

# Cambridge Public Schools School Counseling Program Review: CRLS

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# Guiding Questions



1. What is the role of the CRLS guidance counselor in a 21st century high school?
2. What systems and supports need to be in place for counselors to deliver proactive curriculum that supports all students?
3. How do we define success for CRLS students - both while they are in school and at the time of graduation?
4. How can the program's effectiveness in student learning be measured?

# CPS District Plan Framework

Provide **all CPS students in all student groups**, with the knowledge and skills they need to achieve their goals and postsecondary success as engaged community members

- Provide equity and access to increase opportunity and achievement
- Provide engaging learning for students and staff to strengthen instruction for all types of learners
- Support the whole child as an individual
- Expand and strengthen family and community partnerships
- Improve implementation and progress monitoring

# The Program Review Process: 4 days on-site

## **Interviews:**

- Upper School guidance counselors and school social workers
- Upper School Heads of School
- CRLS Principal
- Guidance Coordinator
- CRLS guidance counselors
- CRLS social workers
- Guidance secretary
- RSTA Executive Director and career counselor
- Extension School guidance counselor
- ELL program leaders
- Superintendent Salim

## **Focus Groups:**

- Caregiver Group for grades 6-12
- Upper School education representatives
- CRLS education representatives
- Upper School student representatives
- CRLS students in grades 9 and 10
- CRLS students in grades 11 and 12
- CRLS Deans
- Community Partners

## **Record Review**

# Best Practices in Massachusetts for School Counseling

In April 2016, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [DESE] and the Massachusetts School Counselors' Association [MASCA] endorsed the newly revised version of the *Massachusetts Model for Comprehensive School Counseling Programs*, referred to as MA Model 2.0.

- MA Model 2.0 is the guiding document to describe current best practices for schools interested in implementing a comprehensive school counseling program.
- It is a framework and a resource to help school counselors shift from a reactive service delivery approach to a more proactive, data driven, programmatic approach to serving ALL students.
- MA Model 2.0 is organized into 4 sections: **Foundation, Accountability, Management** and **Delivery**, each of which guide counselors [and administrators] to think about the different components of a counseling program. It loosely follows the principles of backwards design.

# MA Model 2.0

## FOUNDATION

*A strong foundation helps to answer guiding question #1: **What is the role of a guidance counselor in a 21st century high school?** and #3: **How is student success defined?***

***A school counseling program's foundation serves as the ground upon which the rest of the program is built.***

Beginning with the end in mind, it articulates what the desired outcomes are for students.

- The school counseling program needs to have a **clearly defined, results driven vision [focus]**
- This vision clarifies what it is that school counselors can contribute to the overall goals of the district.
- **Program results need to be shared regularly** with stakeholders so that the important role guidance counselors play in academic achievement and school improvement is understood throughout the community.

# Foundation: Current Practices @ CRLS

## Current Practices

The most common response to the question ***“what do you see as a guidance counselor’s primary function?”***

- to form relationships with students
- getting students into college
- scheduling

***What student success looks like?***

- getting into college

## Commendations

- The District is open to learning from this program review
- The Guidance department has developed goals that begin to align their work with the District’s Improvement Plan
- Guidance counselors have identified one data driven goal using EDWIN analytics
- While not formally stated as the primary measure of student success, the graduation rate and college going rates are higher than the state average.

# Foundation: Recommendations

1. Form a team of stakeholders [sometimes referred to as an “**advisory council**”]
2. Have the advisory council review district data [using the DART Success after High School and Edwin tools] and the school improvement plan to
  - a. identify and then prioritize the data points school counselors can impact.
  - b. develop data driven goals for the school counseling program
3. Share goals broadly
4. Connect the identified goals to school counseling standards
5. Update the department’s mission statement to reflect this work

# In summary...

*Currently, there is no agreed upon focus for the work of guidance counselors, thus, the first step toward having a school counseling program aligned with MA Model 2.0 is **to have a clearly defined focus anchored in data driven objectives**. Rather than “forming relationships with students” as the primary focus, counselors and stakeholders need to determine what data driven student outcomes should be the focus of the school counseling program. The role of the counselor is to deliver a scope and sequence of standards based programming and tiered interventions that supports these outcomes.*



# MA Model 2.0

## ACCOUNTABILITY

*Guiding Question #4 How is program effectiveness measured?*

The Accountability section of MA Model 2.0 provides the counseling program with a framework for evaluating its effectiveness and demonstrating how it is an essential part of the school system.

