

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STAFF PERCEPTIONS OF
GUIDANCE COUNSELOR ROLES AND GUIDANCE PROGRAM NEEDS


by

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ABSTRACT

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In recent years, school counselors have become more readily seen in elementary schools across the country. Many guidance counselors accept the roles expected of them from district administration to determine the type of programs and services needed. However, teachers and staff are also directly working with the students and therefore are in a unique position for offering ideas about programming.

The purpose of this study was to document the perceptions that elementary school teachers and staff have towards the roles of a school counselor and a school counseling program. Data was collected through a survey distributed to kindergarten through fifth grade elementary school teachers and staff at a rural Midwestern elementary school in March 2004.

The study attempted to address two questions. First, it determined what elementary school teachers and staff at the school perceive to be important guidance and counseling services and programs. It also gathered information from the same staff regarding their perceptions of the importance of specific roles and functions of the school counselor position.

Overall, the findings suggest that most of the roles expected of a school counselor, are seen as important and essential by school staff. Some roles were considered most important for a counselor to perform: counsel students individually and in small groups; consult with teachers and other staff; refer students as needed; and promote a positive and healthy school climate for all students. The duty that had the highest amount of participants respond, “should not provide” was a counselor assisting with bus, lunch and recess duties.

The researcher’s overall goal was to determine what elementary school staff believe to be important counselor functions and program needs. These perceptions were sought after to document what important roles were needed and what topics should be included in a program. A counselor may be central to the guidance program, but it takes an effort and opinion from everyone involved to make the implementation successful.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Throughout history and societal changes, the roles and functions of a school counselor have continued to develop. Within recent years, the demand for school counselors has grown rapidly, assisting students in the areas of personal/social, academic, and career interests. To make sure that counselors are doing what is needed, continuous evaluation of the counselor's role and effectiveness is necessary and should be an ongoing process.

According to Myrick (2003), developmental guidance attempts to meet the needs of all students, addressing the typical concerns, questions, and choices facing young people. From the simplest to the most severe of requests, counselors are sought out by students of all ages to assist them in a variety of situations and needs.

Throughout one's lifetime, a student will learn necessary information from his or her counselor, such as learning how to behave in school, cooperation, and study skills, to name a few. Although teachers play an integral role in the child's life, the counselor typically responds differently to a student who needs to help better his or her overall self and well-being. Guidance programs did not always exist, but are now becoming part of the norm in each school.

The spectacular launching of Sputnik in 1957 by the U.S.S.R. sparked the rapid development of school guidance and counseling services (Myrick, 2003). That event alone startled the nation into realizing that crises do occur and prevention and planning for the future should exist. However, at that time, nobody was sure what school counselors should do. They realized the need was there and the intent was clear, but there wasn't a formal curriculum or guideline to use. The profession itself started off with teachers and administrators playing the part of the counselor. Soon to follow, universities started to develop programs that offered

graduate courses in counseling. Although it was a rough beginning, school counseling eventually grew into the profession it is today. With the help of leaders in the American School Counselor Association (ASCA), state departments of education, universities, and school districts, a vision of what school counseling could be for all students at all grade levels began to take form (Myrick, 2003).

According to Campbell and Dahir (1997), a comprehensive school counseling program is developmental and systematic in nature, sequential, clearly defined, and accountable. It has a basis of methodology, theory, psychology, and education behind it. These ideas combined form a set of principles and guidelines for school counselors to follow. Most will agree that putting the student first by giving direct services is where counselors spend their time, energy, and skills. However, it takes more than just a school counselor to make a guidance program successful.

According to Gysbers and Henderson (2000), guidance programs feature a team approach. A comprehensive, developmental program of guidance is based on the assumption that all school staff is involved. At the same time, it is understood that professionally certified school counselors are central to the program. School counselors not only provide direct services to students, but also work in consultative and collaborative relations with other members of the guidance team, members of the school staff, parents, and members of the community (Gysbers & Henderson, 2000).

Teachers are one of the groups that work directly with their students. They are typically also first to realize when a student is displaying aggressive behavior, not doing their work, and left out of social groups. Many teachers are not aware of what to do with their students who are lazy, unmotivated, or disruptive. When teachers need help with their students, they often turn to a counselor to assist them with classroom management skills or positive ways to build

friendships among peers. According to Myrick (2003), teachers also need to reexamine the type of guidance services that are available to students in their schools and to clarify teacher roles in a guidance program. Counselors are continually assessing the needs of their students and evaluating their school counseling programs. Since teachers are also an integral aspect of schools and students' lives, then it is understandable if they are to give their input and evaluate the guidance program as well.

