

A Process Model

This outline provides a process for counselors and other stakeholders to become involved in the design of a comprehensive counseling program. Counseling program development is a process to plan, design, implement, and evaluate program effectiveness. A measure of that effectiveness will be the program's ability to identify and meet the changing needs of students. Consequently, the process provides for purposeful change and growth. A school district which supports this process will see the relevance of the process for 1) designing new counseling programs, 2) improving existing counseling programs, and 3) evaluating and documenting counseling program effectiveness.

Effective counseling programs require a continuous process of planning, designing, implementing, and evaluating. The continuous process is presented in four phases:

Planning Phase

- Step 1: Decide to change
- Step 2: Get organized
- Step 3: Select guidance committee
- Step 4: Assess current program

Designing Phase

- Step 5: Conduct needs assessment
- Step 6: Identify student competencies
- Step 7: Develop written curriculum

Implementing Phase

- Step 8: Plan implementation

Evaluating Phase

- Step 9: Evaluate program

Planning Phase

Step 1: Decide to Change

Districts readily see the importance of a comprehensive, developmentally planned school counseling program. The challenge is how to make the transition from an existing program to a comprehensive program. Three conditions are necessary to successfully meet this challenge:

- The board of trustees and administrative staff make a commitment to the process. Counseling personnel will need to meet with the board of trustees and district administrators to gain support and approval for a comprehensive counseling program. The support is crucial to ensure allocation of resources, release time for planning, and approval of the final product.
- The counseling personnel and/or district administrator(s) recognize a need for change, revision, and/or evaluation. Counseling personnel will need to become familiar with the comprehensive program model; the curriculum planning process; implementation strategies; and evaluation tools.
- The key administrator(s) actively participates in the process. Active participation on the part of administrators will ensure the elimination of current counseling activities that do not support new priorities identified in the curriculum planning process.

Step 2: Get Organized

A model for curriculum development will need to be selected. The model presented in this document was adapted from the Montana School Counseling Program Model as designed by the Montana School Counselor Association. However, Montana districts have the freedom to select any model that best fits their curriculum design and philosophy. Each district will need to adapt an organizational structure and model that has a “common language” in curriculum design throughout their district.

Written Proposal

Once a model has been selected, a written proposal specific to each district should be developed. The written proposal will serve as an overview of the counseling program model for the district personnel and the guidance committee members. The proposal defines and articulates the:

- Rationale for comprehensive programming
- Structural and program components
- Curriculum planning process

Conditions

- All staff/administrators are involved and committed.
- Counselors must be willing to make changes.
- Design for a transition, not a abrupt change.
- Establish a "vision" of the program — know change process:
Planning — Designing — Implementing — Evaluating

Resistance

- Expect it — Appreciate the anxiety of change
- Counselors may have to change — acquire new skills/new responsibilities and be accountable for helping students acquire specific competencies.

Trust

- Counselors may need time/privacy to develop trust in program and each other.
- Trust is essential for the process to move forward.
- Eventually, trust from faculty and others in the process must be gained.

Challenges

- Programs are based on student competencies.
- Programs are accountable for these competencies.
- Programs are developmental.
- Programs are responsive to changing student-school-community needs.
- Counselors need to develop new competencies.
- Counselors need to be involved in community and curriculum.

Program Content

- Focus is on content in a program, not process of position.
- The content is for all students.
- Program focuses on developing effective learners, workers, and good citizens.

Academic	Career	Personal/Social
<i>Learning to Learn</i>	<i>Learning to Work</i>	<i>Learning to Live</i>

Program Structural Components

- Foundation – Definition, Philosophy, Assumptions, Mission, Standards
- Delivery System – Curriculum, Student Planning, Responsive Services, System Support
- Management System – Agreements, Advisory Council, Data and Time Management
- Accountability System – Program, Personnel, Results, Reports

Step 3: Select Guidance Committee

Essential to the success of the counseling program development will be the involvement of representative populations directly or indirectly affected by the counseling program. A guidance committee serves to assess and review the present program, propose ideas, and promote an understanding of the counseling program with the school and community.