Massachusetts school counselors must collect and analyze data that demonstrates how the counseling program supports student achievement and school improvement, as well as college and career readiness.

As in the backwards design model, assessment strategies and tools are developed BEFORE the counseling lessons/interventions are mapped out.

# Accountability: Current Practices @ CRLS

## Current Practices:

- Measuring program effectiveness intentionally and regularly is **not** part of current practice.
- Data required by DESE is collected and reported each year
- The guidance team has recently participated in data training provided by DESE
- There are vast amounts of data available for counselors to use, but there is currently no time scheduled to review it regularly
- The lack of accountability data leaves the school community with little information about how students benefit from the counseling program

## Commendations

- The Guidance Coordinator is aware of the importance of data and has taken steps to train her team in its use
- The Guidance Coordinator has prepared a document using data to raise awareness of issues relative to college persistence
- The authors of the school improvement plan recognize the role guidance can play in supporting district initiatives

# Accountability Recommendations

1. Establish a regular “Data Meeting” for all counselors
2. Determine what data will be collected and when to evaluate the effectiveness of a program or service
3. Look at district data trends to inform content of tier 1 interventions
4. Establish criteria for tier 2 interventions using discipline, attendance and/or grades
5. Learn how to generate and disseminate charts with concise explanations of counseling interventions
6. Adopt a continuous improvement mindset

# In Summary...

***In order to establish the counseling program as an essential component of student success, CRLS counselors must begin to collect and analyze data that demonstrates how the counseling program supports student achievement and school improvement, as well as college and career readiness.***



# MA Model 2.0

## MANAGEMENT

*A strong focus on management helps to answer guiding question #2: **What systems /supports need to be in place for proactive curriculum delivery?***

The Management System of MA Model 2.0 describes how the counseling department is organized to provide programs and services to students.

In order to manage a comprehensive school counseling program, a systemic approach is necessary.

At the school level, counseling programs need to have various organizational tools in place

Following the backwards design analogy, logistics like when, where, for how long and by whom counseling lessons/ interventions will be delivered must be decided so that the learning activities can be shaped accordingly

# Management: Current Practices @ CRLS

- CRLS counselors are in reactive mode.
- They are not the masters of their own time.
- Guidance counselors are spending a great deal of their time in meetings, doing administrative work and on scheduling
- There are no systems or structures in place that are aligned with MA Model 2.0's management system.
- This current model is inefficient, ineffective and unintentionally culturally biased.

# Management: Commendations

- Guidance counselors work very hard to get to know their students by meeting with them individually or during community meeting time
- The Guidance Coordinator completed a comprehensive guidance service delivery analysis
- Quality lesson plans have been developed.
- Current job descriptions [especially for the career counselor] are aligned with MA Model 2.0
- There is valuable information presented on the School Counseling page[s] of the CRLS website

# Management: Recommendations

## Organizational Issues:

MA Model 2.0 advocates that management “agreements” be created to support effective school counseling program delivery aligned with district identified goals. These agreements address:

- the identified needs of the students and the school (based on data analysis)
- the assignment of students to specific counselors (based on data analysis)
- where and when counselors have access to students to deliver curriculum
- the responsibilities of individual counselors for program management and delivery
- the professional development priorities for the school counseling department
- the priorities for guidance counselor evaluation

# Management Recommendations [cont.]

## Strategic Implementation of a Gradual Paradigm Shift

### Year 1: Getting Started [Planning]

- Have Administration and Guidance review the work done by the advisory council
- Identify a small step that can be taken as a “pilot”
- Select a group of students with whom to implement the pilot
- Assign which counselor[s] will be responsible for this pilot
- Establish administrator/counselor check in points to assess progress
- Run the pilot and evaluate outcomes
- Have counselor[s] create and present a “results report” at the end of the pilot