This feedback from teachers should begin early on, preferably at the elementary level when a child is just starting out in a school counseling program. Elementary guidance counselors are trained to use early intervention techniques to help students work towards their full potential, and teachers at this level feel the same way. If teachers and counselors work together, they are providing the best opportunities for their students' education and well-being. According to DeBauche (1999), counselors must know how their role is perceived by the teachers they work with to better understand their viewpoint. Feedback can provide insight into positive and negative aspects of the guidance program. This will in turn provide more effective communication between the counselor and teacher, and may allow the teacher to feel more comfortable in consultative relationships with the counselor. With support, input, and expert opinions from teachers, developmental guidance has a better chance of being more successful for students and their education in an elementary school setting.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to document the perceptions that elementary school teachers and staff have towards the roles of a school counselor and a school counseling program. The survey given was intended to be a needs assessment for the chosen school. Data were collected through a survey distributed to kindergarten through fifth grade elementary school

teachers and staff at a rural Midwestern elementary school. The survey was distributed in March 2004.

Research Questions

This study attempted to address the following questions:

1. What do elementary school teachers and staff perceive to be important guidance and counseling services and programs?
2. What are the perceptions from elementary school teachers and staff of the roles of an elementary school counselor?

Definition of Terms

For understanding and clarity of some of the terms used in this research, they are defined here:

Developmental Guidance. Component in all guidance efforts to facilitate total development of individuals in all areas (personal, social, emotional, career, moral-ethical, cognitive, and aesthetic) of one's life style (Myrick, 2003).

Elementary Teachers. The individuals employed at a rural Midwestern elementary school during the 2003-2004 school year as certified classroom instructors. The grade levels taught are K-5.

Guidance. A comprehensive process of helping students make informed decisions about their lives in relation to course work, personal and career development, and social situations. This process aids students in realizing their potential and increasing potential achievement and development (DeBauche, 1999).

Perception. An observation and awareness of looking at others.

School Counseling. An individual or group interaction between students and a trained school professional, in which feelings, ideas, behaviors and goals are discussed in confidence. The focus is on the students and their understanding of self. The purpose of school counseling includes aiding students in becoming more self-actualized, gain self-identity, and be successful in their development.

Assumptions and Limitations

The research being conducted does have several assumptions by the researcher and limitations to mention. The setting is limited because currently there is not a school guidance counselor. The school has been using other school personnel and resources to complete the guidance roles and functions in the school. Therefore, the researcher believes that the elementary school teachers and staff in Augusta may be biased or may have limited information about the counselor's roles, functions, and the program as a whole. The researcher is assuming that the staff will have some knowledge base about school counselor roles and programs. It is also assumed that the staff will be completely honest in giving their opinions about the importance of roles and programs.

In addition, the setting for research is in a rural location, and may differ from results in other locations. The opinions generated from this smaller school only represent the population of one school district, instead of comparing results to other schools.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will focus on important aspects regarding an elementary school counselor and guidance program. General content of guidance programs in the elementary school will be discussed, along with roles and functions expected of the school counselor. In addition, the teacher's role in guidance will conclude this chapter.

Guidance Programs in the Elementary School

Before counselors were incorporated into the school setting, other school personnel were relied on to deliver guidance to the students. At the elementary level, this was required mainly from teachers. Having a school counselor at the elementary level was never heard of until the last few decades. Guidance was focused primarily on career and vocational interests for students in high school, and students at the elementary level were not considered to be a part of this or any other component of guidance. Gibson and Mitchell (1999) reported that by the 1970's, it had become increasingly evident that the developmental requirements of elementary-age youth were often neglected and unrecognized. Many states, including Wisconsin, opted to mandate elementary school counseling programs into their districts. As more states become aware of the importance of guidance programs in elementary schools, it is likely that more states will adopt this trend and put counselors in elementary schools to begin primary prevention in students' lives.

Many approaches to elementary school counseling are considered to be developmental in nature. Basically, developmental guidance is an attempt to provide an organized structure of services designed to assist the school to meet the students' developmental needs more effectively. Myrick (2003), an expert in the field, stated that developmental guidance has been

recognized for many years to be the best approach for elementary school students. Although school counselors typically deliver developmental guidance, it is considered to be a comprehensive effort. It is a collaboration of ideas employed from teachers, administrators, parents, and community. The intent is to provide services to students that are systematic and preventative in nature.

School counselors provide many services to students at all levels. Gibson and Mitchell (1999) provided an example of specific objectives of an elementary guidance program:

- 1) Providing classroom guidance to enhance learning and relate learning to preparation.
- 2) Developing multicultural awareness; pride in our cultural diversity and respect for the uniqueness of all cultural/ethnic groups.
- 3) Providing for the socialization (social development) of all children, including respect for self and others.
- 4) Providing for the development of each individual's human potential (p. 57).

Goals of elementary guidance programs will also vary by schools. The interest of the student, however, is always kept in top priority. For most programs, goals for the students state that all children will: derive personal meaning from learning activities, develop and enhance academic skills to their maximum ability, value their individuality, realize they are responsible for their own behavior, and develop a positive attitude toward life, among others (Kottman & Muro, 1995).

The key to the development and successful implementation of an elementary school guidance program is the involvement of the school staff. Determining the specific objectives, goals, and responsibilities of the counselor are required to initiate a successful program. As an elementary school counselor, it is important to not take on too much in a guidance program.

