

## PROVIDING COUNSELING SERVICES IN HIGH SCHOOLS: PARTNERSHIPS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

By

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### ABSTRACT

*This article will discuss the importance and implications of providing high quality school counseling services in K-12 schools, and specifically in high schools. The delivery of comprehensive school counseling programs and related services such as mentoring and academic advisement have been linked to students' academic success, graduation rates, and post-secondary outcomes in terms of college admission and retention (Castro-Atwater, 2013; DeKruyf, Auger, & Trice-Black, 2013; Engberg & Gilbert, 2014). The multi-faceted roles of contemporary school counselors will be highlighted, with a focus on responsive services that they deliver directly and indirectly. Competencies that school counselors are expected to demonstrate in successful schools will expand beyond providing individual and small group counseling services to delivering comprehensive guidance curricula in academic, personal/social, and career development domains through services, such as classroom guidance, consultation, and coordination of special events (Schmidt, 2014). School counselors are charged with taking on advocacy and leadership roles to ensure that all students have equal access to a diversity of post-secondary options while offering training to enhance students' college preparedness and planning skills. To do this effectively, ethically, and responsibly, school counselors must seek to achieve multicultural competence and continual professional development (Davis, Davis, & Mobley, 2013; Savitz-Romer, 2012). The impact of effective counseling programs and services will be reviewed as well as the need for students to obtain rigorous college and career preparation, which can be enhanced through technology and software geared towards delivering guidance curricula. An example of an actual high school and university partnership will be shared to illustrate the potential for high schools to partner with institutions of higher education to fulfill mutual goals while serving the community of learners. Institutions of higher education can contribute to K-12 schools by offering professional development on instructional technologies, particularly those utilized in career and college preparedness services for students, and by providing the expertise of trained faculty and their interns to supplement existing school resources (Gysbers, 2013).*

*Keywords: Career Development, College Preparedness, College Readiness, Comprehensive Counseling Programs, Counselor Roles, Higher Education, School Partnerships, School Counseling.*

### INTRODUCTION

The school counseling profession has been redefined in response to the changing needs of communities, schools, and students. The school counselor is a fundamental part of the academic life of a K - 12 school. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) led the transformation of the school counseling profession by outlining the roles and responsibilities of school counselors

in the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2012). Contemporary school counselors take on roles, such as leaders, advocates, systemic change agents, and team members and collaborators in school organizations. They simultaneously serve as consultants, researchers, and resource brokers, taking an active part in creative decision-making and problem-solving in their schools. The impact of comprehensive school counseling programs that

implement academic, personal/social, and career development curricula have been documented, with clear indications of improved student success, academic and behavioral performance, graduation rates, and post-secondary achievements as well as favorable school culture and climate (ASCA, 2012; Colbert & Kulikowich, 2006; Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015; Schmidt, 2014). This article will review the roles of contemporary school counselors, their potential impact in schools, and their importance in providing career and college readiness services. The benefits of establishing partnerships between high schools and institutions of higher education will also be highlighted, as university faculty and counseling interns may provide much needed resources for high schools such as delivering targeted classroom guidance lessons for students, professional development for high school staff members on career, college readiness software, and other relevant instructional technologies.

## 1. The Roles of the Contemporary School Counselor

The ASCA National Model recognizes that the contemporary school counselor is engaged in a variety of activities that extend beyond the traditional counseling responsive services (ASCA, 2012; Schmidt, 2014). In fact, it outlines a series of school counseling programs that serve all school stakeholders, including parents, students, community members, school staff and faculty, and administration. The school counselor, per this model, is recognized as a leader in the academic life of the school. In schools that incorporate a comprehensive school counseling program, students receive counseling services directly in the forms of individual counseling, small group counseling, crisis intervention and counseling, individual student planning or academic advisement, meetings with parents, and classroom guidance sessions, which are better recognized as lessons in a guidance course taught by certified school counselors. These guidance lessons offer students the unique opportunity to work with school counselors as they offer psychoeducation on a multitude of topics ranging from academic to personal/social to career development. Themes that can be addressed in the high school setting may be as simple as teaching students to read their own transcripts, identifying

graduation requirements, and reviewing resume writing. In the realm of personal/social information, the counselor may address learning objectives related to bullying, harassment, discrimination, and cyberbullying, to help students recognize their strengths as citizens called to be upstanders as opposed to bystanders. These skills are greatly needed as students and their parents navigate the challenges of social media (Austin, Reynolds, & Barnes, 2016). The career development domain is of particular interest to high schoolers, though it should be addressed as early as early childhood age, and herein school counselors may help students explore their interests and aptitudes to link them with potential careers, post-secondary options, and college applications and majors. Classroom guidance unit plans that emerge in the career domain should incorporate career and college preparedness software such as Naviance, a program that provides comprehensive career and college readiness services for students in grades K - 12 (Hobsons, 2016).

