THE COMPREHENSIVE GUIDANCE CURRICULUM PROGRAM AND ITS EFFECTS ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

by

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ABSTRACT

Today, schools are under increasing pressure to provide students with a quality education while providing a safe, nurturing environment. The role of the school guidance counselor has begun to change from emotional and career counseling to being actively involved with student achievement rates, all while still being required to deal with the emotional and psychological problems of students. More states have begun to implement Comprehensive Guidance and Curriculum model to help counselors become more active in student and school achievement. Although much study is currently taking place, there is no conclusive evidence that supports that the Comprehensive Guidance Curriculum increases student achievement and lowers critical incident rates in schools, but studies do show that school counselors working in the context of a comprehensive school counseling program can contribute to academic achievement.
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction and Statement Problem

Introduction

School guidance counselors have had national standards implemented, which provide a comprehensive framework for the way guidance programs should run. These standards are intended to provide consistency throughout guidance programs in all public high schools, as well as help the role of the guidance counselor in all facets of their school. This comprehensive program was created because school guidance counselors were having difficulties defining their roles. Along with this confusion, administrators also feel that counselors could be better benefiting their school. The Comprehensive Guidance Counseling Program was created, based on the national standards, to answer these problems. So, does the Comprehensive Guidance Counseling Program provide better results in public high schools, and are the standards effective?

The Comprehensive model outlines the main components to give guidance to school administrators and counselors about what expectations should be met in the district. Every activity of a school counseling program should fit into one of four main categories, as they emphasize the core educational need for students in public educational systems. A new national model has been created as a standard for guidance programs throughout the country, and it sees guidance as an intellectually coherent, organized program with both preventative and remedial components that is structured to serve all children through a mix of intervention approaches (Lapan, Gysbers, and Sun, 1997). It is through the national and adopted state comprehensive models that the true role of the guidance counselor is defined. These models state that 1) a greater emphasis is placed on the goal of enhancing academic achievement and the connection to the mission of
schools, 2) uses the ASCA national standards in the development of the program’s curriculum, 3) emphasizes the use of quantitative data to describe problems, plan interventions, and measure student change, and 4) present specific mechanisms for managing the program and ensuring program accountability (Lapan, Gysbers, & Sun, 1997).

The Comprehensive Guidance Model can be broken down even further into three steps:

- Learn to Learn
- Learn to Work
- Learn to Live

The role of the school guidance counselor is changing with the implementation of the new comprehensive models. But the fundamental goal of the counselor is still to educate and inform students about the necessary skills that they will need to succeed in the workforce and in life. The Comprehensive model meshes with the greater emphasis for student achievement brought forth in *No Child Left Behind*.

The ASCA National Model builds on the solid foundations of the Comprehensive Developmental Guidance Model (Gysbers & Henderson, 2001), the Results-Based Model (Johnson & Johnson, 1997, 2001), and the National Standards (Campbell & Dahir, 1997; Dahir, Sheldon, & Valiga, 1998). It was specifically developed to address the growing need for standardization and accountability in school counseling programs. While there are tremendous variations in schools and student populations, school counseling programs can share many elements. This article uses the ASCA National Model as a structure to suggest the program components that school counselors can put into practice in order to create successful transitions for all students (Dimmitt & Carey, 2007). It is
through the combination of previous models and the use of data that has made the ASCA national model and other similar state models successful in tracking success rates, although the program is still relatively new.

Though the role of the guidance counselor is changing, ASCA has worked to ensure that counselors are contributing to the success of students and school districts. ASCA engaged in several initiatives to improve both the effectiveness of school counselors and the status of school counselors within the education community (Hatch, 2002; Perusse et al., 2004). For example, ASCA initially established role and function statements for school counselors, and then established recommended guidelines for student-to-counselor ratios (ASCA, 2003), developed the ASCA National Standards for School Counseling Programs (Campbell & Dahir, 1997), and revised the ASCA code of ethics (ASCA, 2004). Through these initiatives, state departments of education have modeled their own programs after the national model, as school districts try and achieve higher rates of student success and lower critical incident rates.

The State of Michigan has developed its own comprehensive counseling model based on the national model and the Missouri model. In 2002, a comprehensive guidance counseling curriculum became available. The model is based off of ASCA’s national model and demonstrates a renewed emphasis on school counseling programs. The comprehensive guidance model for Michigan has three components: Individual Planning, Responsive Services, and Systems Support. According to the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) website, the guidance curriculum consists of structured developmental experiences presented through classroom and group activities kindergarten through twelfth grade. Variations of the comprehensive guidance and counseling program model
(CGCP) have been adopted throughout the United States (Sink & MacDonald, 1998). Most schools have accepted this model as the basis of their counseling program, and it looks to be the model that is will be used for years to come.

