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## School Counselor Evaluation: Why it should be different

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## School Counselor Evaluation—Why should it be different?

by Dr. Brandie Oliver, Pres. of IN School Counselor Assoc./Asst. Prof. at Butler Univ. & Dr. Nick Abel, Butler Univ.

Imagine a student in your school approaching you about his grade in English 10. When you reach out to the teacher, you get the following response: “Well of course he failed English 10 – he did poorly on every geometry test I gave!” While this is obviously a ridiculous premise, the idea of an English teacher using math tests is not too far removed from the idea of a teacher evaluation scale being used to rate the performance of a school counselor. While there is certainly some overlap, we are essentially talking about very different skill sets, roles, and responsibilities.

School counselors are educators and vital members of the school community, and like all educators in an age of accountability, they need to be evaluated on the work they do with students, parents, and teachers. But what does that evaluation look? How does one quantify the care and support provided by the school counselor? In what settings can an administrator observe a school counselor, especially considering the confidential – and sometimes unpredictable -- nature of the counselor’s work?

The seminal work on teaching practice and evaluation is arguably Charlotte Danielson’s, *Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching*, 2nd ed. In it, Danielson clearly lays out the case for evaluating school counselors (and other “specialists”) in ways that are unique to their positions, rather than through methods developed for classroom teachers. To quote Danielson, “The framework for teaching is just that – a framework for teaching; it is not a framework for school nurses, school psychologists, [and other specialists]...their positions are essentially different from those of teachers and must be described separately” (p. 109). Danielson goes on to suggest a model of school counselor evaluation on a scale from “Unsatisfactory” to “Distinguished” across 4 domains and 22 components, each of which is unique to the role of the school counselors. Examples of these components include:

- 1a: Demonstrating knowledge of counseling theory and techniques.
- 1c: Establishing goals for the counseling program appropriate to the setting and the students served.
- 2c: Managing routing and procedures.
- 3b: Assisting students and teachers in the formulation of academic, personal/social, and career plans based on knowledge of student needs.
- 4c: Communicating with families.

So if there is agreement among experts that school counselors need to be evaluated differently than teachers, the questions become, “How do we evaluate them?” and “What tools are available?” We are glad you asked! Aside from Danielson’s model, the following might be good places to start:

- American School Counselor Association (ASCA): School Counselor Competencies
- IDOE: Professional School Counselor Effectiveness Rubric
- Ohio School Counselor Association: Ohio School Counselor Evaluation System

We encourage you to have an open dialogue with your school counselor regarding evaluation, and to work together to develop ways to assess the work they do. As direct observations are required for all educators, a key step would be working together to find optimal times and settings to observe your school counselor at work in a variety of non-confidential settings, such as classroom guidance, parent presentations, and committee meetings. Above all, we hope you will consider the various ways in which your counselor impacts school climate, parent involvement, and student achievement, and that you will design ways to evaluate their unique contributions, rather than relying on tools designed to assess teacher performance.

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such as truancy, curfew violations, runaways and such things as liquor violations. Nationally, over 10,000 students experienced some time in detention in the courts for non-violent behaviors with truancy being the number one offense. Acknowledging this shortcoming, some states have made the move to make the out-of-school suspension and expulsion of students illegal by state statute (for non-violent behaviors) requiring schools to make greater use of alternative solutions to solve this growing problem. A combined approach of restorative justice - focusing on the need of the victims as well as the offenders – has shown great promise in some states to keep young people out of the court system. Admittedly, this potentially puts more stress on school personnel and community agencies, but relieves the courts to deal with more violent behaviors of both an adolescent and adult nature.

The Indiana Partnerships Center makes the following suggestions for immediate implementation in Indiana schools:

- 1) Amend the state’s definition of attendance to draw a distinction between chronic absence and truancy. Both terms now are defined as 10 unexcused absences.
- 2) Count days on which a student is suspended from school as absences.
- 3) Encourage districts to develop consistent definitions for excused and unexcused absences.
- 4) Identify chronic absence as a measure that districts should track and report to the state.
- 5) Launch an attendance campaign spelling out the connection between attendance and achievement and dropout rates.

**IASP and Your Voice:** IASP testified in February, 2014 regarding HB 1287 and the many potentially discouraging aspects, and a follow-up article was written which contains a good summary of our viewpoint: <http://tinyurl.com/Discipline1287>. Becoming aware of this issue and then telling your story, as the article suggests, to legislators and county officials will allow us to work as an Association, 2400 members strong, to craft a solution. This will address a very real issue while allowing building administrators the ability to positively impact their building climate. Schoolhouse News will keep you updated, but the work you do this fall will make a difference in January as legislators consider decisions impacting discipline, data, and disproportionality.