Indirectly delivered counseling services in a comprehensive school counseling program include collaboration with other educators and professionals in the school organization and in the community to coordinate special events and activities for students. They train and supervise peer leaders, mentors, and counseling trainees to provide student support and enrichment services. Counselors also facilitate referrals when students' needs go beyond the scope of what school services can provide. As consultants, counselors work with their professional colleagues, parents, and students to improve instruction and the delivery of needed services for students of diverse learning styles and abilities (Kampwirth & Powers, 2016; Schmidt, 2014). As collaborators and team players, counselors shift from working as isolated professionals in schools to joining forces with professionals in other disciplinary areas to use their unique strengths and competencies to provide optimal services for students. These professional partnerships allow for program evaluations, needs assessments, and systemic changes to take place. For these reasons, the school counselor is also in a unique position to be a catalyst as an organizational systemic change agent as well as an effective resource manager. Having training in research and data

management and analysis, the counselor is qualified to identify gaps in services and areas in need of improvement, particularly in terms of needed technologies and professional development. In planning special events and coordinating needed services for students, the school counselor also performs the special role as advocate, ensuring that students of diverse abilities and learning needs will be provided with equal access to services and resources that they need to reach their maximum potential. School counselors must be ever aware of the needs of students with disabilities and any potential barriers to their success. Similarly, counselors must recognize that each student, whether academically gifted or challenged and the varying achievement levels in between, requires thoughtful individual planning and advocacy. This also calls for counselors to develop self-awareness of their own potential biases and multicultural competence to provide optimal counseling services for their students (ASCA, 2012; Colbert & Kulkowich, 2006; Savitz-Romer, 2012; Schmidt, 2014).

## 2. The Impact of Counseling Services in K - 12 Schools

The numerous services provided by school counselors in academic, personal/social, and career development domains clearly distinguish them from other counseling professionals. They are charged to serve as leaders, team members and collaborators, advocates, and systemic change agents (ASCA, 2012; Schmidt, 2014). Their impact is abundant and far-reaching in terms of actual student outcomes, such as overall student success, graduation rates, and college application submission and access (Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, & Holcomb-McCoy, 2011). Smaller student-counselor ratios have heightened these positive effects, further pointing to the need for additional counselors in K-12 schools (Lapan, Whitcomb, & Aleman, 2012). Counselors work with students in psychoeducational tasks, such as building social skills, developing respect and appreciation for diversity, citizenship, and exploring spirituality (Dobmeier, 2011). School counselors possess an array of competencies and continue to work with professional organizations to create safe schools that help students who may be at risk for bullying and to prevent violence and tragedies such as

suicide through increasing awareness, education, and a multitude of interpersonal counseling services (Black, Fedewa, & Gonzalez, 2012; Erickson & Abel, 2013). Furthermore, school counselors are vital to ensuring that all students are developing in safe and healthy environments and that they receive the educational services that they need to reach their full potential (Trolley, Haas, & Patti, 2009). They also rely on technology to manage data, to develop reports to ensure that achievement gaps continue to close, and to provide college and career readiness services by utilizing software that assists students in developing short and long-term life goals (Savitz-Romer, 2012; Schmidt, 2014).

## 3. College and Career Readiness

The contemporary vision for high school counselors calls upon them to prepare students for post-secondary careers and for college admission, retention, and success through delivering engaging comprehensive school counseling programs (Gysbers, 2013). To do this effectively, school counselors must fulfill the aforementioned roles aligned with the ASCA National Model, while remaining involved in their programs' foundation, delivery, accountability, and management with the use of quantitative and qualitative data support (ASCA, 2012). Evidence-based practices also require that counselors remain informed of current research and the best techniques for student development and wellness. College and career readiness and preparation are areas of the school counselor's responsibilities that are well-suited to partnership with higher education institutions. Because the goal is to prepare high schoolers for the challenges of college admission and retention, college and university professionals are in an excellent position to provide guidance and support resources on numerous levels (Kampwirth & Powers, 2016). For example, college career centers are often willing to visit local high schools, apart from the admissions recruiting efforts, to discuss the college application process, including writing a quality personal statement and obtaining appropriate recommendation letters. These career counseling professionals are also available to assist with online summer job searches and with training for online strengths inventories. Financial aid professionals from local

colleges may also be willing to present high school students and parents with resources on applying for federal and private loans and scholarships. School counselors rely on the support of colleges and universities to host events such as career and college fairs as well as student job fairs. These events help students to plan campus visits, gather application materials, develop confidence in the college entry process, and examine the programs of study that match their strengths and interests as well as their long-term goals. The coordination of these services calls for counselors to effectively network with community leaders while developing rapport with students to encourage participation in these events (Schmidt, 2014).