The role of the guidance counselor, the ASCA national comprehensive guidance counseling model, and the state models have attempted to improve school districts across the country. Schools are under strain to create developmentally appropriate practices for all students. Recent changes in the American society accompanied by social and economic needs have increased, so too has the role of the counselor. Many families consist of dual or single working parents with extremely busy schedules, so counselors are required to help students in a number of facets, including career preparation, college application/searches, emotional guidance, and education.

Comprehensive guidance models have an advantage over previous or non-existent school counseling models because they help to assure that all students will acquire and demonstrate competencies in the areas of academic, personal-social, and career development. Students are required to know more about the world and new technologies than any generation before, so the components of the comprehensive guidance curriculum help students to achieve academic success, future planning, and lower rates of critical incidents. According to Granello & Sears, various reasons may contribute to counselors’ lack of involvement in increasing student achievement: the pressure of dealing with students’ mental health problems; principals’ tendency to involve counselors in administrativia; lack of knowledge and skills to do so; or a belief that such activities do not fall within the counselor’s role (1999). Regardless of the reasoning behind the lack of intervention, school guidance counselors must be aware that they are in the best position
to assess the school for barriers to academic success for all students (Granello & Sears, 1999). By defining a counselor’s role, students and school districts benefit and achieve more. Though research is still new and debatable, the Comprehensive Guidance Curriculum Model continues to be implemented and used by schools all over the nation.

**Statement of Problem**

In today’s changing public educational system, it is becoming increasingly difficult for public school districts to incorporate the necessary pieces of fundamental education, instruction, and curriculum necessary to meet the changing standards and benchmarks that are being forced upon them. With the emergence of *No Child Left Behind* and more rigorous standardized testing guidelines, public school districts must provide more resources to students with less funding. As these strains are being placed upon them, public schools are feeling the greatest crunch, as they struggle to find a balance between providing the best possible education and keeping their doors open. Because of budget and funding issues, often times some of the most important aspects of public education are cut down or eliminated completely. School guidance is an area where many administrators feel they can downsize, yet the National Standards for School Counseling and presidential administrative trends indicate that career planning and testing are at the forefront of public education. The preceding leads to the following question: How effective is the Comprehensive Guidance Curriculum in producing 1) higher academic achievement, and 2) lower rates of critical incidents?

**Purpose of Review**
This review of literature examines the role of the Comprehensive Guidance Curriculum Program in public schools, if the program helps to affect student achievement, what the actual intended outcomes of the program are, what the role of the guidance counselor is according to this model, and if student achievement is increasing because of the Comprehensive Guidance Curriculum Program. Research indicates a positive correlation between schools that have implemented the Comprehensive Guidance Curriculum and higher student achievement rates, although the research is still relatively new. The review will conclude with some recommendations for future research and study that will help to examine this important topic more in-depth.

To narrow the focus of this literature review, I am focusing on literature that has been currently published, paying particular attention to literature that has been published since 2003, the year in which ASCA created the Comprehensive Guidance Curriculum Program. Using the PsychInfo database as my primary basis for obtaining research articles, I searched the keywords “counseling,” “national standards,” and “comprehensive guidance” that resulted in 154 citations. A similar search of the key terms “counseling,” “comprehensive guidance,” and “achievement” resulted in 44 citations. From these various combinations and a Google search, I then was able to narrow my references to 31, using these articles and websites as my primary focus for evaluating the effectiveness of the Comprehensive Guidance Curriculum Program and how it relates to student achievement. Research indicates that schools who use the Comprehensive Guidance Curriculum displayed the following: 1) increased academic achievement, and 2) lower critical incident rates within the school district compared to schools who have not implemented the guidance curriculum and its framework.
Definition of Key Terms

Throughout this review of literature will be key terms that help to define and narrow the studies focus. The Comprehensive Guidance Counseling Program, according to this study, is a program for all school guidance counselors, which provides a method for school counselors within their school districts to organize their efforts to proactively address the needs of students. Its purpose is to help districts plan, develop, implement, and evaluate comprehensive and systematic guidance and counseling programs, which accomplish this goal. Lapan (2001) stressed the importance of comprehensive programs of guidance and counseling as a results-based system. The Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling Program has four program components:

- Guidance Curriculum,
- Individual Planning
- Responsive Services
- Systems Support

(http://www.michigan.gov, 2006)