The guidance committee should include representatives from students, parents, teachers, counselors, administrators, and possibly school board trustees. The inclusion of community representatives and human service workers may contribute additional perspectives.

Members may be selected through appointments or from volunteers. Membership of the guidance committee may be affected by school district size. However, a committee is crucial to any school district regardless of size. Membership is recommended not to exceed 10.

Guidance Committee Organization

Larger districts may choose to organize a district guidance committee comprised of select administrators, school board members, counselors, and teachers. Their purpose may be primarily to oversee and guide the curriculum planning process. In addition, at each building level, a building committee would be organized. The building committees would be comprised of representative teachers, students, parents, and building-level counselors and administrators. The purpose of each building committee is to assist in the actual design and implementation of the counseling program.

The guidance committee will need to be trained in the comprehensive program model in an effort to gain their support, commitment, and trust.

Guidance Committee Functions

The guidance committee serves the school district and functions within the conditions

established for similar curriculum and advisory committees. Functions might include:

- Establish a mission statement to give purpose and direction for members.
- Prepare a master timetable to provide direction to the process.
- Determine the status of the existing program.
- Define the structural and program components of the counseling program.
- Write/revise the district's counseling philosophy to ensure that it complements the educational philosophy of the district and reflects the elements of a comprehensive counseling program.
- Determine desired percentages of counselor time to be assigned to each program component (guidance curriculum, student planning, responsive services, system support) at each building level.
- Identify key decision makers (those persons in the school and community whose understanding and support will generate resources for the counseling program).
- Identify the characteristics of the students (the social, cultural, economic, and political factors unique to the community) which would influence the needs of students.
- Serve as an advocate of the counseling program.

Step 4: Assess Current Program

The transition from the current program will require a comparative assessment of what is currently in place with what is wanted. An assessment of the current program will require the following:

- Identify current resources available, including personnel, facilities, and materials.
- Identify current counseling responsibilities and activities.
- Identify who is served by the current program.
- Prepare a summary of the current program assessment.

Non-counseling Activities

Non-counseling does not imply unimportant activities. The non-counseling activities are very likely an essential part of the overall school program. The question is: Are these activities best and most effectively performed by counselors? Some schools have come to rely on counselors performing these tasks. It will become the responsibility of the guidance committee to make recommendations for reassignment of non-counseling activities if they do not support the priorities identified through the curriculum planning process.

Designing Phase

Step 5: Conduct Needs Assessment

An essential step is to ascertain counseling needs, since goals and competencies established on the basis of a needs assessment are more apt to be relevant. Most importantly, the assessment:

- Provides concrete data for the basis of a counseling program.
- Establishes priorities for program planning and/or revisions.
- Provides for an accountability base in the counseling program.

A needs assessment identifies priorities of the counseling program within the philosophical framework of the school and community. The assessment determines what the students' needs or desired outcomes are. The process provides support for the continuation of successful counseling activities with sufficient feedback for change if necessary.

The Assessment Process

The guidance committee will design the needs assessment. Their input and involvement throughout will be the key to a successful and relevant assessment. There are a variety of ways to determine counseling needs of students. Interviews, analysis of community communications, surveys, and developmental needs analysis will be briefly explained.

- Interviews—group or individual interviews permit the use of structured and open-ended questions. The information acquired can be useful but time-consuming to collect. Validity depends upon knowledgeable sources and the quality of the interview process.
- Developmental *needs analysis*—a study of the developmental needs of a given age group that falls within the span of the counseling program.
- Surveys—a survey approach that involves students, parents, teachers, and administrators in identifying priority needs from a list of potential counseling needs is recommended.

Defining Student Needs

It is important to carefully select items for the needs assessment. The results of the needs assessment will shape your final counseling program. Student competencies, upon which the counseling curriculum is established, are simply a restatement of student needs. Needs should be considered which address the fundamental aspects of the counseling program. Equal importance should be given to the four content areas (personal, social, educational, and

career/life planning) as items are selected for the instrument. A list of student needs should be generated from content area and grade level or grade-level grouping. A preliminary study of developmental needs and stages of human development will assist the guidance committee in selecting need items for the assessment. Sources of human development theory include Havighurst, Sullivan, Erikson, Piaget, Kohlberg, and Super.

