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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the development of the Utah Model for Comprehensive Counseling and Guidance, and specifically, its application in the Granite School Districts Guidance Program. This model adopted the National Occupational Information Coordinating Committee (NOICC) competencies as its desired program content, which focuses on student outcomes. While the comprehensive guidance and counseling program model adopted in Utah shares major characteristics of other models, it is singularly unique in its statewide approach to implementation and the near universal adoption by the secondary schools of the state. Critical evaluation of school counseling and guidance services and the development of the Utah model in the early 1990s has led to a commitment to plan, deliver, and evaluate a school comprehensive counseling and guidance program that focuses on: reaching 100 percent of the student population; providing a programmatic approach to guidance; assuring accountability; eliminating non-guidance activities; developing student competencies to address identified student needs; and defining the role of the school counselor within the comprehensive counseling and guidance program model. (GCP)

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by

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Granite School District's Comprehensive Counseling and Guidance Program in Action

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Setting the Stage at the State Level

During the 1980s, there was a growing sense of concern with counseling and guidance in Utah's public secondary schools. Counselor numbers were not keeping pace with a rapidly growing student population. Pupil/counselor ratios rose from 430/1 to 550/1. In addition, the counselor's role was frequently debated, widely varied, and dominated by a myriad of duties and non-guidance activities. The counselor's job was not viewed as very attractive, counselor training institutions were producing very few counselors, and the shortage of trained counselors was so severe that certification requirements were significantly reduced for entry-level counselors.

Counselors in the state were frequently criticized for providing one-dimensional, "university bound" guidance to students, and vocational educators had become particularly dissatisfied with the lack of guidance for students seeking to pursue vocational and technical training, work-based learning options, and direct entry into the work force. Program administrators in the Utah State Office of Education and leaders of the local district vocational directors group believed dramatic measures were needed to restructure guidance in the state. They agreed to commit a percentage of federal, state, and local vocational education resources for guidance support. Tied to this commitment was a stipulation that guidance is established as a full-fledged education program. Development of the *Utah Model for Comprehensive Counseling and Guidance* ensued.

The *Utah Model for Comprehensive Counseling and Guidance* varies little from the Gysbers and Henderson model described in *Developing and Managing Your School Guidance Program* (Gysbers and Henderson, 2000) and the Missouri Model described in *Missouri Comprehensive Guidance: A Model for Program Development, Implementation, and Evaluation* (Gysbers and Starr, 1993). However, Utah adopted the National Occupational Information Coordinating Committee (NOICC) competencies (now known as the National Career Development Guidelines, NCDG) as its desired program content which focuses on student outcomes. While the comprehensive counseling and guidance program model adopted in Utah shares all of the major characteristics of the Gysbers/Henderson and the Missouri models, it is singularly unique in its statewide approach to implementation and the near universal adoption by the secondary schools of the state.

Critical evaluation of school counseling and guidance services and the development of the Utah model in the early 1990's has led to a commitment to plan, deliver, and evaluate

a school comprehensive counseling and guidance program that focuses on: reaching 100 per cent of the student population; providing a programmatic approach to guidance; assuring accountability; eliminating non-guidance activities (clerical duties that could be done by non-certificated personnel); developing student competencies to address identified student needs; and defining the role of the school counselor within the comprehensive counseling and guidance program model.

Guidance is now recognized, state-wide, as a critical component of Utah's public educational system. Administrators, counselors, teachers, parents, and communities view guidance as a vital component of every student's education. This was accomplished by developing a comprehensive counseling and guidance program for *all* students. By spring 2002, nearly all but a handful of Utah's secondary schools have committed to the model, have participated in training, and have met stringent program "standards," which qualify them to receive their share of \$7.4 million appropriated by the Utah State Legislature for the program. A collegial system of program management involving the State Office of Education, regional and district administrators, and a peer review process is used to ensure that each school's guidance program maintains fidelity to the very high program standards.