Student academic achievement, according to this study, encompasses standardized test scores, student grade point averages, and graduation percentages of schools that have and schools that have not implemented the Comprehensive Guidance Counseling Program. According to the International Observatory on Academic Achievement, Student Academic Achievement is defined as the achievement by individuals of objectives related to various types of knowledge and skills. These objectives are socially established based on the age, prior learning and capacity of individuals with regard to education, socialization and qualification (CRIRES, 2005). Standardized Testing is defined as norm-
referenced tests that compare individual scores to others at the same grade level, also known as the norm, and usually only a small sample of content is tested (Ballard & Bates, 2008). *Graduation Rates* refers to the number of students who have completed the proper amount of course credits as determined by the school district and its board of education. A *Course Credit* is the basic unit of coursework measurement is the course credit, which refers to standardized Carnegie units. A Carnegie unit is a standard of measurement used for secondary education that is equivalent to the completion of a course that meets one period per day for one school year, where a period is typically at least 40 minutes (Thompson, Warkentien, & Daniel, 2009).

The term *Critical Incidents* are defined as the amount of suicides, suicide attempts, high level violence, and low level violence that occurs per year in schools that have and schools that have not implemented the Comprehensive Guidance Counseling Program. *High Level Violence* refers to possession and use of weapons, severe physical attacks. *Low Level Violence* focuses to include the chronic victimization of students by other students (Myer-Adams & Conner, 2007).

**Research Question**

Do public schools that have implemented the Comprehensive Guidance Counseling Program have higher student achievement and lower percentages of critical incidents than schools that have not implemented the Comprehensive Guidance Counseling Program?
CHAPTER TWO

Review of Literature

Introduction

The Comprehensive School Guidance Program is still a relatively new concept. ASCA presented its first comprehensive curriculum in 2003, and many states and schools have modified the program to fit the needs of their demographics. Guidance counseling curriculum has been around since the 1930s, although the job responsibilities of the counselor have not been adequately defined until recently. Many school districts across the United States still do not provide the appropriate state recommended mandated hours that each counselor should have per pupil. For example, schools cut costs in the guidance department, when studies have shown that counselors impact student achievement and graduation rates. In an early study, the implementation of guidance in the schools of the United States during the first two decades of the 20th century was accomplished by appointing teachers to the position of vocational counselor, often with no relief from their teaching duties and with no additional pay (Ginn, 1924).

Progression of the counseling position became apparent into the 1970s as vocational/career counseling, developmental counseling, and a greater emphasis on accountability in schools came to light. During this period the call came to reorient guidance from what had become an ancillary set of services delivered by a person in a position (school counselor), to a comprehensive, developmental program (Gysbers & Lapan, 2001). Early studies conducted on the 1) academic, and 2) behavioral and social benefits of the comprehensive guidance program yielded favorable results. According to Gysbers & Lapan, initial research evaluating relationships between guidance
interventions and student development support the positive impact of implementing a comprehensive guidance program (2001). Counselors are reporting that as implementation of the comprehensive program proceeds they: (a) spend more time with students, parents, and teachers; (b) spend more time in classrooms; (c) promote greater public understanding of the aims and objectives of the program; and (d) spend less time on clerical tasks and fill-in roles (Gysbers et al., 1999).

Academic Benefits in using the Comprehensive School Counseling Programs

Gysbers (2003) suggests that school counselors working in the context of a Comprehensive School Counseling Program can contribute to academic achievement. Upon conducting an analysis on the effectiveness of CSCPs in public high schools, school guidance interventions have been positively linked to academic persistence and achievement, school attendance, and classroom behavior (Borders & Drury, 1992). These findings have been replicated across special population groups, e.g., low-achieving students, disruptive students, learning-disabled students, gifted students, and students from divorced families (Borders & Drury, 1992). Academic achievement is at the forefront of almost all school districts agendas, and the emergence of CSCPs have helped counselors to redefine their roles and engage in helping student learning, achievement, and accountability.

Research is being conducted all over the nation regarding the effectiveness of CSCPs, but there have been a number of studies done to examine accountability and evaluative practices of schools using CSCPs. Schools must show a willingness to improve comprehensive guidance programs through systematic evaluation practices promotes the development of accountable guidance programs (Gysbers et al; 1992).
Two independent meta-analyses have both concluded that the integration of career
development (guidance) interventions with academic subjects leads to consistent
increases in student academic achievement across the K-12 years (Baker & Taylor,
1998).

Lapan, Gysbers, & Sun (1997) studied the relationships between the statewide
implementation of comprehensive guidance programs and the school experiences of high
school students. The study analyzed data from 22,964 students attending 236 Missouri
high schools using hierarchical linear modeling. Gerler (1992) called for evaluation
strategies that would allow data detailing the impact of the guidance program on issues of
local concern to inform school boards and school administrations.

