

Issues in K-12 School Counseling

In this report, Hanover Research addresses three critical issues in K-12 school counseling: 1) the validity of the ASCA National Model for school counseling and issues related to its implementation; 2) strategies to leverage school counseling services to support student transitions to elementary, middle, and high school as well as to postsecondary institutions; and 3) whether counselors, school teachers, or both, should write letters of recommendation for students seeking college acceptance. The report begins with an overview of key findings and then proceeds to discussions on the three critical issues in the order outlined above.

Key Findings

The ASCA National Model for School Counseling Programs

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model guides the development of comprehensive counseling programs that provide counseling services to all students and use data to inform practice and programmatic improvements. It is comprised of the following four components: **Program Foundation, Service Delivery System, Management Systems, and Accountability Mechanisms.**

While Hanover found no third-party evaluations of the Model specifically, the Model has been validated to a degree through comprehensive school counselor program evaluations that found that certain Model components were linked to positive student outcomes.

The ASCA suggests that **the full implementation of the National Model should take three to five years.** Schwallie-Giddis et al. recommend the following three strategies for facilitating the smooth implementation of the National Model: **putting together a leadership team to drive the implementation process; teaching the Model in counselor education and training programs; and using the model as a framework to guide the work of practicing counselors.** Implementation is also made easier if practicing counselors acknowledge and accept the **central role of data** in shaping program features and activities, and are open to developing their data management skills. Finally, tools exist that help school districts evaluate their readiness to implement the Model (see Table 2 and Appendix B).

The ASCA National Model has been very well received by counselors at North High School in Evansville, Indiana – a region with similar economic and demographic characteristics to XYZ School District. One of the schools' counselors stated that the Model's data-driven nature is its biggest advantage. The counselor also noted, however, that the amount of time counselors spend performing non-counseling duties has been the biggest challenge to the Model's full implementation.

Supporting Student Transitions

The four components of the ASCA National Model can be used as a framework to develop counseling programs that support students through their transitions to elementary and middle school. For both transitions, **an acknowledgement of the importance of transitional guidance can be enshrined in counseling programs' foundational elements** – particularly its goals and mission statements. For service delivery to be successful, it is important that counselors find ways to **connect with students and their families early on in the transition process.** This can be accomplished through classroom visits, open house events, or sit-down meetings. **The skills and services counselors provide students should reflect the**

challenges associated with each transition. For example, developing pro-social and relationship-building skills are particularly important for adjusting to elementary school, while good study habits and goal setting are crucial for middle school success. Finally, management systems set the parameters within which elementary and middle school counselors conduct their work, and using data gathered through personal experience with students, anecdotal accounts from others, and performance records, ensures accountability by informing equitable and measurable practices.

Middle school counselors can play a significant role in ensuring smooth student transitions to high school as well. It is important that they **share information with their high school counterparts and prepare students for the changes and challenges they will face in the ninth grade.** This includes providing students with information about their academic options in high school, informing of them of the social conditions and changes they can expect, and encouraging them to take challenging courses while in middle school. Further, counselors can support student transitions to high school through the development of **transition plans** implemented by **transition teams** composed of teachers, administrators, middle school and high school counselors, and other individuals that may influence a student's transition experience.

The College Board asserts that **college and career-readiness counseling must begin in elementary school,** and has developed a list of necessary components of college and career-readiness counseling in elementary, middle, and high school counseling programs. Regarding high school counseling efforts specifically, researchers have identified ten counseling practices that have contributed to students' college-preparedness at schools recognized for making substantial gains in their students' college-readiness, including **maintaining external relations with colleges and businesses and ensuring counselors are not overburdened with non-counseling duties.**

Letters of Recommendations in College Applications

Our research found evidence that **colleges and universities prefer to receive letters of recommendation from teachers as opposed to school counselors.** While The College Board proclaims that postsecondary institutions request letters from both teachers and counselors, educational consultants advise students to seek letters from teachers in core subjects (or subjects related to their intended major) who know their work well. Students are also advised to seek letters from **junior year teachers** and to **give them plenty of advanced notice.** The College Board even recommends requesting a letter in the spring semester of junior year so as to provide teachers with the option of completing the letter over the summer break. This is perhaps an indication that teachers may often not have sufficient time to write letters due to their regular commitments.

The ASCA National Model for School Counseling Programs

In this section, Hanover draws upon literature on the American School Counselor Association's National Model for school counseling to discuss the Model's purpose, components, validity, and implementation. The overwhelming majority of the literature on the Model supports its widespread implementation. However, the reader should exercise caution in interpreting findings from the literature, as much of it has been produced by ASCA and researchers associated with that organization, and thus cannot be considered truly objective.

This section also discusses keys to successfully implementing the ASCA National Model, drawing upon advice from ASCA and the Arizona Department of Education.

Finally, the section concludes with an analysis of the ASCA National Model in use at school districts with similar community characteristics to XYZ School District.

The ASCA Model: Purpose and Elements

The ASCA National Model is a comprehensive, carefully-developed framework for organizing school counselors' work. It was developed in 2003 by a team of 15 professional school counselors and counselor educators to "...institutionalize the framework for and process of developing a school counseling program."¹ ASCA notes that while the model intends to serve as a framework for the development of school counseling programs,

...it is not meant to be replicated exactly as written here. **Effective programs consider local demographic needs and political conditions when integrating and adapting the National Model.** The model, therefore, is not intended to be used as a cookie-cutter approach in developing school counseling programs.²

It was the intention of the architects of the Model that it remain flexible and general enough to be applicable in all schools. It was also designed to be proactive and preventive, with a broad focus on providing counseling services to all students rather than serving the neediest students alone. According to ASCA, the National Model "ensures the school counseling program is **comprehensive in design and delivered in a systematic fashion to all students.**"³ It is based on the Comprehensive Developmental Guidance (CDG) program model, which

...emerged during the 1970's and emphasizes school counseling as a core

¹ "The ASCA National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs." American School Counselor Association, 2003, 10. <http://oak.cats.ohiou.edu/~ds688887/ASCA%20Model.pdf>

² Ibid., 10.

³ Ibid., 14.

educational program rather than a set of ancillary support services. **CDG programs are designed to promote student competence and to prevent problems.** Counselors implementing these programs are responsible for a guidance curriculum based on student learning objectives and outcomes and the programs are designed to serve all students well.⁴

CDG programs are thus a step away from “student services” counseling models, which focus on dealing with crisis situations as they arise. It can be expected that states that have already adopted some variation of the CDG model will have relatively smooth transitions to the ASCA National Model.⁵

The National Model **encourages data-driven decision-making and accountability for student outcomes.** In a 2005 report, researchers from the Center for School Counseling Outcome Research and Evaluation stated:

The National Model encourages counselors to complete yearly results reports with data about student change, to develop school counselor performance standards for constructing job descriptions and annual performance evaluations, and to conduct periodic program audits to ensure that the school counseling program is targeted at the right goals and implementing interventions effectively.⁶

The ASCA National Model is comprised of four components: Foundation, Delivery System, Management System, and Accountability, which serve to guide the development of school counseling programs that meet the ASCA’s National Standards for School Counseling Programs as well as districts’ specific programmatic goals. The four components are described in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Components of the ASCA National Model

| Component | Description | |
|------------|--|---|
| Foundation | <i>Beliefs and Philosophy:</i> The philosophy is a set of principles (usually a set of "we agree statements") guiding the program development, implementation, and evaluation. All personnel involved in managing and implementing the program must agree on each belief or guiding principle contained in the philosophy. | <i>ASCA National Standards and competencies:</i> The ASCA National Standards serve as the foundation for the ASCA National Model. These student content standards and competencies define the knowledge, attitudes or skills students should obtain or demonstrate as a result of participating in a school counseling program. |

⁴ McGannon, W., J. Carey, and C. Dimmitt. 2005. “The Current Status of School Counseling Outcome Research.” Center for School Counseling Outcome Research, 7-8. <http://www.counseling.org/Files/FD.aspx?guid=5aa26081-d71e-4bfa-99b9-81827c781e79>

⁵ Ibid., 9.

