Hints For Hiring School Counselors: Using Your New School Counselor Effectively

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Hints for Hiring School Counselors: Using Your New School Counselor Effectively

by Dr. Brandie Oliver and Dr. Nick Abel, Butler University School Counseling Program

Now that you have hired a new school counselor, you may want to examine how your school has traditionally used the counselor, and whether assigned roles/tasks have been the most effective means for improving student outcomes. In this column, we will discuss the use of a school counselor’s time -- specifically, the recommendation by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) that 80% of a counselor’s time be devoted to delivery of a comprehensive school counseling program.

Big news was made in Mississippi prior to the 2014-2015 school year when the state Senate passed SB2423, a portion of which mandated the 80% delivery ratio mentioned above (see http://bit.ly/1ObFcfY). Essentially, state lawmakers showed their support of ASCA’s belief that trained school counselors should be spending the vast majority of their time on activities that directly contribute to student outcomes in academics, college/career readiness, and social/emotional wellbeing. Interestingly, it was around the same time that the Indiana Chamber of Commerce Foundation released a report on the state of school counseling in Indiana. One finding showed that the percentage of time counselors in our state spent on “non-counseling duties” had risen from 18% in 2010 to almost 40% in 2013. When asked for examples, school counselors listed things such as test coordinator, substitute nurse, and school mascot coordinator (yes, this is true!). While we fully recognize the importance of “fair share” duties in creating a cohesive, cooperative staff, we encourage administrators to take a hard look at how they are utilizing school counselors, and whether their expectations for the school counseling program are aligned with national standards and connected to student outcomes.

So what are the proper uses of a school counselor? And what does 80% of time spent on program delivery actually look like? We’re glad you asked! ASCA divides that 80% into two categories: Direct and Indirect services. Direct services include face-to-face interactions with students. In a typical school, these should include a school counselor’s time -- specifically, the recommendation by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) that 80% of a counselor’s time be devoted to delivery of a comprehensive school counseling program.

We hope you have enjoyed these columns throughout the year, including the recent series on hiring. It is our hope that every administrator sees the value in school counseling and feels a passionate need to put the right counselor in place at their building, and increase collaboration and support between administration and the counseling department in an effort to improve student outcomes.