Overview

The implementation of Comprehensive Competency Based Guidance (CCBG) programs at the elementary level in Arizona has not been as rapid as program installation at middle and high school levels because of the relatively few elementary school counselors in Arizona and because the CCBG training made available to secondary school counselors through Carl Perkins funds has not been available to elementary school counselors. In spite of these obstacles, exciting CCBG programs have been started in several districts, namely, the Sierra Vista School District, the Tucson Unified School District (TUSD), and the Sunnyside Unified School District #10.

Sunnyside Elementary Counselors and CCBG

Adele Bromiel, the only elementary school counselor in Tucson in the 1970's, and Lee Anna Simons have been CCBG leaders in the Sunnyside Schools for eight years. After six years of effort, each of the twelve elementary schools in the district now has an elementary school counselor. Initially, Adele and Lee Anna were fortunate to have Mary Belle McCorkle as their assistant superintendent. Mary Belle advocated prevention-based programs while at Sunnyside and is continuing to do so while currently serving on the governing board of the neighboring Tucson Unified School District. Adele and Lee Anna started from scratch and developed a prevention-based program that makes extensive use of classroom guidance activities and small group work mixed in with a little crisis intervention.

The Sunnyside CCBG model is based on William Glasser’s five psychological needs of survival, love and belonging, power and achievement, fun, and freedom. Counselors attempt to provide experiences for children to meet those needs according to Glasser’s Control Theory in the Classroom and The Quality Classroom. Adele and Lee Anna are fortunate to have teacher aides who keep track of her CCBG activities. In the Classroom and The Quality Classroom, all Sunnyside elementary school counselors have completed, at a minimum, a Basic Reality Therapy Certification week and the counselors have provided more than 1600 hours of classroom demonstrations of Reality Therapy concepts for district teachers.

The 1994-95 End of the Year Report (Sunnyside, 1995) contains hard data, as well as testimonials, regarding the impact of the counseling program in Sunnyside, where 7434 students experienced some form of classroom guidance (6963 students), small group counseling (1466 students), crisis counseling (4238 students) or field trips and special events. Sunnyside teachers received 1610 training hours, including 50 hours of site-based faculty in-service, 228 hours of district-wide Reality Therapy in-service, 17 hours of career ladder workshops, and 1318 hours of classroom demonstrations. Additionally, 2347 parent contacts were made. Perhaps, more important, were the student testimonials that included, “I learned I can kick a punching bag instead of my sister and brother.” and “I’m learning I don’t have to drink like my mom.” A teacher said, “Thanks for teaching us about cooperation and conflict. Thanks for caring.”

The mission of the Sunnyside Unified School District Elementary Guidance Program is to enable all students, regardless of individual differences, to acquire the educational, social and life-planning skills necessary to participate and contribute in a changing society. Life planning was identified as a domain because most counselors felt that their students were not ready for Career Planning and because many elementary school teachers felt that facilitating career planning was not their responsibility. Besides, career planning is not as valued in Sunnyside as it is in other, more academically oriented, districts. Examples of both Sunnyside and TUSD elementary school competencies appear in other digests in this series.

TUSD Elementary School Counselors and CCBG

The TUSD CCBG Management System calls upon elementary school counselors to spend their time, and use their expertise, within the following four delivery strategies: Guidance Curriculum (Classroom Activities, Group Activities), Individual Planning (Individual Appraisal, Individual Advisement), Responsive Services (Consultation, Personal Counseling, Crisis Counseling, Referral), and System Support (Professional Development, Staff and Community Relations, Consultation with Teachers, Advisory Councils, Community Outreach Programs, and Management and Operations, Research and Development). The following time allocations are suggested: Guidance curriculum 35 to 45%, Individual Planning 5 - 10%, Responsive services 30-40%, and System Support 10-15%.

There are fourteen elementary school counselors in the TUSD. CCBG is envisioned as the vehicle that will eventually enable TUSD to have at least one counselor in each of its 72 elementary schools. Drachman Elementary, Luchi Alvarez’ school, is a bilingual magnet school with 300 students. Drachman focuses on early education and equal amounts of time are spent on each lesson in English and in Spanish. Alvarez is fortunate to have teacher aides in every classroom who keep track of her CCBG activities. She also makes teachers aware of her CCBG activities by posting her monthly schedule on her door and by delivering a copy to each teacher.

Alvarez makes readily available teacher and student referrals so that a student can say, “I need help to stop sucking my thumb” or a teacher can say, “Has Steve set any fires this week?” She has conducted workshops for adult playground monitors so they can learn how to engage the children in conversation and she has conducted parenting classes in Spanish. Other activities include teaching peace-making skills, making presentations to the PTA, and developing a school crisis plan. At Drachman, parents are sent a letter informing
them that their child is being seen by a counselor, but it is not necessary to ask permission because CCBG is a district approved program.

Sierra Vista Elementary School Counselors and CCBG

In Sierra Vista, Arizona, a culturally diverse (42% Anglo, 20% Hispanic, 20% African American, 10% Asian American), rural community eighty miles southeast of Tucson, Arizona, it was easier to implement CCBG at the elementary level (K-8), than it was to do so at the high school level, even though two high school counselors attended at least one Arizona Counselors Academy to receive CCBG training. Elementary teachers in Sierra Vista continue to be more receptive to classroom interventions by the counselor than apparently is the case at the high school level where teachers are more protective of their instructional time with students and more dubious of the benefits of a CCBG program.

In Sierra Vista, elementary school counselors also deliver front line counseling services for students, students’ families, and the teaching community. Counselors are often viewed reverently by Hispanic parents who treat counselors with priest-like respect and are appreciative of being able to receive counsel and advice in a safe school setting which does not carry the clinical stigma associated with community agencies or private practices.

The choice of which domain to present first is a matter of personal preference. Selecting the domain in which you are likely to experience the most success and have the most fun will help assure that you and the class will enjoy the presentations and will lead to more positive outcomes. Casi prefers to present the Personal/Social Domain first and she focuses on communication skills, taking responsibility, decision making, and problem solving. Each of these skills can be assessed easily and improvement in these areas will facilitate growth in the other domains.

Casi’s second choice is the Educational/Academic Domain where she continues with more problem solving from the first domain and also covers study skills, prioritizing, and coping skills. Her final choice is the Career/Occupational Domain. This fits in well with later-in-the-year activities that are common in many elementary classrooms. Usually, the classroom lessons in health and social studies are focusing on careers in the “real world” and guidance presentations can provide a further elaboration on the classroom teacher’s lessons. She continues with more focus on prioritizing from the second domain and then adds work with goal-setting, values-clarification, and socialization skills.

With these suggestions in mind, the success of the CCBG program becomes more realistic. Knowing the dedication that exists in elementary school counselors, the CCBG program will define for the community our value as an essential component in the education of our students.

References

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