

## Article 9

### **Factors That Affect Implementation of a Comprehensive School Counseling Program in Secondary Schools**

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#### **Abstract**

The purpose of this article is to define the role of secondary school counselors and to define comprehensive school counseling programs (CSCPs), as well as to examine factors that affect implementation of a CSCP in secondary schools. Factors included in this paper are administrative support, role ambiguity and conflict, inappropriate job duties, and caseload.

*Keywords:* secondary school counselors, comprehensive school counseling program, school administration, supervision, job duties

Although the role of school counselors has changed and expanded recently in response to educational and societal trends (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2012), school counselors are ultimately expected to collaborate with stakeholders to promote mental health and academic achievement and to act as advocates for all students. Through comprehensive school counseling programs (CSCPs), school counselors design and deliver programs to promote the success of all students (ASCA, 2012). “School counseling programs should be an integral part of students’ daily educational environment, and school counselors should be partners in student achievement” (ASCA, 2013a, para. 2). CSCPs are being implemented across all school levels, and various types of programs exist nationwide (Dahir, Burnham, & Stone, 2009).

Historically, school counselors have been trained as mental health care providers rather than as school leaders, advocates, and researchers. Under a student services model

of school counseling, school counselors spent the majority of their time with a small number of students with the greatest needs (McGannon et al., 2005; Tang & Erford, 2004). The focus of a student services model revolved around career planning, problem solving, and class scheduling, and was reactionary as crisis situations arose (Tang & Erford, 2004). In this outdated framework, school counselors are unable to provide proactive services or meet the needs of all students within the school (McGannon et al., 2005).

Today, school counselors are asked to provide evidence of the effectiveness of their school counseling programs as they relate to the school mission, as well as to provide support for the emotional adjustment of students (ASCA, 2012). School counselors provide direct and indirect services to students, in addition to collaborating with administrators, teachers, parents, and the community to help link students to resources (ASCA, 2012). To achieve program effectiveness, ASCA recommends a 1:250 counselor-student ratio and suggests that school counselors spend 80% or more of their time providing direct student services (ASCA, 2012).

The purpose of this paper is to define the role of secondary school counselors and to define CSCPs, as well as to provide information on two models of CSCPs. Furthermore, this paper reviews factors that affect implementation of CSCPs, including administrative support, role conflict, inappropriate job duties, and caseload. This paper promotes the usage of CSCPs by secondary school counselors and highlights the need for further research, continuing education, and advocacy on the implementation of CSCPs among secondary school counselors.

## **Secondary School Counselors**

Professional secondary school counselors often find themselves with no clearly defined role in school environments because the school administration lacks education regarding the duties of a school counselor (Cervoni & DeLucia-Waack, 2011). Traditionally, the professional secondary school counselor's role has included making academic recommendations, record keeping, report writing, vocational planning, test administration and scoring, scheduling, and other assigned administrative duties (Tang & Erford, 2004). The professional secondary school counselor's role has continually changed along with the evolution of school counseling, creating challenges for professional identity and role clarity (ASCA, 2012). Now, professional secondary school counselors must serve as counselor, coordinator, facilitator, leader, and consultant to provide services to their schools through the implementation of a comprehensive counseling model (Tang & Erford, 2004).

Professional secondary school counselors are prominent members of the educational team who help advance organizational change through leadership, advocacy, and collaboration (ASCA, 2013b). The role of professional secondary school counselors is defined by ASCA as:

Secondary school counselors are professional educators with a mental health perspective who understand and respond to the challenges presented by today's diverse student population. Secondary school counselors do not work in isolation; rather they are integral to the total educational program. They provide proactive leadership that engages all stakeholders in the delivery of programs and services

to help the student achieve success in school. Professional school counselors align and work with the school's mission to support the academic achievement of all students as they prepare for the ever-changing world of the 21st century. (ASCA, 2013b, para. 2)

A secondary school counselor is further defined by ASCA as someone who holds a "master's degree in school counseling, making them uniquely qualified to address all students' academic, career and social/emotional development needs by designing, implementing, evaluating and enhancing a comprehensive school counseling program that promotes and enhances student success" (ASCA, 2016, para. 1). As secondary school counselors redefine their roles, a strong emphasis is on advocacy for the role of the school counselor and implementation of a CSCP.

