

## Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling Program Evaluation: Program + Personnel = Results

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The evaluation of guidance and counseling programs and their activities and services, has been part of professional dialogue since the 1920s (Gysbers, 2004). Today, however, the issue of evaluation is receiving even more attention. School counselors increasingly are being asked to demonstrate that their work contributes to student success, particularly student academic achievement, as a result of the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (P.L. 107-110) in 2001 (McGannon, Carey, & Dimmitt, 2005).

Three kinds of evaluation are required for school counselors to demonstrate that their work within the framework of comprehensive guidance and counseling programs contributes to overall student success. Personnel evaluation, the first kind, describes the way school counselors are supervised and evaluated. Program evaluation, the second kind, reviews the status of a district's program against established program standards to ascertain the degree to which the program is being implemented. Results evaluation, the third kind, focuses on the impact that the activities and services of a program are having on students, the school, and the community.

Each type of evaluation is important. Equally important however, is how they relate to and interact with each other. Personnel evaluation plus program evaluation equals results evaluation. The personnel of a program need to be doing the work of the program, and the program must be fully in place and fully functioning in order to achieve the desired results.

### Personnel Evaluation

Personnel evaluation is the procedure used to judge the effectiveness of school counselors working within the framework of comprehensive school guidance and counseling programs. Judgments are made about school counselor effectiveness using personnel performance standards, criteria, and descriptors that are derived directly from the language of the framework of comprehensive guidance and

counseling programs (Gysbers & Henderson, 2006; Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2000). Personnel performance standards are acknowledged measures of comparison used to make judgments about the scope of the work of school counselors within a comprehensive program. Once a sufficient number of personnel performance standards have been specified that fully represent a complete comprehensive program, criteria and descriptors are written for each standard specifying all of the important aspects of that standard. Enough criteria and descriptors are needed to assure evaluators that all of the important aspects of each personnel performance standard have been identified and can be evaluated.

What do personnel performance standards, criteria, and descriptors look like? To illustrate, the following is an example standard with two criteria and several descriptors from *Guidelines for Performance-Based Professional School Counselor Evaluation* (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2000). This document can be obtained at <http://www.dese.mo.gov/divteachqual/profdev/counselorscorrected2.pdf>

**Standard 1:** The professional school counselor implements the Guidance Curriculum Component through the use of effective instructional skills and the careful planning of structured group sessions for all students.

**Criterion 1:** The professional school counselor teaches guidance units effectively.

The professional school counselor:

1. Organizes units for student mastery based on student needs.
2. Uses effective instructional strategies.
3. Establishes an environment conducive for student learning through the use of effective classroom management techniques.
4. Other . . .

**Criterion 2:** The professional school counselor encourages staff involvement to ensure the effective implementation of the guidance curriculum.

The professional school counselor:

1. Collaborates with or assists teachers in developing and/or teaching guidance units effectively.
2. Serves as a resource regarding guidance materials appropriate to the guidance units being taught.
3. Provides in-service training for teachers on guidance-related subject matter and guidance instruction methodology.
4. Other . . .

In Missouri, school counselor evaluation using the standards, criteria, and descriptors found in the *Guidelines* document is both formative and summative. Ongoing professional development and supervision procedures using the standards, criteria, and descriptors constitute the formative part of the evaluation. The summative part of the process deals with the evaluation of school counselors' work at an end point. Various forms used to conduct both types of evaluation are available in the *Guidelines* document.

### Program Evaluation

Program evaluation is the procedure used to determine the degree to which a school district's comprehensive guidance and counseling program is in place and functioning fully. Judgments are made about the status of a program using program evaluation standards and criteria that are derived directly from the language of the framework of comprehensive guidance and counseling programs (Gysbers & Henderson, 2006). Enough program evaluation standards and criteria are required to ensure that a complete comprehensive guidance and counseling program is fully represented.

Once the standards and criteria have been chosen that fully represent a comprehensive guidance and counseling program, a scale is created for each criterion that can range from 5 to 6 or 7 points. Sometimes a scoring guide is provided that describes what an evaluator would look for at each point. A scoring guide can also include examples of evidence evaluators would expect to find along with the documentation required to show the degree to which the standards and criteria have been met.

