

School Counselors work to improve success for ALL students by implementing a comprehensive school counseling program focused on career readiness, appropriate academic supports, and social emotional skills to become a productive citizen.

# School Counseling Department Program Review

# Pine-Richland School District

June 2023

*The information contained in this report is provided by the Pine-Richland School Counseling Department for general purposes only. While this report serves as a strategic approach to curriculum planning, recommendations must be considered with respect to all programs provided by Pine-Richland School District.*

## School Counseling Department Program Review

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## School Counseling Department Program Review

### Executive Summary

The mission of the Pine-Richland School District is to *Focus on Learning for Every Student Every Day*. Within the PRSD Strategic Plan, long-term and short-term goals outlined in the Teaching and Learning category form the foundation for continuous improvement. One of the short-term goals for 2016 - 2017 was to design and pilot an in-depth program review process for two of our departments (i.e., Science and Health & Physical Education). That initial work led to a final report and set of recommendations for program improvement. The process itself was refined and used in 2017 - 2018 in the areas of Mathematics and Business & Computer Science. **Since that initial year, our district has now supported this comprehensive process for sixteen departments and/or programs.** The sequence of departmental study and implementation for 2019 - 2023 is outlined in Figure 1. Each of the summary reports are publicly available on the Pine-Richland School District website ([“Academics”](#) and [“In-Depth Program Review”](#)).

Figure 1. Strategic Plan: Mini-Engine

2019 - 2020	2020 - 2021	2021 - 2022 Revised	2022 - 2023 Revised
<b>Pine-Richland School District Strategic Plan</b>			
<b>Teaching and Learning</b>			
2019 - 2020	2020 - 2021	2021 - 2022	2022 - 2023
<b>Refine and strengthen each element of the model for teaching and learning with a focus on integration.</b>			
	Educational Continuum (During COVID-19)	Educational Model Transition and Transformation (Post COVID-19)	
In-Depth Program Review: Study (English, Library and Music)	In-Depth Program Review: Study (Special Education, World Language, and Art)	In-Depth Program Review: Study (Special Education, World Language, and Art)	In-Depth Program Review: Study (H/PE, Counseling & Health Svcs., Family & Consumer Science)(Technology Education, Science)
In-Depth Program Review: Implement Recommendations and Resource Integration (Science, Health/PE, Math, B/CS, Gifted, SS)	In-Depth Program Review: Implement (Math, B/CS, Gifted, SS, English, Library, Music)	In-Depth Program Review: Implement (Math, B/CS, Gifted, SS, English, Library, Music)	In-Depth Program Review: Implement (English, Library, Music, Special Ed., W. Lang., Art, Health/PE, Counseling/Health Svcs., FCS)

This report outlines the process, findings, and recommendations from that work related to the School Counseling Program. As an organization, it is understood that the pace of change may be dependent upon the impact of that change on other aspects of the educational program. When conducting this work in an individual department, it is important and difficult to balance competing interests and constraints. The process model reflects this challenge as the “ripple effect” of balancing people, time and money. Practically, the committee utilized the action-priority matrix to evaluate each recommendation and established an implementation timeline with associated cost estimates.

One element of the in-depth program review was the establishment of a departmental philosophy and vision (Figure 1). As a result, the vision is captured through the following image and words:

Figure 1



School Counselors work to improve success for ALL students by implementing a comprehensive school counseling program focused on career readiness, appropriate academic supports, and social emotional skills to become productive citizens.

## Recommendation Overview

### Recommendation #1: Philosophy and Vision

1. Adopt and widely communicate the School Counseling Department philosophy and vision to internal and external stakeholders while ensuring a practical connection to program design and delivery.

### Recommendation #2: Role and Responsibility of the School Counselor

1. Clarify and effectively communicate the role of the school counselor to students, parents, and community.
2. Balance the responsibilities (i.e., academic, social-emotional, and career) to increase direct student support (individual, small, and large group).
3. Refine and improve transition services to support all students in the special education program.

### Recommendation #3: Academic Support for Every Student as an Individual

1. Clarify and expand classroom lessons on learning strategies for all students in K-6 to include topics of study skills, organization, test-taking, time management, and executive functioning skills (e.g. Integrated Curriculum).
2. Strengthen communication with other departments around their course offerings, particularly after in-depth program reviews and curricular adjustments and course resequencing, to be knowledgeable about the pathways being offered within each department from an academic advice standpoint.
3. Educate students about career clusters and pathways and how these relate to the program of studies and courses.
4. Expand use of the graduation plan as a decision-making tool for course selection, the overall academic transcript, future career aspirations (college, career, trade, military), and the connection between student-counselor-parents.

### Recommendation #4: Career Counseling for Every Student as an Individual

1. Collaborate with other relevant staff members to curate the integrated curriculum that addresses other areas of planned instruction (e.g., career, education, work, social, emotional, safety, suicide awareness, RAMS Way, PR Graduate Portrait, (K-2) PA Early Learning Standards, etc.).
2. Streamline a career education standard data warehouse K-12 to ensure easy retrieval of evidence and to assist in defining a student's future pathway, given the use of both Smart Futures and Naviance and the transitions between grades 6 and 7 between these two tools.
3. Enhance current Career Education and Work Standards (CEW) classroom lessons to include specific career exploration through collaboration with **classroom teachers across all departments** and community members.
4. Explore opportunities for students to engage in workforce experiences and/or earn workforce credentials both inside and outside of the Pine-Richland Academic Program.