The secondary school counselor's role has continually changed with the evolution of school counseling, creating challenges for professional identity and role clarity (ASCA, 2012). Historically, school counselors created vocational guidance lessons, scheduled students, administered standardized tests, and were tasked with other various administrative duties (Tang & Erford, 2004). Currently, ASCA promotes secondary school counselors as members of the educational team who help advance organizational change through leadership, advocacy, and collaboration (ASCA, 2013b) and serve as counselors, coordinators, facilitators, leaders, and consultants to provide services to their schools through the implementation of a comprehensive counseling model (Tang & Erford, 2004). Professional secondary school counselors can implement a comprehensive school counseling program by providing classroom guidance (e.g., academic skills support, coping strategies), individual student planning (e.g., goal setting, transition plans), responsive services (e.g., peer facilitation, referrals), and system support (e.g., consultation, program management; ASCA, 2013b). In addition, professional secondary school counselors collaborate with parents, students, teachers, administrators, and the community (ASCA, 2013b). CSCPs help define the role and responsibilities of school counselors nationwide, while reducing non-school counseling activities performed by school counselors.

### **Comprehensive School Counseling Programs (CSCPs)**

Because adolescence is a time of rapid growth, students need support to help ensure that they are prepared and supported as they enter the final transition into adulthood (ASCA, 2013b). Professional secondary school counselors are tasked with helping students resolve emotional, social, and behavioral problems, while also helping students develop post-graduation plans for college and careers (Coogan & DeLucia-Waack, 2007). Secondary school counseling programs are "essential for students to achieve optimal personal growth, acquire positive social skills and values, set appropriate career goals and realize full academic potential to become productive, contributing members of the world community" (ASCA, 2013b, para. 13).

Comprehensive school counseling programs are "proactive, preventative, and aimed at helping all students acquire the knowledge, skills, self-awareness and attitudes necessary for normal development" (Moore-Thomas, 2004, p. 257), and can include counseling, referral, consultation, information, assessment, and curriculum (Moore-Thomas, 2004). Gysbers and Henderson (2000) suggested that CSCPs exist when the

integration of curriculum supports the mission of the school and complements existing academic programs. CSCPs create a framework for providing services to all students that are focused and accountable because they are research based (Moore-Thomas, 2004).

There are three steps in CSCPs—emphasizing student competencies, program delivery, and program evaluation (Moore-Thomas, 2004). Program delivery includes direct and indirect services to students and other stakeholders within the school system regarding guidance curriculum, individual student planning, and responsive counseling. Program evaluation is achieved through informal or formal measures that are systematic, ongoing, and cyclical. According to Moore-Thomas (2004), it is the effective implementation of a CSCP that allows school counselors to help students achieve success by assisting students to acquire culturally appropriate knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

Current research shows that CSCPs are beneficial to both the school counselor and the school community (Moore-Thomas, 2004; Pyne, 2011; Rayle, 2006). Rayle (2006) found that school counselors who utilized a comprehensive, competency-based guidance program had greater perceptions of mattering and higher levels of job satisfaction than those who did not use a comprehensive, competency-based guidance program. Other researchers have found that students who participated in CSCPs had higher grades, better peer interactions, and less classroom disruptions (Dahir et al., 2009; Sink, 2005; Sink & Stroh, 2003). In addition, many individual state departments of education (e.g., North Carolina, Oregon, Tennessee, and Wisconsin) have promoted the use of CSCPs and have created individualized programs grounded in the implementation of a CSCP (Dahir et al., 2009).

### **The Comprehensive Guidance Program Model (CGPM)**

The Comprehensive Guidance Program Model (CGPM) was originally developed by Gysbers and Moore (1974, 1981) and was later revised by Gysbers and Henderson (2000). This model, developed originally as a nontraditional, prescriptive approach to school counseling, incorporates three components: content, organizational framework, and resources. The goal of the model is to create a “common language” for school counseling through curriculum-based functions, individual facilitation functions, and on-call functions (Gysbers, 2002). The model allows structure and flexibility since “the common language of the structure of guidance program is a constant, school counselors’ time allocations, the tasks they do, and the activities and interventions they use within the program structure to work with students, parents, and teachers may vary by school building and grade level” (Gysbers, 2002, p. 151). To implement the CGPM, school counselors need to have a student-oriented, educational program focused approach that starts the first day of school and continues throughout the year until the last school day (Gysbers et al., 1990). Administrative and clerical tasks, one-to-one counseling only, and limited accountability were deemphasized so that school counselors can turn to more appropriate functions (Gysbers et al., 1990).