The study analyzed Missouri School Improvement Program (MSIP) students and
school counselor survey data collected from 1992 to 1995. For each of these years, a
statewide, stratified random sampling procedure was used by MSIP to select schools to
be accredited. MSIP selected school districts to represent the diversity in geography,
district sizes, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status across the state. For the purposes of the
study, approximately 100 students were randomly selected from every high school
included in the MSIP files during this 4-year period. The final sample included 22,964
students from 236 Missouri high schools. Equal numbers of boys and girls participated in
this study. Approximately 24% of the students were receiving free or reduced lunch.
Approximately 11% of the sample were minority students. MSIP data were collected
from 434 school counselors who were currently working in these 236 high schools. Most
of these counselors were Caucasian (7% were African American, 0.2% were Hispanic
American) and female (60% female, 40% male). Most of the counselors had master's
degrees (86%), and cumulatively 95% of the total sample of counselors had earned a specialist, master's, or doctoral degree (Lapan, Gysbers, & Sun, 1997).

The study took into account a number of variables, including level of implementation of the guidance program, school enrollment size, the socioeconomic level of the school, and the percentage of minority students attending each school. Male students and nonminority students reported higher grades. Students who felt that there was more career information available in their school were more likely to report earning higher grades. Furthermore, students who felt that their school had a more positive school climate reported earning higher grades (Lapan, Gysbers, & Sun, 1997). On average, students indicated that they earned mostly Bs. Students enrolled in schools with a more fully implemented guidance program reported earning higher grades than other students.

The study also examined student perceptions that the school was adequately preparing them for their future. Students attending schools that had a more fully implemented guidance program were more likely to indicate that the quality of their education was adequately preparing them for their future than were students enrolled in schools with less fully implemented guidance programs (1997).

Overall, the study found that students who attended schools with more fully implemented guidance programs rated the climate in their school as being more positive. They reported greater feelings of belonging and safety in their school. They indicated that their classes were less likely to be interrupted by other students and that their peers behaved better in school (Lapan, Gysbers, & Sun, 1997). The results reported by this study fully support the ASCA’s Comprehensive School Counseling Program initiative,
and it puts a greater emphasis on counselors and the link between positive school environment and student achievement.

Along with Missouri, Utah has taken the forefront on incorporating the Comprehensive School Counseling Program. Due to strong guidance leadership in the state education department, both states implemented CSCPs as early as 1992. There have been state-wide efforts to study the effects of the program, specifically on student achievement and school environment (Gysbers & Lapan, 2001). Students in schools that had more fully implemented the Missouri Comprehensive Guidance Program (MCGP) reported: (a) earning higher grades; (b) that their education was better preparing them for their future; (c) that their school made more career and college information available to them; and (d) that their school had a more positive school climate (Lapan, Gysbers, & Sun, 1997).

In 2001, Lapan, et al. examined the impact that the CSCP was having on 7th grade students using state-wide school accreditation data. Results indicated that 7th graders attending schools where counselors were more likely to do these activities reported: (a) feeling safer at school; (b) having better relationships with teachers; (c) feeling that their education was relevant and important to their future; (d) being more satisfied with the quality of education in their school; (e) a better interpersonal climate between students; and (f) earning higher grades.

In Utah, similar studies with similar results have gotten many other states, including Michigan, interested in implementing the Comprehensive School Guidance Program. With a renewed interest in raising standardized test scores and creating a better school environment, CSCPs have began to make an impact in public high schools all over
the nation. Since 1993, more than 2,000 school counselors, administrators, and teachers have received intensive in-service training in this model. Currently, nearly every middle, junior high, and high school in Utah has participated in this school reform initiative (Gysbers & Lapan, 2001). Even with Utah’s unique geographic and demographic conditions, the state government and educational board has provided funding for the Comprehensive School Counseling Program, and results have mirrored that of Missouri. According to studies done in Utah, CSCP positively affects student achievement and helps to support a positive school environment. Students attending Utah public schools where CSCPs are more fully implemented were found to: a) be taking more advanced mathematics and science courses; b) be taking more technical classes; and c) have higher ACT scores in nearly every area of the test (Gysbers & Lapan, 2001).

Although there are many studies and research done that supports the notion that Comprehensive School Counseling Programs help to increase student achievement, not all researchers support this assertion, but they do support the fact that counselors can have an effect on student achievement under certain conditions. When school counselors carefully design and deliver strategic interventions aimed at increasing academic achievement, the likelihood that they will produce the hoped-for outcomes is substantial (Brown & Trusty, 2005). Peer-led groups, counseling, and tutoring are all strategic interventions that can have a positive impact on student achievement.