The program standards are supported by Utah State Board of Education Administrative Rules, R277-462-3: Comprehensive Guidance Program funds shall be distributed to districts for each school within the district that meet all of the following criteria: (a) local ***Board adoption and approval***; (b) documentation that a ***school advisory and steering committee*** have been organized and are functioning effectively; (c) a ***school-wide student/parent/teacher needs assessment*** completed within the last three years prior to the application deadline for funding; (d) evidence that ***80% of aggregate counselor time is devoted to DIRECT services to students*** through guidance curriculum, individual planning, and responsive services; (e) a program that reflects a commitment that ***every student in the school shall benefit*** from the Comprehensive Guidance Program; (f) the establishment of the ***SEOP (Student Education Occupation Plan) requirement for ALL students as both a process and a product*** consistent with Board rules, the secondary core curriculum, and high school graduation requirements; (g) ***assistance for students in career exploration and development*** such as job seeking and finding skills and in post high school placement; (h) inclusion in the ***guidance curriculum activities*** for each of the twelve National Occupational Information Coordinating Committee (NOICC)* competencies (available from the state guidance specialist); (i) distribution to and ***discussion with feeder schools*** of the Comprehensive Guidance Program; and (j) ***sufficient district budget*** to adequately provide for guidance facilities, materials, equipment, and clerical support; and (k) all guidance team members and school administrators ***participate in state sponsored training*** (Utah State Board of education Administrative Rule R277-462-3).

Setting the Stage at the Local District Level

Granite School District is located in the central suburban area of Salt Lake County, adjacent to Salt Lake City, Utah. Granite School District covers about 300 square miles and serves a wide variety of urban, suburban, commercial, and industrial communities including

*Competencies now known as the National Career Development Guidelines.

West Valley City, Utah's second largest city. With more than 70,000 students, Granite is currently the second largest school district in the great state of Utah and is among the 30 largest districts in the nation. Granite School District provides a comprehensive educational program for students grades K through 12, with 90 school locations. The district is recognized nationally for academic excellence and innovative leadership.

In 1989, Kearns High School, one of the district's ten high schools, was selected as one of eleven "lead schools" identified by the Utah State Office of Education to participate in the development of a comprehensive approach to guidance. The small number of "lead schools" was selected to initiate the process and a supportive environment at both the school and school district level had to be in place in order to maximize the chances of a successful program implementation in the lead schools. Each of the eleven lead schools made a commitment to attend training each August for a three-year time period. The school principal and all counselors along with any other key individuals the school selected to attend participated in the training. Also, district leaders made a commitment to provide counselors with an additional seven to ten days of time (beyond the nine and one-half month contract), for each of the three years, to plan and develop program strategies, activities, and evaluation processes.

Granite District Board of Education adopted the comprehensive program approach to counseling guidance for all students in April 1992. Within the framework of the guidance program, school counselors structure activities to meet the needs of the students in the areas of guidance curriculum, individual planning, and responsive services; consult with teachers, staff, and parents to enhance their effectiveness in helping students; and they work in harmony with school staff to promote the educational program in the schools.

Granite School District's comprehensive counseling and guidance program has now experienced more than ten years of success. Although it is currently only a secondary school program directed toward all students, grades 7-12, all of the district's 25 secondary schools have met stringent state guidance program standards and qualify for their share of the funding allocated to the district by the Utah State Legislature for the guidance program. The secondary school guidance programs are managed and coordinated through the *Student Services Department* of the district which falls in the larger division of *Program Services*. The *Student Services Department* has responsibility for a wide range of personnel and programs: school counselors, psychologists, and social workers, K-12; the secondary comprehensive counseling and guidance program; community of caring/character education; drug and alcohol prevention and education; alternative education programs, and so on.

Granite School District's Guidance Program in Action

Granite School District guidance program leaders recognize and appreciate the strong foundation for guidance established and held firmly in place through leadership at the Utah State Office of Education. Granite School District secondary school guidance programs continue to be evaluated on their level of implementation of the state program standards through the well-accepted peer review process every three years. The state guidance program standards have remained largely unchanged for ten years, yet schools endeavor to evaluate and enhance their programs annually to respond to their school's changing demographics

and student needs.

Granite School District guidance program leaders have contributed to the success of their 25 secondary schools' guidance programs by focusing on the specific state guidance program standards and doing what they can at the district level to streamline program implementation. As a result, they take on a shared responsibility for the state standards in order to help free up counselors from labor intensive program management issues. These district-level initiatives also support program improvement, evaluation, and enhancement through the state guidance program standards. In actuality, this is a process of taking the state standards and developing common elements for each standard that can be adopted by the individual schools. The following is a brief synopsis of district-wide efforts to streamline each state guidance program standard.