Using resources such as school staff will provide assistance and support in the roles and functions expected of a counselor.

Roles of the Elementary School Counselor

The characteristics of an elementary student and the school demonstrate specific features in guidance program organization that distinguish elementary school counseling programs from those in other educational levels (Gibson & Mitchell, 1999). Therefore, it is not surprising that the role and function of an elementary school counselor will also differ. The functions of elementary school counselors are not replicas of secondary school counselor functions, according to Morse and Russell (cited in Coll, 1997). Unlike middle and secondary school counseling, which may involve some administration duties, the elementary counselor is consistently performing developmental interventions (Coll, 1997).

Gysbers and Henderson (2000) cited a passage that demonstrates what type of role confusion school counselors are actually under.

....counselor responsibilities and functions vary not only among school districts but among schools in the same district. The school principal is predominant in determining the daily routine of counselors, and while citing the support their principals provide them, many counselors bemoan the plethora of administrative tasks they are called upon to perform. Without standard position descriptions, counselors “fill vacuums” with the result that counselors are expected to do “too much for too many.” (Commission on Precollege Guidance and Counseling, cited in Gysbers & Henderson, 2000, p. 34)

Although there may not be a definite list of duties for counselors to follow, there are numerous models describing counselor roles and functions at the national and state levels. Examples of models include the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) components

at the national level, the Wisconsin Developmental Guidance Model (WDGM) at the state level, and Myrick's six counselor interventions, to name a few. These models present similar functions for the counselor to follow. For example, three familiar helping processes included in most models use the three C's method: counseling, consulting, and coordinating (Leu, 1999).

The ASCA model is considered representative of fitting the needs of most school counselors. The components in this model cover a wide array of roles that counselors perform. According to Campbell and Dahir (1997), the comprehensive school counseling program integrates academic, career, and personal/social development. There are seven components included in the ASCA model, all comprising what a counselor does on the job. The first of these is counseling. This may include meeting with students on an individual or small group basis. During these sessions, counselor and student(s) form a bond while working on a problem, topic of interest, or area of growth development. Consultation is another role school counselors are typically involved in. When being a consultant, the counselor is primarily assisting teachers and parents to be more effective in working with others. The consultation provides information and skills to parents, teachers, and the community to assist them in helping students in all areas of development (Campbell & Dahir, 1997).

Coordination and case management are two other functions school counselors perform. In coordination, counselors are an intermediary between those involved in the comprehensive guidance program, and use these persons and resources to facilitate student success. Case management involves monitoring each student's progress toward the areas of academics, career, and personal/social needs.

Guidance curriculum is the next component included in the ASCA model. The guidance curriculum typically consists of student competencies (organized by domains and specified by

grade levels) and structured lessons presented systematically through such strategies as classroom and school-wide activities (Gysbers & Henderson, 2000).

Although the counselor's responsibilities include planning and implementing the curriculum, the cooperation and support of the entire faculty and staff are necessary for it to be successful. This idea relates to the next component, program evaluation and development. Counselors are constantly assessing the needs of the students, evaluating their programs, and making any needed changes to better meet the students' needs. Others may also be included in evaluating the program to give the counselor an outside view of the program. If the program is to be comprehensive in nature, all groups included should evaluate it.

The final component added to the ASCA national model is program delivery. This aspect promotes achieving a balance among all the program components. According to Campbell and Dahir (1997), counselors need to spend 70-80% of their time in direct contact with students and limit their duties to program delivery and direct counseling services.

Elementary school counselors, compared to middle and secondary school counselors, performed more consultative/coordination activities; less administrative-like activities (scheduling and paperwork); and tended to work more systematically with families, teachers, and community agencies, according to Hardesty and Dillard (cited in Coll, 1997).

An elementary school counselor has many objectives and goals to accomplish throughout the school year. The actual counseling of a student is just one task they undertake. Before deciding on what roles to take in a school, counselors must be aware of components that make up a guidance program, no matter what model they choose to follow. From there, roles are established and services are performed. It is important for counselors and other school specialists to work closely and effectively with classroom teachers (Gibson & Mitchell, 1999). Although

teachers have their own classrooms to attend to and lessons to plan, more than likely they have opinions regarding what roles counselors should take, and what services are necessary to be included in the guidance program. In return, it is important for counselors to know teacher perceptions of their role, to better understand what the teachers are looking for, and overall to provide effective services (DeBauche, 1999).

Elementary School Teacher's Involvement in Guidance Programs

When looking at guidance history, it is important to note that for many years counselors were non-existent, and the only way students received personal guidance was through their classroom teachers. Even today, elementary school teachers still accept their role in guidance and recognize the value of classroom guidance. They are working closely with students in small classrooms and get a good sense of what the students' needs may be. According to Myrick (2003), elementary teachers have more opportunities to build close relationships with their students and provide them with guidance lessons and activities because so much of their day is spent with the same individuals. With the exception of the home, students spend much of their critical developmental years in school. Teachers, educational specialists, administrators, and all other staff spend a majority of the child's life with them. They help them learn, grow and develop to be their best.

