COUNSELING PROGRAM

School counseling programs are provided by the school system with the ultimate aim of improving student performance by implementing strategies and activities that support and maximize student learning; helping students to grow in their personal and social development; and providing a foundation for acquiring the skills that enable students to make a successful transition from school to the world of work. The principal of each school, in consultation with the student services director, shall develop a counseling program that meets the objectives of the State Board of Education's comprehensive school counseling program curriculum and the needs of the student population at that school.

School counselors and other guiding adults in middle and high schools shall provide guidance and information to students about high school course selections and requirements prior to ninth grade. This guidance and information will inform students about the requirements for college entry, including accelerated preparation for college entry, and about the requirements and available options for career/technical education and related post-secondary education. School counselors shall encourage ninth grade students to complete these requirements in less than four years if feasible and appropriate.

The counseling program is the shared responsibility of teachers, counselors, parents and community members, and should operate with the collaboration of all individuals involved in educating students, including those who assist children with special needs or students who are at risk of dropping out of school or not meeting performance expectations. Input from parents and students should be sought in accordance with the school's plan for involvement of the community in school programs. All school personnel must follow the Parental Involvement Plan (policy 4002) in regard to parental notification and permission for counseling programs. In addition, school personnel shall annually provide all students in Grades 9 through 12 with information on the manner in which a parent may lawfully abandon a newborn baby with a responsible person in accordance with policy 4024, Safe Surrender of a Newborn.

Counseling may be provided on an individual basis or in small or large groups. School counselors may refer students who have extensive needs or needs that go beyond the purpose of the counseling program to community resources.

Students may seek counseling or be referred by staff or parents. Any staff member who is aware that a student is contemplating suicide or is otherwise suffering from an emotional or psychological crisis must immediately notify the counseling program in accordance with any rules established by the superintendent or principal. Any counselor or other staff member who knows or has cause to suspect child abuse, neglect, dependency or death as a result of maltreatment must report the information as provided in policy 4240/7312, Child Abuse – Reports and Investigations, and as required by law.

Counseling programs are most effective when voluntarily entered into by a student. School officials and teachers may recommend a counseling program to help a student meet standards of

conduct and academic performance established by the Watauga County Board of Education (the "board") and school system. However, students will not be required to attend individual or small group counseling sessions to address identified significant personal issues unless agreement has been reached with the parent and student in a behavior contract, an intervention plan or, for special education students, an individualized education plan. (See student behavior policies (4300 series), policy 3420, Student Promotion and Accountability, and policy 3520, Special Education Programs/Rights of Students with Disabilities.)

Information obtained in a session with a counselor may be privileged and protected from disclosure as provided by law. A counselor cannot be required to testify concerning privileged information unless, as provided by G.S. 8-53.4, the student waives the privilege or the court compels testimony as necessary to the proper administration of justice. The school counselor privilege does not, however, exempt the counselor from reporting child abuse as required by G.S. 7B-301. Any notation made by a counselor for his or her own use is a confidential document and is neither a public record nor a part of the student's record. Such confidential documents do not have to be shared with parents or others except as required by law. Any document prepared by a counselor that is shared or intended to be shared with other staff is considered an educational record of the student and is available to the parent or eligible student in accordance with policy 4700, Student Records.

Legal References: Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, 20 U.S.C. 1232g; G.S. 7B-301, -500; 8-53.4; 115C-12, -47, -401; State Board of Education Policies GCS-F-011, GCS-L-006

Cross References: Parental Involvement (policy 4002), Goals and Objectives of the Educational Program (policy 3000), Student Promotion and Accountability (policy 3420), Special Education Programs/Rights of Students with Disabilities (policy 3520), Safe Surrender of a Newborn (policy 4024), Child Abuse – Reports and Investigations (policy 4240/7312), Student Behavior Policies (4300 series), Student Records (policy 4700)

Adopted: August 3, 2015

Revised: December 14, 2015