### **ASCA National Model**

The ASCA National Model, originally published in 2003, emerged from educational reform that resulted from the No Child Left Behind legislation, which mandated accountability for student learning for all federally funded school programs (Hatch, 2004). The model was developed based on input from national school counseling

professional leaders, practicing school counselors, and documented research—including Gysbers’s model and the national standards of school counseling from ASCA (Hatch, 2004).

The ASCA model is intended to assist school counselors in carrying out a CSCP through focusing on four primary school counseling components: foundation, management, delivery, and accountability (ASCA, 2012). Within this framework, the model has standards related to academic, personal/social, and career development for all students through guidance curriculum, individual student planning, responsive services, and system support (ASCA, 2012). In addition, the ASCA model emphasizes the themes of leadership, advocacy, collaboration, and systematic change to accentuate the unique position of school counselors in improving student achievement for all students (ASCA, 2012).

## **Factors That Affect Implementation**

### **Administrative Support**

Administrative support is critical for the implementation and maintenance of CSCPs (Lambie & Williamson, 2004; Wingfield, Reese, & West-Olatunji, 2010; Yildirim, 2008). Administrators who were informed about a CSCP supported the role of school counselors within the school and assigned appropriate job duties to school counselors, compared to non-informed administrators (Lambie & Williamson, 2004).

Amatea and Clark (2005) noted that for school counselors to succeed, there needs to be support and commitment from the administrative team; however, there are limited opportunities for administrators to learn about the role of the school counselor. They found that many administrators in their sample believed that school counselors' roles should include individual and group counseling, classroom guidance, teacher or parent consultation, exceptional student coordination, scheduling, and standardized testing. Yet in the same study, administrators differed in prioritizing these various work obligations, saying that, at the secondary school level, school counselors should operate in more of a responsive, direct service provider role.

Dodson (2009) found that administrators with knowledge of a CSCP viewed school counselors as having a significant role in guidance curriculum lessons in collaboration with teachers, counseling students with discipline problems, providing teacher support for better management, and interpretation of student records compared to administrators without knowledge of a CSCP.

### **Role Ambiguity and Conflict**

Role ambiguity for high school counselors comes in several forms and frequently inhibits personal wellness as it contributes to occupational stress and burnout (Cervoni & DeLucia-Waack, 2011). Role ambiguity exists when there is not a clear understanding of the school counselor's role. School counselors often have dissonance regarding their own idealized version of school counseling versus the day-to-day tasks they are asked to perform by the administration (Falls & Nichter, 2007). At times, it is difficult for school counselors to advocate for role clarity when the administrators are their direct supervisors.

Role conflict is defined as the attempt to perform multiple roles within the same job or the distortion of expectations compared to the actual demands of the job (Bryant & Constantine, 2006). Role conflict can hinder personal wellness, contributing to occupational burnout (Cervoni & DeLucia-Waack, 2011). Researchers have shown that school counselors have competing demands and a high level of difficulty regarding deciding what services to provide (Cervoni & DeLucia-Waack, 2011; Lambie & Williamson, 2004).

School counselors interact with various groups, including students, parents, teachers, administrators, and the community, so that role ambiguity sometimes arises as to who should be the priority (Culbreth, Scarborough, Banks-Johnson, & Solomon, 2005). In addition, the lack of clear guidelines for implementing a comprehensive school counseling program contributes to role ambiguity and conflict. Cervoni and DeLucia-Waack (2011) found that, although the ASCA National Model is widely disseminated to school counseling professionals, there is still much ambiguity surrounding the role of the school counselor at the institutional level. Role ambiguity at the institutional level creates concerns for overall job satisfaction and burnout (Cervoni & DeLucia-Waack, 2011).

### **Inappropriate Job Duties**

Role conflict in school counseling is often due to inappropriate job duties. The biggest predictor of role stress for school counselors found by Culbreth et al. (2005) was the relationship between the initial perceptions of the job and the actual practice experiences. According to Baggerly and Osborn (2006), inappropriate duties for school counselors included registration, administrative tasks, handling discipline issues, lunchroom duty, and bus duty. Non-counseling duties assigned by administration create a lack of clarity about the professional role of secondary school counselors and diminish the importance of the overall school counseling role (Falls & Nichter, 2007; Moyer, 2011). Moyer (2011) found that over 50% of school counselors surveyed spent more than 10 hours per week on inappropriate job duties, and 74% of participants reported spending more than 5 hours per week on inappropriate job duties.