Just like counselors, elementary school teachers learn about children's growth and development. Teachers want their students to be successful in all areas of their development, including academic, career, and personal/social needs. Guidance is an integral part of the teaching process. Classroom management and discipline in the classroom is a form of guidance, because it is using behavior management techniques to change the student's behavior. Teachers

can also follow up on lessons taught by the counselor during a large group lesson. There are many aspects of a guidance program that a teacher is directly or indirectly involved in.

When considering what services and techniques teachers perform in conjunction with classroom duties, there might be questions as to why elementary guidance is even being used. There are limits to the teacher's duties, primarily because of time and knowledge. The teacher is only one person, and cannot meet all of the needs of each student. They have a large class that all needs their attention. Time is a major constraint on activities. Overcrowding, non-teaching activities, and clerical work all tend to restrict the impact that the teacher is able to make upon students (Brown & Srebalus, 1972). An issue with competency in the counselor's role is another limitation for teachers. School counseling requires extra knowledge on information such as assessment and testing, consultation, and counseling that teachers may not be competent to perform.

It is evident that although school counselors and teachers have similar functions and expectations for students, they both have their own distinct roles. Teachers, however, do play a role in the comprehensive guidance program. According to Barr (1958), it is a good idea to assess the competencies and attitudes in guidance that are held by teachers. Every teacher perceives things differently and the same holds true for what they believe a guidance program should be, and what a school counselor should do. Counselors have a clear perception of their roles within a school. However, DeBauche (1999) stated that expectations and perceptions other than the counselor's might not match up. Therefore, it is important that expectations and roles are clearly defined for everyone involved, especially teachers, to promote a positive environment incorporating ideas into guidance and also assist counselors in their role with students.

Summary

Elementary schools today are becoming larger and more urbanized, and they place a greater stress on individualized instruction for all students. These needs combined make it more difficult for teachers to develop the knowledge and understanding of each child required for optimal learning and adjustment, and especially necessitated by the stress on individualized instruction (Gibson, Higgins, & Mitchell, 1973). Even with teacher aides, special education teachers, and emotional/behavioral disorder specialists, the teacher has little time to determine the individual characteristics and needs of each child. As a result, a counselor has been put into place as a guidance specialist.

A counselors' role in the school is large, therefore assistance from other sources are needed to make the comprehensive program successful. Effective developmental guidance programs integrate evaluation, review, and revision into the ongoing activities (Bilzing, Brittingham, Perrone, Schutt, & Thompson, 1997). The need for a counselor within the school is only practical if they are deemed to be effective. Both teachers and school counselors work together to reach the common goal of providing the best academic opportunities for their students. For counselors to have a better understanding of their role within the school, they should be aware of how teachers perceive their role and the guidance program. According to DeBauche (1999), feedback from teachers can provide useful and insightful information for school counselors and can lead to improved communication and effectiveness. With support, opinions, and input from teachers, the counselors can take the needed information to assist them with defining their role in the school and provide students with appropriate and successful developmental guidance.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This chapter will include a discussion of how the sample was selected and a brief description of the subjects. The instrumentation being used, including a content description and construction will also be covered. Data collection and data analysis procedures are included, followed by limitations of the method, sample, and procedures.

Description and Selection of Subjects

All elementary school teachers and staff at a rural Midwestern elementary school received a survey (Appendix A) in March 2004 regarding their perceptions of elementary school counselor roles and guidance program needs. There is only one elementary school in the district for the school surveyed, described as rural and mainly low income. A total of 30 surveys were distributed to staff members, and 27 chose to fill it out. This would account for a 90% return rate.

Instrumentation

The survey distributed to the selected subjects is relatively easy to fill out. The researcher has constructed an original study including Likert items and a personal comment section. It provides a means to gain understanding of what elementary school teachers and other staff are looking for from an elementary school counselor and developmental guidance program. There are no measures of validity or reliability, since the survey was constructed specifically for this study.

The two page survey consisted of 22 questions and one section for comments. Each question asked for the respondent to rate their opinion on a Likert scale to determine if a counselor role or guidance program (1) should not be provided, (2) was not very important, (3) was somewhat important, (4) important, or (5) essential.

The first 11 items addressed some of the roles that are expected or demonstrated by a school counselor. A few examples of questions asked are: counseling students individually, providing guidance lessons in the classroom, monitoring the building in the absence of the principal, and assisting with bus, lunch, and recess duties.

Questions 12-17 focused on getting the respondents opinion on the importance of the elementary counselor to provide certain programs. The programs given were specific to Augusta Elementary. They are: crisis intervention; peer mediation; alcohol, tobacco, and other drug awareness; wellness (staff and students); red ribbon week; and parent education opportunities.

Items 18-22 were directed towards gaining insight into the importance of the school counselor to provide specific types of small groups. The topics are: family change; self-esteem building; social skills (including friendship groups); anger management; and bullying and harassment.

The last question was open for any respondent to include comments that they felt would be beneficial to the guidance and counseling program at the elementary school.

