Program Results Measurement to Prove the Guidance and Counseling Program Accountability

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Abstract: Guidance and counseling program accountability faces growing demands about the extent to which the work of counselors in guidance and counseling services programs makes significant, measurable changes in students' lives, their contribution to student success and the improvement of school quality. Counselors are encouraged to work within an accountability framework together with other educators to prove that the counseling program is accountable and effective in the overall students learning process. This paper addresses the issues and challenges of results-based accountability by covering the discussion of the level of accountability level, ways of measuring key data, critical tools of accountability, analyzing critical data elements, and measurement for systemic change.

Keywords: data-driven accountability; program accountability; program evaluation; school improvement; student success

1. Introduction

Discussion of accountability seems no longer be a serious concern for professionals after many studies have proved that the implementation of guidance and counseling programs in schools have an impact and contribute significantly to student success (Gay & Swank, 2021; Parzych et al., 2023; C. Stone & Dahir, 2011; Zyromski & Dimmitt, 2019). In fact, the problem of accountability always arises because it is a phenomenon that continues to occur along with the challenges and demands for innovative guidance and counseling services in schools (M. H. Brown et al., 2019; Dahir et al., 2019). Accountability is the responsibility of the guidance and counseling profession at the local and national levels (Gysbers, 2004; Havlik et al., 2018; Strear et al., 2018; A. A. Young & Bryan, 2018).

Accountability is the achievement of guidance and counseling program management obtained through the program evaluation process, including personnel evaluation, program evaluation, and results evaluation (Carey et al., 2018; Gysbers & Henderson, 2012; Maras et al., 2013; Paufler & Sloat, 2020). Currently, the issue of accountability for guidance and counseling programs is a major topic of discussion for counselors working within a comprehensive guidance and counseling framework. The basic role of other educators who also contribute to student development are addressed questions about accountability through the programs' contribution to student success (Fadli et al., 2022; Hines et al., 2020; C. B. Stone & Dahir, 2016; Wilkerson et al., 2013; Zyromski et al., 2018).

The program accountability barriers (Bemak et al., 2014) such as time constraints, lack of training in evaluation methods, difficulties in measuring the results of school counseling, lack of qualified human resources in the field of evaluation management, and unclear standards and guidelines about what criteria to measure, cause school counselors to be unable and hesitate in demonstrating their contributons to students success and achievement (Akos et al., 2018; M. H.

Brown et al., 2019; Fye et al., 2020; Paufler & Sloat, 2020; Perera-Diltz & Mason, 2010; Wilkerson et al., 2013).

Some recommendation of counseling accountability models have been proposed (Akos et al., 2018; Gay & Swank, 2021; Gysbers & Henderson, 2012; Johnson et al., 2006; C. Stone & Dahir, 2011); unfortunately, few provide details about the specific type of accountability data that has merit to critical stakeholders and to the future of students. Consequently, many counselors are confused about what they should measure and think they do not have a standard reference for measuring student success as a result of guidance and counseling services in schools (Blake, 2020; Chae, 2022; Kiper Riechel et al., 2020).

2. Method

The literature review method was employed for this study. The literature used includes topics on guidance and counseling program accountability, data driven accountability, evidence of guidance and counseling accountability, and the impact of guidance and counseling services on student success. The literature used is conceptual scientific journals and empirical findings by prioritizing journals published in the last 10 years. However, journals over the last 10 years were used if the journal is a main reference that presents substantial information on the topic of accountability for guidance and counseling programs.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Accountability: The Level of Evidence

Accountability in the 21st century increases the focus from just systems to buildings and systems where accountability for guidance and counseling programs does not become a separate entity from the school and to improve the system must involve the school as a whole including the principal, other educators, and school administrator so that the resulting changes are not just changes system, but changes in the whole school/ building (Dahir et al., 2019; Dahir & Stone, 2003, 2009; Paufler & Sloat, 2020). They work in an accountability-driven environment where reforms standards-based work has dramatically changed the way every educator works in schools to improve student performance. Historically, the accountability standards of other professions have been better than school counselors (Fadli et al., 2022; Paufler & Sloat, 2020; C. Stone & Dahir, 2011). This is rarely included in school and district conversations especially about their contribution to school improvement. The traditional way of working for counselors is outdated, such as showing time-on-task data or numerical summaries of various types of activities to assess and evaluate the impact of school counseling programs. A challenge like this is a reminder to all educators, especially school counselors, to redesign and change methods of proving accountability. School counselors as the key players in students academic success, will be counted as an integral part of student achievement (Gagnon & Schneider, 2019; Perera-Diltz & Mason, 2010; C. Stone & Dahir, 2011).