⁶ Ibid., 9.

| Component | Description | |
|--------------------|--|---|
| | <p><i>Mission:</i> A mission statement describes the program's purpose and provides the vision of what is desired for every student. A school counseling program mission statement aligns with and is a sub-set of the school and district's mission.</p> | <p><i>Domains:</i> The school counseling program facilitates student development in three broad domains, academic, career and personal/social, to promote and enhance the learning process.</p> |
| Delivery System | <p><i>Guidance curriculum:</i> The guidance curriculum component consists of structured developmental lessons designed to assist students in achieving the competencies and is presented systematically through classroom and group activities. The purpose of the guidance activities is to provide all students the knowledge and skills appropriate for their developmental level.</p> | <p><i>Systems support:</i> The systems support component consists of the professional development; consultation, collaboration and teaming; and program management and operation activities that establish, maintain and enhance the total school counseling program.</p> |
| | <p><i>Individual student planning:</i> The individual planning component consists of school counselors coordinating ongoing systemic activities designed to assist the individual student in establishing personal goals and developing future plans.</p> | <p><i>Responsive services:</i> The responsive services component consists of activities to meet students' immediate needs. These needs require counseling, consultation, referral, peer mediation or information.</p> |
| Management Systems | <p><i>Management agreements:</i> School counselor and administrator agreements include statements of responsibilities by each counselor specifying the program results the counselor is accountable for achieving during the year. It also includes how counselors divide the program responsibilities. These agreements are negotiated with and approved by designated administrators at the beginning of each school year.</p> | <p><i>Use of data:</i> School counselors must show that each activity implemented as part of the program was developed from a careful analysis of students' needs, achievement and related data. Data should be used for student monitoring as well as closing the gap between where the counseling program is and where it strives to be.</p> |
| | <p><i>Action plans:</i> Two types of action plans, "guidance curriculum" action plans and "closing the gap" action plans are described in the ASCA National Model. Guidance curriculum action plans include: the domain, standard and competency addressed; description of guidance lesson activity; curriculum or materials to be used; time activity is to be completed; the person(s) responsible for the delivery; and the means of evaluating student success. Closing the gap action plans also describe the data driving the decision addressing this competency.</p> | <p><i>Use of time:</i> A comprehensive school counseling program requires counselors to spend the majority of their time in direct service (contact) with students. Non-school-counseling program tasks are eliminated or reassigned, so school counselors can focus on the prevention and intervention needs of students in their program.</p> |

| Component | Description | |
|----------------|--|--|
| | <i>Calendars:</i> Once school counselors determine the amount of time to spend in each area of the delivery system, a master calendar and weekly calendars are developed and published to ensure that students, parents or guardians, teachers and administrators know what is scheduled. This will assist in planning and will ensure active participation in the program. Annual, monthly and weekly calendars ensure planned activities are accomplished. | -- |
| Accountability | <i>Results reports:</i> Results reports, which include process, perception and results data, ensure programs are carried out, analyzed for effectiveness and changed and improved as needed. Sharing these reports with stakeholders serves as an advocacy for the students and the program. Immediate, intermediate and long-range results (impact over time) are collected and analyzed for program improvement. | <i>School counselor performance standards:</i> The school counselor's performance evaluation contains basic standards of practice expected of school counselors implementing a school counseling program. These performance standards serve as both a basis for counselor evaluation and as a means for counselor self-evaluation. |
| | <i>Program audit:</i> The program audit provides evidence of the programs alignment with ASCA's National Model for School Counseling Programs. The primary purpose for collecting information is to guide future action within the program and to improve future results for students. | -- |

Source: ASCA⁷

Validity of the ASCA National Model

Hanover's searches through various Internet databases failed to uncover studies evaluating the validity or effectiveness of the ASCA's National Model specifically. Our efforts consisted of keyword searches in the Google search engine as well as the ProQuest Education and the LexisNexis databases. We were, however, able to glean the effectiveness of certain model components through analyses of comprehensive statewide school counselor program evaluations. Findings from those analyses will be discussed toward the end of this sub-section.

The available literature on the Model is dominated by reports issued by the ASCA itself. Unsurprisingly, ASCA literature heaps praise on the Model; casting it as the optimal framework for developing, operating, and evaluating a school counseling program. Writing in the ASCA's *Professional School Counseling* journal, Schwallie-Giddis et al. claim:

⁷ "The ASCA National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs," Op. Cit. 22-24.

The model is a guide for all school counselors, in all settings, and with all populations. It is a model that is flexible and adaptable to meet the unique needs of schools and students. It is comprehensive and maintains children's best interests at its heart. And it can be easily followed because it incorporates what school counselors across the nation already do.⁸

The ASCA also credits the Model with **adding much-needed clarity to the role of the school counselor**. In a short article in *Professional School Counseling*, Russell A. Sabella, the Interim Director of the ASCA National School Counseling Research Center, asserted:

This landmark document has paved the way for school counselors to navigate the chaotic landscape of education in more comprehensive, consistent, and systematic ways—a manner unprecedented in our profession's history. The ASCA National Model provides a framework that helps school counselors practice with greater intention and increased clarity.⁹

While not evaluating the efficacy of the National Model per se, school counseling program evaluations have found evidence that core aspects of the National Model contribute to positive student outcomes. For example, a recent evaluation of 272 high schools in Nebraska by the Center for School Counseling Outcome Research and Evaluation (CSCORE) found that positive student outcomes were associated with certain program characteristics that follow guidelines established in the National Model:

- ❖ Needs Assessments are completed regularly and guide program planning.
- ❖ School counselors use student performance data to decide how to meet student needs.
- ❖ An annual review is conducted in order to collect information for improving next year's programs.
- ❖ School counselors spend most of their time in activities that directly benefit students.
- ❖ The program includes interventions designed to improve the school's ability to educate all students to high standards.¹⁰

A multi-state evaluation project also conducted by CSCORE found similar results – particularly with regard to the connection between the use of performance data to inform program improvements and positive student outcomes. In Connecticut, CSCORE researchers surveyed counselors, guidance directors, and principals at 96 high schools across the state and found that **using data to evaluate program**

⁸ Schwallie-Giddis, P., M. ter Maat, and M. Pak. 2003. "Initiating Leadership by Introducing and Implementing the ASCA National Model." *Professional School Counseling*, 1. http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0KOC/is_3_6/ai_100732132/?tag=content;col1

⁹ Sabella, R.A. 2006. "The ASCA National School Counseling Research Center: A Brief History and Agenda." American School Counselor Association, 1. <http://www.schoolcounselor.org/files/9-5-412%20Sabella.pdf>

¹⁰ Carey, J. and K. Harrington. 2010. "Nebraska School Counseling State Evaluation." Center for School Counseling Outcome Research, 4. <http://www.education.ne.gov/cared/docs/NSCE%20Full%20Report.pdf>

effectiveness was linked to higher graduation and lower suspension rates.¹¹ In Utah, the use of performance data was “significantly associated” with more students achieving reading and mathematics proficiency and increased graduation rates.¹²

The researchers also found that other program features (related to the National Model) were associated with enhanced student outcomes in Utah schools. For instance, **improvements were found when “Services are organized so that all students are well served and have access to these services” and “School counselors spend at least 80 [percent] of their time in activities that directly benefit students.”**¹³

There is also evidence from CSCORE’s multi-state evaluation and other studies that comprehensive developmental guidance programs – which the ASCA’s National Model is used to develop – foster positive student outcomes. In Wisconsin, the CSCORE researchers found that in high schools that had firmly implemented a comprehensive school counseling program, a higher percentage of students had taken Advanced Placement exams and attendance rates were better than at high schools where the implementation of a comprehensive program was less complete.¹⁴ Further, a study of counseling effectiveness at 150 elementary schools in Washington State found that

...early elementary-age students who attend the same school for three or more years do better academically when there is a CDG program, even if the CDG program is not fully implemented. Additionally, students who remain in the same school for multiple years with a well-implemented CDG program will obtain higher achievement test scores than students who attend schools without such programs.¹⁵

To gather the counselor perspective on the most effective and ineffective aspects of the Model, a 2008 study surveyed 3,000 counselors working in schools that have implemented the National Model. The study was conducted by one of the key architects of the Model, Trish Hatch, and found **that foundational aspects of the model – setting explicit goals for the counseling program in particular – were the most useful parts of the Model, while the Model’s emphasis on using data to monitor student achievement and development and inform service/program improvements was commonly cited as its least useful component.**¹⁶

¹¹ “Results of CSCORE’s Multi-State School Counseling Research Project.” Presented at the ASCA National Conference, July 4, 2010. Center for School Counseling Outcome Research and Evaluation, 23. <http://www.umass.edu/schoolcounseling/uploads/ASCA2010MultiState.pdf>

¹² Ibid., 46.

¹³ Ibid., 50.

¹⁴ Ibid., 74.

¹⁵ McGannon et al. Op. cit., 12.

¹⁶ Hatch, T. and S.F. Chen-Hayes. 2008. “School Counselor Beliefs About ASCA National Model School Counseling

Keys to the Successful Implementation of the ASCA National Model

An article in *Professional School Counseling* published shortly after the release of the National Model in 2003 outlines some keys to the Model's successful implementation. The authors, Schwallie-Giddis et al., suggest that a **leadership team, counselor education, and a framework for practicing counselors**, have been "...found useful to make this model succeed."¹⁷ These suggestions are described in detail below.