**Recommendation #5: Social-Emotional Counseling for Every Student as an Individual**

1. Ensure access and availability of social-emotional health services for students K-12.
  - a. Collaborate with other relevant staff members to curate the integrated curriculum that addresses other areas of planned instruction (e.g., career, education, work, social, emotional, safety, suicide awareness, RAMS Way, PR Graduate Portrait, (K-2) PA Early Learning Standards, etc.).
  - b. Provide access to all students to short-term, time-limited, skill-based school counseling groups (social, friendship, grief, etc.) aligned with students' needs.
  - c. Expand connections and remove barriers to community programs and outpatient services for students.
  - d. Clarify the continuum of services and school/family referral process (i.e., school-based mental health, outside mental health services) based on intensity of students' needs.

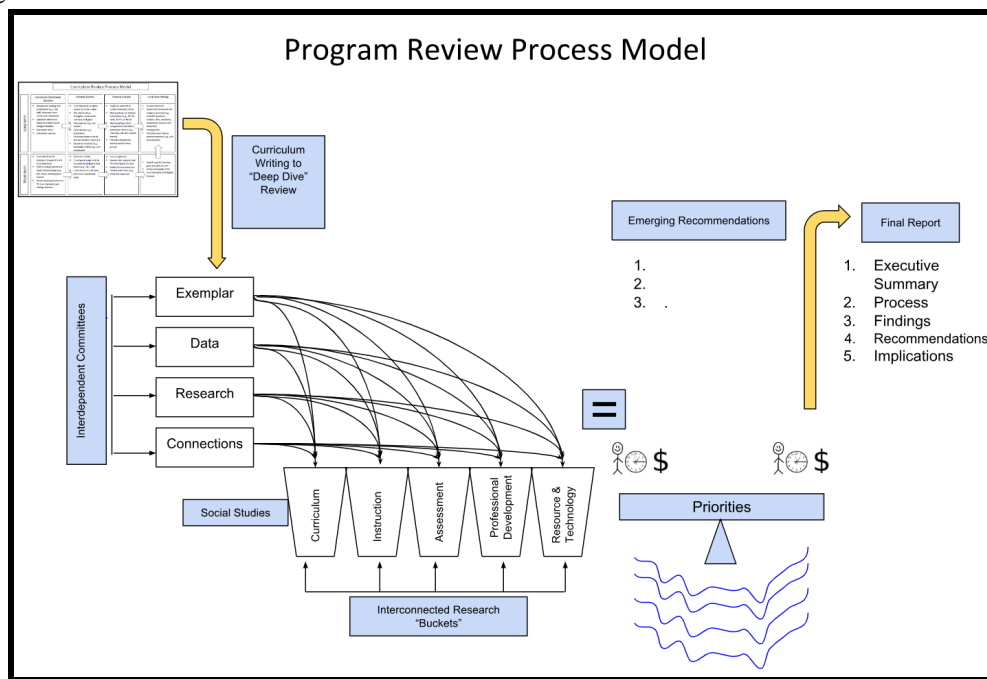


**In-Depth Program Review Process**

The process for in-depth program review was developed in the 2016 - 2017 school year and has been refined through multiple cycles of improvement. The process was “paused” during the 2020 - 2021 school year given workforce capacity and response to the pandemic. The departments scheduled for that year were shifted to 2021 - 2022 with some modifications to the meeting schedule to accommodate pandemic-related constraints.

To help ensure a clear understanding of the systematic approach to program improvement, the following process diagram was developed and reviewed on a regular basis. Major elements of this image are further described below:

Figure 3 IDPR Process Model



**Curriculum Writing to “Deep Dive”**

Given the time and effort invested into curriculum writing at Pine-Richland from 2014 - 2016, it is important to understand the relationship of that work to the in-depth program review process. The two-year curriculum writing process was designed to capture the current content in a consistent format through vertical teams (e.g., units, big ideas, and learning goals). That process allowed the department to identify strengths and opportunities for improvement. Most of the attention was directed internally at a review of our district’s current structure and practices.

The **in-depth program review process has a broader focus** on all elements of the department. Importantly, the process was designed to emphasize a balance of internal needs and a review of best practices from external sources. It asks questions, such as, “Are we doing the right things?” or “Do we need to consider more significant changes in program design?” In the image above, the curriculum writing process is like a “springboard” to “dive” more deeply into the content area. The personnel, structure, and work were organized into four major sub-committees.

### **Committee Composition and Structure**

We strongly believe that meaningful and lasting change requires engagement of all key stakeholders. The overall size of the department is an important consideration in study team design. In smaller departments, all members participate in the process. In very large departments, a representative sample of teachers are included. In medium departments, effort is made to ensure that all levels and courses are addressed by at least one member. Within the study team, members were then organized by **four main subcommittees**: (1) Research; (2) Exemplar K-12 Schools/Districts/Programs; (3) Connections to Universities, Businesses, and the Community; and (4) Data and Information. Two overarching elements were critical. First, the arrows on the left side of the subcommittees indicate that the groups must collaborate and exchange information (i.e., no silos). Second, the arrows on the right side of the subcommittees demonstrate that key findings/learnings were captured and organized by major research buckets.