Data Collection Procedures

The principal was initially contacted in February 2004 and approved the study prior to the distribution of the surveys. Once approved, the surveys were distributed to teachers during a staff meeting in March 2004. The subjects were asked to complete the surveys within one week from distribution, and return them to a designated mailbox in the office. Out of the 30 distributed surveys to the teachers and education specialists at the school, 27 completed surveys were filled out and returned. A letter of consent (Appendix B) was stapled on the top of the survey, so each staff member knew of the terms and conditions of participating in the study. Directions for

completing the survey, confidentiality concerns, and informed consent were also included in the letter.

Data Analysis Procedures

An ordinal scale of measurement was used in the survey. The researcher had the data analysis completed for this survey using a computerized statistics package called SPSS-X for the PC. Frequencies were used to obtain frequency counts, percentages, mean, and standard deviation on item variables 1-22.

Limitations

In this study, there were a number of limitations pertaining to the sample selected, data collection procedures, and the survey used. One limitation regarding the subjects was the fact that currently there is not a school counselor in their school, so participant lack of experience or information regarding counselors and guidance program needs might play a part in their responses. Also, only one school was chosen for this survey, therefore any results should not be generalized to districts of a similar size. Another limitation was the way the data were collected. Teachers and staff may not have been able to fill out the survey because of absenteeism on the day of the selected staff meeting. Another limitation was the fact that there are no measures of validity or reliability because of the original survey design.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to document the perceptions that elementary school teachers and staff have towards the roles of a school counselor and a school counseling program. The survey given was intended to be a needs assessment for the chosen school. Data were collected through a survey distributed to a rural Midwestern elementary school staff.

This chapter will include demographic information about the subjects who participated in the study as well as specific item analysis. It will answer the following research questions: what do elementary school staff perceive to be important guidance and counseling services and programs, and what are the perceptions from elementary school staff of the roles of the school counselor?

Demographic Information

Thirty surveys were distributed to the elementary school staff during a meeting in March 2004. Twenty-seven surveys were completed and returned.

The survey did not ask for participants' gender, age, educational level, or title of profession. It is known that all respondents work in the rural Midwestern elementary school, and were teachers, administrators, educational specialists, or other staff members.

Item Analysis

This section will include item analysis on the data collected for each statement or question asked on the Likert scale. The means for items 1-11 and 12-17 are kept separate to distinguish the roles of a school counselor and the program options as determined by the staff.

Items 1-11 asked for respondents to rate the importance of counselor roles and functions in the school. The scale ranged from 1-5, (1) should not provide, (2) not very important, (3) somewhat important, (4) important, and (5) essential.

Item one stated “Counseling students individually.” Of the 27 participants, 10 believed individual counseling to be important (37%), while 17 thought it to be essential (63%). Item two addressed “Counseling students in small groups.” 48.1% of the participants thought this was important (n=13), while 51.9% believed it was essential for counselors to provide (n=14).

The next item dealt with the role of a school counselor to provide guidance lessons in the classroom. Three out of the 27 participants believed this was somewhat important (11.1%), 10 thought it was important for a counselor to do (37%), but 14 said it was essential (51.9%).

The next two items had an overwhelming amount of subjects respond that the specific component was essential to a guidance counselors’ role. The first of these was item 4: consulting with teachers and staff regarding students’ personal, behavioral, and academic concerns. A majority of the participants, 22 out of the 27 said this was essential (81.5%), while 5 believed it was important (18.5%). The next one, item 5 stated: referral of students as appropriate to police, social services, and other community agencies. An outstanding amount of respondents, 23 out of 27 said this was essential (85.2%), and 14.8% said it was important (n=4).

Item 6 had a varying response to its rate of importance. It was asking for the importance of providing orientation for new students and families. One subject responded not very important (3.7%), 7 said somewhat important (25.9%), 14 believed it was important for a counselor to do (51.9%) and 5 thought it to be essential (18.5%).

For item 7: assist in coordination activities throughout the school and the district, 1 out of 27 said this is not very important (3.7%), 8 said it was somewhat important (29.6%), just about

half (n=13) said it was important (48.1%), and 5 said it was an essential role of the counselor (18.5%). Item 8: assist in monitoring the building in the absence of the principal. Out of the 27 participants, 1 said it should not be provided (3.7%), 6 said it was not very important (22.2%), 9 believed it was somewhat important (33.3%), and 6 thought it to be essential (22.2%).

Item 9 asked participants if they believed that the school counselor should be responsible to maintain accurate, complete, and correct student records on file. Of the 27 participants, 2 said it was not very important (7.4%), and 2 also said it was somewhat important (7.4%). 7 said it was important (25.9%), and over half (59.3%) said it was essential (n=16).

Item 10 was another question that had varying levels of importance from the participants. It was asking the participants to rate the importance of assisting with extra duties such as bus, lunch and recess. 6 out of the 27 responded should not provide (22.2%), as well as 6 respond not very important (22.2%). Eleven believed this was somewhat important (40.7%), and 2 thought it was important as well as 2 believing it was essential (each 7.4%).

