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Hints for hiring school counselors: What does it mean when an applicant graduates from a CACREP accredited program?

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

As we approach the hiring season, some of you will undoubtedly be searching for a school counselor. You will likely be faced with a tough decision as you wade through resumes and interview candidates, all the while wrestling with the question of what exactly you are looking for in a school counselor. Do you want a strong leader? Student advocate? Task-master? Data guru? Clone of your previous counselor? The hiring of any staff member is a delicate balancing act in which you weigh the knowledge, skills, and personalities of applicants against the specific needs and culture of your school. While we recognize that no two hiring situations are exactly the same, we plan to use the next two upcoming columns to provide tips that might help make your counselor hiring process a bit easier. First up, an explanation of what it means to be a graduate from a CACREP (Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Education Programs) accredited school counseling program.

As you might be aware, many undergraduate and graduate degree programs seek accreditation from one or more national organizations dedicated to ensuring excellence in training. One such example is CAEP (Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation), formerly NCATE, which holds undergraduate teacher training programs to high standards, assures quality, and supports continuous improvement to strengthen P-12 student learning. In the world of counseling, CACREP accreditation demonstrates excellence. CACREP has been around since 1981 and is an agency recognized by both the American Counseling Association and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). CACREP accredits Master's and Doctoral programs in a variety of counseling-related specialties, including school counselor education. School counseling programs accredited by CACREP have gone through a rigorous, multi-year process to demonstrate they are meeting a large set of standards related to program design, faculty training, course content, and intentional field work in K-12 schools, all meant to ensure that students receive quality experiences and instruction.

Currently, all CACREP accredited Master's degree programs in school counseling require a minimum of 48 semester credits, but in the near future CACREP will require that programs transition to 60 semester credits. Given this large amount of coursework, you can rest assured that each CACREP graduate is entering the field of school counseling as prepared as possible -- equipped with not only the required knowledge, but also the skills to be an effective and data-driven school counselor.

The bulleted items below capture just a few of the skills required of school counselors trained in CACREP programs:

- Provide individual and group counseling and classroom guidance to promote the academic, career, and personal/social development of students.
- Design and implement prevention and intervention plans related to the effects of (a) atypical growth and development, (b) health and wellness, (c) language, (d) ability level, (e) multicultural issues, and (f) factors of resiliency on student learning and development.
- Provide crisis response (including assessing for suicide).
- Demonstrate multicultural competencies in relation to diversity, equity, and opportunity in student learning and development and work to address gaps in equity and access.
- Collaborate with parents, guardians, and families to promote the academic, career, and personal/social development of students.
- Apply data to inform and enhance the school counseling program.
- Participate in the design, implementation, management, and evaluation of a comprehensive developmental school counseling program.

While we realize that no set of training standards can assure 100% quality across the board, CACREP accreditation does signify that a school counselor education program is highly dedicated to student outcomes and continuous improvement. We hope that as you review resumes and notice applicants who have graduated from a CACREP program, you keep in mind that at a minimum these students have received high quality, nationally recognized training. As you engage in the rigorous interview process, please ask these candidates about their training from a CACREP accredited program to hear firsthand about the comprehensive experiences that have prepared them to be change agents equipped to build, implement, and evaluate a comprehensive school counseling program. Please visit the CACREP website for additional information regarding accreditation standards and processes. <http://www.cacrep.org>

Stay tuned for the next two articles in this series dedicated to assist you in finding the best school counselor candidate for your job opening.