# Strategic Implementation of a Gradual Paradigm Shift [cont]

## Year 2: Scaling Up [a little]

- Explore steps to expand the pilot,
- Consider the kind of systemic changes needed to expand the pilot
- Create a strategic plan to move the pilot through this and following phases
- Create written agreements with counselors documenting how much time will be spent on the initiative,
- Conduct the extended intervention, evaluate and create a results report

## Year 3: Plan for further expansion [expand, revise and update the strategic plan]

## Year 4 and Beyond : Continue the process bringing the initiative to scale

# Management: Additional Recommendations

- Writing Days for counselors to complete letters of recommendation
- Professional development to move from cultural proficiency to culturally responsive practice,
  - Use data to identify caregivers and students who need a different approach to supporting their child's progress through high school as well as the post secondary planning process
  - Create meaningful programming for 1st generation students
  - Conduct outreach and engage students and caregivers from other cultures in having a successful high school experience as well as supporting them through the post secondary planning process

# In Summary.....

*In order for any significant changes to be made to improve the quality and inclusiveness of school counseling programming at CRLS, the way counselors spend their time must change. The culture of seeing one student at a time and waiting until the end of junior year to begin post secondary planning must shift. The inordinate amount of time some 12th graders spend with their counselors must shift by putting more responsibility on students, which in turn, requires that they be taught more about post secondary planning starting much earlier. This will require both a shift in the culture of the whole community as well as a willingness on the part of the administration to rethink how counselors can access groups of students in a manner that allows more than lectures, assemblies or reminders.*

***If social/emotional health and college and career readiness are true priorities, there must be time in a student's schedule to participate in learning activities that intentionally teach the competencies associated with these outcomes.***



# MA Model 2.0

## DELIVERY

Guiding question #1: *What is the role of the guidance counselor in a 21st century high school?*

The Delivery System answers the question “what do counselors do?”

As in backwards design lesson plan development, the learning activities should be developed AFTER desired outcomes, assessment strategies and logistics have been determined.

Delivery of direct and indirect services should take up 80% or more of school counselors’ time.

**Direct Services [counselors working directly with students]** include: classroom instruction and delivering the school counseling curriculum, individual and small group counseling, advising and academic planning, responsive services, grade level and whole school initiatives,.

**Indirect Services [counselors working on behalf of students]** include: consultation, collaboration, advocacy, and referrals with school staff, parents/families and community partners to enhance services and opportunities for students. This can include planning and delivering parent workshops and community presentations.

[MA Model 2.0 p.22]

# Delivery : Current Practices @CRLS

- Seniors: college applications [first ½ of year]
  - Juniors [2nd ½ of the year]
  - Scheduling and schedule changes.
  - Community meetings, IEP meetings. 504 meetings
  - Support for their Deans as needed, particularly when a student is in crisis.
  - Email and phone calls.
- 
- Naviance is the College and Career planning software platform but counselors claim they lack the time to train students and caregivers to use it optimally.
  - Multiple community partners willing to deliver Tier 2 services

# Delivery

## Commendations

- 50% of the current senior class completed early action or early decision college applications
- Lessons and resources for the post secondary planning process
- The *Career and College Planning Guidebook*
- The RSTA career counselor delivers curriculum
- Counselors have worked hard to establish relationships with many of their students

## Recommendations

- Guidance curriculum exists but it needs to be expanded and the systemic conditions that will allow its implementation must be considered and implemented
- Focused individual planning for rigorous course taking and post secondary options happens for some but not all. It needs to start earlier for ALL students.
- Tiered interventions exist but are not data driven.



# In Conclusion...

***By rethinking priorities, implementation strategies, etc. the district may be able to improve the utilization of existing personnel rather than looking to add another counselor as the solution to current inefficiencies and inequities.***