The last item included in the research question of the importance of counselor roles was item 11: promoting a positive and health school climate for all students. This is a typical role of a school counselor, and the teachers and staff at the rural Midwestern elementary school agreed. Out of the 27 participants, 4 responded it was important (14.8%), and an overwhelming 23 said it was essential for a school counselor to perform (85.2%).

The data analyzed also provided a total of means for each given question. The means are a range of 1-5, gathered from the staffs' opinions. They range from 2.56-4.85. Table 1 presents the means for the total group of respondents.

Table 1

Means of Important School Counselor Roles

Guidance component	Mean
Counseling students individually	4.63
Counseling students in small groups	4.52
Providing guidance lessons in the classroom	4.41
Consulting with teachers and staff	4.81
Referral of students to community agencies	4.85
Provide orientation for new students and families	3.85
Assist in coordination activities throughout district	3.81
Assist in monitoring building if principal absent	3.33
Maintaining student records on file	4.37
Assisting with bus, lunch, and recess duties	2.56
Promoting a positive, healthy school climate	4.85

Items 12-22 asked for respondents to rate the importance of a counselor participating in and/or organizing specific programs and small groups in the school. The scale ranged from 1-5, (1) should not provide, (2) not very important, (3) somewhat important, (4) important, and (5) essential.

Item 12 asked for an opinion on the importance of crisis intervention. Out of the 27 participants, 20 believed this was essential for school counselors to be a part of (74.1%), while 7

thought it to be important (25.9%). For peer mediation, item 13, 16 subjects, which is a little over half (59.3%), believed it was essential, and 40.7% (n=11) marked important.

Next, item 14 asked for the importance of alcohol, tobacco, and other drug awareness involvement. The majority of the respondents believed it was essential (59.3%), a third of them thought it was important (33.3%), and two people out of the 27 thought it to be somewhat important (7.4%).

Item 15 asked respondents to rate the importance of a school counselor participating in and/or organizing a wellness program for either staff or students. Of the 27 participants, 9 answered essential (33.3%), 12 said important (44.4%), 5 thought it to be somewhat important (18.5%), and 1 thought it was not very important (3.7%).

The next survey item pertaining to the importance of a school counselor related program was number 16, Red Ribbon Week. Thirteen answered essential (48.1%), 10 thought important (37%), and 4 said somewhat important (14.8%). The final item dealing with a specific program was parent education opportunities, number 17. The results showed that out of the 27 who responded, 10 thought this was something essential (37%), 14 said important (51.9%), and only 3 said somewhat important (11.1%).

The next section of the survey included questions asking the subjects to rate the importance of the elementary school counselor to provide specific types of small groups to the students. The importance was also ranked on a scale of 1-5. The first item, number 18 asked the respondents to rate their opinion on a counselor providing a family change small group. Four chose somewhat important (14.8%), 15 said important (55.6%), and 8 responded essential (29.6%).

For item 19, an overwhelming amount of teachers and staff (n= 21) agreed that providing small groups dealing with self-esteem building was essential in the elementary school setting (77.8%). The others ranked this item as important (18.5%) and somewhat important (3.7%). In question 20, most thought providing a social skills small group was essential, 17 of the 27 respondents (63%). Ten did think it was an important topic to cover also (37%).

Anger management was item 21, and 18 participants chose this to be an essential topic for counselors to provide (66.7%). Eight said important (29.6%), and one chose somewhat important (3.7%). Finally, item 22 proved that bullying and harassment is a necessary topic to cover in a small group. Out of the 27 participants, 24 of them said this type of group is essential for an elementary school counselor to provide (88.9%), and 3 of the 27 did choose important (11.1%).

The data analyzed also provided a total of means for each given question, ranging on a scale of 1-5. The means for the five items in this category ranged between 4.07 and 4.74. Table 2 presents the means for the total group of respondents.

Table 2

Means of Important Programs and Small Groups

Program or Small Group Name	Mean
Crisis intervention	4.74
Peer mediation	4.59
Alcohol, tobacco, and other drug awareness	4.52
Wellness (staff and students)	4.07
Red Ribbon Week	4.33
Parent education opportunities	4.26
Family change small groups	4.15
Self-esteem building small groups	4.74
Social skills (including friendship) small groups	4.63
Anger management small groups	4.63
Bullying and harassment small groups	4.89

Discussion

The questions asked on the given survey related directly to the two research questions stated earlier. The data collected helped document the perceptions of elementary school staff towards guidance programming and counselor roles.

Research Question 1: What do elementary school teachers and staff perceive to be important guidance and counseling services and programs? According to the results, the staff

perceived most of the programs and small group topics important to guidance programming. Although they are close in range, crisis intervention is considered the most important program for a counselor to participate in and/or organize with a mean of 4.74. The type of program that is considered least important by the staff is wellness, with a mean of 4.07. The most important, almost essential small group for a counselor to run is bullying and harassment, with a mean of 4.89. The second most important would be self-esteem groups, with a mean of 4.74.