Leadership Team

Schwallie-Giddis et al. suggest that leadership teams, comprised of practicing school counselors, directors of guidance and counseling, school administrators, and coordinators of student services, are fundamental to the Model's successful implementation. **Leadership teams effectively serve as information hubs and facilitators who guide other practitioners through the process of transitioning to the Model.** They cite the Northern Virginia School Counselors' Leadership Team as an example of an effective team. The team's key tactic was to hold a summit for counselors and administrators from school districts within the region, where they introduced the ASCA National Model and facilitated group discussion on it. Discussions took place amongst counselors and between counselors and their district administrators, which presented counselors with an opportunity to discuss their needs with their administrators regarding the implementation of the Model. Regarding the counselor-administrator deliberations, Schwallie-Giddis et al. note: "This is where the first steps toward implementation began."¹⁸

Counselor Education

Schwallie-Giddis et al. stress the importance of integrating instruction on the ASCA National Model into counselor education and training programs. This can be done by redesigning course syllabi in foundational school counseling and practicum courses to teach the major components of the Model. **Courses should not only teach the Model but engage counselors-in-training in discussions on how they feel it could be applied in the schools in which they are completing their practicums.** Schwallie-Giddis et al. also believe new counselors should be advocates of the Model at the schools in which they complete their practicums, and share their knowledge of it to supervising counselors.¹⁹

Program Components Using the SCPCS." *Professional School Counseling*, 3.

http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0KOC/is_1_12/ai_n30951793/?tag=content;col1

¹⁷ Schwallie-Giddis, P., M. ter Maat, and M. Pak. 2003. Op. Cit, 1.

¹⁸ Ibid., 1-3.

¹⁹ Ibid., 3.

Framework for Practicing Counselors

Schwallie-Giddis et al. support the use of the ASCA National Model as a framework to guide the work of practicing counselors. They note, “The model provides a proactive framework that has steps that are universal, standard-reaching counseling programs for all schools.” Schwallie-Giddis et al. find the **“action plan” and “calendars” sections of the Model to be particularly helpful to new counselors**, as they provide structure and guidance for their practice. They also claim the Model’s emphasis on data collection provides a framework to guide program improvement, as it enables counselors and administrators to better measure the effectiveness of interventions.²⁰

Other ASCA Advice

The ASCA offers five “Bits of Advice” or things to keep in mind when implementing the National Model:

- ❖ Remember, the purpose of the ASCA National Model is to do more school counseling.
- ❖ Keep it simple.
- ❖ The ASCA National Model is even more important when you have a large caseload.
- ❖ The ASCA National Model gives you the tools to take things off your plate.
- ❖ Take advantage of experts in your district.²¹

In addition to these suggestions, a 2008 study that appeared in *Professional School Counseling* stresses the importance of data to the implementation process. The architects of the study assert:

Successful implementation of ASCA National Model school counseling program components requires lessening the fear of using data. It requires that school counselors understand the importance of developing data skills and then using data in both program management and accountability. It includes using data to drive decision making, setting measurable goals and objectives, and evaluating program effectiveness.²²

The Model’s emphasis on using measurable data to drive strategic decision-making runs counter to more reactionary, case-by-case approaches to counseling. As the above quote suggests, successful adoption of the Model requires counselors to embrace the centrality of data in their planning and practice as well as a willingness to develop sufficient data management skills.

²⁰ Ibid., 4-5

²¹ “Five Bits of Advice for ASCA National Model Implementation.” American School Counselor Association. <http://www.ascanationalmodel.org/>

²² Hatch, T., and S.F. Chen-Hayes. 2008. “School Counselor Beliefs About ASCA National Model School Counseling Program Components Using the SCPCS.” *Professional School Counseling*, 6. http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0KOC/is_1_12/ai_n30951793/?tag=content;col1

Arizona Implementation Plan

Arizona, one of the leading states in terms of the number of its schools designated as Recognized ASCA Model Program (RAMP) schools, produced a three-year implementation plan for schools looking to transition to the ASCA National Model. The three-year plan outlines a timeline for implementing all of the key elements of the Model. For example, the plan stipulates that **a mission philosophy, beliefs, and vision should be implemented within the first year, while gathering standards and competency-related data should take place in the second year of implementation.** A three-year implementation timeline is in line with the ASCA's suggested three-to-five year timeline.²³ The implementation plan also suggests that the following tasks and relationships are fundamental to the success of ASCA Model programs:

- ❖ Collaboration with faculty members
- ❖ Commitment of top administrators
- ❖ Long range implementation plan
- ❖ Incorporate school mission with school counseling program
- ❖ Community support
- ❖ Program of accountability
- ❖ Public relations plan²⁴

The full Arizona implementation timeline can be found in Appendix A of this report.

Tools for Assessing Implementation Readiness

Carey et al. devised a self-assessment instrument school districts can use to determine their level of readiness for implementing the ASCA Model. According to Carey et al., districts are deemed ready to implement the Model if they minimally satisfy all of the 14 readiness indicators contained in the instrument, which are outlined in Table 2 below:

Table 2: National Model Implementation Readiness Indicators

| Cluster | Item |
|--------------------------|--|
| Community Support | The school board recognizes that school counseling is an important component of all students' public education. |
| | The school board believes that school counselors can play an influential role in closing the achievement gap. |
| Leadership | The superintendent believes that the school counseling program is an essential component of the school district's educational mission. |

²³ Carey, J., J. Harrity, and C. Dimmitt. 2005. "The Development of a Self-Assessment Instrument to Measure a School District's Readiness to Implement the ASCA's National Model." *Professional School Counseling*, 305. <http://www.schoolcounselor.org/files/8-4-305%20Carey.pdf>

²⁴ Bowers, J. "ASCA Model Three Year Implementation Plan." Arizona Department of Education. 1-3. <http://www.ade.state.az.us/cte/Counselors/ThreeYearImplementationPlan.pdf>

| Cluster | Item |
|---|---|
| | The superintendent believes that the school counseling program can help support students' academic achievement. |
| | The school counseling program has a full-time, district-level leader who is respected by the superintendent, principals, and school counselors. |
| | The majority of principals believe that school counselors ought to be engaged in developmental and preventative activities. |
| | The majority of principals believe that school counselors ought to be involved in helping students achieve academically. |
| | The majority of principals would be receptive to redefining school counselor activities. |
| Guidance Curriculum | The school counseling program operates from a set of student learning objectives that have measurable student outcomes. |
| School Counselors' Beliefs and Attitudes | In general, school counselors are open to change. |
| | In general, school counselors believe that it is important to adopt the ASCA National Model. |
| | In general, school counselors believe that they should be responsible for helping all students achieve academically. |
| District Resources | The district is committed to providing professional development to help school counselors develop skills necessary for the implementation of the ASCA National Model. |
| | The district guidance leader has implemented a system ensuring good communication and information sharing across the school counseling program. |

Source: Carey et al.²⁵

Furthermore, the Prairie Lakes Area Education Agency in Iowa has developed a useful assessment tool that any district can use to determine their level of readiness to implement the ASCA National Model. The Prairie Lakes assessment tool can be found in Appendix B of this report.

The ASCA Model in Practice

Hanover reached out to three Recognized ASCA Model Program high schools in regions with similar demographics to XYZ School District to record their experience in implementing and using the ASCA National Model. Hanover selected these specific high schools due to their status as RAMP recipients and location in small-to-medium-sized towns or cities in which higher education institutions are a prominent employer. Two schools responded to our inquiries, and their experiences with the Model have been starkly different from each other. Profiles of the two responding schools are displayed in Table 3.

²⁵ Carey et al. Op. cit., 311.

Table 3: Profiles of Responding High Schools

| School Name | North High School | Bloomington High School North |
|---|--|---|
| District | Evansville-Vanderburgh School Corporation | Monroe County Community School Corporation |
| City and State | Evansville, IN | Bloomington, IN |
| Total Population in District (2008) | 174,591 | 112,011 |
| Higher Education Institutions Nearby | University of Southern Indiana, University of Evansville, Ivy Tech Community College, Harrison College | University of Indiana-Bloomington, Ivy Tech Community College |

Source: NCES²⁶

We learned through e-mail correspondence with the Chair of the Guidance Department at Bloomington High School North that the school has thus far been unable to implement many of the RAMP requirements due to staff cuts.²⁷ Since RAMP designation is reserved for schools that have demonstrated sufficient implementation of the ASCA National Model or have developed a plan to do so, it can be assumed that staff cuts have interfered with Bloomington High School North's ability to fully implement the Model. This section will thus focus more closely on North High School in Evansville, Indiana, which has had greater success in implementing the Model.