To be accountable means being responsible for the actions and contributions of the program to other parties whose the target of the program, especially regarding the objectives, procedures, and results. This involves describing goals, and what is being worked on to fulfill them. It requires the collection of important information and data that supports evidence of claimed achievement. It can also require documentation demonstrating commitment to and compliance with laws and work standards at school and national levels (Fye et al., 2020; Paufler & Sloat, 2020). Every school counselor is expected to be able to answer basic questions about

the impact of guidance and counseling programs as part of the overall school program on student success (Myrick, 2003).

The work of counselors and their contribution to school improvement and student success, optimal development and academic achievement, involves a variety of good management from planning, implementation, supervision, to evaluation. Among these stages, absolutely, there must be an effective use of financial resources to improve student achievement. School improvement is focused on addressing achievement gaps and using critical data elements in a positive direction. By closely monitoring the practice of counseling work, school counselors can articulate and communicate how their contribution has a positive impact on improving student achievement, which is certainly achieved through synergistic work in a supportive work team (Geesa et al., 2022; Gysbers & Henderson, 2012; Young et al., 2013).

3.2. Measuring What Matters

Traditionally, perception data and service process data are used to assess and evaluate the impact of guidance and counseling programs (Myrick, 2003; C. Stone & Dahir, 2011). The data from the assessment model is indeed useful but is unable to show the specific contribution of professional counselor work. This evaluation model also fails to meet expectations that school counselors are expected to be able overcoming achievement gaps and promote student development and success (Biesta, 2007; Gay & Swank, 2021). Even though school counselors are required to prove specific work results as well as evaluate the effectiveness of interventions, for example, correlation between guidance and counseling interventions and student achievement data or behavior change (Kivlighan et al., 2014; Pyhältö et al., 2014; Zyromski & Dimmitt, 2019).

The newest edition of the ASCA National Model (2012) has coped the potential pitfalls of traditional accountability methods. It demand school counselors to answer a fundamental question—"How are students different as a result of the guidance and counseling program?"—through disclosure of result data. The outcome data provides evidence that the guidance activity and counseling intervention has or has no impact on students' ability to implement their knowledge and skills in increasing success and changing behavior. The use of behavior, attendance, and achievement data assists school counselors to identify areas of concerns as well as students different as a consequent of school counselors' work (Akos et al., 2018; American School Counselor Association, 2012; Gay & Swank, 2021). The ASCA National Model is helpful in providing a list of data types correlated to students' academic achievement and progress; however, the availability of a uniform set of guidelines as a general guide for school counselors regarding "what data is important and should be analyzed" is urgently needed.

The four accountability domains are considered as critical areas and cores for evaluation, namely grades, attendance, suspension, and disciplinary referrals. The four domains are the scope of evaluating overall school success regarding students that must be analyzed by school counselors. The four important data elements comprise: (1) the most important operational data which is an indicator of student success in the national education system in general (Allensworth & Easton, 2007; Bemak et al., 2014; Neild et al., 2007), (2) can be accessed through school administrators (American School Counselor Association, 2012); (3) widely used at the school level, regional to central education offices, and by critical stakeholders (United States Department of Education, 2002); (4) used in international standards-based reforms such as No Child Left Behind (United States Department of Education, 2002); and (5) directly related to the

role and responsibilities of the counselor. The four accountability data sets enable school counselors to properly document their contributions to the school's mission.