It is important to note that the study teams also used a systematic approach to listen to students and parents. Student focus groups were organized at the high school, middle school, upper elementary, and the primary buildings. These groups were representative of the student body and a wide range of academic rigor. In addition, parent and community input was gathered during day and evening town hall sessions. Parents who were unable to attend those face-to-face meetings were able to submit comments electronically.

### **Research “Buckets”**

Within each discipline, information and findings that emerge from each subcommittee become known as research buckets. These buckets help the department members begin to organize concepts and themes. In the early months of the process, the buckets are dynamic, meaning that some initial concepts were removed or combined with other key themes. As the process evolves and teams continue to learn, the themes begin to solidify. Importantly, the arrows on the bottom of the buckets also demonstrate the relationship between areas (i.e., no silos). The subcommittees’ learning and identification of information for the buckets were interconnected, as information from one area informed others. Based upon the information gathered through the bucket findings, a set of emerging recommendations was developed.

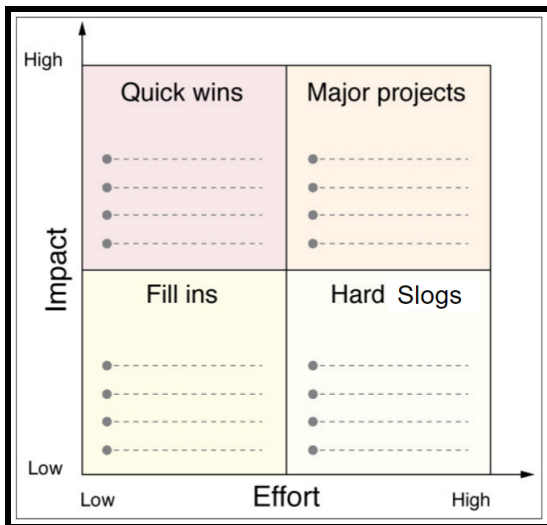
### **Emerging Recommendations**

A systems thinking approach was critical to the in-depth program review process. The transition from “findings” to “emerging recommendations” required skills of synthesis, critical thinking, healthy debate, and communication. At both the start of the study phase and again at the point of emerging recommendations, the team revisits the departmental strengths and opportunities that had been historically developed in the department. Some emerging recommendations were designed to improve current gaps and weaknesses. Other emerging recommendations were identified in the analysis of exemplary programs, universities, businesses, or in the research literature. The team brainstormed recommendations by identifying recurring themes, ideas, and opportunities for growth. The team then discussed, modified, and edited the recommendations. Emerging recommendations were consolidated into a draft. The expanded team worked with the draft to link the emerging recommendations to data provided by the subcommittees.

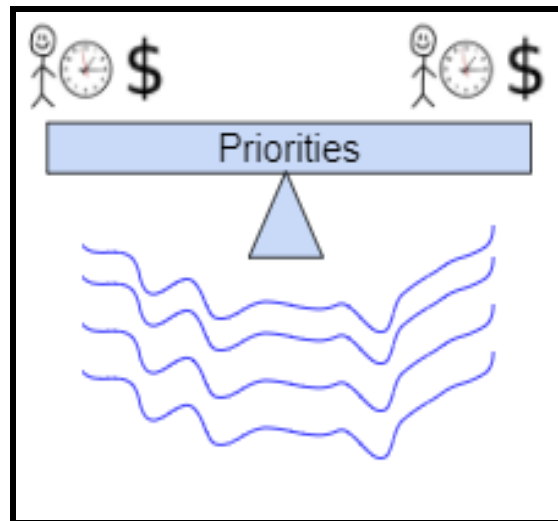
**Balancing Priorities and Resources**

The action-priority matrix evaluates the impact versus the effort of the emerging recommendations (Figure 4). Emerging recommendations were categorized as fill-ins, quick wins, major projects, and hard slogs. For example, a hard slog was used to categorize those recommendations that would require much effort but have little impact on student learning. As a system, the “ripple effect” of recommendations was built into the process model (Figure 5). This is further described in the next section.

**Figure 4. Action Priority Matrix**



**Figure 5. Balance of People, Time and Money**



Elmansy, Rafiq. “Time Management Tips for Designers: The Action Priority Matrix.” *Designorate*, 14 June 2016, [www.designorate.com/time-management-the-action-priority-matrix/](http://www.designorate.com/time-management-the-action-priority-matrix/). Accessed 14 Mar. 2017.

**Tensions of Balancing People, Time and Money with a Rigorous Research Process**

It is important to address the challenge that emerges at this stage of the work. At Pine-Richland, we have a culture that believes in the pursuit of excellence at the organizational, department and individual levels. Our departments are composed of certified, experienced, dedicated and passionate educators. Through the in-depth program review, the process exposes department members to current literature/research, exemplary programs, data/information, community connections and focused dialogue about internal strengths and opportunities.

At this point, it is common for a recommendation to directly or indirectly require expanded resources of additional people, time and/or money. Time is impacted by the structure and schedule of the existing day at each level (i.e., K - 3, 4 - 6, 7 - 8 and 9 - 12). Simply stated, additional time for one content area has the effect of reducing time in another area. Additional staff added to one department may have the effect of possible reduction in another department. The assignment of staff and/or scheduling parameters are

also addressed through the collective bargaining agreement (e.g., teaching periods and course preparations).