Edmondson and White (1998) found that an intervention composed of tutoring plus counseling, compared to tutoring alone or no treatment was an effective means for increasing the academic achievement of middle school students. Tutoring, whether conducted by peers or others, appears to be an effective method for increasing academic
achievement, and the organization and delivery of these programs are well within the scope of school counselors' roles as set forth in the ASCA National Model (2003). The former evidence suggests that these strategic interventions help facilitate student achievement, but according to Brown and Trusty, more studies need to be done to ascertain that this is indeed the case (2005). For school counselors to make the connection between student achievement and CSCPs, they must first be able to identify the factors that are involved with academic success or failure, and then target those individuals and skill levels to help meet their needs. Concrete information about which students are failing which classes gives counselors valuable knowledge to advocate for programs and policies which will be effective (Hayes, et al, 2002).

There are multiple factors involved with student achievement, like tardiness, absenteeism, low self-esteem/self-concept, student beliefs about abilities, etc. To determine student achievement and success as a group is difficult because in each individual case, the parameters are different. The counselor’s role is to help students individually through these problems to benefit the whole, including the school district. According to House, it is possible that students who are doing well academically are less likely to engage in conflict and are more attractive to both their peers and their teachers. Students who are more involved in extra-curricular activities and social events are more likely to feel connected to others in the school, are more motivated to do well academically, and are more successful (1999).

School guidance counselors work on a number of levels and age groups ranging from kindergarten through twelfth grade. Career planning and emotional guidance are strong areas in elementary and secondary schools, but where do the middle school
counselor’s role lie? According to a study done by Sink (2005), middle school counselors can influence academic development and performance, but their impact is largely secondary or tertiary to other educational activities occurring in the schools. Middle school counselors must make the bridge between student achievement and the other host of activities going through students’ lives. The counselors must know that "intermediate outcomes have a more immediate impact on student learning" (Brown et al., 2004, p. 432).

As such, counselors need to realize that conducting ongoing guidance lessons--for example, on educational planning--will not directly produce measurable gains on a particular classroom mathematics test; nonetheless, these instructional activities should immediately enhance the learning skills needed to master the subject matter explored in different classrooms. The study makes the assertion that CSCPs and school counselors may not change standardized test scores or individual grade point averages, but they have the power to help aid in the different subject areas, and help to foster the positive school environment that helps make students successful in all content areas (Sink, 2005).

Brigman and Campbell (2003) conducted a well-controlled experimental study on low achieving fifth, sixth, and eighth graders. The study examined the impact that school counselors had on student achievement and school success using an approach called Student Success Skills. These researchers demonstrated that about 70% of the students in the experimental group improved on average 22 percentile points, as measured by the School Social Behavior Scale. According to the study, not only were there significant group differences found between the experimental and control students' overall test scores, favoring the former group, but in mathematics and reading scores, 82% and 61%,
respectively, of the students receiving the guidance intervention improved (Rowley, Stroh, & Sink, 2005).

**Lowering Critical Incident Rates**

With research being new to the field, researchers are still debating whether or not Comprehensive School Counseling Programs do indeed lower critical incident rates. What cannot be debated is the fact that suicide and school violence is at the forefront of public school concerns. Suicide and violence topped the list of recommended *high-priority topics* for school counselor education programs to address (Allen, et al, 2002). Based on the unique characteristics of the individual, family, and community, those who intervene must tailor their support to align with what is needed and what will work. In particular, a needs assessment of crisis intervention could be utilized to evaluate concerns and propose strategies and possible solutions to improve services for students from diverse backgrounds (Canada et al., 2006).

In a study done by Lapan, Gysbers, & Petroski (2001), the researchers examined the relationships between statewide implementation of comprehensive guidance and counseling programs and indicators of safety and success for seventh graders. The study was done to show the effects that CSCPs are having on improving school safety. The study analyzed 7th grade students and middle school teachers between the years of 1992 and 1996. For each of these years, MSIP collected stratified random samples representative of all schools in Missouri. The data set analyzed in the study included 22,601 seventh graders and 4,868 teachers from 184 schools. Results indicated that schools with a more complete implementation of a comprehensive counseling program
were positively linked with school-level indicators of student safety and success ((Lapan, Gysbers, & Petroski, 2001).

