Past Arizona CCBG Successes and Future Considerations

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Overview

In 1986, when C. Diane Bishop became Arizona’s Superintendent of Public Instruction, her first initiative was to set up eight task forces, including a Guidance Task Force, to discuss the critical issues facing education in Arizona. Two significant recommendations by the Guidance Task Force were that the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) should pilot the Johnson Comprehensive Competency Based Guidance (CCBG) model (Johnson & Johnson, 1991) and that, if CCBG was successfully implemented, ADE would request that the legislature increase the funding of school counseling positions in the schools.

At that time, the public sentiment was that guidance and counseling “wasn’t happening” in Arizona schools. The reality was that schools were still using the traditional guidance and counseling model that had been prevalent since the 1950’s. Most school counselors were still being assigned caseloads by grade level or by letter of the alphabet and most school counselors were in a reactive mode, responding either to crises or to the ten percent of students who voluntarily came in to see the counselor. What few counselors were employed at the elementary school level had caseloads far in excess of North Central Association standards and could see only the most difficult crisis cases. In 1986, the idea of a competency based K-12 developmental guidance and counseling program was unknown to Arizona school counselors.

Societal changes during Arizona’s CCBG implementation years, 1988 to 1995, have intensified. The 1950’s pupil services model met some student needs because extended families were intact and students still were receiving parental support and guidance. However, the majority of today’s students come from single parent families, blended families, or families where both parents work and today’s students need more and different guidance and counseling services.

A Decade of Progress

Almost ten years have passed since Ms. Bishop took office. To date, approximately 50 Arizona school districts have implemented the CCBG model and counselors report numerous counselor, teacher, student and administrator successes (Bloom, 1994). However, Arizona school counselors do not believe the task has been completed. They would like to see CCBG implemented in every district, whether voluntarily or by legislative mandate. They would like to see elementary school counselors hired in every district so that CCBG’s can be activated at the elementary school level. And, they would like to see data collected to verify the impact of the implementation of CCBG’s on students and student learning.

After a nine year effort to implement statewide Comprehensive Competency Based Guidance (CCBG) programs in Arizona schools, a Results Study Task Force was formed to address the need for outcome data. Task force members began the process of gathering CCBG student results data to document program effectiveness. Wellman and Twiford suggest that, “...one appropriate measure of the value of a guidance program (is) its impact on students.” (Gysbers & Henderson, 1994, p. 22). The Results Study Task Force will continue its work in the years ahead with the hope that more data can be used to make a case with the legislature and with school district governing boards for more CCBG programs and more elementary school counselors.

However, the climate for enacting guidance and counseling legislation, either to mandate CCBG programs in the schools or to increase the number of elementary (or secondary school counselors) in the state, is not good. Mandates are being rescinded, not enacted, at both the state and federal level. But the lack of legislative response cannot be permitted to deter efforts to implement CCBG. When extrinsic motivation is not provided by legislative or administrative response, partial or full implementation of CCBG models can have its own intrinsic rewards. For counselors, such intrinsic rewards may be the only motivation remaining to implement CCBG programs!

Intrinsic Rewards of CCBG Program Implementation

If one examines the five attributes of innovation, CCBG meets all five—relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability (Rogers, 1983).

1. The relative advantage for counselors implementing CCBG is professionalism. When counselors have a clearly defined program, they have priorities and are not at the whim of administrators to complete non-counseling tasks. “We have found that counselors are now feeling more empowered and are enjoying their work more. We are gradually getting rid of more and more non-guidance duties, i.e., clerical work” (Bloom, 1994, p. 38).

2. The CCBG program model is compatible with industry trends. Industry is promoting “life long learning” corporate images. One focus of a CCBG model is to teach the student competence in the career guidance process, a process that permeates life. CCBG also meshes with national trends as reflected in the School to Work legislation, in the National Occupational Information Coordinating Council (NOICC) National Career Development Guidelines, and in the SCANS report (Copple, 1992). “Students usually do not acquire ‘Skill A’ only at a single point in time (for example, learn the skill of participating in a group in fourth grade) and then move on to other skills. Rather, they keep developing group participation skills (or any set of skills) at successively more advanced levels”
3. At first the test of complexity seems to be a barrier to implementation of the CCBG model. CCBG is a systems approach and implementation requires twelve program components. It adds to the traditional guidance and counseling services model, a guidance curriculum delivered by counselors. Recently, the Virginia State Department of Education guidance and counseling staff was given notice that the guidance and counseling department would be eliminated. Virginia legislated a counseling services model requiring counselors to spend "X" number of hours counseling with students. The problem with the services model is its inability to demonstrate how "students are different" because of the counseling process. Delivering a CCBG model, including a guidance curriculum, means that schools can "...report student successes in terms of student's learning new life skills such as conflict resolution and decision making" (Bloom, 1994, p. 38).

4. When the Arizona Handbook Steering Committee developed Arizona’s CCBG handbook and workbook, a singular "program model" was not the expectation of the handbook. The committee opted for a more eclectic approach, concentrating on the Johnson CCBG model (Johnson, S. & Johnson, C., 1991) as a focus, but it also highlighted other implementation formats of a comprehensive, developmental guidance and counseling program. That permitted trialability, e.g., the large urban high school could choose program management centering on differential staffing, whereas the small, rural high school could select the Gysbers’ time on task management strategy that can be implemented by a single counselor. In fact, what has occurred over the nine years in Arizona is that various school districts have tried different program management configurations and have developed customized CCBG programs that work in their district and community and fit the counseling staff’s management style.

5. The final test of intrinsic rewards in innovation is observability- the degree to which the results of an innovation are visible to others. Counselors report that “…counselors and their administrators are frequently praised by parents, students, and teachers for their efforts on behalf of all students” (Bloom, 1994, p. 38)

Conclusion

The final piece of Arizona’s effort to implement a statewide CCBG guidance and counseling program model was intended to be legislation to support additional guidance and counseling personnel. With the current governor looking to cut state spending, any educational legislation has little chance of being considered. The intrinsic rewards of statewide implementation of Arizona’s CCBG model are there. The Results Study Task Force will continue to gather and publish research data evidencing how students are different when counselors deliver a CCBG program. The future direction of the Results Study Task Force is to identify guidance curriculum benchmarks for counselors’ statewide collection of results data.

Striving for professionalism will be the ‘trade off’ in Arizona’s statewide implementation of CCBG. Professionalism and CCBG program results together will provide marketing packages to persuade local school boards of education to increase guidance and counseling personnel as demonstrated in the award-winning CCBG programs of the Marana Unified Schools, Marana, Arizona and of the Omaha Public Schools, Omaha, Nebraska.

References


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