What do program evaluation standards look like? To illustrate, the following is an example standard with several example criteria.

**Standard 2:** Students have access to responsive services that assist them in addressing issues and concerns that may affect their personal, academic, social, and career development.

**Criteria 1:** Individual counseling services are available to all students who may be experiencing problems that are interfering with their healthy development.

Small group counseling is available to all students who may be experiencing problems that are interfering with their health development.

To assess the degree to which each criterion is being implemented a 7-point scale could be developed as follows:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Beginning			Partially		Fully	
to			Implemented		Implemented	
Implement						

When and how often a district conducts program evaluation depends on the purposes to be achieved. For self-study purposes the American School Counselor Association (ASCA; 2005) recommended that program evaluation be conducted when a program is being designed and yearly thereafter. The state of Utah uses program evaluation to determine whether or not a school district has met the standards for program organization and implementation in order to receive state funding (Utah State Office of Education, 2003). Whether program evaluation is done yearly or periodically, this type of evaluation provides the opportunity to determine if the written district program is the actual implemented district program. The results of program evaluation reveal where progress has been made or whether progress is lacking in overall comprehensive guidance and counseling program implementation.

### Results Evaluation

Results evaluation is the procedure used to answer the question, What impact do comprehensive guidance and counseling programs (activities and services) have on students' success, particularly on students' academic achievement? Outcomes typically addressed in results evaluation include attendance, discipline referrals, grade point average, achievement test scores, and classroom behavior. Positive changes in outcomes such as these are anticipated as a result of students' participation in a district's comprehensive guidance and counseling program.

It is recommended that school counselors develop and carry out a results-based evaluation plan as a part of the overall implementation of their districts' comprehensive guidance and counseling programs. The outcomes to be addressed in the plan come from their districts' comprehensive school improvement plan, mission statement, and/or strategic plan. These documents contain outcomes chosen as important for a district to achieve.

A results evaluation plan can focus on specific guidance and counseling activities or services chosen because they address specific outcomes identified in a district's comprehensive improvement plan. If this approach is chosen, then the plan needs to include the specific outcomes desired, the activities or services to be used that can address the desired outcomes, how the activities or services will be provided and by whom, the evaluation design to be used, how the data will be collected and analyzed, and what kind of report (power point presentation) will be prepared and to whom it will be presented. A results evaluation plan can also focus more broadly on the impact of an entire district's guidance and counseling programs K-12 or a specific grade grouping such as elementary, middle, or high school districtwide or statewide. The same procedures would be used as already identified.

In designing a results evaluation plan, several types of data can be used. Process data, the first type, describe what guidance and counseling activities and services were provided, when, and for whom. Process data provide evidence that guidance and counseling activities and services were actually provided. Perception data, the second type, tell us what students, parents, teachers, administrators, or others think about or feel about the activities and services and the work of school counselors. Outcome data (results data), the third type, are the actual behaviors of students as measured by attendance rates, discipline referral rates, grade point averages, and achievement test scores. All three types of data are useful in ascertaining the impact of comprehensive guidance and counseling programs on student behavior (ASCA, 2005).

Disaggregating data is an important step in data analysis because it allows us to see if there are any students who are not doing as well as others. The American School Counselor Association (2005) suggested that the common fields for disaggregating data are as follows:

- gender,
- ethnicity,
- socioeconomic status (free and reduced lunch),
- vocational (multi-period vocational program track),

- language spoken at home,
- special education,
- grade level, and
- teacher(s).

An important tool for results data analysis is a spread sheet such as Excel. Spread sheets allow us to enter results data and conduct various statistical procedures as appropriate. In addition, various charts and graphs can be created to show relationships of results data to possible outcomes such as state achievement test scores and external tests such as the SAT or ACT.

Finally, a results evaluation plan needs to emphasize how results data will be used. One use of such data is to demonstrate the contributions school counselors make to the goals of education as presented in a district's comprehensive school improvement plan. The second is how the data are used to enhance the district's current comprehensive guidance and counseling program. Results evaluation data serve both to prove and improve the program.

## References

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