**Environmental and Behavioral Benefits**

Research also supports effectiveness of Comprehensive School Counseling Programs on improving environmental and behavioral development in public high schools. Lapan, Gysbers, & Sun (1997) found that problems relating to academic learning, personal identity issues, drugs, and peer and family relationships are increasingly a part of the educational scene. Individual counseling, small group counseling, consultation, and referral are included as ongoing services of the responsive services component of the comprehensive guidance program. The responsive services component organizes guidance techniques and methods to respond to individual concerns and needs; it is also supportive of the guidance curriculum and individual planning components. Although school counselors have special training and possess skills to respond to students’ current needs and concerns, the co-operation and support of parents and the entire faculty are necessary for this component’s successful implementation.

Through the responsive services component of CSCPs, a major aspect of the counselor’s role still extends to crisis counseling, diagnostic and remediation activities, and consultation and referral (Lapan & Henderson, 1997). As seen in the chart below, responsive services and individual counseling should take up anywhere between 25% to 40% of a school counselor’s activities during the day. Though everyone wants to address the issue of student achievement, counseling students and responding to individual issues is still a largely important part of a counselor’s job.
In the previously mentioned study of 7th graders in Missouri, Gysbers, Lapan, & Petroski examined how safe these students felt within their schools. By using these five indicators (a) perceptions of safety in school, (b) satisfaction with their education, (c) grades, (d) perceptions of their relationships with teachers, and (e) perceptions of the importance and relevance of education to their future, the following questions were examined:

1. Are student indicators of safety and success positively related to student characteristics (i.e., sex, minority status, objective assessment of the quality of life in one's school, and amount of time spent on homework)?

2. After controlling for differences between schools due to enrollment size and socioeconomic size and socioeconomic level, are more fully implemented comprehensive guidance and counseling programs related to each of the five indicators of student safety and success?
3. Do school enrollment size, socioeconomic level, and level of implementation of the school counseling program significantly affect the regression slopes between student characteristics and student indicators of safety and success?

The results were conclusive favoring more implemented CSCPs and their positive affects on the school environment. After controlling for between-school differences in SES and enrollment size, more fully implemented school counseling programs significantly predicted (a) student perceptions of being safer in their schools ($T = 3.23, p < .01$), (b) better relationships between students and teachers ($T = 2.61, p < .05$), (c) greater satisfaction of students with the education they were receiving in their schools ($T = 5.14, p < .001$), (d) perceptions that one's education was more relevant and important to one's future ($T = 2.63, p < .05$), and (e) earning higher grades ($T = 3.27, p < .01$) (2003). According to the study, students who went to schools with CSCPs that were fully or near fully implemented, reported having a better school and learning environment – one of ASCA’s initial goals in developing the comprehensive guidance programs (Gysbers, Lapan, & Petroski, 2001).

In another study done by the Ferguson-Florissant School District, a middle school implemented a conflict resolution program as part of its overall guidance program. The climate of the middle school was changed because the program helped to reduce the number of referrals sent to the office that addressed student problems and conflicts (Gysbers; et al, 1992).

**Research Opposing CSCPs Link to Student Achievement**

Lapan and Gysbers are the current leading proponents in the field of CSCPs and their link to student achievement, lower critical incident rates, and a better school environment, but Brown, Trusty, and Sink have all published findings that question the
link between CSCPs and student achievement that the former proclaim. A recent study by Brown and Trusty (2005) asserts that there is little support for the proposition that CSCPs increase student achievement.

In a response to the Brown and Trusty (2005) findings, Sink asks the bigger question: did the framers of the ASCA model really intend that their guidance model would result in higher test scores and grade point averages (Sink, 2005, p 3)? As studies continue to analyze the data from Comprehensive Guidance Curriculum programs, student achievement continues to be a major concern for the guidance counselors in today’s schools.

According to Sink & McDonald, ASCA has in no way erred in its efforts to reorient school counseling programs to focus on academic achievement. But CSCPs must have goals other than improving academic achievement such as enhancing personal growth and promoting career development (1998). For schools to create tasks and programs for counselors to help aid in student achievement makes sens, but according to Sink & McDonald, to link student achievement with no empirical evidence is naïve (1998). In addition, a major component of the ASCA National Model involves responsive services, that is, those services designed to deal with crises, personal issues, and consultation with parents or teachers. Some of these activities may make students feel more secure at school and better about themselves, but the link between the school counselors' activities associated in the responsive services component of CSCPs and academic achievement has not been established. The development of CSCPs throughout the country is well underway and should continue with deliberate haste (Brown & Trusty, 2005).
Critics are skeptical about using standardized tests scores and school graduation rates to make generalized statements about counselors affect on student achievement. Directly speaking, no matter what research design is deployed in school counseling studies, it is virtually impossible to make airtight causal statements about the direct effects of any small-scale (proximal) educational innovation let alone systemic programs such as CSCPs (Spirtes, Glymour, & Scheines, 2001; Sink, 2005). According to Sink, other multivariate statistical approaches (e.g., discriminant analysis, hierarchical linear modeling) also can be used effectively to explain a significant proportion of variance in student achievement outcomes (2005). Inferences can still be made using the findings from studies, but these inferences require researchers to make generalizations from large sample sizes without any airtight positive correlations (Sink, 2005).
CHAPTER THREE
Analysis of Data