Board Adoption and Policy for the Comprehensive Guidance Program

This standard specifically requires school guidance teams and/or district level guidance administrators to communicate guidance program issues to the local Boards of Education at least every three years. Granite District guidance leaders communicate annually with the Board to update them on the status of program implementation. During the 2000-01 school year, Granite District School Board and district level administrators developed long-range goals and objectives intended to drive the district for the next five years. The district guidance program leaders have reported to the Board as to how the comprehensive counseling and guidance program supports their long-range goals and objectives.

Advisory and Steering Committee are Organized and are Functioning Effectively

School advisory and steering committees are defined as key components of the structural framework of the *Utah Model for Comprehensive Counseling and Guidance* and are stated as such as a program standard. The advisory committee provides support and assists in establishing a direction and identifying goals for a school's guidance program. The steering committee not only designs the methods to implement and achieve the goals, but also provides on-site school management for the guidance program. Granite District counseling and guidance leaders have adhered to the structural framework (and program standard) outlined by the *Utah Model* and have organized a district advisory/steering committee. The district level committee brings leadership, continuity, and consistency to the guidance program from school to school and across the district. Committees are recognized as important aspects of the guidance program, and they have been in place since the early years of program implementation. The district comprehensive guidance *steering committee* has been most productive in attending to displacing non-guidance activities and facilitating district-wide management of the comprehensive guidance program. The current membership structure of the steering committee includes the district Student Services director, district coordinators for counseling and guidance, and the comprehensive guidance chair [counselor] from each secondary school. The steering committee holds regularly scheduled monthly meetings. The chair of the committee is a district secondary comprehensive

counseling and guidance coordinator.

A School-wide Student/Parent/Teacher Needs Assessment Completed Every Three Years

Another key guidance program standard is the use of school data including a formal student/parent/teacher needs survey to identify program content goals. Granite School District guidance program leaders contracted with an outside agency, Institute for Behavioral Research in Creativity (IBRIC) to develop a common instrument and conduct needs surveys for secondary schools going through their comprehensive guidance program review and evaluation. The goal of the survey is to standardize the way schools identify student needs and the importance of skills and abilities (competencies) students can learn in areas of self-discovery, life skills, and future planning. The NOICC (NCDG) competencies serve as the content for the school's guidance curriculum and are restated as items listed in the needs survey. Seventeen of 25 Granite secondary schools have participated in the district needs survey including students, parents, and teachers. In a recent district-level report, when responses from students, parents, and teachers were combined, they believed that the three most important areas for skills and abilities for students were: 1) Learning how to respect and get along with others; 2) Knowing how to set goals for my future (education and career); and, 3) Learning how to accept myself in a positive way. When responses from students, parents, and faculty were combined, they believed that the three areas in which students need the most help are: 1) Learning how to find and use information that will help them plan for their education and career; 2) Knowing how to set goals for my future (education and career); and, 3) Recognizing skills for a specific occupation. Schools use the results of the needs survey to determine priorities for classroom presentations and other guidance curriculum activities. The data are dis-aggregated by school, and the district has access to aggregate data. The district can use the data as evidence to support guidance program content and continued implementation of the guidance program in secondary schools.

80% of Aggregate Counselor Time is Devoted to DIRECT Services to Students

The comprehensive approach to counseling and guidance requires effective time management practices. The district guidance program leaders develop a full year guidance program planning calendar for each school year, and schools use it as a template for developing their school guidance program calendars. This, too, has helped bring greater consistency and continuity to the guidance program from school to school. Not only does it serve as a model for schools to organize and plan their school programs, but it also assists schools in program planning so that their guidance programs are ready to begin on the first day of school with a full year guidance program calendar as the road map. Included in the full year program calendar are district dates and events, district professional learning days for counselors, local and national test dates, dates for state and national conferences, and program prompts to assist counselors in developing their individual school guidance programs. The program prompts have been very effective. For example, a prompt for October suggests that counselors plan and hold advisory committee meetings. Interestingly enough, most schools do exactly that – they hold their advisory committee meetings in October.