North High School

To gather information on North High School's experience in implementing the ASCA National Model, Hanover posed the following five questions to Sylvia Melchior, Secretary of the school's Guidance Department:

- ❖ Why did your school or district decided to adopt the ASCA National Model?
- ❖ What inherent advantages or disadvantages does the ASCA's National Model offer compared to your department's practices prior to adopting the Model?
- ❖ Have specific components of the Model led to noticeable improvements in the quality of counseling services provided by your department?
- ❖ Have staff generally been supportive of the Model?
- ❖ What have been the biggest challenges in implementing the Model?

²⁶ "School District Demographic System." National Center for Education Statistics.
<http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sdds/index.aspx>

²⁷ Chaffin, Greg W. Electronic Email. October 25, 2010.

Our questions were addressed by the Guidance Department's RAMP coordinator, Karen Halle. Regarding the first question, Ms. Halle informed us that North High School decided to adopt the ASCA National Model as well as the Indiana Gold Star model to "...ensure that our program met state and national counseling standards, in order to provide the best program possible to our students." She noted that **the data-driven nature of the ASCA Model is its biggest advantage**, enabling the Guidance Department to "...better measure student perceptions and growth in the areas of counseling and guidance." Ms. Halle noted that though the Department was already meeting high standards in most areas of counseling prior to adopting the Model, it has helped counselors better organize the counseling program. **Reserving enough time to plan practices and initiatives according to the Model's guidelines has been the Department's biggest implementation challenge thus far, as non-counseling duties take up a considerable amount of counselors' time.** However, the model still enjoys substantial staff support.²⁸

²⁸ Halle, Karen. Electronic Mail. October, 22, 2010.

Supporting Student Transitions

Assisting students as they transition from one level of schooling to the next is one of the most important and challenging aspects of the school counseling profession. Student transitions from elementary school to middle school, middle school to high school, and high school to postsecondary institutions, each bring new academic and social challenges that students must negotiate to find success. Effective school counselors can serve as an invaluable resource to students as they grapple with transitional challenges. This section outlines best practices identified in the literature for counseling students through each transition point from kindergarten to postsecondary education. It is divided into four subsections – one for each major K-college transition: **transitions to elementary school; transitions to middle school; transitions to high school; and transitions to postsecondary institutions.**

Counseling Transitions to Elementary School

While most of the transitional counseling literature focuses on post-elementary transitions, University of Massachusetts professors Carey Dimmitt and Jay Carey suggest there is a role for school counselors in helping students adjust to elementary school. They claim “Kindergarten is usually the start of formal education for children in public schools and is, thus, a significant transition period.” Further, they assert **the ASCA National Model can be used as a framework to develop an effective elementary school counseling program – one that supports children as they adjust to their new role as a student.** They discuss how the Model can be used to develop counseling programs in a way that effectively supports student transitions to elementary schools. Their suggestions fall within the four major components of the model: foundation, delivery system, management systems, and accountability systems.²⁹

Dimmitt and Carey state that the *foundation* of elementary schools’ counseling programs can include the expressed, written goals of “...**orienting and connecting with incoming kindergarten students and their families in order to facilitate school engagement and feelings of membership.**”³⁰

Dimmitt and Carey also outline many ways in which counseling *delivery systems* in elementary schools can effectively support new students. They discuss strategies counselors can use to connect with new students in their families, citing **kindergarten classroom visits, sit-down meetings with students and family members, and presentations at open house events, as ways of becoming acquainted and sharing information about the counselor’s role in the school.**³¹ Regarding specific counseling services, Dimmitt and Carey assert that “As early as is

²⁹ Dimmitt, C. and J. Carey. 2007. “Using the ASCA National Model to Facilitate School Transitions.” *Professional School Counseling*, 227-228. <http://www.schoolcounselor.org/files/10-3-227%20Dimmitt.pdf>

³⁰ Ibid., 228.

³¹ Ibid., 228.

feasible, school counselors also can implement curriculum units that reinforce the teachers' efforts to create community, ensure emotional safety, and promote learning." For example, **counselors can implement a guidance curriculum that fosters pro-social behavior and relationship building.** Counselors can also leverage their expertise to aid teachers in identifying new students' learning styles. Counselors can provide this support by performing classroom observations early in the academic term.³²

Clearly articulated and understood ground rules and agreements within the counseling program's *management system* set the parameters for counselors' work. These parameters should be established before the counselor begins working with new students. Dimmitt and Carey note:

The answers to questions such as "Who will deal with a crisis when the counselor is in the classroom?" and "What amount of time should be spent on curricula, small groups, and one-to-one counseling?" are best dealt with ahead of time, so that there are clear expectations about the roles and functions of the school counselors in the building.³³

The establishment of an advisory council, comprised of representatives from the school and wider community, can be more than just an effective *accountability* mechanism; it **can serve as a valuable source of insight into the needs of all stakeholders impacted by the counseling program** – including new or future students. Gathering information on incoming and current students is crucial in structuring services to effectively meet their needs. **Using data** to "determine program components, measure student learning, [and] monitor the impact of interventions" is fundamental to efforts to ensure accountability, as it **provides counselors with measurable and tangible evidence of their work which can be shared with administrators, parents, and other stakeholders.**³⁴

Counseling Transitions to Middle School

As Dimmitt and Carey point out, the transition to middle school comes at a key developmental stage in an adolescent's life. Most students experience puberty and cognitive shifts in or around the time they spend in middle school. In addition to these developmental changes, students entering middle school are faced with a curriculum that in many respects is quite different from the one they became accustomed to in elementary school. Students are offered a degree of choice regarding their academic curriculum for the first time in their educational careers. For most students, these changes require significant adjustment. Mayberry provides a few reasons why it is imperative that every effort is made to ensure that middle school students navigate these changes successfully:

³² Ibid., 228.

³³ Ibid., 228.

³⁴ Ibid., 228-229.

...patterns of achievement throughout early adolescent years can predict school achievement in the 12th grade. Socially, if students fail to make the transition in middle school, especially in the areas of social adjustment and maturity, they may well be socially immature for the remainder of their lives.³⁵

To support students as they transition to middle school, Dimmitt and Carey suggest that counselors from the receiving middle school as well as from the sending elementary school can work together to effectuate seamless transitions. **Elementary school counselors can share student information with their middle school counterparts**, which “can help middle school counselors be proactive in their services for a group of students.” Further, elementary and middle school counselors can also **coordinate student visits to the middle school** to help acclimating students to their new surroundings before they actually change schools.³⁶

University of North Carolina professor Patrick Akos asserts that middle school counselors must take the lead in programs that assist students in making the transition to middle school. In addition to collaborating with elementary school counselors, this requires that they **coordinate orientation programs that create an inviting environment for new students**.³⁷ Mayberry offers some additional practices middle school counselors and other school staff members could employ to ease students’ transitions to middle school:

- ❖ Effective time management should be discussed in an orientation for sixth-grade students.
- ❖ All faculty and staff should be taught the time management process, with orientations and staff development meetings to keep them focused.
- ❖ Students should be allowed a time during the day to prepare for assignments. By doing so, the school is implying that good study habits are important. It also reinforces the idea that the school wants its students to be successful academically.
- ❖ Every week, each child should be given a chart to plan the week’s activities. Saturday and Sunday should also be listed on the chart, to reinforce the goal of doing small amounts of school work each day, thus managing the workload instead of finishing a large project overnight or cramming for a test.
- ❖ Students should be provided with information on how to take better notes.³⁸

As with transitions to elementary school, Dimmitt and Carey argue that certain components of the ASCA National Model can be used as a framework for developing middle school counseling programs that effectively support incoming students. They assert: **“Foundation components that specifically address the significance of the move from elementary to middle school help focus efforts**

³⁵ Mayberry, M. “The School Counselor’s Role in Easing Students’ Transition From Elementary to Middle School.” *VISTAS*, Article 17, 2005, 83. <http://www.counseling.org/Resources/Library/VISTAS/vistas05/Vistas05.art17.pdf>

³⁶ Dimmitt and Carey. Op. cit., 229.

³⁷ Akos, P. 2005. “The Unique Nature of Middle School Counseling.” *Professional School Counseling*, 98.

