District School Counselor Recommendation for More SEL Support

Several questions were raised at the initial Mental Health Committee meeting, in response our department hoped to clarify with the following information:

What do school counselors do?

Where does the school counselor role end and a clinical counselor's role begin?

ASCA Position Statement Student Mental Health

Main Ideas from this Article:

School Counselor's Role within the district:

- Deliver the school counseling core curriculum that proactively enhances awareness of mental health; promotes positive, healthy behaviors; and seeks to remove the stigma associated with mental health issues
    - Monthly classroom lessons, sequentially designed to build social skills (Tier One Supports)
    - Responsive classroom lessons based on identified social deficits or classroom dynamic that interferes with learning or social climate
    - Small groups designed to support specific academic, social, or emotional need, e.g., Study Skills for students with ADHD, positive friendship traits, emotional regulation, grief, etc (Tier Two Supports)
    - Whole school programs (Rachel's Club, etc)
    - Collect, analyze, and share data to measure needs and responsive measures taken with Tier 1 and Tier 2 supports on annual basis or as often as needed Provide responsive services including internal and external referral procedures, short-term counseling or crisis intervention focused on mental health or situational (e.g. grief, difficult transitions) concerns with the intent of helping the student return to the classroom and removing barriers to learning
- Recognize warning signs: changes in school performance (changes in grades, attendance), mood changes, complaining of illness before school, increased disciplinary problems at school, experiencing problems at home or family situation (stress, trauma, divorce, substance abuse, exposure to poverty conditions domestic violence), communication from teachers about problems at school, and dealing with existing mental health concerns
    - Serve on RTI Committee or participate with teachers in conferences
- Provide school-based prevention and universal interventions and targeted interventions for students with mental health and behavioral health concerns
    - Assist teachers and provide resources for behavior management at the classroom or individual level
    - Perform classroom observations to identify patterns and potential triggers within the learning environment that may limit student success
    - Analyze data and collaborate with teachers to design systems of behavioral and academic intervention support using evidence-based strategies
    - Coordinate support services for students who demonstrate coping gaps and collaborate with outside therapists
- Create and maintain socially safe culture at school by implementing and maintaining SWPBIS systems and monitor data to measure effectiveness
- Provide students with individual planning addressing their academic, career and social/emotional (including mental health) needs

- Educate teachers, administrators, parents/guardians, and community stakeholders about the mental health concerns of students, including recognition of the role environmental factors have in causing or exacerbating mental health issues and provide resources and information
- Advocate, collaborate and coordinate with school and community stakeholders to ensure that students and their families have access to mental health services
- Recognize and address barriers to access mental health services and the associated stigma, including cultural and linguistic impediments • Adhere to appropriate guidelines regarding confidentiality, the distinction between public and private information and consultation
- Direct students and parents to school and/or community resources for additional assistance through referrals that treat mental health issues (suicidal ideation, violence, abuse and depression)
- Help identify and address students' mental health issues while working within the ASCA's Ethical Standards; Competencies for School Counselors; and national, state and local legislation (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act and Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act), which guide school counselors' informed decision-making and standardize professional practice to protect both the student and school counselor
- Seek to continually update their professional knowledge regarding the students' social/emotional needs

In addition, do counselors feel they are asked to provide services or complete tasks outside their responsibilities?

The following is a summary of School Counselor roles and responsibilities:

Executive Summary of National Model/What School Counselors Do ASCA

APPROPRIATE ACTIVITIES FOR SCHOOL COUNSELORS

- individual student academic program planning
- interpreting cognitive, aptitude and achievement tests
- providing counseling to students who are tardy or absent
- providing counseling to students who have disciplinary problems
- providing counseling to students as to appropriate school dress
- collaborating with teachers to present school counseling core curriculum lessons
- analyzing grade-point averages in relationship to achievement
- interpreting student records
- providing teachers with suggestions for effective classroom management
- ensuring student records are maintained as per state and federal regulations
- helping the school principal identify and resolve student issues, needs and problems
- providing individual and small-group counseling services to students
- advocating for students at individual education plan meetings, student study teams and school attendance review boards
- analyzing disaggregated data

INAPPROPRIATE ACTIVITIES FOR SCHOOL COUNSELORS

- coordinating paperwork and data entry of all new students
- coordinating cognitive, aptitude and achievement testing programs
- signing excuses for students who are tardy or absent
- performing disciplinary actions or assigning discipline consequences
- sending students home who are not appropriately dressed
- teaching classes when teachers are absent

- computing grade-point averages
- maintaining student records
- supervising classrooms or common areas
- keeping clerical records
- assisting with duties in the principal's office
- providing therapy or long-term counseling in schools to address psychological disorders
- coordinating schoolwide individual education plans, student study teams and school attendance review boards
- serving as a data entry clerk

The consensus is that outside of reducing clerical tasks, it isn't that School Counselors feel they are asked to complete inappropriate tasks. Instead the School Counselors at the Elementary, Intermediate and High School level feel that they do not have the time to accomplish as many of the beneficial "appropriate" activities as we feel our students need.