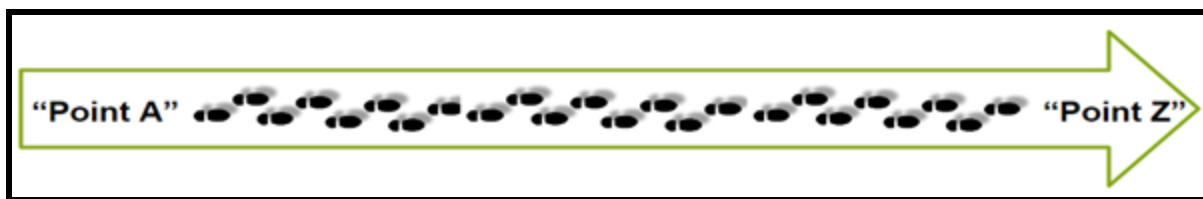
These discussions can be difficult. They are conducted with honesty, support and an understanding of potential implications for the entire system. For example, the concept of adding requirements and/or courses - with associated staff - were discussed in Health/Physical Education, Music, Business & Computer Science to name a few. We work creatively to determine how we can strengthen the specific department, take steps on the improvement continuum and also ensure sustainability and fiscal responsibility. For example, personal finance was addressed at the high school level as a graduation competency and not a required course. If a course was required, we would need to increase staff and that requirement would have decreased flexibility for elective course selections. In science, a recommendation was implemented for “science every day” at Eden Hall. This recommendation caused a major “ripple” in the master schedule and student day. It required a curriculum revision. It impacted multiple other content areas (i.e., ELA, math and social studies). However, it was also able to be addressed without additional staffing requirements.

Given all of this discussion, the team then identified the final emerging recommendations to support continuous improvement.

### **Continuum of Improvement**

Throughout the in-depth program review process, it was important to maintain perspective on the nature of program improvements. Especially when considering effective elements of exemplary schools or programs, the desire to move from the current program ("Point A") to an ideal future ("Point Z") is natural. However, it is more realistic to recognize that meaningful program improvement within an organizational system will often result from a series of smaller steps ("Points B, C, D, etc."). Although depicted as a straight line in the image below (Figure 6), the in-depth program review committee recognizes that continuous improvement is not always a linear process.

**Figure 6 Continuum**



## Recommendations

### **Recommendation #1: Philosophy and Vision**

Adopt and widely communicate the School Counseling Department philosophy and vision to internal and external stakeholders while ensuring a practical connection to program design and delivery.

#### **Internal Analysis**

- Pine-Richland School Counselors are student-focused and responsive (PRSD School Counseling Team, 2014).
- Counselors promote healthy behaviors, including the understanding of “resilience” (PRSD School Counseling Team, 2014).
- The ideal responsibilities include helping teachers support students in any way that they need support. This includes friendship groups, social skills, grief support, and much more (PRSD Staff, 2023).
- Assist with keeping students in a good state of mind to aid in learning and growing (PRSD Staff, 2023).

#### **External Analysis**

- Advocacy for all students: “Call to advocate for equitable, anti-oppressive and anti-bias policies and procedures, systems and practices, and provide effective, evidence-based and culturally sustaining interventions to address student needs” (PA School Counseling Association Conference, 2023).
- Protecting student information: Confidentiality (PA School Counseling Association Conference, 2023).
- "School counselors understand students should demonstrate growth in the career, academic and social/emotional domains equally to be successful. School counseling programs should strive to implement comprehensive, developmental programming addressing student needs. These programs should seek a balance in delivering instruction, appraisal and advisement and counseling enhancing the three domains” (ASCA, 2023).
- “The school counselor provides leadership and collaborates with teachers, administrators and the school community to promote character education for all students as an integral part of school curriculum and activities” (ASCA, 2023).
- Establishing data analysis methods to identify and target systemic barriers deterring equitable access (ASCA, 2023).
- Providing opportunities for students to:
  - Enhance their self-efficacy beliefs and competence
  - Develop attributional beliefs
  - See value in tasks related to achievement
  - Develop mastery/learning goals
  - Develop autonomy
  - Relate to others (Rowell & Hong, 2013; ASCA, 2023).

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- Emphasizing family-community-school relationships in addressing academic needs (Brown, 1999; ASCA, 2023).
- “School counseling programs are provided by a state-credentialed school counselor and:
  - are delivered to all students systematically
  - include a developmentally appropriate curriculum focused on the mindsets and behaviors all students need for postsecondary readiness and success
  - close achievement and opportunity gaps
  - result in improved student achievement, attendance and discipline" (ASCA, 2023).

**Implementation Timeline:** Fall 2023 - Ongoing

**Key Personnel:** School Counseling Department Leader; Assistant Superintendents; Assistant Superintendents’ Assistant; Principals, School Psychologists.

**Major Action Steps:** (1) Communicate the vision and philosophy as a part of the formal board presentation and follow-up communications to the community; (2) Resources listed in district website, classroom; (3) Discuss the vision and philosophy with all department members; (4) Integrate the vision and philosophy into lesson design .

**Estimated Budget/Resources:** There are minimal costs anticipated (e.g. costs of printing and distributing the posters; professional development time and resources to share integration ideas).

**Potential Implications (Short-Term and Long-Term):** The department will be able to leverage the vision and philosophy as guiding principles when aligning curriculum and selecting resources to support the learning goals, across all languages. Learning activities will be modified to reinforce the concepts demonstrated by the vision and philosophy with explicit connections made for students.