³⁸ Mayberry, M. Op. cit., 84.

on the distinctive set of challenges that this transition entails.” Such components include the counseling program’s mission statements and goals; within which the role of school counselors in the transitional process is firmly enshrined.³⁹

Dimmitt and Carey outline several service *delivery* tactics middle school counselors can employ to ease student transitions. As with elementary schools, **it is imperative that counselors communicate their role, the services they offer, and any information students will need to adjust to their new surroundings (class schedules, school policies, etc.) to incoming students and their families.** This can occur through “...parent nights, newsletters, brochures, classroom presentations, and family meetings. The goal of providing services for all students and their families means that communication must be broad-based yet efficient.”⁴⁰

Regarding specific counseling services, counselors can help students develop the skills and habits necessary for success in middle school and beyond. Dimmitt and Carey note: **“Early information about goal setting, test-taking strategies, study skills, decision-making, and other competencies that enhance student achievement can make a difference in student learning.”** Counselors can also help students develop the social skills necessary for their successful transition to the new social climate that comes with middle school.⁴¹

Data is fundamental to ensuring *accountability* in transitional counseling, as it enables counselors to make well-informed decisions and provides metrics by which to measure their effectiveness. Dimmitt and Carey note:

Achievement data (grades, state test scores, etc.) and achievement-related data (discipline records, attendance, extracurricular involvement, etc.) can give school counselors crucial information about the specific strengths and challenges of an incoming group.⁴²

The collection and analysis of such data from elementary school sources helps middle school counselors plan effective and appropriate services.

In determining effective practices, it is helpful to gather the perspective of those most affected by transition programs – students, parents, and teachers. A 2004 study from University of North Carolina professors Patrick Akos and John P. Galassi looked into high school students, parents, and teachers’ perceptions on the process of transitioning to middle school and high school. The most common recommendations amongst middle school students were: more information on middle schools while in elementary school; providing better preparatory services, such as study and

³⁹ Dimmitt and Carey. Op. cit., 229.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 230.

⁴¹ Ibid., 230.

⁴² Ibid., 230.

organizational skills; and a tour of the middle school. Parents and teachers both cited orientation services and school tours as practices that best prepared students for the transition.⁴³

Counseling Transitions to High School

The transition from middle school to high school can be an unsettling experience if students are forced to navigate it on their own. New peers, new teachers, a new environment, and more difficult courses can be exciting for some students, but they may also cause anxiety in others. Professors Nancy B. Mizelle and Judith L. Irvin explain:

Studies that have included students' thoughts and feelings about moving into high school reveal that eighth grade students are both excited and concerned about going to high school. They look forward to more freedom, more choice, the opportunity to participate in more extracurricular activities, and the opportunity to develop friendships. However, they also admit to being "nervous" and "scared" about older students teasing them; getting lost in their larger, unfamiliar school; and making bad grades.⁴⁴

For new students who have not established solid friendships with their peers, there may be feelings of being "lost in the crowd." Researchers Amanda Horwitz and Jason Snipes explain: "High schools are often larger and more bureaucratic than elementary and middle schools, leading to depersonalization and a weaker support network of teachers and administrators."⁴⁵

Counselors can play a substantial role in easing student transitions to high school and preparing them for future academic and career success. As with the transition to middle school, counselors from both the receiving school and the sending school have a role to play. Middle school counselors can help students plan their academic future and ensure that they are aware of the full range of academic options available to them in high school. Dimmitt and Carey note: "For example, many students must make decisions about whether or not to attend vocational schools by the end of eighth grade. Early information about academic and career options allows students to make these decisions more easily and effectively."⁴⁶ Such information will help

⁴³ Akos, P., and J.P. Galassi. 2004. "Middle and High School Transitions as Viewed by Students, Parents, and Teachers." *Professional School Counseling*, 217. <http://www.schoolcounselor.org/files/7-4-212%20Akos.pdf>

⁴⁴ Mizelle, N. B., and J.L. Irvin. 2000. "Transition from Middle School into High School." *Middle School Journal*, 31:5, 58.

<http://www.temescalassociates.com/documents/resources/transition/TransitionfromMiddleSchoolintoHighSchool.pdf>

⁴⁵ Horwitz, A., and J. Snipes. 2008. "Supporting Successful Transitions to High School." The Council of Great City Schools, 3.

https://dst.sp.maricopa.edu/DWG/STPG/JuniorACE/Shared%20Documents/Middle%20school/CGCS_SuccessfulTransitions%20to%20HS%20Spring%202008.pdf

⁴⁶ Dimmitt and Carey. Op. cit., 230.

students choose academic programs that align with their abilities and interests, which will in turn prevent feelings of anxiety over coursework.

Middle school counselors can also help prepare students for the more rigorous academic requirements of high school by **pressing them to challenge themselves in middle school**. Horwitz and Snipes assert that **“Poor academic preparation plays a major role in students’ failure to make successful transitions to high school.”**⁴⁷ Dimmitt and Carey, however, outline the role middle school counselors can play in ensuring students are academically prepared for the transition:

School counselors also can assist middle school students by encouraging them to take more challenging math and science classes. The influence that school counselors have through academic advisement can have a tremendous impact on students’ academic success.⁴⁸

In their article entitled, “Transition from Middle School into High School,” Mizelle and Irvin discuss the benefits of establishing a **formalized transition program**. They state:

The research indicates that facilitating young adolescents’ transition from middle school to high school requires programs that specifically address the transition period...

According to MacIver (1990), **the middle level transition programs that school administrators viewed as best at helping students succeed during their first year following transition were those programs that used a number of different articulation activities**. They were programs that included activities that (a) provided students and parents information about the new school, (b) provided students social support during the transition, and (c) brought middle school and high school personnel together to learn about one another’s curriculum and requirements.⁴⁹

Successful transition programs are guided by a well-developed **transition plans**. The Texas Comprehensive Center claims the following steps are important to developing a successful transition plan for students going from middle school to high school:

❖ **Organize a transition team**

- The most effective teams include representation from the following stakeholder groups: teachers, administrators, curriculum specialists, counselors, parents, students, government-funded support program staff, and local service organizations. When selecting school personnel to

⁴⁷ Horwitz and Snipes. Op. cit., 1.

⁴⁸ Dimmitt and Carey. Op. cit., 230.

⁴⁹ Mizelle and Irvin. Op. cit., 58-59.

participate as members of the team, it is important to include both middle and high school teachers.

- The team should delineate its purpose in guiding the transition work and create a detailed transition plan that includes an evaluation process informed by data.
- It is important to stress that the transition process starts during the eighth-grade year, and it continues throughout the entire ninth-grade year. The multi-level transition team should consider this entire time period while planning supports and interventions.

❖ **Develop a counseling team**

- The purpose of developing a counseling team is to increase the amount of individual time each student receives. Although each school will need to develop criteria for selecting transition counselors and the roles that might be appropriate, counselors could include student peers, teachers, and other district and school staff, as well as parents and community volunteers.

❖ **Create special programs and initiatives to prepare students and their families for the transition to high school**

- The key to the success of these programs is to develop an organized approach to provide information that supports students academically and builds relationships among all stakeholders—among students, between students and educators, between students and their families, and between students and their community.⁵⁰

The Texas Comprehensive Center also synthesized suggestions from relevant literature into the following list of best practices for implementing a transition plan:

- ❖ Involve parents and families in the transition process
- ❖ Promote collaboration among middle and high school staff to support the transition process
- ❖ Increase awareness of academic programs offered at the high school level
- ❖ Increase comfort and reduce anxiety through orientation activities
- ❖ Provide resources designed to make the transition easier
- ❖ Design activities for the first weeks of ninth grade
- ❖ Continue the use of counseling teams to maintain support throughout the ninth grade year
- ❖ Develop special interventions to support ninth graders who may be struggling academically or socially.⁵¹

Akos and Galassi's 2004 survey on perceptions of high school and middle school transitions gathered student, parent, and teacher opinions on the most effective transition practices. All three groups offered suggestions of practices that could improve the high school transition experience – many of which high school and middle school counselors are primed for. For example, more insight and information

⁵⁰ "Support Student Transition from Middle to High School." Texas Comprehensive Center.
<http://txcc.sedl.org/resources/briefs/number1/index.html>

⁵¹ Ibid.

on what high school was like and better school tours were the two most common student suggestions. Parents also suggested offering better tours, and teachers favored more help with developing students' study skills in middle school.⁵²

Counseling Transitions to Postsecondary Institutions

According to The College Board, 86 percent of American high school students *expect* to go to college.⁵³ For many, however, it is a dream that will go unfulfilled. There are several factors that prevent high school students from attending college, including financial concerns, personal/social issues, and inadequate academic preparation. For those who do attend, the transition is often the most exciting yet challenging one in their educational journey. Whether students move out to attend college or commute from home, postsecondary education requires students to make tough decisions that will directly impact their academic and professional careers. School counselors can play a crucial role in ensuring students are well-equipped to face the challenges presented by postsecondary education – be they academic, personal, or social. This sub-section outlines school counselor best practices for getting students college-ready and preparing them for the transition.