504 Resolution - Who does what?

This varies greatly at each building level. Counselors k-6 feel that it is imperative they are directly involved in the coordination and oversight of the 504 process. In many cases, these levels are when identification occurs. They need support in the clerical aspect, scheduling appointments, distributing materials to staff and managing the process. At the 7-12 levels, we currently have clerical support but instead would benefit from being involved in the process but not overseeing or coordinating. This would free significant time for direct services to students.

We have worked to make the process as efficient as possible. Some examples of this attempt at the upper levels include the implementation of 504 days, mailed 504 documents to families outside of 9th grade, initials or re-evaluations, and utilizing clerical support to schedule appointments, run copies and distribute materials. Even with these attempts at streamlining, the overall workload and time spent on the complete 504 process has increased dramatically and is reducing the ability to not only adequately manage students with plans but also provide services to all students.

Summary of impact demonstrated through increased school counselor staffing:

The School Counseling department strongly supports the position that district outcomes in all areas including student achievement, attendance, graduation rate and post-secondary placement along with student mental health are positively impacted by the services school counselors provide.

The impact of one additional day of school counseling at CIS resulted in the ability of the school counselor to increase the amount of classroom guidance lessons offered and also add academic conferences for all students who have multiple D's or at least one F. The school counselor was also able to develop a building wide school culture program.

The addition of one school day for each of the school counselors at MS resulted in:

- Delivery of school-wide lessons based on school counselor standards every other week in IE (flipped classroom delivery--video lessons)
- Increased small group delivery, especially kids that have a high needs anxiety and need of coping skills
- Increased data collecting to use for evaluation to improve program

- Able to devote time to become a RAMP Nationally Recognized School. Data proves that student attendance increased, discipline decreased, and standardized test scores increased. RAMP Data Presentation

The addition of more elementary school counselors:

- Counselors at each building 2.5 days, an increase from 1-2 days per week in previous years
- With this extra time, the following has increased:
    - more lessons
    - small groups
    - individual sessions
    - collaboration/consultation with administration, teachers, and parents
- Increased data collection

Departmental Recommendations:

Based upon our discussion and consideration of the current state of mental health and supporting the whole student, we strongly feel that the most effective support strategy would be the hiring of an additional full time School Counselor at both the Intermediate and the High School level. We need the ability to provide more direct services to our students as opposed to hiring a high level, thinly-spread district coordinator/case manager. In addition, the Elementary level would welcome the opportunity to demonstrate the positive correlation between additional school counselor support and favorable student outcomes. For example, increasing the time allocation at one building while collecting data measuring the impact and outcomes. We understand the request for additional staffing resonates strongly within most departments in the district; however we feel that this increase would advantageously impact our district across all levels and measures of student success. In addition, clerical support at both the Elementary and Intermediate levels could help relieve counselors of excessive clerical demands which creates a barrier to providing more appropriate direct services. Finally, we would like to work together to review the current MCDAC proposal to determine as a team the most effective use of resources.

Gaps to be addressed through resources:

Central Intermediate School:

If an additional School Counselor were added to CIS with each School Counselor carrying one grade level, the School Counselor could attend team meetings and develop an even deeper awareness of student needs across the building. The School Counselor, who is trained to look for mental health problems, could develop more detailed plans for intervention, connect more parents to available resources and provide greater education about mental illnesses to teachers. With a lower student caseload, the school counselor could spend more time on prevention and intervention as well as the daily response to crisis. The School Counselor would also have greater availability for follow up with serious crisis such as students returning from psychiatric hospitalization and students returning from juvenile incarceration. The School Counselor could also follow up with 504 plans (which have increased drastically) to make sure they are being followed and that students are benefiting from the plans as they are written. The School Counselor could also pay greater attention to students who are on home instruction due to mental health concerns and students who are using Digital Academy.

High School Level:

We visualize an additional school counselor at the high school taking on a "support counselor" role without a defined-by-last-name caseload. Instead, this counselor would work directly with our most at risk students and families, those in the building and those in alternative education settings such as Digital Academy, SchoolPlus courses from home, JDC, etc. We currently have over 20 students with unique educational plans and the tracking and supporting of them is arduous. In addition, this person would coordinate 504 services for those students with more significant mental health needs which requires ongoing support and oversight of this population. Support would be given to the increasing demands surrounding testing for the state and post-secondary levels (EOC, ACT, AP) and tracking/guiding students to meet graduation requirements. The ripple effect of this support counselor would allow for High School Counselors to provide more direct services to all students in the form of classroom guidance, small groups and individual counseling- addressing needs such as anxiety, coping skills, transition to high school, etc. Margins of time would be opened to allow for improved response time given to the increased "drop ins" and crises during the school day, as well as opportunity to follow-up properly with students, parents and teachers. In addition, school programming could grow to embrace more social emotional lessons- while now it is heavily weighted upon college and career readiness.