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Hints For Hiring School Counselors: How Can School Counselors Have A Positive Effect On Student Outcomes?

by Dr. Brandie Oliver and Dr. Nick Abel, Butler University School Counseling Program

According to the American School Counselor Association (ASCA; 2012), the primary role of the school counselor is to design, deliver, and manage a comprehensive school counseling program that is “driven by student data and based on standards in academic, career and personal/social development” and which “promote(s) and enhance(s) the learning process for all students.” As such, counselors are increasingly expected to ask themselves this critical question: “How are students different as a result of the school counseling program?” (ASCA, 2012). In this way, school counselors are no different than teachers, administrators, and other educators who are being held responsible for student outcomes in this age of accountability. While some counselors (specifically those who operate in a traditional “responsive services” environment) see such expectations as a negative, undue burden, responsible school counselors embrace the challenges of designing a data-driven program and demonstrating their effectiveness in impacting the academic, social/emotional, and college/career outcomes of students.

In evaluating the effectiveness of their interventions and overall program, ASCA (2012) recommends that counselors collect three types of data: process, perception, and outcome. Process data answers the question, ‘what did you do for whom?’ and is simply a report of how many students received an intervention (i.e., 300 students received the guidance lessons). Perception data answers the question, ‘what do students think they know, believe or can do?’ by measuring changes in student knowledge, attitudes, or skills and is frequently gathered through surveys (i.e., on a pre-test, students named an average of 2 coping strategies; post-tests revealed that students could name an average of 5 coping strategies). Another measure of perception data would include assessments of the Indiana School Counseling Competencies for Students that were just revised in November 2015. Outcome (or results) data is a portrait of the ways in which students use learned knowledge, changed attitudes, or new skills to increase academic, social/emotional, or college/career outcomes (i.e., students in the counselor-led study skills group increased GPA by an average of 0.5 grade points over the course of the academic year). Simply, outcome data demonstrates the effectiveness of school counselor interventions as it directly impacts student attendance, behavior, and/or achievement.

Below is an example these three types of data with regard to one intervention a school counselor might implement within the social/emotional domain of a school counseling program.

School Counselor Intervention: 4-lesson guidance unit focused on emotional/self-regulation skills.

Domain: Social/Emotional

Process Data:

Approximately 200 seventh grade students participated in a 4-lesson guidance unit related to identifying emotions, naming emotions, and strategies to regulate emotional responses.

Perception Data: According to the pre-post test surveys given before and after the unit, approximately 92% of students report an increased understanding of how to use an I-message to express their feelings.

Outcomes Data:

Disciplinary infractions related to poor emotional/self-regulation have decreased 15% following the completion of the guidance unit.

Taking the information above into account, here are a few questions you might ask during an interview to gauge the interviewee’s knowledge and skillset with regard to the use of data and measurement of student outcomes:

- How have you (or would you) implement components of the ASCA National Model?
- Describe how you would develop a comprehensive school counseling program.
- How will you evaluate your school counseling program?
- What type of data would demonstrate an effective school counseling program?
- What do the most recent state standardized test results indicate about this school district and this school, and what is your role regarding standardized testing?
- What are some interventions you would implement to address the Indiana School Counseling Student Competencies? How would you demonstrate students in our school successfully mastered these competencies?

Sources: American School Counselor Association