Items for a needs assessment can be generated at the local level or may be selected from instruments already developed. In choosing items for the assessment instrument, districts may find it helpful to refer to compiled lists of student competencies. The American School Counselor Association has compiled the National Standards for School Counseling Programs. These standards provide a useful starting place for the development of student competencies.

Step 6: Identify Student Competencies

The needs assessment data will need to be integrated into the National Standards in order to customize student competencies based on community or district needs. If the needs assessment uncovers additional needs, then these needs must be translated into student competency statements. Student competencies are merely a restatement of student needs.

Example:

- Needs statement: To understand, accept, and like myself better
- Student competency: Students will understand, accept, and like themselves

Once the student competencies are identified:

- Prioritize those student competencies.
- List student competencies by content areas and grade levels or grade-level groupings.
- Cluster the student competencies into similar categories. The clustered student competencies will be further defined by goal statements.

Step 7: Develop Written Curriculum

A necessary and integral component of a comprehensive counseling program is the written curriculum plan. The written plan serves as a structural guide for the delivery of counseling services, thus setting the parameters of the counseling program.

Developmental Scope and Sequence Chart

The written plan must be organized around a developmental scope and sequence. Therefore, it

may be helpful for districts to organize their curriculum data into a scope and sequence chart. Such a chart would incorporate the content areas, program goals, and student competencies by grade level.

Select Outcomes, Activities, and Resources

The student outcomes or indicators are essentially the same as competencies, but broken down into smaller steps that are more readily measurable. Student indicators are written so that behavior is observable, thus measurable. The indicators should reflect what students will accomplish as a result of the strategies and experiences provided. Measurable indicators must be more than a statement of what teachers or counselors will do to, or for, students. The outcomes identify what a student is expected to know and/or do as a result of counseling activities. Outcomes are a key to evaluating program effectiveness. Strategies and resources used to achieve outcomes define how it will happen. Examples of strategies could be individual or group counseling, classroom guidance, parent consultation, or in-service presentations.

Current counseling activities may already be helping students achieve competency outcomes. Other competencies may require new programs, strategies, and activities. A search of literature, reviewing catalogs, talking with colleagues, and participating in workshops may identify appropriate programs or strategies.

Implementing Phase

Step 8: Plan Implementation

Once a plan is developed, it only becomes an issue of implementing the program through the delivery system. Program implementation must be realistic and practical. This involves the comparison of the identified program goals and available time and resources.

The guidance committee has previously determined the desired percentages of counselor time by program components. Tasks and activities not serving the identified needs should be modified or eliminated. Alternative means to accomplish the services more efficiently should be explored.

The preceding activity may have transferred some counseling duties, for the purpose of best allocation of time and resources, to other school personnel. Some duties may remain the primary responsibility of the counseling personnel. Such duties may not have measurable student outcomes and may be difficult to evaluate in terms of specific student performance. These types of activities will fall within the realm of system support.

The curriculum plan should reflect to what extent the student competencies will be developed within the program components. The percentage of the counselor's time designated to each program component (guidance curriculum, individual planning, responsive services, and system support) must be compared against the priorities established by the guidance committee.

Reassess

The curriculum plan will need to be reassessed based on what is attainable with available resources, both human and material. This process will require consideration of:

- Time—is there enough time available to accomplish the curriculum plan? Student indicators may be eliminated, or substitutions made, depending on time constraints.
- Resources—are there sufficient resources, both human and material, to accomplish the curriculum plans? Identify resources available to the counseling program, including teacher, administrators, counselors, parents, and community members.

The priority of student competencies may have to be modified or postponed based on the reassessment of time and resources. Some student competencies may be best addressed by other departments. It is essential that counselors work closely with those departments to

provide appropriate assistance and resources.