Research Question 2: What are the perceptions from elementary school teachers and staff of the roles of an elementary school counselor? According to the results, the staff perceived most of the counselors' roles important. Considered the most important, referral of students to community services and promoting a positive and healthy school climate were ranked the highest, with individual means of 4.85. The counselor roles that were ranked the least important were assisting in monitoring the building if the principal was absent with a mean of 3.33, and assisting with bus, lunch, and recess duties with a mean of 2.56.

Conclusion

Overall, the teachers and staff believe that most of the roles, programs, and types of groups the researcher has given are either important or essential for a counselor to provide. With that said, there are a few responsibilities given forth to counselors that some staff believe should not be, such as monitoring the building when the principal is gone or assisting with extra duties during lunch or recess. All of the programs and small group topics given were rated either important or essential for a counselor to participate in or organize.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussions, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This chapter will include a discussion of the findings in this study, a summary of important results including limitations, and finally recommendations for school staff including guidance counselors, and for future research on this topic.

Discussion

School counselors have many responsibilities to provide on a daily basis, no matter what level of education they are at. The roles and functions expected of them come from their knowledge base of counseling, and expectations from administrators and the district. Depending on the budget and resources allowed, school counselors may get spread between more than one school. With the assistance and support of other staff at the schools, counselors can perform their job to the best of their ability: assisting students in being their best.

Guidance programs feature a team approach (Gysbers & Henderson, 2000). A comprehensive, developmental program of guidance is based on the assumption that all school staff is involved. Teachers are one of the groups that work directly with students on a regular basis. They may typically be the first ones to realize when a student is upset, not completing work, or having problems at home. They work in consultative and collaborative efforts with the school counselor to see each student succeed. Secretaries, principals, and recess supervisors are also important aspects to a successful school. Evaluation of a guidance program and roles of a counselor is something all staff can be involved with. Gaining insight from the school as a whole can help build a positive teamwork approach to education.

The American School Counseling Association (ASCA) has developed a national model that they believe should be a tool for school counselors to follow (Campbell & Dahir, 1997). The

components in this model cover a wide array of roles that counselors perform. According to Campbell and Dahir (1997), there are seven components included in the ASCA model: individual counseling, small group counseling, consultation, coordination, case management, guidance curriculum and program delivery.

The staff at this rural elementary school believes counseling students individually or in small groups is either important or essential for a school counselor to provide. The literature also says that direct contact with students is important for a counselor to do in order to form a bond with the student while working on a problem, topic of interest, or area of growth development (Campbell & Dahir, 1997). It can be agreed that putting the student first by giving direct services is where counselors spend their time, energy, and skills.

The study results also compare with a specific objective of an elementary guidance program, according to the experts of the field. According to Gysbers and Henderson (2000), the administration and management of a comprehensive guidance program requires an ongoing support system. Assisting in monitoring the building while the principal is absent, or assisting with bus, lunch and recess duties is a fair share responsibility that the support system helps out with. Teachers, secretaries, specialists and other staff in the building realize that they too must take their turn in the routine of duties. The staff surveyed realize that the duties of mock principal and playground supervisor are not the counselors' sole responsibility. Therefore these results show that the cooperation of school staff will increase the student's opportunities for successful achievement in school. The results also determine that the school counselor use consultation and coordination techniques to keep the students' well being a top priority. Talking with and gaining insight from the school staff will provide assistance and support in the role and functions expected of a school counselor.

Limitations

The limitations previously mentioned must be considered in interpreting the study's results. The setting was limited to one district; findings should not be generalized to other school districts. The location is a small, rural school, currently without a school counselor at the elementary level. A great majority of the staff completed surveys, but the staff is not large to begin with, and should not be compared to a school counselor's roles and program needs as a whole.

Conclusions

School counselors have a large amount of responsibilities to fulfill. This study demonstrates the idea that counselors have many duties to perform because the majority of participants ranked the roles, programs, and small groups as important and essential. The roles that were most important for a counselor to perform (mean included) were: refer students to community agencies as needed (4.85); and promote a positive and healthy school climate for all students (4.85). The duty that had the highest amount of participants respond, "not important" or "should not provide" was the role of counselor assisting with bus, lunch and recess duties, with a mean of 2.56.

As for the importance of the elementary school counselor to participate in and/or organize specific programs, one of the six topics was considered the most important. According to the results, crisis intervention is the most important program for a counselor to participate in and/or organize with a mean of 4.74. The most important, almost essential small group for a counselor to run is bullying and harassment, with a mean of 4.89. The second most important would be self-esteem groups, with a mean of 4.74.

Recommendations for Elementary School Counselors and Staff

Counseling in elementary schools is a recent development. The profession has become increasingly evident since the 1970's, when the developmental requirements of elementary-age youth were being neglected (Gibson and Mitchell, 1999). School counselors are considered to be central to a guidance program and typically deliver developmental guidance. However, guidance is considered to be a comprehensive effort, a collaboration of ideas employed from teachers, administrators, parents, and community.