While the bulk of the transitional counseling literature focuses on the role school counselors can play in guiding students through specific transition points, The College Board National Office for School Counselor Advocacy views college and career-readiness counseling as a longer-term, continuous process. The College Board asserts that college and career-readiness counseling necessarily begins in elementary school and carries on until high school graduation. It has developed eight components of college and career-readiness counseling that it believes, with the exception of two components (college and career admissions processes and transition from high school to college enrollment), should be integrated into counseling programs in elementary, middle, and high schools to ensure that students are college-ready upon high school graduation. The Eight Components of College and Career-Readiness Counseling and the strategic goals associated with them are displayed below:

❖ College aspirations

- Goal: Build a college-going culture based on early college awareness by nurturing in students the confidence to aspire to college and the resilience to overcome challenges along the way. Maintain high expectations by providing adequate supports, building social capital and conveying the conviction that all students can succeed in college.

⁵² Akos and Galassi. Op. cit., 217.

⁵³ "Eight Components of College and Career Readiness Counseling." The College Board National Office for School Counselor Advocacy, 2.
http://advocacy.collegeboard.org/sites/default/files/10b_2217_EightComponents_WEB_100625.pdf

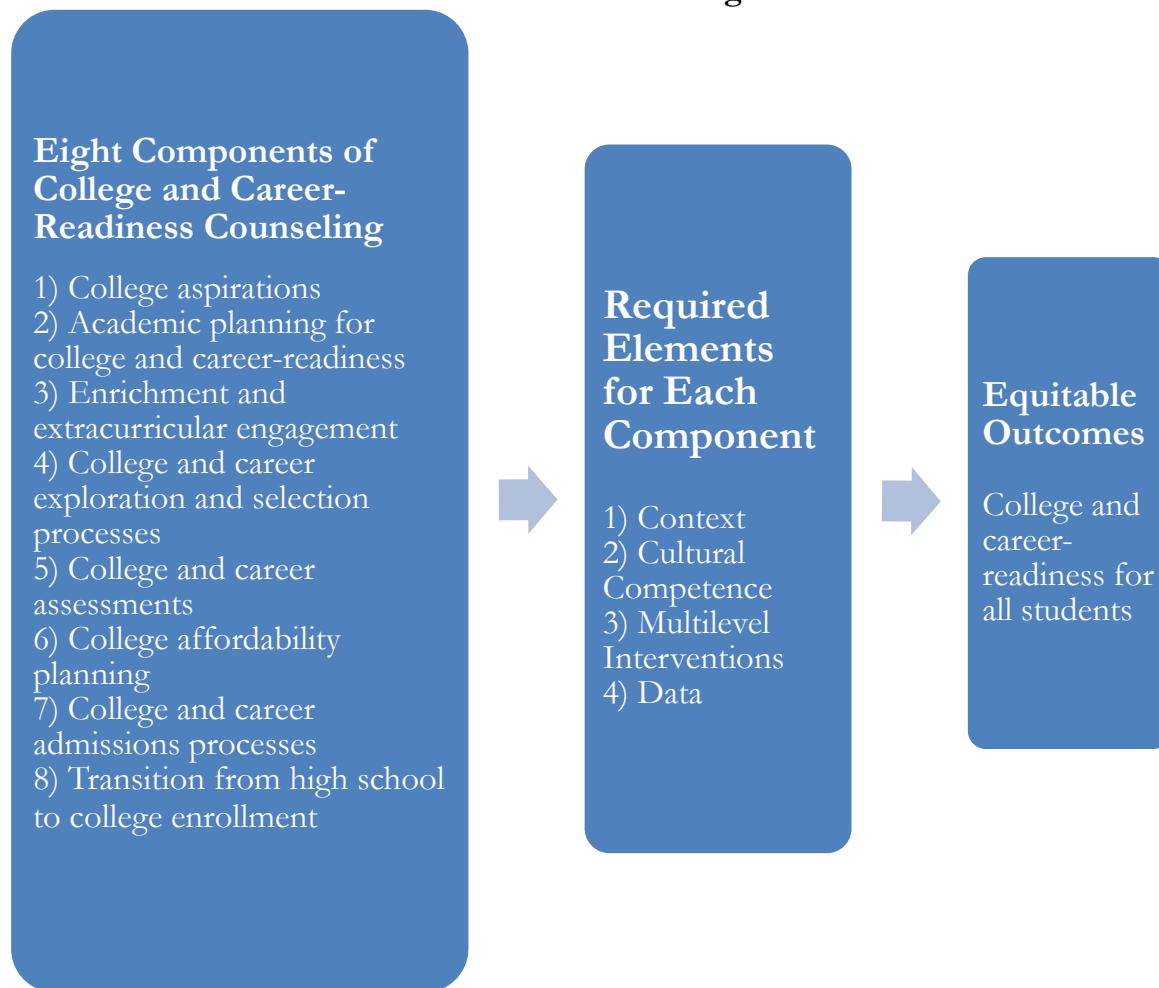
- ❖ **Academic planning for college and career readiness**
 - Goal: Advance students' planning, preparation, participation and performance in a rigorous academic program that connects to their college and career aspirations and goals.
- ❖ **Enrichment and extracurricular engagement**
 - Goal: Ensure equitable exposure to a wide range of extracurricular and enrichment opportunities that build leadership, nurture talents and interests, and increase engagement with school.
- ❖ **College and career exploration and selection processes**
 - Goal: Provide early and ongoing exposure to experiences and information necessary to make informed decisions when selecting a college or career that connects to academic preparation and future aspirations.
- ❖ **College and career assessments**
 - Goal: Promote preparation, participation and performance in college and career assessments by all students.
- ❖ **College affordability planning**
 - Goal: Provide students and families with comprehensive information about college costs, options for paying for college, and the financial aid and scholarship processes and eligibility requirements, so they are able to plan for and afford a college education.
- ❖ **College and career admissions processes**
 - Goal: Ensure that students and families have an early and ongoing understanding of the college and career application and admission processes so they can find the postsecondary options that are the best fit with their aspirations and interests.
- ❖ **Transition from high school graduation to college enrollment**
 - Goal: Connect students to school and community resources to help the students overcome barriers and ensure the successful transition from high school to college.⁵⁴

In order to implement the Eight Components effectively, counselors must: account for contextual factors that may influence the students they work with; apply the Components in ways that are sensitive to students' cultures and beliefs; ensure interventions are employed on multiple levels (student, school, family, and community); and use data to drive their practice and maintain accountability.⁵⁵ Figure 1 illustrates the intended implementation path of the Eight Components.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 3.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 4.

Figure 1: Implementing the Eight Components of College and Career-Readiness Counseling



Source: The College Board⁵⁶

Looking at college and career-readiness counseling at high schools specifically, a 2009 report in the *Journal of School Counseling* analyzed the counseling programs of 18 high schools that have been recognized by a nonprofit educational organization for improving the rates of their students' college acceptance. To be considered for the award, schools must demonstrate significant improvement in: the percentage of students enrolled in rigorous coursework (such as Advanced Placement courses), the percentage of students taking college preparatory courses, and the percentage of students accepted to institutions of higher education.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Ibid., 5.

⁵⁷ Militello, M., J. Carey, C. Dimmitt, V. Lee, and J. Schweid. 2009. "Identifying Exemplary School Counseling Practices in Nationally Recognized High Schools." *Journal of School Counseling*, 7:13, 6-7. <http://eric.ed.gov/PDFS/EJ886125.pdf>

The report details several best practices and program features associated with improving students' college-readiness. Some particularly innovative practices and program features observed include: **arranging classroom visits from alumni/ae enrolled in college, having counselors available until 10:00pm to assist parents with financial aid issues, and hiring a full-time counselor that focuses exclusively on college preparation and transition.**⁵⁸

The authors identifies ten themes that cut across multiple high schools, which can be taken as evidence-based strategies for preparing high school students for higher education. They found that counselors at these schools:

- ❖ show effective program management practices;
- ❖ maintain external partnerships (colleges, businesses) that add resources and social capital;
- ❖ are leaders in the school;
- ❖ show effective college-focused interventions with low-income students;
- ❖ help establish an achievement-oriented school climate;
- ❖ implement effective parent academic and financial outreach programs;
- ❖ think systemically and use multi-level interventions;
- ❖ use school data effectively;
- ❖ facilitate the development and implementation of inclusive school policies; and
- ❖ routinize mundane aspects of the job or offload nonessential activities to free up time for innovative practice.⁵⁹

It is likely that the nonprofit organization the authors were referring to is The College Board, since that organization published a list of ten best practices found at several of its *Inspiration* award-winning schools that is nearly identical to the themes outlined above. The “Ten Effective Counseling Practices from the College Board’s Inspiration Award Schools” can be found by accessing the link contained in the footnote to this paragraph.⁶⁰

Casey Study – Chicago Public Schools

In recent years, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) has implemented a comprehensive reform initiative aimed at aligning school counselor practices with recognized best practices. The district has adopted a comprehensive school counseling model based on the ASCA National Model, and commissioned the Center for School Counseling Outcome Research and Evaluation to conduct an evaluation on the reforms' impact on students. The study also sought to observe the relationship between specific counselor work duties and preparedness for higher education. Eighty-three schools

⁵⁸ Ibid., 11-14.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 10-18.