Discussion

Comprehensive School Counseling Programs have begun to be implemented in schools across the nation since the early 1990s. The mission of the ASCA national model (2003) asserts that schools who implement a CSCP can: 1) Establish the school counseling program as an integral component of the academic mission of the school. 2) Ensure every student has equitable access to the school counseling program. 3) Identify and deliver the knowledge and skills all students should acquire. 4) Ensure that the school counseling program is Comprehensive in design and is delivered systematically to all students. School counselors, working within the framework of Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling Programs, increasingly are being asked to demonstrate that their work contributes to student success, particularly student academic achievement. Not only are school counselors being asked to tell what they do, they also are being asked to demonstrate how what they do makes a difference in the lives of students (Gysbers, 2004).

The Comprehensive Guidance Curriculum Program and the link to student-achievement and lower critical incident rates are still being identified and debated, due to the newness of the model and the number of schools implementing the model into their school systems, but data supports the notion that schools with more fully implemented CSCPs achieve higher rates of student achievement and help promote a better school atmosphere. The ASCA model aimed to stimulate school counselors to develop school counseling programs (CSCPs) and align the goals of their program with the goals of today’s schools, which would increase academic achievement of all students (Brown &
Initial research supports the positive impact of Comprehensive School Counseling Programs (Gysbers & Lapan, 2001). Based on studies done, students report that they are meeting with their counselors more and their meetings are more meaningful and important to them (Hughey et al., 1993). Counselors are reporting that as implementation of the Comprehensive Program proceeds they: (a) spend more time with students, parents, and teachers; (b) spend more time in classrooms; (c) promote greater public understanding of the aims and objectives of the program; and (d) spend less time on clerical tasks and fill-in roles (Gysbers et al., 1999). These findings have been found to be true amongst many different spectrums, including learning disability students, gifted students, disruptive students, and at-risk students (Gysbers & Lapan, 2001).

The Comprehensive Model for Guidance Curriculum is proving to have a positive affect on student achievement, although research in this area is still relatively new. Program evaluation studies conducted in Missouri (see Gysbers, 2001; Lapan, 2001, for summaries), and to a lesser extent in Utah (Nelson & Gardner, 1998), indicate that CSCPs can have a positive influence on various noncognitive and cognitive student outcomes, including achievement (Sink & Stroh, 2003).

In a study done by Lapan, Gysbers, & Sun, (1997) students who attended schools that had more fully implemented comprehensive guidance programs reported earning higher grades. It appeared that schools that were spending time with students to more fully implement comprehensive guidance programs did not detract from student academic progress but may, in fact, have played a positive role in enhancing student academic achievement. This research indicates the correlation between CSCPs and higher academic
achievement in public school districts.

Research indicates that schools with fully implemented counseling programs also have lower incident rates. Today, counselors have the daunting task of dealing with challenges that stem from academic, environmental, socioeconomic, and multicultural. At a point in American history when schools are searching for effective ways to respond to issues of violence, drugs, dropouts, teenage pregnancy, adolescent suicide and depression, the quality of life (QOL) available to students in schools has become a critical educational issue (Lapan, Gysbers, & Petroski, 2001). Evaluation is becoming a more essential part to determining the effectiveness of CSCPs, as concluded a study in Missouri schools which linked the responsive services aspect of the Comprehensive Counseling Program to lower referral rates in middle schools and lower amounts of student conflicts (Gysbers; et al, 1992).

Comprehensive Guidance Curriculum Programs seem to have the greatest measurable affect on improving school learning environments and students’ perceptions about their schools. In a case study done by Lapan, Gysbers, & Sun, students attending high schools in Missouri reported feeling better about their schools with more fully implemented counseling programs (1997). These students reported earning higher grades, spending more time with their counselors, feeling that their schools is better preparing them for the future, and indicating that classes were less likely to be interrupted by other students and misbehaving peers (Lapan, Gysbers, & Sun, 1997). Similar studies were replicated in Utah public schools concerning CSCPs and the affects that guidance counselors can have on school environments.