Results of recent research studies have shown that there is a correlation between time spent on inappropriate counseling duties and lower levels of job satisfaction; by contrast, time spent on appropriate counseling duties increases job satisfaction (Baggerly & Osborn, 2006; Cervoni & DeLucia-Waack, 2011; Moyer, 2011). McCarthy, Van Horn Kerne, Calfa, Lambert, and Guzman (2010) found that the most challenging aspects of school counselors' position included paperwork requirements and caseload size. Based on inappropriate job duties, Moyer (2011) found that school counselors were discouraged, yet felt that they had to perform these inappropriate job duties to secure their positions and keep their jobs. Moyer (2011) concluded that participants were less likely to show empathy towards students when they were responsible for more inappropriate job duties.

Baggerly and Osborn (2006) found that school counselors' satisfaction and commitment were correlated to the performance of appropriate versus inappropriate duties as defined by the ASCA National Model. This finding suggests that the lack of appropriate duties created frustration in school counselors that led to increases in career dissatisfaction (Baggerly & Osborn, 2006). Cervoni and DeLuccia-Waack (2011) concluded that time spent on other inappropriate duties was the variable that best predicted general job dissatisfaction in school counselors. Moyer (2011) found that the

greater the amount of time spent on inappropriate, non-counseling duties, the greater that school counselors were affected by burnout.

### **Caseload**

School counselors' workloads have continually increased over time, making it difficult to spend equal time with every student (Smith, 2011). The ASCA recommended counselor-to-student ratio is 1:250 (ASCA, 2012). The national average for school counselor-to-student ratio is 1:459. It could be surmised that a large caseload may be a potential risk for burnout (ASCA, 2012). There is some evidence that high ratios negatively affect school counselor performance (McCarthy et al., 2010). A demanding, large caseload was found to be the most challenging aspect of a school counselor's position and led to a theme of frustration regarding the inability to address all students' needs (McCarthy et al., 2010). Gunduz (2012) surveyed 194 school counselors and found that school counselors with caseloads of over 1,000 students had higher depersonalization scores on the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), demonstrating a positive and significant relationship between caseload and emotional exhaustion.

### **Implications**

A review of the literature suggests that professional secondary school counselors have higher levels of dissatisfaction or burnout compared to elementary/middle school counselors (Baggerly & Osborn, 2006; Rayle, 2006). Based on these factors, there may be significant differences between those who teach (counselor educators) and promote CSCPs from a theoretical foundation and those who are responsible to interpret the theoretical foundation and clinically apply the CSCPs to a real school setting (professional secondary school counselors and school administrators).

As counselor educators work to prepare professional secondary school counselors, they might consider including more practical application assignments, as well as observations of schools with successful CSCPs, if available. The importance of ongoing supervision might also be more purposefully integrated within school counselor education programs. The stress associated with being required to perform inappropriate duties might be alleviated if professional secondary school counselors could receive more training on implementation of CSCPs and advocacy for their role.

Studies within the field of school counseling have produced evidence that CSCPs can reduce levels of job dissatisfaction (as cited by Pyne, 2011). Professional secondary school counselors need to find opportunities to connect with administration for support in the implementation of a CSCP and to advocate for role clarification. It may be important for professional secondary school counselors to request meetings with administration, introduce the model to school system personnel at faculty meetings, and gain leadership roles on their campuses to promote a CSCP. Those in administrative positions in school settings might examine the job duties of professional secondary school counselors, as well as the need for implementation of a CSCP in their school systems. The role of school counselors needs to be clearly defined to school administrators by school counselors so that administrators will cease assigning inappropriate job duties to professional secondary school counselors. School administrators, to promote a more facilitative work

environment, should explore school policies, resource management, and funding, all of which affect professional secondary school counselors' ability to implement a CSCP.

### **Conclusion**

As the role of the secondary school counselor continually evolves to meet the growing and ever-changing needs and expectations of the school community, the importance of the comprehensive school counseling program remains consistent. Research indicates that school counselors who utilized a comprehensive program had higher levels of job satisfaction and lower levels of burnout and that the students who were offered comprehensive programs had higher grades and better peer interactions. However, several factors affect the implementation of CSCPs, including the level of administrative support, supervision, role ambiguity and conflict, the number of inappropriate job duties assigned, and the size of the caseload. Administrators who were informed about CSCPs and supported the role of school counselors, tended to assign appropriate job duties to school counselors that supported the implementation of comprehensive programs. When there is a lack of clear guidelines for implementing a comprehensive school counseling program, or when school counselors are preoccupied with inappropriate job duties or their caseloads are too large, it makes it more difficult for those counselors to implement the much needed comprehensive school counseling programs.

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