⁶⁰ “Ten Effective Counseling Practices from the College Board’s Inspiration Award Schools.” The College Board, 2008, 8-9. http://advocacy.collegeboard.org/sites/default/files/inspiration_innovation_booklet.PDF

took part in the CSCORE study, which surveyed school counselors and principals to learn about the effectiveness of specific program components. The researchers used survey data to gather information about the work duties of counselors and then performed regression analyses to check for correlations between work duties and student outcomes. This sub-section discusses the major findings of the CPS study, which can be considered revelatory of the most effective use of counselors' time in terms of impact on students' college preparedness.

The study's major finding was that student test scores, attendance, enrollment in Advanced Placement courses, and graduation rates were higher in schools where counselors were not overburdened with non-counseling tasks and were able to provide career and college planning services than their peers at schools where a large proportion of counselors' work duties consisted of performing non-counseling tasks.⁶¹ Specifically, the study found that every standard deviation increase in individual planning time devoted to students (college and career counseling) yielded a four percent increase in the amount of students meeting or exceeding proficiency on the Prairie State Achievement Exam (PSAE) Composite test.⁶²

Conversely, the study found that higher amounts of non-counseling tasks were associated with lower PSAE Composite scores and fewer students enrolled in Advanced Placement courses.⁶³ The CSCORE researchers found that **every two additional non-counseling tasks counselors performed led to an approximately four percent reduction in the amount of students meeting or exceeding proficiency on the PSAE Composite test.⁶⁴**

The implications of these findings are clear: the work of school counselors affects students' academic performance and preparedness for higher education, and burdening counselors with extensive non-counseling duties burdens students' prospects for postsecondary success. Budgets permitting, a possible solution would be to create an administrative position to fulfill the clerical duties counselors are often asked to undertake, freeing counselors up to work directly with students and leverage their expertise.

⁶¹ Lapan, R., and K. Harrington. "Paving the Road to College: How School Counselors Help Students Succeed." Center for School Counseling Outcome Research and Evaluation, 89.

<http://www.umass.edu/schoolcounseling/uploads/TheChicagoReport.pdf>

⁶² Ibid., 45.

⁶³ Ibid., 41.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 44.

Letters of Recommendation in College Applications

In this section, Hanover outlines the opinions of educational consultants and nonprofit organizations regarding which high school staff members should write letters of recommendation in support of students' applications to institutions of higher education.

The College Board notes that colleges often require a letter of recommendation from academic teachers, school counselors, or both, in applications for undergraduate admission. They also note that most institutions require two-to-three letters from people familiar with the student both inside and outside of the classroom. The College Board recommends approaching teachers in the spring semester of junior year, as many high school teachers prefer to write letters over the summer break. **This is perhaps an indication that from a resource allocation (time) perspective, teachers are not the best sources for letters of recommendation.** However, they caution against approaching teachers from too far back in a student's high school career, as colleges prefer to gather recent perspectives on prospective students. If the application does not specify any particular academic subject, it is best to secure letters from English and mathematics teachers. The teacher, however, should be familiar with the student's work and able to attest to the student's academic achievement and potential.⁶⁵

Montgomery Educational Consulting advises students to secure letters of recommendations from teachers rather than counselors. The company's founder, Mark Montgomery, states:

Generally most colleges want one counselor recommendation and one teacher recommendation. I advise my students to obtain two solid recommendations from teachers. One should be from a teacher in a core subject (math, English, science, social studies, or foreign language). The second can be from another core teacher, or from an elective teacher who knows you well or in an area that the student hopes to pursue in college.⁶⁶

In addition to these two letters, Montgomery claims **it may be helpful to secure a third letter from another figure that knows the student's character and/or abilities well – perhaps a coach or youth group leader.** Like The College Board, he claims that all letters should come from people know the student's work and would be able to speak convincingly about their qualities.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ "Letters of Recommendation: How to Get the References You Need." The College Board. <http://www.collegeboard.com/student/apply/the-application/119.html>

⁶⁶ Montgomery, M. "Six Tips for Getting Great Letters of Recommendation for College." Montgomery Educational Consulting, 2008. <http://greatcollegeadvice.com/six-tips-for-getting-great-letters-of-recommendation-for-college/>

⁶⁷ Ibid.

Alison Jaenicke, a Senior Editor at the admissions consultancy *Accepted.com*, also claims it is **best for teachers to write letters of recommendations rather than school counselors**. She divides her suggestions for potential referees into two categories: Teachers and Additional References, and counselors are not even included in the latter category. Like The College Board, Jaenicke advises students to approach teachers in their junior year to give them enough time to honor the request. One letter should come from a teachers in a subject related to the student's intended major (if it is known), and a second should come from a teacher of another subject. It is also best if the recommending teachers know the student in different ways and “can address different strengths and dimensions to [their] personality.”⁶⁸

Peterson's College Search, a college application consultancy and educational content resource, suggests that the two-to-three letters of recommendation that are required in most undergraduate applications **should come from teachers, employers, or supervisors who are familiar with the student's work**. Notably, Peterson's does not mention counselors as suitable referees. Peterson's notes, however, that letters from teachers are preferable to letters from employers, as:

Admission officers are looking to supplement their knowledge of your academic performance and aptitude — gleaned from your transcript and standardized scores — with concrete evidence that you are a dedicated and enthusiastic learner that will enhance the college culture.⁶⁹

Summary

While The College Board claims that institutions of higher education seek letters of recommendation from both teachers and counselors, **our research found that educational consultancies advise students to request letters from teachers** and perhaps coaches, supervisors, employers, or others who have direct experience supervising the student's work for second or third letters. **We further found no indications that colleges prefer letters from counselors over teachers.**

At least one letter should be from a teacher of a core academic subject (English, mathematics, science), and if the student has already chosen an intended major, one letter should be from a teacher who teaches a related subject (mathematics for engineering, for example). Additionally, students should provide teachers with ample time to write the letters. Finally, **letters should only be written by teachers who know the student's work well and would be able to comment on the student's abilities and potential**. This may not always be a teacher from a class the student has earned a high grade in.

⁶⁸ Jaenicke, A. “Lining Up Letters of Recommendation.” *Accepted.com*. <http://u101.com/articles/get-accepted/recommendation-letters.shtml>

⁶⁹ “The Letter of Recommendation in College Admissions.” *Peterson's College Search*. <http://www.petersons.com/college-search/letter-recommendation-college-admissions.aspx>

Appendix A: Arizona ASCA National Model Implementation Timeline

| ASCA Model Elements | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 |
|---|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Develop mission philosophy and beliefs, and vision | X | X | X |
| Selection of student standards, competencies, and indicators | X | X | X |
| Develop delivery system | X | X | X |
| Counselor/principal agreement | X | X | X |
| Advisory Committee | | X | X |
| Year-long calendar | X | X | X |
| Monthly calendar | | X | X |
| Curriculum action plan | X (1 per semester) | X (2 per semester) | X (4 per semester) |
| Curriculum results reports for action plans | X (1 per semester) | X (2 per semester) | X (4 per semester) |
| Closing the gap action plan | X (1 per year) | X (2 per year) | X (3 per year) |
| Closing the gap results report | X (1 per year) | X (2 per year) | X (3 per year) |
| Results over time | | X | X |
| Use of time | | X | X |
| Student achievement and related data | X | | |
| Disaggregated data | X | X | X |
| Standards and competency-related data | | X | X |
| Program evaluation data: Process, perception and results | | X | X |
| Data over time: Immediate, intermediate, longitudinal data | | X | X |
| Give one pre-post test on guidance curriculum lesson (immediate) | X | X | X |
| Program audit | X | X | X |
| School counselor performance standards/evaluation | | | X |
| School Counselor Skills | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 |
| Leadership | | X | X |
| Advocacy | X | X | X |
| Collaboration | X | X | X |
| Systematic Change | | | X |
| Present completed program to district governing board for approval. | | | X (end of year) |
| Apply for the ASCA RAMP award | | | X (end of year) |

Source: Bowers⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Bowers. Op. cit., 2-3.