3.3. Critical Tools of Accountability Measurement

A vivid set of performance measures is crucial for ensuring school counselor accountability. By outlining the key performance evaluation indicators, the counselor provides a proper understanding of the role and activities of the school counselor, and how the guidance and counseling program relates to the school's mission by emphasizing student achievement. In addition, it helps other school staff understand the school counselor's contribution to student academic success (Anita & Carol, 2015; Geesa et al., 2022; Kiper Riechel et al., 2020). In turn, providing outcome-based data was able to clarify the specific performance of the school counselor in his role in the guidance and counseling program and generally demonstrate the ability to work in teams with other educators. Accountability measures that correlate consistently with academic success help school counselors understand, verify, and improve the impact of their services on student outcomes. Accountable performance measures by leveraging the four areas of accountability helped introduce guidance and counseling services and programs that linked school counselor progress to school progress data (Young & Kaffenberger, 2009).

All school counselors, regardless of level, area, or community served ought to be able answering three questions: (a) What are the goals and standards of the school guidance program regarding student achievement? (b) What interventions were used or what activities did the counselor do to meet the standards and needs of the students? and (c) Is there evidence that school counseling programs and special interventions contribute to student achievement and close achievement gaps among students? Each of these questions may be complicated to be answered unless reliable data are available (Johnson et al., 2006; Myrick, 2011).

Utilizing the four data domains can be very useful and can accounted for by school counselors as a basis for targeted program outcomes. Using the four data domains helps school counselors to answer "How are students different as a result of a school counseling program or intervention?" For example, if a small number of students take part in a group counseling intervention for the emotional management, then the counselor will measure the student's progress and decline regarding discipline and reduced anger (Akos et al., 2018; American School Counselor Association, 2012). In this way of working, school counselors develop easier ways to define and measure the results of their professional work. However, measuring a school counselor's unique contribution to student and school success is not always simple.

In some cases, school counselors cannot control for unobservable factors such as student motivation, real family circumstances, and school climate, as well as other influences that can contribute to positive or negative outcomes. Thus, the possible limitations have practical reasons. Correlational data are generally relatively simple and generous to obtain, allow more realistic comparisons between variables, and are less time consuming than experimental data. In addition, some causal relationships are so subtle that they need to be investigated through the correlations detected in observational data (Houser, 2014).

3.4. Identifying and Analyzing Critical Data Elements

Data about students serves not only as information, but also as a challenge for counselors to manage the data used to determine systemic changes, confirm progress, and reveal students'

specific weaknesses in their academic performance (Dahir & Stone, 2009; Hines et al., 2020; Pyhältö et al., 2014; Zyromski & Dimmitt, 2019). Examination of critical data such as the socio-economic impact on student behavior, the post-graduation success rate of students, the number of students continuing on to further education, and the results of student academic tests can identify school-wide issues affecting achievement. School counselors can present a complete picture of students' needs and challenges, and can also test the impact of counseling interventions on better student achievement levels when using reliable data (Young & Kaffenberger, 2009; Zyromski et al., 2021).

Sorting data based on predictor variables such as ethnicity, gender, or socio-economic status is very important to analyze which predictors play a greater role in the development of students' academic and non-academic performance (Cook et al., 2019; Day-Vines et al., 2018; Pretorius et al., 2013). Data disaggregation makes it possible to design policies and implement services that are principled in equity, and help counselors work with other educators to address student achievement gaps. Meanwhile, process data can still be used to demonstrate the school counselor's commitment to program responsibility and accountability for student success (Gay & Swank, 2021; Nakash et al., 2014; Zyromski et al., 2021).

Process data is a commitment to professional responsibility while result data is an indicator of success. Demonstrating performance-based and evidence-based results is critical to gaining the internal and external trust that requires concrete information about the work of school counselors (Anita & Carol, 2015; Dimmitt et al., 2007; Young & Kaffenberger, 2009; Zyromski et al., 2018). On the other hand, the school system must have good data management, collecting and storing student academic and demographic data in a retrievable storage system. Identifying and examining important data elements that can collectively impact all stakeholders should be undertaken to analyze their relation to the performance and work of counselors. Other complementary data such as course knowledge and skills occupied by students can be collected by the counselor for analysis of conditions or other factors that contribute to student success. The principal plays a pivotal role in the process of collecting and testing this data (Dahir et al., 2010).