### **Recommendation #2: Role and Responsibility of the School Counselor**

1. Clarify and effectively communicate the role of the school counselor to students, parents, and community.
2. Balance the responsibilities (i.e., academic, social-emotional, and career) to increase direct student support (individual, small, and large group).
3. Refine and improve transition services to support all students in the special education program.

### **Internal Analysis**

- “The counselors are stretched thin; I think in the future there should be more support; the guidance department wears many heads and are spread thin; there should be more people who can add extra support in more places (Student Focus Group, 2023).
- School counselors are not mental health counselors and need to stop being used as such. They cannot be used to replace therapists. The current office is understaffed. The counselor to student ratio is way too high. (Pine-Richland Staff, 2023).
- “Counselors are spread thin. Too many responsibilities. Hard to schedule a meeting. Their schedules are packed.”(Student Focus Group, 2023).
- Counselor not being accessible to the Tier 1 because being utilized in other areas (Parent Focus Group, 2023)
- How do the counselors have enough hours in the day? Can we update the way we look at the counseling department, maybe we need to double the staff? (Parent Focus Group, 2023)
- According to the American School Counselor Association and our enrollment of 4,474 we should have 18 School Counselors (Pine-Richland Staff, 2023).
- Parents of Middle School and High School Students stated they would like more communication regarding career awareness (Parent Focus Group, 2023).
- An ideal role of a counselor would primarily be a role of communicating to parents helpful strategies and to help them connect with forms of support outside of school (Pine Richland Staff, 2023).
- Clarifying the direct (Instruction, Appraisal and Advisement, Counseling) and indirect (Consultation, Collaboration, Referral) service delivery model of a school counselor will assist in more clearly defined roles (School Counseling IDPR Committee, 2023).
- Extend “Manage to Lead” administrative learning goals from the PR Academy to the School Counseling Department to equip the team with habits and systems of maintaining a focus on the ideal role and division of time and duties, prioritizing direct student support and proactive approaches (e.g. assured experiences and lessons for school counseling department in core classrooms) (PRSD Administrative Team, 2023).

### **External Analysis**

- Define and distinguish the role of a school counselor from other related services. Update terminology to eliminate guidance counselor and replace with school counselor on internal and external publications (ASCA Position Statement, 2023).
- Counselors need to balance among the three focal areas of Academic, Social-Emotional, & Career, keeping in mind the ASCA ethical standards for school counselors (ASCA Standards; Shaler, 2023).
- Research External Analysis: Design and deliver school counseling programs that improve all student outcomes. They lead, advocate and collaborate to promote equity and access for all students by connecting their school counseling program to the school's academic mission and school improvement plan.
- The better the service delivery proactively in Tier 1, the less referrals are made to Tiers 2-3 and the more time the counselor will have with direct supports for more students (Shaler, 2023; ASCA Standards).
- Counseling minutes should not be included in Individual Education Plans, which limits the amount of Tier 1 time available for all students (Fox Chapel, Shaler, Upper St. Clair, Hempfield Area, Cumberland Valley, East Allegheny, Seneca Valley, North Allegheny Interviews, 2023).
- "School counselors are supports for ALL students and as soon as we are written into IEPs to provide minutes then we are no longer available for all students" (North Allegheny Interview, 2023).
- IEP teams need leadership, communication and clarity as to the appropriate use of IEPs. The team leader should ensure every team member understands in advance that the school counselor's role must be realistic and relevant as defined by ASCA. School counselors hold a certificate and serve all students in their charge; it is unethical and professionally questionable when others define school counselors' role as acting outside their scope of practice and serving a small percentage of their population to the exclusion of hundreds of other students in their caseload (Stone and Haviland, 2018).
- Freshman Seminar is held with two counselors in the 9th grade to assist with the transition. This course is 1 time per week during the first semester for all students (Upper St. Clair, 2023).
- Adjusted bell schedule for teaching SEL topics monthly by all staff (Fox Chapel, 2023).
- Attendance Coordinator and Transition Coordinator are extra duty contracts for teachers or facilitated by Social Workers or Assistant Principals in districts interviewed (Cumberland Valley, Fox Chapel, Shaler, North Allegheny Interviews, 2023) .
- "School counselors support the school's educational initiatives by organizing and implementing a school counseling program aligned with the school's academic mission and providing support to students, teachers and administrators" (ASCA, 2023).
- School Counselors should be working with administrators on home-school communication to aid in maintaining a healthy school and classroom assessment environment (Cizek & Burg, 2006)
- Advocating to postsecondary institutions that students should be considered holistically throughout the admissions process" (*American School Counselor Association - High Stakes*



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*Testing.* [www.schoolcounselor.org/Standards-Positions/Position-Statements/ASCA-Position-Statements/The-School-Counselor-and-High-Stakes-Testing](http://www.schoolcounselor.org/Standards-Positions/Position-Statements/ASCA-Position-Statements/The-School-Counselor-and-High-Stakes-Testing). Accessed 16 Jan. 2023).

