A portion of the Arizona Comprehensive Competency Based Guidance Model is the Advisory Council. The selection and role of this committee is a necessary component of all successful Counseling and Guidance programs. The role of the Guidance Advisory Council is to “assist in developing a school competency-based guidance model and to assist in continuous evaluation, revision and improvement of the program.” (ADE, 1991, p. 91)

History
As far back as 1976, Guidance Advisory Councils were identified as an effective strategy in identifying school district guidance goals and recommending priorities for guidance and counseling. Even then, funding for support programs was becoming more and more precarious, and the mode of dealing with one student at a time on a continuous basis, began to be viewed as too costly. To survive, a shift in thinking and practice occurred, which also directed students and community members to share in the responsibility of identifying student guidance goals and outcomes. At that time, the most efficient means to accomplish such a task was to form and implement a Guidance Advisory Council. In Mesa, Arizona, as part of an ESEA Title III Project, a Competency-Based Staff Development Training Package was developed by district staff under the direction of Byron McKinnon, Director of Guidance, and addressed the establishment of Guidance Advisory Councils. Although incomplete, a draft document describing this process was begun by Sharon Crosson (Johnson), C.J. (Curly) Johnson and Duane Richins.

As the importance of Comprehensive Competency Based Guidance programs grew and was recognized by the Arizona Department of Education, the Advisory Council concept continued as one of the twelve program elements of Arizona’s CCBG model. Marana Public School District, Marana Arizona, was used as the state model for developing and implementing a Guidance and Counseling Advisory Council. Consisting of volunteers from the community at large, the Council successfully promoted constructive change in the Marana Guidance and Counseling program (see the Holaway CCBG Digest).

During the early 1990’s several additional school districts across the state of Arizona developed and implemented Guidance Advisory Councils. In Mesa, Arizona, however, the Guidance Advisory Councils of the mid-1970’s had been absorbed by site-advisory councils. Then during the 1992-93 school year, Mesa Public Schools conducted a Counseling and Guidance Strategic Curriculum Review, which recreated the Guidance Advisory model. A Guidance Review Committee was formed by volunteers representing Mesa Public Schools, business and industry, parents, students, Mesa Education Association, Arizona School Counselors Association, American Counseling Association, and Mesa Public Schools administrators. The committee reviewed the historical perspective of the Guidance Program in Mesa Public Schools, issues and trends for the 21st Century, and reviewed, revised and approved Mesa’s Competency Based Guidance Curriculum. The Mesa Public Schools Student Outcome-Based Counseling and Guidance Program was presented to the Governing Board, March 9, 1993.

Implementation
The first step in developing a Guidance Advisory Council is to identify the need for such a group. The formation of a competency-based guidance program requires this type of support to effectively develop and implement the philosophy, goals, competencies, management system and school plans for the CCBG model. The guidance department and counselors who committed to the CCBG concept should first agree on the development of the Guidance Advisory Council and one counselor should be identified who will specifically be in charge of facilitating the Council. Administrative approval and support of the Guidance Advisory Council is an initial part of the process. A meeting should be scheduled with necessary administrators at the building and/or district level. A presentation of the purpose, the membership composition of the council, schedule of meetings, governing board presentation and proposed agendas should be addressed.

After administrative approval is obtained, further discussion of the qualifications of advisory members should be discussed. Guidance personnel, administrators, former students, parents, local employers, teachers, and representation of handicapped individuals, racial and ethnic minorities, and various age levels should be included, if possible. The size of the council should be determined by the size of the community and the purpose of the council. It should be large enough to truly represent the school and community population, yet small enough to be managed effectively. Motivated individuals should be sought who are willing to devote time and effort required to complete the task. Members should be familiar with both the needs of the school and of the community at large.

The counselor in charge of the Guidance Advisory Committee should personally telephone the prospective members to request their participation. The telephone contact should be followed by a letter of appointment. A reminder call to members before each meeting is helpful as attendance at meetings is critical to the success of the Council. Meeting dates should be projected annually, if possible. If the Council meets on an on-going basis, a yearly planning work session is suggested to set dates and times of meetings as well as yearly goals. Several days before the Guidance Advisory Council meeting arrangements should be confirmed and an agenda prepared. The meeting room should be large enough to accommodate all in attendance and audio/visual equipment should be in working order.

Some additional adjustments may be in order to promote attendance and smoothly run meetings. The time of day for meetings will need to be addressed as well as the possibility of child care. Refreshments are always a welcome addition!
The Guidance Advisory Council Meeting

An agenda should be prepared for each meeting, including a time limit for speakers and presentations. Those individuals who are listed on the agenda should be informed in advance as to when they are scheduled to speak and their time allotment. Caution should be taken to keep the meeting times to a reasonable length. When the time limit is up, items under discussion should be tabled until the next meeting, or an additional meeting arranged to discuss a particular topic. It is also advantageous to involve the Guidance Advisory Council with other parent advisory groups. Advocacy should be promoted and collegial relationships developed throughout the school and community.

The first meeting of the Council should provide for a get-acquainted activity. A presentation of the existing Guidance and Counseling program should be included. Guidance and Counseling goals for the current school year should be discussed, including a timeline for the Guidance Advisory Council. Brainstorming is recommended to identify concerns and important considerations for the Council. A team approach and consensus should be stressed. Attention should be paid not to make the program so wide in scope that goals are unrealistic. An Action Plan for the Guidance Advisory Council should reflect the philosophy and goals (the cornerstones) of the Counseling and Guidance department (Trotter, 1992).

Conclusion

Looking toward the future, Guidance and Counseling programs across the country will be competing for funding and support from school boards and other sources of revenue within their community (Johnson & Whitfield, 1991). Guidance Advisory Councils that can serve as vehicles to monitor guidance programs and recommend priorities to school and community leaders will increase visibility of counseling and guidance programs as well as provide advocacy for the importance of counseling and guidance activities and opportunities for students.

References


Fran Carney, M.A., CPC, is the Director of Guidance and Counseling, Mesa Public Schools, Mesa, AZ.