Disaggregation of data based on demographics including gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status can be leveraged into the entire school analysis. The data units that are analyzed for their impact on student performance and success can cover all their needs so that no student is left behind or neglected, no student is outlawed from opportunities, student development can be facilitated through careful data analysis (Hines et al., 2020; Parzych et al., 2023). For the example, school counselors begin identifying whom is accessing and not accessing the post-secondary education. Disaggregating data units will help school counselors better understand student profiles as well as those going on to higher education (Lapan et al., 2014; Zullig et al., 2009). For instance, if only half of the total number of students are able to access further education, then it is critical for counselors to identify the various barriers that hinder high school alumni from accessing higher education. Informal or formal analysis can be chosen as counselors embark on examining the trend of alumni from time to time begins with attendance and achievements at the secondary level.

3.5. Results Measurement for Systemic Change
With an evolving demand for outcome-based evidence combined with an emphasis on accountability (Bauman, 2004; Brown & Trusty, 2005; Dimmitt et al., 2007; Zyromski et al.,

2018; Zyromski & Dimmitt, 2019), conducting classroom action research is urgently needed to articulate the counselor's contribution to student achievement as a big picture, and its contribution on the abilities that develop in each student. Student achievement in general and individually also indicates a different and meaningful process as a result of accountability for guidance and counseling services in schools. The classroom action research method offers advantages that other methods do not have, it is the opportunity for school counselors to act, manage progress, and reform service strategies rather than only presenting stability and mediocracy (Marzano, 2003; Mason et al., 2016; Swank & Lambie, 2016).

The expectations of school counselor' accountability have resulted various models of using data to improve accountability practices. MEASURE (mission, elements, analyze, stakeholders unite, results, and educate is one of guidance and counseling accountability models (Dahir & Stone, 2003; C. Stone & Dahir, 2011). It engages school counselors in the process of using data to identify key needs for school improvement, focus on arranged collaborative efforts, and use the results to reflect and provide feedback on practice. MEASURE offers comprehensive ways to use process and outcome data, includes systematic and organized methods to explore school-based problems, develop possible data-driven remedial actions, and monitor progress and results of actions on individual and group student performance (Erford & McCaskill, 2010; Zyromski et al., 2021).

The measure model is consistent with the tenets of the Education Trust's (1997) Transforming School Counseling initiative, supports the accountability component of the ASCA National Model (American School Counselor Association, 2005, 2012), and connects the work of school counselors to the school improvement mission. Guidance and counseling as an integral part of education mandates counselors to collaborate in implementing the process (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012; C. B. Stone & Dahir, 2016; C. Stone & Dahir, 2011), which entails school counselors to work in teams with other educators and administrative staff who work in the same institution. This collaboration will build a cooperative system that focuses on key data about students as a barometer of overall school success. The proactive and intentional measurement activities encourage a counselor led collaborative endeavor that is focused on specific outcomes and piece of each school improvement plan. When the data and results have meaning, not only for the school, but also for the interests of the stakeholders, the guidance and counseling program can be concluded as effective and contributory. These two things mean that the guidance and counseling program is accountable because it is proven to have an impact on student success in school.

Researchers have called for more guidance and counseling accountability research related to student performance (Brown et al., 2019; Parzych et al., 2023; Zyromski & Dimmitt, 2019). Years of documentation have been done realizing the critical need to transform school counseling from marginalized service, the isolated role of the counselor to a program that has a goal of harmony with the school's vision (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012). Failure to determine the significant contribution of guidance and counseling programs to school progress is sometimes also considered a failure to student achievement (Brigman & Campbell, 2010; Hines et al., 2020). In the 21st century school world, the goal that school counselors must achieve is the improvement of academic performance for all students. School counselors are mandated to take innovative steps and become regular users of data to inform and sharpen their focus. Data comes to life when school counselors process and analysize it appropriately and effectively because

they believe in its immediate impact on individuals and groups of students to increase their opportunity to acquire an equitable education (Mahmoudi et al., 2012; Norahmi, 2017).