- School counselors focus their skills, time and energy on direct and indirect services to students. To achieve maximum program effectiveness, ASCA recommends a student-to-school-counselor ratio of 250:1. Although ratios vary across states, school districts and even grade levels, the growing body of research as summarized by Carey and Martin (2015) supports that implementation of school counseling programs positively affects outcome data (e.g., student achievement and discipline referrals) at all grade levels (American School Counselor Association, 2023).
- Administrative assistants are very involved and there is a Registrar in the counseling office who does a lot of the clerical items as well. 504's are managed by school psychologists (Upper St. Clair Interview, 2023).
- Counselors are not written into IEP's as that is inappropriate (Hempfield Area Interview, 2023).
- Ratio is 1:215. All counselors share special education students. The only involvement is to attend the IEP meeting and nothing more (Fox Chapel Interview, 2023).
- Transition Coordinator is a supplemental contract for a special education teacher. No involvement in being written into IEP's (Fox Chapel Interview, 2023).
- Counselors are Tier 1 with no duties or coverage. Counselors do not evaluate students for or write initial 504s but manage them after written. Counselors are not written into IEP's for counseling minutes. SAIP meetings are coordinated by the administrative assistant and held by the Principals as they are punitive in nature and not the role of the counselor. Ratio is 1:275 (Upper St. Clair Interview, 2023). (Cumberland Valley, Shaler, East Allegheny, Seneca Valley, North Allegheny Interviews, 2023).
- Counselors send out a message every other Friday to the community & students to explain what they just did, what they are doing and what is coming up. (Fox Chapel Interview, 2023)
- There is a weekly meeting between building counselors and administration to discuss current tasks and student concerns. (North Allegheny Interview, 2023)

**Implementation Timeline:** Fall 2024-Fall 2027

**Key Personnel:** K-12 School Counselors; K-12 Administrators; Central Office Administrators

**Major Action Steps:** (1) Identify how K-12 counselors are currently managing the demands of their days, weeks, and months; (2) Determine internal process modifications to support the mindsets and behaviors within each of the three domains; (3) Review current practices in supporting transition services for all students with a focus on students in the special education program; (4) Modify how transition services are provided - guided by internal needs and best practices.

**Estimated Budget/Resources:** Resource needs will be determined based upon the findings from the internal studies to better balance the roles of the K-12 counselors within the three domains (social emotional, academic, career).

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**Potential Implications (Short-Term and Long-Term):** The current time committed to Tier III support will need to be adjusted. Counselors will spend more time in classrooms and other settings to provide increased direct student support. All students and families will be well informed of all transition options to guide their post-secondary plans.

### **Recommendation #3: Academic Support for Every Student as an Individual**

1. Clarify and expand classroom lessons on learning strategies for all students in K-6 to include topics of study skills, organization, test-taking, time management, and executive functioning skills (e.g. Integrated Curriculum).
2. Strengthen communication with other departments around their course offerings, particularly after in-depth program reviews and curricular adjustments and course resequencing, to be knowledgeable about the pathways being offered within each department from an academic advice standpoint.
3. Educate students about career clusters and pathways and how these relate to the program of studies and courses.
4. Expand use of the graduation plan as a decision-making tool for course selection, the overall academic transcript, future career aspirations (college, career, trade, military), and the connection between student-counselor-parents.

### **Internal Analysis**

- Students in grades 7-12 reported a desire in learning about self care, and how to handle pressure. Students had a strong interest in lessons in diversity and how to handle emotions (Student Focus Group, 2023).
- Students in grades 7-12 could use a lot more support in stress management and additional support in time management and organization (Student Focus Group, 2023).
- During the in-depth program review town halls, parents and staff members voiced that they need additional guidance and support in communicating about the departmental offerings aligned with particular career clusters (e.g. Engineering and Technology will be building a pathway for students and families to refer and counselors will need to be knowledgeable about this) (IDPR Town Hall, 2023).
- Parents of students in grades 7-12 would like to see more information on how to help students recognize when they need to ask for help and how to do that (Parent Focus Group, 2023).
- Parents feel counselors are spread too thin (Parent Focus Group, 2023).
- Parents feel that more counselors at the High School level would be helpful to give all students enough support in all areas (Parent Focus Group, 2023).

### **External Analysis**

- “School Counselors can provide support within the academic domain through Tier 1 instruction with student success skills, collaboration within the school’s MTSS process and teams, and providing targeted short-term small group instruction.” (ASCA, 2023).
- “Using data to develop and assess preventive and responsive services to address these risks is an integral part of a school counseling program.” (ASCA, 2017).
- “School counseling programs should strive to implement comprehensive, developmental programming addressing student needs. These programs should seek a balance in delivering instruction, appraisal and advisement and counseling enhancing the three domains.” (ASCA, 2017).

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- “School counselors address those barriers to student success by offering instruction that enhances awareness of mental health and short-term intervention to include small-group counseling until the student is connected with available community resources.” (ASCA, 2020).
- School counseling instruction is provided to students by pushing into classrooms based on teacher schedule. (Shaler, North Allegheny, 2023)
- "School counselors align their school counseling program with MTSS by providing direct and indirect student services including:
  - Tier 1 interventions in the form of classroom instruction and schoolwide programming and initiatives
  - Tier 2 interventions including small-group and individual counseling, consultation and collaboration with school personnel, families and community stakeholders
  - Tier 3 indirect student support services through consultation, collaboration and facilitation of referrals (Goodman-Scott, et al., 2020) " (ASCA, 2008).
- "School counselors collaboratively support the process of MTSS universal screening for mental health (Donohue et al., 2016), academic and behavioral supports" (ASCA, 2008).