With this idea in mind, it is important for school staff to be aware of their role and function in a guidance program for successful implementation. It is important for counselors and other school specialists to work closely and effectively with classroom teachers (Gibson & Mitchell, 1999). This collaborated effort will help create a positive relationship between adult and student when students know everyone in the school is assisting them in being their best.

As for the counselors, it is important to realize how large and varied the your job can be. Assistance from other sources is needed to make the comprehensive program successful, including assessments from school staff. The need for a counselor within the school is only realistic if they are effective at meeting the needs of the students. Guidance programming is something that cannot be done alone. As this assessment shows, school staff have a good knowledge of what school counselors are capable of and should provide. By working with the counselor, teachers, secretaries, volunteers, principals, specialists and all other staff can reach the common goal of providing the best academic opportunities for their students.

Recommendations for Future Research

One of the limitations of this study was the setting. The elementary school chosen is in a small, rural community, and results should not be applied to other schools, especially if in a larger area. Further investigation of staff opinions at a larger school or district would provide additional information for those who are interested in the size of the population, area or school. Another possibility would be to survey two schools, possibly comparing rural schools' opinions of a school counselor to a larger schools' opinions.

Also, demographic information regarding the subjects selected was left out. The researcher was not looking for specifics on who was filling out the surveys, but this information might be helpful for future research. A study would provide additional information if questions regarding job title, highest educational level attained, years working in the education field, and others were asked.

Finally, it may be helpful to use the same or a similar needs assessment survey to collect data regarding opinions from others. The guidance program is a comprehensive approach, using more than just ideas from counselors and school staff. Gaining insight on a counselors' position from parents and the community would be just as helpful, as well as the students opinions. This research could also be done at other levels, including middle and high school. Evaluation of a counselors' role and program needs should be continual, there is a lot left to discover.

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APPENDIX A

Elementary School Counselor and Guidance Program Survey

Your opinion is needed to help gain an awareness of student needs in a guidance program at the elementary level. Your responses are anonymous and participation will be kept confidential. Thanks for your input!

Please respond by circling a number indicating your opinion about the importance of each component in a guidance program.

1=Should not provide 2=Not very important 3=Somewhat important 4=Important 5= Essential

- | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| 1. Counseling students individually. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 2. Counseling students in small groups. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 3. Providing guidance lessons in the classroom. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 4. Consulting with teachers and staff regarding students' personal, behavioral and academic concerns. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 5. Referral of students as appropriate to police, social services, and other community agencies. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 6. Provide orientation for new students and families. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 7. Assist in coordination activities throughout the school and the district. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 8. Assist in monitoring the building in the absence of the principal. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 9. Being responsible to maintain accurate, complete and correct student records on file. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 10. Assisting with bus, lunch, and recess duties. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 11. Promoting a positive, healthy, school climate for all students. | 1 2 3 4 5 |

1=Should not provide 2=Not very important 3=Somewhat important 4=Important 5= Essential

How important is it for the elementary school counselor to participate in and/or organize these programs?

12. Crisis intervention 1 2 3 4 5

13. Peer mediation 1 2 3 4 5

14. Alcohol, tobacco, and other drug awareness 1 2 3 4 5

15. Wellness (staff and students) 1 2 3 4 5

16. Red Ribbon Week 1 2 3 4 5

17. Parent Education Opportunities 1 2 3 4 5

How important is it for the elementary school counselor to provide these types of small groups?

18. Family change 1 2 3 4 5

19. Self-esteem building 1 2 3 4 5

20. Social skills (including friendship groups) 1 2 3 4 5

21. Anger management 1 2 3 4 5

22. Bullying and harassment 1 2 3 4 5

Please add any comments that you feel would be beneficial to a guidance and counseling program at an elementary school level.

APPENDIX B

February 22, 2004

To teachers and staff:

Becky Olson, graduate student in Guidance and Counseling at the University of Wisconsin – Stout is conducting a research project titled, Elementary Staff Perceptions of Guidance Counselor Roles and Guidance Program Needs. The survey results will look at what the staff believes to be important roles of a school counselor and will also assist with needs of the guidance program. We would appreciate your participation in this study.

I understand that by returning this survey, I am giving my informed consent as a participating volunteer in this study. I understand the basic nature of the study and agree that any potential risks are exceedingly small. I also understand the potential benefits that might be realized from the successful completion of this study. I am aware that the information is being sought in a specific manner so that only minimal identifiers are necessary and so that confidentiality is guaranteed. I realize that I have the right to refuse to participate and that my right to withdraw from participation at any time during the study will be respected with no coercion or prejudice.

NOTE: Questions or concerns about the research study should be addressed to Becky Olson, the researcher at (715)523-9955 or Barb Flom, the research advisor at (715)232-1343. Questions about the rights of research subjects can be addressed to Sue Foxwell, Human Protections Administrator, UW-Stout Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research, 152 VocR., Menomonie, WI, 54751, phone (715) 232-1126.

Thank you again for participating in this study.