Appendix B: Prairie Lakes Area Education Agency Implementation Assessment Tool

| Components: | Like My District | Somewhat Like My District | Not Like My District | Possible Interventions if Not Like My District |
|---|------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|--|
| A. Community Support | | | | |
| 1. The school board recognizes that school counseling is an important component of all students' public education. | | | | |
| 2. The school board believes school counselors can play an influential role in closing the achievement gap. | | | | |
| 3. Parents understand the intended benefits of the school counseling program. | | | | |
| 4. Parents support the school counseling program. | | | | |
| 5. Students believe the school counseling program is an important resource. | | | | |
| 6. Teachers at all levels appreciate the importance of the school counseling program. | | | | |
| 7. Teachers at all levels collaborate with school counselors in meeting school counseling program goals and objectives. | | | | |
| 8. School counselors are recognized by teachers for their expertise in issues that have an impact on learning and teaching. | | | | |
| 9. Parents from all racial/ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds believe school counseling can be an important source of help for to all students. | | | | |
| 10. Influential business and community leaders are familiar with and support the school counseling program. | | | | |
| 11. Community leaders would be eager to be active participants on a school counseling advisory board. | | | | |
| B. Leadership | | | | |
| 1. The superintendent believes the school counseling program is an essential component of the district's educational mission. | | | | |

| Components: | Like My District | Somewhat Like My District | Not Like My District | Possible Interventions if Not Like My District |
|---|------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|--|
| 2. The superintendent believes the school counseling program can help support students' academic achievement. | | | | |
| 3. The school counseling program has a full-time, district-level leader who is respected by the superintendent, principals and school counselors. | | | | |
| 4. The superintendent commits resources to support school counseling program development. | | | | |
| 5. The district's school counseling leader knows the principals of standards-based reform and can communicate the relationships between school counseling activities and student learning outcomes. | | | | |
| 6. The district's school counseling leader knows how to initiate and coordinate systemic change in the school counseling program. | | | | |
| 7. The majority of principals believe school counselors ought to be engaged in developmental and preventive activities. | | | | |
| 8. The majority of principals believe school counselors ought to be involved in helping students achieve academically. | | | | |
| 9. The majority of principals would be receptive to redefining school counselor activities. | | | | |
| 10. The majority of principals would be receptive to creating yearly plans with school counselors. | | | | |
| 11. The majority of principals would be willing to commit resources to alleviate school counselors from routine clerical/administrative duties so they can devote at least 80 percent of their time to activities directly benefiting students. | | | | |
| C. Guidance Curriculum | | | | |

| Components: | Like My District | Somewhat Like My District | Not Like My District | Possible Interventions if Not Like My District |
|---|------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|--|
| 1. The school counseling program operates from a set of student learning objectives that have measurable student outcomes. | | | | |
| 2. The school counseling program operates from a set of student learning objectives that are grouped by grade or grade cluster. | | | | |
| 3. The school counseling program operates from a set of student learning objectives grounded in both the ASCA National Standards and local norms. | | | | |
| 4. The school counseling program operates from a set of student learning objectives connected to the district's academic curricula. | | | | |
| D. Staffing/Time Use | | | | |
| 1. School counselor workload is consistent with needs of a National Model program (e.g. 300 students/elementary counselor; 200 students/middle school-high school counselor). | | | | |
| 2. School counselors spend at least 80 percent of their time in activities the directly benefit students. | | | | |
| 3. School counselors spend at least 25 percent of their time in educational activities that promote student development and prevent problems. | | | | |
| 4. School counselors spend less than 30 percent of their time responding to crises, emergencies and delivering mental health counseling. | | | | |
| 5. School counselors do not spend an inordinate amount of time on routine clerical tasks. | | | | |
| E. School Counselors' Beliefs and Attitudes | | | | |
| 1. In general, school counselors are open to change. | | | | |
| 2. In general, school counselors believe it is important to adopt the ASCA National Model. | | | | |
| 3. In general, school counselors believe they should be responsible for helping all students achieve academically. | | | | |

| Components: | Like My District | Somewhat Like My District | Not Like My District | Possible Interventions if Not Like My District |
|--|------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|--|
| 4. In general, school counselors believe it is important to demonstrate how students are different as a consequence of guidance interventions. | | | | |
| 5. In general, school counselors believe it is important collect outcome data in order to be able to modify interventions. | | | | |
| 6. In general, school counselors agree on a mission statement that establishes the school counseling program as an essential educational program that is designed to serve all students. | | | | |
| 7. In general, school counselors are willing to devote the time to learn new skills. | | | | |
| 8. In general, school counselors believe it is important that they serve as advocates for underserved students. | | | | |
| F. School Counselors' Skills | | | | |
| 1. School counselors are competent in a wide range of interventions (whole school, classroom guidance, small group and individual counseling). | | | | |
| 2. School counselors understand the individual and systemic factors associated with poor academic achievement and the achievement gap. | | | | |
| 3. School counselors are familiar with the principles of standards-based educational reform and can identify the relationships between school counseling activities and student performance. | | | | |
| 4. School counselors can identify evidence-based interventions that enhance academic achievement, career development and personal/social development. | | | | |
| 5. School counselors know how to be effective advocates for underserved students. | | | | |
| 6. School counselors can measure how students are different as a consequence their interventions. | | | | |
| 7. School counselors can use institutional data (e.g. achievement, attendance, school climate surveys) to describe current problems and set goals. | | | | |

| Components: | Like My District | Somewhat Like My District | Not Like My District | Possible Interventions if Not Like My District |
|--|------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|--|
| 8. School counselors use technology effectively to access needed student data. | | | | |
| 9. School counselors use technology effectively to accomplish routine clerical tasks efficiently. | | | | |
| 10. School counselors use technology effectively to communicate with students, parents and colleagues. | | | | |
| 11. School counselors are recognized as leaders in their schools. | | | | |
| 12. School counselors can establish goals and benchmarks for school counseling in their own schools. | | | | |
| 13. School counselors can document their impact on students for principals, school committees and the community. | | | | |
| G. District Resources | | | | |
| 1. The district's school counseling program has developed or adopted a set of instruments, referenced to the student learning objectives, to measure student change in academic development, career development and personal/social domains. | | | | |
| 2. The district provides school counselors with regular institutional data reports (disaggregated student achievement, attendance and school climate data) in user-friendly form in order to facilitate monitoring students and defining problems. | | | | |
| 3. The district has a school counselor performance evaluation system that evaluates counselor effectiveness in a broad range of activities (e.g. whole school, classroom guidance, small group and individual counseling). | | | | |
| 4. The district has a school counselor performance evaluation system based upon professional performance standards. | | | | |
| 5. The district has a school counselor performance evaluation system connected to meaningful professional development. | | | | |

| Components: | Like My District | Somewhat Like My District | Not Like My District | Possible Interventions if Not Like My District |
|--|------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|--|
| 6. The district has a system for ensuring all school counselors have access to developmental supervision to improve practice. | | | | |
| 7. The district is committed to providing professional development to help school counselors develop skills necessary for the implementation of the ASCA National Model. | | | | |
| 8. The district school counseling leader has implemented a system for monitoring the ongoing outcomes and continuously improving programs in each school. | | | | |
| 9. The district school counseling leader has implemented a system for periodic program evaluation for the entire school counseling program. | | | | |
| 10. The district school counseling leader has implemented a system for coordinating school counseling program activities (e.g. a master calendar). | | | | |
| 11. The district school counseling leader has implemented a system ensuring good communication and information sharing across the school counseling program. | | | | |

Source: Prairie Lakes Area Education Agency⁷¹

⁷¹ "Are You Ready for the ASCA National Model?" Prairie Lakes Area Education Agency, 1-6.
http://www.aca8.k12.ia.us/documents/filelibrary/deb_gade/school_counseling/Are_you_ReadyProgram_Audit.doc

Project Evaluation Form

Hanover Research is committed to providing a work product that meets or exceeds member expectations. In keeping with that goal, we would like to hear your opinions regarding our reports. Feedback is critically important and serves as the strongest mechanism by which we tailor our research to your organization. When you have had a chance to evaluate this report, please take a moment to fill out the following questionnaire.

<http://www.hanoverresearch.com/evaluation/index.php>

Note

This brief was written to fulfill the specific request of an individual member of Hanover Research. As such, it may not satisfy the needs of all members. We encourage any and all members who have additional questions about this topic – or any other – to contact us.

Caveat

The publisher and authors have used their best efforts in preparing this brief. The publisher and authors make no representations or warranties with respect to the accuracy or completeness of the contents of this brief and specifically disclaim any implied warranties of fitness for a particular purpose. There are no warranties which extend beyond the descriptions contained in this paragraph. No warranty may be created or extended by representatives of Hanover Research or its marketing materials. The accuracy and completeness of the information provided herein and the opinions stated herein are not guaranteed or warranted to produce any particular results, and the advice and strategies contained herein may not be suitable for every member. Neither the publisher nor the authors shall be liable for any loss of profit or any other commercial damages, including but not limited to special, incidental, consequential, or other damages. Moreover, Hanover Research is not engaged in rendering legal, accounting, or other professional services. Members requiring such services are advised to consult an appropriate professional.