**Implementation Timeline (Anticipated Start/Finish):** Fall 2024 - Fall 2025

**Key Personnel:** School Counselors, Assistant Superintendents, Director of Student Services, Assistant Director of Student Services & Special Education, & Academic Leadership Council members.

**Major Action Steps:** (1) Review resources and curriculum for teaching learning strategies; (2) Adopt a curriculum for teaching learning strategies K-6; and (3) Schedule time to deliver lessons in collaboration with classroom teachers by grade span.

**Estimated Budget/Resources:** Minimal budget impact anticipated

**Potential Implications (Short-Term and Long-Term):** K-6 students will receive the foundational support to ensure they can achieve and grow to their greatest potential. Students and staff will be more aware of the career education and work standards to determine course recommendations and post-high school experiences. Counselors’ understanding of all program pathways will improve in order to guide students and families in making course request decisions. Graduation plans will be used as a collaborative tool to support students and families in making coursework decisions and post-high school plans.

#### Recommendation #4: Career Counseling for Every Student as an Individual

1. Collaborate with other relevant staff members to curate the integrated curriculum that addresses other areas of planned instruction (e.g., career, education, work, social, emotional, safety, suicide awareness, RAMS Way, PR Graduate Portrait, (K-2) PA Early Learning Standards, etc.).
2. Streamline a career education standard data warehouse K-12 to ensure easy retrieval of evidence and to assist in defining a student's future pathway, given the use of both Smart Futures and Naviance and the transitions between grades 6 and 7 between these two tools.
3. Enhance current Career Education and Work Standards (CEW) classroom lessons to include specific career exploration through collaboration with **classroom teachers across all departments** and community members.
4. Explore opportunities for students to engage in workforce experiences and/or earn workforce credentials both inside and outside of the Pine-Richland Academic Program.

#### Internal Analysis

- During the in-depth program review town halls, parents and staff members voiced that they need additional guidance and support in communicating about the departmental offerings aligned with particular career clusters (e.g. Engineering and Technology will be building a pathway for students and families to refer and counselors will need to be knowledgeable about this) (IDPR Town Hall, 2023).
- Parents feel that more counselors at the High School level would be helpful to give all students enough support in all areas (Parent Focus Group, 2023).
- "What topics would you like to see addressed more through school counseling services?" Increase in career exploration. (School Counseling Staff Input, 2023).
- Continued work and options are necessary for workforce credentials, internships, and job shadowing experiences (School Counseling Staff, 2023).
- A small percentage of Pine-Richland students have earned workforce credentials (outside of A.W. Beattie) (PA Career Readiness, 2022).

#### External Analysis

- "School counseling programs should strive to implement comprehensive, developmental programming addressing student needs. These programs should seek a balance in delivering instruction, appraisal and advisement and counseling enhancing the three domains." (ASCA, 2017).
- Career awareness and career acquisition are essential areas to focus on in grades K-12 to better prepare students with postsecondary plans. (Slippery Rock University, 2023).
- "Encourage classroom teachers to provide career speakers throughout the school year, or as a one-day event." (School Counseling Interview Summary Form, 2023)
- Top rated and most sought after job skills are also SEL skills: Problem-Solving, Self-Management, Working with People, Technology (Sharp & Pastor, 2022).

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- "School counselors provide test-taking strategies as a part of a school counseling program promoting academic, career and social/emotional development of all students" (ASCA, 2023).
- "School counselors collaborate with teachers and other school staff to coordinate and provide information on integrating test-taking strategies, content and practice tests into regular classroom instruction" (ASCA, 2023).

**Implementation Timeline (Anticipated Start/Finish):** Fall 2024 - Fall 2027

**Key Personnel:** School Counselors, Assistant Superintendents, Director of Student Services; Technology Department; Building Level Technology Coaches.

**Major Action Steps:** (1) Review resources and curriculum for teaching Pennsylvania Career Education and Work Standards; (2) Adopt a curriculum for teaching Pennsylvania Career Education and Work Standards K-6; (3) Identify time to deliver lessons; (4) Identify the program to house, manage and track artifacts to document compliance with the Pennsylvania State Standards.

**Estimated Budget/Resources:** Curriculum for Pennsylvania Career Education and Work Standards that are consistent for students K-12.

**Potential Implications (Short-Term and Long-Term):** Students have the potential to be scheduled more appropriately for courses that align with their future employment or career goals. Cross-departmental connections will strengthen and counselors' awareness of pathways to careers and course selection will be integrated. Students, families, and educators will be able to access students' CEW reporting data K-12 in one location and reports could be created across the full grade span despite two warehouses being leveraged as is developmentally-appropriate.

### **Recommendation #5: Social-Emotional Counseling for Every Student as an Individual**

1. Ensure access and availability of social-emotional health services for students K-12.
  - a. Collaborate with other relevant staff members to curate the integrated curriculum that addresses other areas of planned instruction (e.g., career, education, work, social, emotional, safety, suicide awareness, RAMS Way, PR Graduate Portrait, (K-2) PA Early Learning Standards, etc.).
  - b. Provide access to all students to short-term, time-limited, skill-based school counseling groups (social, friendship, grief, etc.) aligned with students' needs.
  - c. Expand connections and remove barriers to community programs and outpatient services for students.
  - d. Clarify the continuum of services and school/family referral process (i.e., school-based mental health, outside mental health services) based on intensity of students' needs.