SEOP (Student Education Occupation Plan) Requirement for ALL Students as a Process and a Product

Central to Utah's comprehensive guidance program is a requirement for counselors to guide and counsel students in the individual planning component through the development of the Student Education Occupation Plan (SEOP). State law 53A.1a.106 defines the parameters of the SEOP process, and Granite District has had a policy in place since 1996 that defines and supports the SEOP process at the local level. The state SEOP law and supporting district SEOP policy represent a strong commitment to the individual planning component of the guidance program. The School Board, Granite District PTA, district level administrators, counselors, parents, and students strongly support the SEOP process as evidenced by the state law and the district policy.

SEOP is a process whereby counselors meet annually with individual students (grades 7-12) and their parents to review school success, individual strengths and goals, and to identify any specific student needs that can be addressed by the guidance program. A district-wide SEOP planning document has been developed and is used with students in grades 7-12. The planning document follows the students from grade to grade and school to school. The district guidance steering committee is currently in the process of discussing possible modifications to the district SEOP policy. It has been suggested that the policy reflect stronger commitment for schools to use the SEOP process to better assist "at risk" students and all students specifically at key transition years in the secondary school experience.

Assistance for Students in Career Development and Exploration

This standard places strong emphasis on the goals of the guidance program to assist students in their "next step" planning. Granite School District provides resources to support a career information system in each secondary school – *Career Futures* for the junior high schools and *Choices* for schools serving students in grades 9-12. In addition, the district is unique in its support for career development and exploration by supporting a career center and a certified counselor as career center directors in each of the high schools. The career center counselors work with students in job seeking and finding skills, career days and career fairs, and in post high school placement. The career center counselors also have the services of work-based learning coordinators assigned to each school to coordinate such activities within each high school's feeder system.

Program Content

State guidance program standards specify that school programs have specific content that addresses student needs through student competencies. District guidance leaders in cooperation with key counselors have developed a scope and sequence for guidance program content. The current plan is to have the draft document ready for pilot testing for the 2002-2003 school year. The competencies identified for program content are in the areas of self-discovery, life skills, and future planning. They were developed after careful study of the NOICC (NCDG) competencies, the ASCA standards for comprehensive guidance programs,

the SCANS skills, and locally developed guidance program competencies. Through the scope and sequence project, secondary counselors will have the support and resources to deliver one guidance lesson per grade level (7-12) each term. The counselors will select guidance lessons from the district scope and sequence curriculum that connect to the identified student needs from the school's needs survey.

System Support and Program Management

Non-guidance activities have been eliminated from counselor assignments in secondary schools in Granite School District. To support this standard, a 30 hours per week guidance assistant has been hired in each secondary school, and, in addition, guidance program funds have been allocated to each secondary school for the purpose of hiring a manager for school-wide testing. As a result, counselors are spending more time with students and less time on clerical tasks associated with the day to day activities of a guidance program and school-wide testing.

In addition, district guidance leaders conduct monthly professional learning opportunities for counselors and guidance assistants that address a wide variety of topics ranging from district level services available for students; the Utah Electronic High School and other approved alternatives to earning high school credit; school culture; to career development and truancy intervention. A goal has been set to conduct an annual *Summer Institute* for school guidance teams including administrators that will focus on evaluation and accountability has. As is the case across the country, there is a need to identify data that supports the impact of the district's guidance program on student achievement and determine the value added to the overall mission of the schools by the work that we do through the guidance program.

Conclusion

Program improvement is a process based on evaluation. The planning, designing, and implementing phases of guidance program improvement must be very strong in order for meaningful evaluation and eventual program enhancement to occur. To avoid stagnation and complacency in Granite School District guidance programs and to bring greater consistency and continuity to the overall, broader vision of a district guidance program, the guidance leaders are taking a stronger position with the support and assistance of the steering committee in the process of identifying common elements that can be incorporated into individual school guidance programs. As a new century settles in, it is apparent that the next phase of comprehensive counseling and guidance program development, evaluation, and enhancement in Utah will appear at the local district level, and Granite School District is committed to be at the forefront of this new era. Individual districts can and will emerge as guidance program leaders in the areas of program planning, implementation, evaluation, and enhancement. We are extremely proud of the success of Granite School District's guidance program, but at the same time we recognize that the program is dynamic and will continue to grow and improve.

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