Colleges and universities may be particularly helpful to school counselors by providing them with school counseling interns. These counselors-in-training will serve schools with 100 to 300 hours of time over the course of a 15-week semester, in a range of counseling services, under the supervision of a certified school counselor at the elementary, middle, or high school. These counseling trainees can alleviate some of the stress for school counselors by taking on some of the challenging tasks that require long-term planning and coordination, which sometimes get pushed aside when counselors are delivering responsive services that require immediate attention, such as crises. These trainees are often assigned tasks, such as formulating research projects, action plans, and developmental unit lesson plans, which are fully aligned with the domains and curriculum that should be provided in their field schools. Ideally, these assignments would be conducted to serve their internship site's staff and students. Counselors-in-training are also highly knowledgeable on a diversity of career and college preparation software programs and they can provide training for school counselors and students on how to employ these technologies to improve their test preparation skills and college readiness. These services would fulfill their counseling training experiential requirements while also serving local school counseling departments in fulfilling their ASCA roles. Additionally, these types of instruction and training may lend themselves to the delivery of classroom guidance lessons on the topics of career and college preparedness (ASCA, 2012; Schmidt,

2014). Another service that university partnerships with high schools could provide is staff development and training by higher education faculty to school faculty and staff on timely issues that require demonstration of skills, practices, and discussion of the latest research findings. Similarly, local school counselors and educators may visit college classes to provide supervision and training and to discuss their experiences and the techniques they utilize on a daily basis as practitioners. Partnerships such as these help each institution to meet individual and mutual goals. College staff may be helpful also in assisting high school counselors with conversion of classroom guidance materials to the fully online format, so that students can access college and career services in an online classroom (Cicco, 2014; Kampwirth & Powers, 2016).

#### 4. The Story of a Unique Partnership

Two schools in metropolitan New York City institutions formed a partnership much like the one described above to conduct a pilot study. A career technical high school allowed a university to provide several services for its staff and students, the focus of which was to assist their school counseling efforts. Two graduate students enrolled in a counselor education program fulfilled their practicum and internship experiences in the local career technical high school, under the supervision of two permanently certified onsite school counselors. Each graduate student fulfilled typical school counselor duties on a daily basis but in addition, they created a series of ten classroom guidance sessions on the topic of college and career readiness. This classroom guidance unit was delivered by the graduate student interns. The series included training on various computer software programs that the high school purchased, including Naviance, to ensure that it would be utilized properly and frequently to help deliver a comprehensive school counseling curriculum (Hobsons, 2016). Prior to delivering the lessons to a cohort of tenth-grade graphic arts students, each student was asked to complete a college and career attitude assessment. Individual lesson objectives were formulated for each of the ten lessons and mastery was measured through student tasks and activities during each lesson. Evaluations for each of the lessons were also collected. At the end of

the ten lessons, student participants in the pilot study again completed the college and career attitude assessment. A report of the findings is currently being produced. It will likely provide feedback for the graduate students as well as implications on the benefits of the classroom guidance series. At the university level, the graduate student interns received faculty supervision as well as clinical supervision from a certified counseling professional to assist with the mastery of their skills and techniques during the course of the study. The resources utilized in this study were funded by an external funder, invested in student success and college readiness and preparedness. Partnerships such as these are effective models of the value of partnerships among educational institutions and their professionals.

### Conclusion

The relevance of school counseling services in providing quality education in K-12 schools are evident in numerous studies that document their impact (ASCA, 2012; Bryan et al., 2011; Engberg & Gilbert, 2014). The roles of school counselors expand beyond delivery of counseling services to serving as academic leaders, team members and collaborators, systemic change agents, and advocates (ASCA, 2012; Schmidt, 2014). Delivering comprehensive school counseling programs also promote college and career preparedness, which is of particular concern for high schools (Gysbers, 2013). It is imperative that high schools and institutions of higher education partner to achieve individual and mutual goals, particularly as they seek to deliver high quality counseling services for all students across academic, personal/social, and career development domains. These partnerships allow school counselors and educators to obtain external resources such as training on effective instructional technologies that can be useful classroom guidance and individual planning tools. Likewise, counseling and other education students benefit from working with practitioners outside of their college classrooms, to obtain quality supervision and to develop skills, relationships, and practices that are most available through experiential learning. Furthermore, these partnerships are fundamental to producing research on effective techniques, programs, and strategies that will serve to improve learning experiences and career

preparedness for students across all age groups (Castro-Atwater, 2013; Cicco, 2014).

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