Resource Development

Resource development is a product of the reassessment process. Discrepancies between staff competencies and availability of resources to meet student needs may become apparent. A plan for staff development may be warranted for specific skill acquisition and professional growth. A worthy counseling activity may have been postponed due to lack of material resources. The plan for resource development should include procedures to purchase, borrow, or develop essential resources.

Master Calendar

Develop a master calendar of the school year, categorizing activities under the appropriate components. The master calendar systematically shows how each building level is going to accomplish the curriculum plan.

Job Description

A job description will further define and clarify the role of the school counselor. As a job description is developed, ensure that it reflects the actual job tasks and responsibilities of each building-level counselor.

Evaluating Phase

Step 9: Evaluate Program

Evaluation is a process used to determine the effectiveness of the counseling program. The process should be systematic, comprehensive and ongoing. There are various levels and methods for evaluating programs to “be accountable.” Evaluation has and will continue to occur throughout the planning and designing stages of the process. These guidelines suggest that an evaluation plan should cover three aspects:

- Program
- Personnel
- Results

Program Evaluation

Program evaluation is simply an evaluation of the structure and implementation of the counseling program. It includes an examination of the four program components in relation to program standards.

Personnel Evaluation

The personnel evaluation, specific to school counselors, provides a summative evaluation of their effectiveness. Many districts require that the personnel evaluation be consistent for all district staff. If your district has the latitude to create an evaluation tool specific to the unique tasks of a school counselor, many examples are available through counseling literature and the American School Counselors Association.

Results Evaluation

A variety of techniques, including tests, observations, surveys, questionnaires, and interviews may be devised or purchased to measure attainment of student outcomes. An internal evaluation of outcome completion is an effective tool for evaluation requiring minimal time. The internal evaluation is the counselor’s or teacher’s documentation of outcome attainment. An example of outcome evaluation is: 18 of 20 students could list, in sequence, the major steps involved in making decisions. Evaluation measures *how well* the outcome was achieved. Collection of evidence necessitates organizing and compiling data for immediate feedback and year-end reports. An expansion of the curriculum plan to include the evaluation measurement will expedite the process.

Student outcome evaluation can also be achieved through the use of a student assessment instrument. The student assessment instrument should be brief and easy to complete. Ideally the entire student population would be assessed when appropriate per grade level. Otherwise, a sampling of the student population would meet the requirements for the evaluation process.

Monitoring Data

Some evaluations will be ongoing while others will be accomplished at specified times in the school year. Evaluation requires continual monitoring of program needs and student competencies. A major value of comprehensive program development is that program competencies include the criteria for determining whether outcomes have been reached. Continual monitoring of desired outcomes and strategies will allow feedback for continuation of successful activities and modification or elimination of ineffective elements.

Reporting Data

Results of the evaluation process are compiled, summarized, and presented to the distinct administrators, school board trustees, and other key decision makers. The type of format used should be appropriate to the receiving audience. It can be a simple statement of outcome results or an elaborate system of graphs. Most importantly, it should be concise and easy to understand and to the point. The evaluation process will:

- Determine program effectiveness and provide support to the counseling program
- Help school personnel communicate the worth of the counseling program to school and community members
- Provide greater efficiency in time, personnel, and resources
- Give direction for needed change and growth

Summary

The process outline in these guidelines provides for planning, designing, implementing, and evaluating comprehensive school counseling programs. Programs can be comprehensive when based upon 1) a K-12 developmental sequence, 2) academic, career and personal/social needs of students, and 3) translating student needs into goals, competencies, outcomes, implementation strategies, and evaluation procedures. Programs are accountable when they can demonstrate a positive influence on students.

Completing the process will create outcomes that serve the needs of students across the state.

Completion of the outlined process will enable a school district to:

- Develop programs unique to their schools and communities based upon identified student needs.
- Build evaluation procedures for establishing and maintaining program effectiveness.
- Maximize the use of available resources, both human and material.
- Verify that the counseling program is an integral part of the education system.

Whereas the focus of this document has been to present a systematic process for developing, improving, and evaluating comprehensive counseling programs, the central purpose remains to enhance meaningful learning experiences for all students in the state of Montana.