Overview

Discussed here is an historical perspective of one school district’s development of a Comprehensive Competency-Based Guidance (CCBG) program. The Marana school district is located in Pima County, Arizona on the outskirts of the city of Tucson. Here, approximately 10,100 students represent a wide variety of ethnic (79 percent Anglo, 16 percent Hispanic, 2 percent African American, 1.5 percent Native American and 1.5 percent Asian American) and socioeconomic backgrounds, ranging from rural to suburban lifestyles.

All K-12 students in the Marana Unified School District are served by the Guidance and Counseling Program (The reference to a Guidance and Counseling PROGRAM is deliberate as Guidance and Counseling DEPARTMENTS or SERVICES are believed to be too easy for school boards to eliminate or replace). The Marana CCBG plan is developmental, is articulated for K-12, and is accountable. The plan provides clear direction both for the district guidance program and for each student’s program. It also clarifies the role of the guidance counselor in the schools. School counselors are now considered an integral part of the school community and are often found in leadership positions.

The Past

In 1986, the Marana Guidance and Counseling Program had many problems. These problems involved issues with which school counselors throughout the nation struggle. The program lacked articulation, direction, and support. Marana counselors can laugh a little now, but it was their frustration, born of the question, “Can things get much worse?” that they began to improve the guidance and counseling program. Even though the student population was increasing about 8 percent a year, there had been no increase in the staff in many years.

Our road to change began in November 1986 with an all day in-service conducted by a member of the Arizona Department of Education. All five counselors met every three weeks to develop and write the Marana CCBG plan. By March 1987, a printed Guidance Plan was presented to the Marana Governing Board. Their response was overwhelmingly positive and included a tripling of the number of school counselors from five to fifteen, including the addition of four elementary school counselors. During the next four years, Marana counselors prepared the following documents, all of which were adopted by the Marana schools governing board:

- wrote and administered a needs assessment
- wrote and implemented a 7-12 guidance curriculum
- wrote and implemented a crisis response plan
- wrote a guidance counselor evaluation instrument that includes counselor competencies

Evidence of Accountability

CCBG systems evolved in the 1980’s out of a need for schools in general, and guidance and counseling programs in particular, to be more accountable to the various publics they serve. In the Marana district, accountability is achieved by the fact that (a) all students, K-12, receive guidance lessons and competency attainment is recorded in a student portfolio, (b) all 9-12 students participate in at least one individual planning activity with the school counselor each year, and (c) a record number of students participate in conflict resolution and small group counseling.

In 1989 a study was conducted in which students were pretested, then posttested after three to four days of CCBG instruction, and then post tested again two to six months after that classroom instruction. The delayed post testing was conducted at the request of the school board president who wanted documentation of the extent to which students remembered what had been presented to them in the classroom. Data suggest that seniors retained the most, perhaps because the classroom teacher and the school counselor team taught the curriculum and the classroom teacher continued to emphasize the content after the original presentation was made. Also, the seniors were close to graduation and perhaps they perceived the materials as particularly relevant to their immediate needs.

Sample data from 115 seniors include the following: “When filling out a job application, state three requirements for it to be acceptable.”—pretest, 39 percent, post test, 82 percent and delayed post test, 94 percent; “What areas of the job market will have the most growth?” - pretest, 5 percent, post test 77 percent, and delayed post test 83 percent; and “Two stages in the decision-making process are...”—9.8 percent pretest, 78 percent post test and 91 percent delayed post test.

During the 1991-92 school year data were collected from at-risk students in grades 9-12 in Marana. Sample data from 36 students at the pretest and 27 students at the post test include the following: “After high school, I plan to...” - pretest 56 percent, post test 100 percent; “Classes I am taking that relate to my career goal are...” — 56 percent pretest, 70 percent posttest; and “One consequence of not using the decision-making process is...”—50 percent pretest, 82 percent post test.

The Future

It is anticipated that additional school counselors will be hired to keep up with increased student enrollment. A resource and wellness program was started in 1994 and will provide students with much needed social services. School counselors will continue to improve the Marana CCBG program. School counselors will carry on as a vital, visible, and valuable resource for students, parents and staff. School counselors will also continue to be passionate, professional, and proud.

Excerpts from the Marana CCBG Plan:

The Marana Guidance and Counseling Program has adopted the following overall CCBG goal for each domain. Many, but certainly not all, of the more specific goals within each domain were adapted from the NOICC (1989) National Career Development Guidelines. Within
the Educational Domain, the goal is that “All Marana Unified School District students will demonstrate educational competencies to constructively function in and contribute to society.” Within the Personal/Social Domain, the goal reads, “All Marana Unified School District students will demonstrate competencies in effective interpersonal communication and in recognizing the contributions of self and others.”

Finally, with the Career/Life Planning Domain, the program goal is “All Marana Unified School District students will demonstrate career and life planning competencies.”

Further, in order to achieve the goals of the Marana CCBG program, school counselors are involved in various activities which can be grouped into one of four major components: Curriculum Activities are “classroom activities for all students”; Individual Planning Activities include “developmental activities with students and parents”; Responsive Services are those “activities that respond to an identified need”; and System Support Activities “support the operation of the Guidance and Counseling Program.”

**Recommendations**

This digest provides the reader with a summary of how one school district totally changed its guidance and counseling program and the effect these changes have had. Consistent with the suggestions of Walz (1988), we in Marana also believe that it is critical that school counselors take a proactive approach to revising the guidance and counseling program, rather than wait for a top-down mandate from their district or from the state. It is critical that program goals, student competencies, and the role of the school counselor be clearly delineated in a CCBG program. All students must be served and school counselors must be visible and accessible to students and parents. School counselors are challenged to have a passion for their chosen career and a clear vision for the future of guidance and counseling.

**References**


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