### **Internal Analysis**

- Students in grades 7-12 reported a desire in learning about self care, and how to handle pressure. Students had a strong interest in lessons in diversity and how to handle emotions (Student Focus Group, 2023).
- Students in grades 7-12 reported anxiety, stress, intrusive thoughts and self harm as primary concerns among the students that they need support in. Students in grades K-6 reported concerns in making friends, bullying, peer pressure and self confidence (Student Focus Group, 2023).
- Students in grades 7-12 could use a lot more support in stress management and additional support in time management and organization (Student Focus Group, 2023).
- Students reported that we need more counselors and mental health support. "The counselors are spread too thin so when we need them the most sometimes they are tied up doing other things" (Student Focus Group, 2023).
- During the in-depth program review town halls, parents and staff members voiced that they need additional guidance and support in communicating about the departmental offerings aligned with particular career clusters (e.g. Engineering and Technology will be building a pathway for students and families to refer and counselors will need to be knowledgeable about this) (IDPR Town Hall, 2023).
- Students in grades 9-12 would like to see more lessons about how to deal with anxiety and stress, not just informative, but how to cope, different strategies and ways to develop resiliency. Students also want lessons of cyber bullying, staying safe on social media, and drug and alcohol information (Student Focus Group, 2023).
- Parents stated they would like more lessons on anxiety, emotional regulation, and acceptance/diversity. Parents of students in grades 7-12 would like to see more information on how to help students recognize when they need to ask for help and how to do that (Parent Focus Group, 2023).

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- Parents are aware of the social-emotional supports offered by the school counselors. Parents would like more services on making friends, conflict resolution, stress management, and social skills (Parent Focus Group, 2023).
- Parents feel counselors are spread too thin (Parent Focus Group, 2023).
- Parents feel that more counselors at the high school level would be helpful to give all students enough support in all areas (Parent Focus Group, 2023).
- Staff survey identified a need for more emotional regulation instruction and friendship skills at all levels K-12 (Pine-Richland Staff, 2023).
- “They support students who are dealing with difficult life situations, social issues, daily anxiety, and much more. They provide support by providing friendship groups, music therapy, and grief groups. These services have directly affected at least 10 of my students this year. They provide support to families during the death of loved ones (We have four students who were directly supported through services dealing with death this year.) The counselors also support teachers who are supporting students with needs” (Pine-Richland Staff, 2023).
- A counselor's role is “to assist teachers with the mental health and wellness of all students” (Pine-Richland Staff, 2023).
- A counselor's role is “making connections with students, developing small groups for specific SEL needs and challenges” (Pine-Richland Staff, 2023).

### **External Analysis**

- “Using data to develop and assess preventive and responsive services to address these risks is an integral part of a school counseling program.” (ASCA, 2017).
- Mental health concerns are on the rise at the post-secondary level, particularly with first year students. (Slippery Rock University, Duquesne University, 2023).
- “School counselors address those barriers to student success by offering instruction that enhances awareness of mental health and short-term intervention to include small-group counseling until the student is connected with available community resources.” (ASCA, 2020).
- The school has an extended homeroom that allows for small groups of students to have a consistent "advisor" throughout their high school career. During this extended homeroom period, SEL curriculum is delivered using a counselor/teacher buddy. (Fox Chapel, 2023).
- School counseling instruction is provided to students by pushing into classrooms based on teacher schedule. (Shaler, North Allegheny, 2023)
- Students are provided Suicide Prevention Curriculum- K-12 using the SOS program in grades 6-12. (Cumberland Valley, 2023).



**Implementation Timeline (Anticipated Start/Finish):** July 2023 through June 2025

**Key Personnel:** School Counselors; Director of Student Services; Assistant Director of Student Services and Special Education; Student Assistance Teams; Social Worker; and Key Community Service Partners

**Major Action Steps:** (1) Audit current curriculum and determine areas of need as mentioned within the recommendation; (2) Infuse those needed learning goals and activities into the curriculum by grade span; (3) Implement lessons within Tier 1 based upon those needs to help build the skill set of all students; (4) Refer students demonstrating a need for supports to MTSS and/or SAP including invitations to participate in relevant short-term groups as an intervention to further equip the students and ensure growth and transfer of skills (pre-/post-assessment); (5) Strengthen current community partnerships and identify additional support systems to benefit students with specific needs, removing barriers for families to access these additional services; and (6) Create written procedures or a flowchart for referral starting with the source of the referral, moving to triage with the counselor, and referrals beyond the school if appropriate and the criteria by which community referrals would occur. (7) Audit staff to student ratios in regards to number of referrals, threat assessments, and crisis situations to consider staffing changes.

**Estimated Budget/Resources:** Minimal costs associated with ancillary pay if completed within the summer months or outside of typical school hours.

**Potential Implications (Short-Term and Long-Term):** School counseling curriculum will be much clearer and well-articulated in terms of the social-emotional skills development, as would be reflected in the integrated curriculum as well. More strategic thought will be put into the development and sequencing of skill development based on gaps in the curriculum and the identification of skills. If additional skills are taught within the Tier 1 curricular experiences, potentially less referrals will be made to Tiers 2 and 3 supports, allowing counselors to spend more time assisting students in direct services and appropriate, time-bound intervention groups. Students requiring more specialized supports would have a referral pathway to getting those services from outside providers if the referral and triage process is solidified.

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