Lapan et al. (2001) used teacher accreditation data to examine the impact of CSCPs
on 7th graders. These results stated that students felt safer at school, had better relationships with teachers, noticed a better school climate, and achieved higher grades. These findings, mixed with the fact that counselors are now becoming actively involved with increasing academic achievement has led to a better school environment, as reported by students. Studies from Utah and Missouri report that schools with fully implemented Comprehensive Counseling Programs see an improvement across the board, including student achievement, critical incident rates, and a safer learning environment.
CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

School counselors and counseling programs have a great impact on students and school districts. Counselors aide in career planning, individual and group counseling, responsive services, student achievement, and much more. There are very few areas within schools where counselors don’t have an impact. Counselors are not merely teachers who sit behind a desk and drink coffee, so the image of the school guidance counselor is having a face-lift with the implementation of Comprehensive School Counseling Programs. CSCPs provide counselors and students with a clearer definition of the school counselor role, which helps lead to higher student achievement, lower incident rates, and a better school environment. Professionals are asking school counselors to see themselves as educational leaders, student advocates, and social change agents (ASCA, 2003).

A continuing question surrounding CSCPs is do they work? The Comprehensive Guidance Curriculum Program and the link to student-achievement and lower critical incident rates are still being identified and debated, due to the newness of the model and the number of schools implementing the model into their school systems. Research supports the notion that schools with more fully implemented programs do indeed have the capabilities of improving school environments, student’s performance, student’s perceptions, and possibly standardized test scores. The ASCA model aimed to stimulate school counselors to develop school counseling programs (CSCPs) and align the goals of
their program with the goals of today’s schools, which would increase academic
achievement of all students (Brown & Trusty, 2005, ¶1).

With the emergence of No Child Left Behind and now the current educational
reform plans of the Obama Administration, schools are under increasing pressure to
improve student achievement. For this reason, there is even a greater need for evidence-
based programs. Federal and state education dollars are being earmarked specifically for
programs and practices meeting these types of guidelines (Webb, Brigman, & Campbell,
2005). The concern lies in accountability. Though accountability isn’t new to school
counselors, there is now a greater push to prove the impact that school counselors have
on schools and students. Being accountable is simply a part of the guidance and
counseling work that is done day to day in schools. It is a way that this work can be
improved and its effectiveness demonstrated (Lapan, 2003).

So why is it so important for schools and school counseling programs to be held
accountable? A student’s education is extremely important today compared with the past
because of the demand for high technology, high thinking positions. Students today are
required to know more, be more adaptive, and more technological savvy than ever before.
Through career guidance, exploration of educational development plans, and career
pathways, counselors help formulate a student’s long term life goals, as well as help
he/she deal with the present. It is recognized that school counselors work within a system
and are impacted by a variety of influences, such as stakeholders, policies, and climate
(Brott & Myers; Paisley & McMahon, 2001). However, the individual school counselor
must work within the system, manage the influences, struggle with priorities, and make
Do CSCPs actually help students achieve more and digress less both academically and emotionally? As shown from the studies above, more fully implemented counseling programs can help, although the newness of the models are still being studied and debated. Gysbers, Lapan, and others have formulated favorable studies in Utah and Missouri, while Sink and Brown still need more evidence to be convinced that school counselors can have a dramatic affect on student achievement.

Whether counselors and school districts implement CSCPs or not, educators have to be aware of the educational and environmental benefit that counselors can have. Lapan (2001) recognized this and stated that counselors should always be asking themselves the following questions:

1) How can the essential work of the school counselor (i.e., counselor roles, duties, functions, and interventions) be improved to be of greater benefit for all students?

2) How can school counselors’ time on varying tasks be redistributed to improve benefits for all students?

3) How can each comprehensive program be more effectively tailored to better meet the needs of each local school?

4) How can the comprehensive program become central to the mission of each school?

5) How can school counselors establish better partnerships between school personnel, parents, and business and community leaders?

6) How can school counselors better advocate for effective programs with local, state, and national policymakers?
With these questions in mind, school counselors are redefining their roles and impact that they have on students. Helping students survive and succeed in a competitive world is still the goal, as ASCA points out in the three fundamental objectives: Learn, Work, and Live. But with a new educational era and a greater renewed focus on accountability, school counselors must jump to the forefront and prove the effectiveness of their program. Gysbers summed it up best when he said, “Accountability talk is not enough. It is important to remember that expressing concern about accountability is necessary but it is not sufficient. It is time for action. It is time for school counselors and their leaders at all levels to accept the challenge of accountability. The past has much to offer us concerning this challenge and how to address it. Let us use the wisdom of the past to address the challenge of accountability today and tomorrow” (Gysbers, 2003, p 11).
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