Beliefs and good intentions alone will not contribute to systemic change. School counselors have a duty to identify and rectify the source of problems that have a negative impact on students' ability to achieve the expected goals. Improvement efforts can establish a solid foundation by using data. Focusing work on planned strategies and interventions can remove barriers to learning and increase student motivation. The achievement of this work depends on the willingness of school counselors to work within an accountability framework. The accountability work system can be proven when the counselor performs his role as an educator as well as an advocate for student success and improving school quality. When school counselors contribute to school improvement goals, they recognize students and their needs, explore opportunities extensively, and examine explicit empirical data to consider appropriateness of ideas and moral values. School counselors consistently help students from what they need to do to what they can become after doing what is needed. In other words, students develop compassionately, become critical thinkers, and become impactful contributors to society (de Vos et al., 2016; Robertson, 2021; Savickas et al., 2009; van der Heijden et al., 2020).

The accountability component of ASCA National Model demonstrates how school counselors can advance school counseling programs with standards-based reforms (Akos et al., 2018; American School Counselor Association, 2012; Gay & Swank, 2021), the mission and requirements of No Child Left Behind (United States Department of Education, 2002). School counselors act as advocates, collaborators, and data-driven decision makers in implementing results-based accountability in their respective schools. The concept of "one student at a time and one school at a time" (Stone, 2006), inspired school counselors to move forward helps narrow the gap, widening information and opportunities.

School and youth challenges can no longer be addressed passively; this is the time for school counselors to be critical, take significant action, and complete a contributive mission to school improvement (Brown et al., 2019). School counselors should create a climate of quality access and rigor norms by taking an active role as agents of school and community change (Lapan et al., 2014; C. Stone & Dahir, 2011). Through this transformation, school counselors provide underserved and underrepresented students with the opportunity to acquire needed educational skills. As a result, students have the skills readiness to participate fully in the 21st century economy (Kilburg, 2012; O'Connell, 2014; Robertson, 2021; Shultz & Adams, 2007). With accountable, data-driven school counseling programs, school counselors serve as powerful partners and collaborators in school improvement and social justice advocates who are determined to narrow inequalities, expand opportunities, and facilitate increased achievement (Cook et al., 2019; Goodman et al., 2015; Grant & Gibson, 2013; Lewis et al., 2011; Singh et al., 2020).

4. Conclusion

Outcome measurement-based accountability leads counselors to use specific strategies that target critical data domains. The accountability framework focuses on fully and optimally utilizing student data and information with the school improvement agenda. Analyzing data systematically proves the commitment of school counselors who focus on student achievement and system improvement through a school-wide system. This cooperative work model helps

school counselors share roles and responsibilities with other educators according to their respective descriptions and areas of work.

Accountability implies that all teachers, especially school counselors, intentionally and deliberately act to close the gap. All stakeholders need to have a developmental paradigm, that all students are able to learn and excel in a conducive school climate and a school system that facilitates every development in an optimal direction. In this way, guidance and counseling teachers become pioneers in aligning guidance goals and improving school quality. Advocacy activities that help principals and other educators better understand the agenda and benefits of guidance and counseling programs encourage high aspirations and create opportunities for students to realize their dreams. Working with an accountability viewpoint encourages school counselors to remove barriers to learning and increase achievement, raising the expectations of the least motivated students.

School counselors who embrace accountability tend to work in partnership (sharing accountability) involving the principal and key stakeholders. As a result, school counselors are able to promote systemic changes that drive each student's academic success. Sharing accountability for school improvement and systematic change with all stakeholders is a driving force for transforming the work of school counselors.

Action research can be used to promote data-based practices, accountability, and school goals such as improving student achievement and social justice. This is an objective-scientific dimension to school counseling. A meta-analysis of guidance and counseling research indicates that school counseling activities (such as individual counseling and group counseling) play an important role in enhancing students' academic and personal development. Research and evaluation can also be used to communicate counselor accountability. One way to conceptualize how this happens is through the interplay of research, evaluation, and accountability. The counselor must establish an ongoing accountability program, which may require additional research strategies to evaluate various aspects of a person's professional activities.

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