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What Are the Expected Benefits Associated with Implementing a Comprehensive Guidance Program?

Lapan, R.T., Gysbers, N.C. and Sun, Y. (1997). The impact of more fully implemented guidance programs on the school experiences of High School students: A statewide evaluation study. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 75, 292-302.

The Comprehensive Guidance Program model was originally developed in the 1970s by Norm Gysbers. This model sees guidance as an organized developmental education program rather than as an ancillary set of student services. Many State Departments of Educations have adopted this model and many school districts have implemented this model. Relatively few studies of how implementing a comprehensive guidance program affects student outcomes have been undertaken. Establishing the benefits to students that can be expected to result from a district's implementation of a comprehensive guidance program is an important question. Why should a school district invest time and expense without knowledge of the benefits to students? The Lapan, Gysbers, and Sun (1997) article is an evaluation of impact of comprehensive developmental guidance implementation on student outcomes. The evaluation included data from a statewide group of 236 high schools in the state of Missouri.

Methods.

For the past twenty years, the State of Missouri has run a school accreditation program. Every school in the state is reviewed on a five year cycle. The self-study process associated with accreditation review includes the collection of survey data from students, parents and school personnel. School Counselors rate the extent to which elements associated with a comprehensive guidance program are evident in their schools. Lapan, Gysbers and Sun (1997) use the high school accreditation data base to develop several measures. These include:

- 1) Student Self-Rating of Grades (single item).
- 2) Student Ratings of the Availability of Career and College Information (single Likert item)
- 3) Student Ratings of the Extent to which their Education was Preparing them for the Future (single Likert scale item).
- 4) Student Liking for School (single Likert scale item).
- 5) Student ratings of Positive School Climate (five Likert scale items)
- 6) Counselor report of Level of Implementation of the Comprehensive Guidance Program (32 item survey)

In addition, data on students' demographics (e.g. gender, racial/ethnic status, and parents education) and school characteristics (e.g. school size, minority enrollment) were collected to use in the analyses as statistical controls. The researchers used Hierarchical

Linear modeling to study the relationships between student outcomes and the level of implementation of the comprehensive guidance model controlling for differences between schools.

Findings:

In schools with more fully implemented comprehensive guidance programs:

- 1) Students reported higher grades.**
- 2) Students were more likely to indicate that their school was preparing them well for later life.**
- 3) Students were more likely to report that career and college information was readily available to them**
- 4) Students were more likely to report a positive school climate (defined primarily in terms of perceptions of safety, orderliness and belonging).**

Implications:

This research study is clearly consistent with the contention that the implementation of a Comprehensive Developmental Guidance Program will result in educational benefits including increased student achievement, more equitable services to students, broader impact on students' development and career decision-making, student satisfaction with the relevance of their education, and the development of a safe, orderly, connected school climate. The study clearly argues in favor of districts' adoption of a Comprehensive Guidance Model.

Recently, the American School Counselors Association has developed a new National Model that builds on and extends the Comprehensive Developmental Guidance model. In the near future, public school districts will need to weigh the costs and benefits of implementing the National Model. Like the Comprehensive Developmental Model, the new National Model 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. The National model 1) places greater weight on the goal of enhancing academic achievement and the connection of the guidance program with the academic 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) presents specific mechanisms for managing the program and ensuring program accountability.

Given the similarities between the two models, it is likely that implementing the National Model should result in many of the outcomes noted in Lappan, Gysbers and Sun (1997). It may be that a National Model program would show an even greater effect for academic achievement given its explicit focus in this area. As evaluation studies of the National Model will be necessary, it is important now to begin the design of instruments

to measure both the degree of implementation of the National Model and the expected outcomes of implementing the model. In addition to large scale evaluations, it would also be helpful to evaluate the features of the National Model that are additions to the Comprehensive Developmental Model (e.g. report card use in accountability) to determine the particular advantages of these program components.

Critical Perspectives:

This research by itself does not prove that the implementation of the Developmental Guidance Program was responsible to the positive outcomes noted. Given the correlational nature of the study, it could just as well be, for example, that schools that are fully implementing the comprehensive guidance model were also implementing other educational programs that directly impact achievement. More complete guidance implementation and higher student grades might both result from a high schools' organizational, leadership and/or personnel strengths (rather than being causally related to each other).

Similarly, the self-report nature of the outcome measures makes it impossible to measure the "size of effect" of the implementation of a comprehensive guidance program. It is impossible to know what value is added by the implementation of a comprehensive program. A future study measuring the changes in more standardized and objective indicators of student benefit (e.g. student achievement test scores, college placement data, scores on standardize measures of school climate) following the implementation of a comprehensive guidance program is needed.

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