teachers which contributes to students in these schools earning higher grades (Lapan, Gysbers & Sun, 1997). Additionally, counselors in these schools are able to spend more time with students, parents, and teachers (Lapan, Gysbers & Blair,
Recent research (Lapan, Poyton, Balkin & Jones, 2018) shows that graduating 12th graders attending schools with lower counselor-to-student ratios and more complete implementation of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model of comprehensive school counseling were more engaged in higher quality college counseling learning activities. These activities helped students to make more informed college decisions. As Lapan pointed out during the 2018 ASCA National Conference in Los Angeles, when examining the numbers of colleges high school students considered, applied to, and were accepted into, student/counselor ratios and ASCA National Model implementation were better predictors than level of parental education. Overall, when certified school counselors have the time, resources and structure of a comprehensive school counseling program to work in, they contribute to positive and safe learning climates in schools as well as increased academic/career development and post-secondary enrollment (Lapan, Gysber & Kaplan, 2007).

The structure of the Missouri Comprehensive School Counseling Program helps school districts plan, design, implement, evaluate, and enhance comprehensive, developmental, and systematic counseling programs in kindergarten through grade 12. There are four components: Curriculum, Individual Student Planning, Responsive Services (direct services), and System Support (indirect services). Missouri’s comprehensive school counseling program is designed to address the academic, social/emotional, and career needs of all students. The four program components are unique, yet mutually supportive in addressing the grade level expectations, student needs, and the on-going mission of the school and district.

- **Counseling Curriculum** - structured group and classroom presentations
- **Individual Student Planning** - appraisal, development of Individual Career and Academic Plans (ICAP), and successful post-secondary transitions
- **Responsive Services** – individual, brief counseling, small-group counseling, consultation, and referral
- **System Support** - program management, program evaluation, professional development, staff and community relations, consultation, committee participation, community outreach, and research and development

Tools have been developed to continually assess the effectiveness of program implementation: Internal Improvement Review (IIR) Document, Evidence Based Evaluation, School Counselor Performance Evaluation. When the programs are fully implemented, school districts will have comprehensive school counseling programs in which school counselors are able to reach 100% of their students and see results that enhance:

- Student academic performance
- Student positive mental health and social/emotional development
- Student achievement
- Positive career development using Individual Career and Academic Plans (ICAP)
• A positive and safe learning environment in collaboration with parents/guardians, teachers, administrators, and the community

• A program approach to counseling

• Program accountability through a comprehensive evaluation process (Program + Personnel = Results) that focuses on full program implementation, appropriate personnel evaluation, and the evaluation of student outcomes using relevant school/student data.

A fully implemented comprehensive school counseling program is one of the most effective programs available to help schools cultivate student readiness to learn, remove barriers to learning and achieve their ultimate potential. The full support of district administrators and the board of education is essential. Abundant research exists that documents that more fully implemented programs create positive results for students and schools. It is imperative that administrators understand the dynamics of this program to use it more effectively to receive the full benefits for the students and the school community.

References:


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