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The Process

It is logical that an evidence-based, data-driven comprehensive school counseling manual be built on evidence and data outcomes. For the purpose of supporting our manual's infrastructure, outcomes from the six state studies communicated through the 2012 special edition of the *Professional School Counseling* journal are used to identify foundational constructs. **This manual is not proposing a *model* of evidence-based, data-driven comprehensive school counseling. Rather, this manual is proposing a *process* by which school counselors can quickly evolve using their current interventions to establish a data-driven comprehensive school counseling program using evidence-based interventions whenever possible.**

Evidence-based, data-driven comprehensive school counseling is not standards-based school counseling but is, rather, focused on identifying how to both provide developmentally appropriate preventative programming for all students while also prioritizing populations of inequity and offering those students evidence-based interventions. While achieving those outcomes, school counseling standards may be met as well. However, the priority when building an evidence-based, data-driven comprehensive school counseling program should be a focus on the needs of students and equity gaps as identified by data, rather than learning standards as identified by adults. Many school counselors feel comfortable with a set of standards to be met by all students. Our perspective is that if one does use standards, the standards should also be data-driven, based on evidence, and linked directly to student outcomes. A recent publication, *Achieving Excellence in School Counseling Through Motivation, Self-Direction, Self-Knowledge and Relationships* by Squier, Nailor, and Carey (2014), is the first to propose evidence-based standards

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for comprehensive school counseling programs. It is important to note that when the tenets mentioned above are applied, a comprehensive school counseling program meets most of the standards to qualify as a Recognized ASCA (American School Counselor Association) Model Program (RAMP), often considered the “gold standard.” Thus, details related to RAMP (including a checklist detailing application requirements) and the evidence-based, data-driven process will be covered in each chapter.

As previously mentioned, the data and evidence from the 2012 special edition of the *Professional School Counseling* journal will be used to provide a template for the process. Not all research findings from the studies presented in the 2012 special edition of *Professional School Counseling* will be used, as not all are within the control of the school counselor as he or she builds a program. For example, although school counselors may advocate for a lower student-to-school-counselor ratio, it is not usually in their power to hire additional school counselors to lower that ratio. Yet four of the studies found that student-to-school-counselor ratio had significant implications for critical data elements. Further, lower student-to-school-counselor ratios resulted in improved attendance rates (Carey, Harrington, Martin, & Hoffman, 2012; Carey, Harrington, Martin, & Stevenson, 2012), improved attendance rates in high-poverty schools (Lapan, Gysbers, Stanley, & Pierce, 2012), fewer discipline issues (Carey, Harrington, Martin, & Stevenson, 2012; Lapan, Gysbers, et al., 2012), lower suspension rates (Lapan, Whitcomb, & Aleman, 2012), increased rates of attaining technical proficiency in career and vocational programs (Carey, Harrington, Martin, & Hoffman, 2012), and improved completion and graduation rates (Carey, Harrington, Martin, & Hoffman, 2012; Lapan, Gysbers, et al., 2012). Obviously, advocacy by school counselors for additional colleagues will result in significant positive outcomes for students. Other research (Carrel & Hoekstra, 2011) suggests that hiring a school counselor is more impactful on student achievement than reducing class size. In addition, having a school counselor reduces negative behaviors by approximately 20% for males and 29% for females compared to schools that did not have counselors (Carrel & Hoekstra, 2011). School counselors can have a powerful impact on student achievement, yet many of us are not equipped with the skills or tools to illustrate our impact on student behaviors and outcomes.

In order to provide an infrastructure and to identify constructs upon which to build an evidence-based, data-driven comprehensive school counseling program, the following central findings from the studies will be used:

Central Construct	Outcome	Study
The program is built upon a strong ASCA National Model orientation	Increased ACT scores, increased percentages of students taking the ACT, and enhanced student achievement in math and reading	Utah Study Carey, Harrington, Martin, & Stevenson (2012)
The school counseling program emphasizes a differentiated delivery system as prescribed by the ASCA National Model and by traditional comprehensive developmental guidance (CDG) (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012)	Decreased suspension rates, decreased discipline rates, increased attendance, and enhanced student achievement in math and reading	Nebraska Study Carey, Harrington, Martin, & Hoffman (2012)
The school counseling program uses data	Increased student achievement in math and reading, decreased suspension rates, fewer student self-reports of being teased or bullied, and increased graduation rates in vocational programs	Utah Study Carey, Harrington, Martin, & Stevenson (2012); Dimmitt, Wilkerson, & Lapan (2012)

Carey and Dimmitt (2012) provide a synopsis of implications for program building using the outcomes of the six studies:

After a differentiated delivery system is in place, developing the mechanisms that support planning, management, and professional decision-making may become more salient factors because these mechanisms increase the effectiveness of the services actually delivered. If this interpretation is correct, it has implications for program development. In implementing an ASCA National Model program, the most effective approach may be to focus first on helping counselors develop a differentiated delivery system, then focus on

developing the mechanisms (e.g., mission statement, advisory council, decision-making processes) that guide the management of these activities. (2012, p. 147)

PURPOSE

The purpose of this book is to provide a step-by-step process for implementation of an evidence-based, data-driven comprehensive school counseling program built from the constructs of the research outcomes described above. Further, the true purpose of this book is to equip school counselors to exist and thrive within an achievement-focused environment while still primarily serving students' holistic needs. How do we, as school counselors, assert our relevance and advocate for the vital importance of serving students' nonacademic needs in an environment primarily focused on academic achievement? Thankfully, when students' needs are met—when they are healthy, safe, and feel connected—they achieve higher academic scores. Instead of shifting our professional identity, school counselors simply need to become more intentional and evaluative and then share the results of the interventions. We know what to do; we have been educated and trained to discern how best to intervene on behalf of our students. But what we lack is how to document our efforts in terms of student outcomes. Bridging the gap from “showing what we are doing” to demonstrating “how students are different as a result of what we are doing” is what is needed. Data changes often are the “coin of the realm” that we can provide to administrators and educational stakeholders who provide us a return of additional freedom to help students. Hopefully, this book will help you free the shackles of clerical work to focus on direct service and program management for students. Providing direct services to students does not mean that you release yourself from all accountability to your administrators, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders. Rather, you embrace gathering data and accountability practices realizing that these are opportunities to show others how effective you can be at impacting the lives of your students. The purpose of this book is to arm school counselors with strategies and skills to ensure they are free to help more students.

An evidence-based, data-driven comprehensive school counseling program can be built through the following steps:

1. Assessing the current school environment (see Chapter 2) as it relates to school-defined goals (as detailed in school improvement plans), as it relates to student equity gaps (as detailed in school report cards or other achievement data or achievement-related data), and as it relates

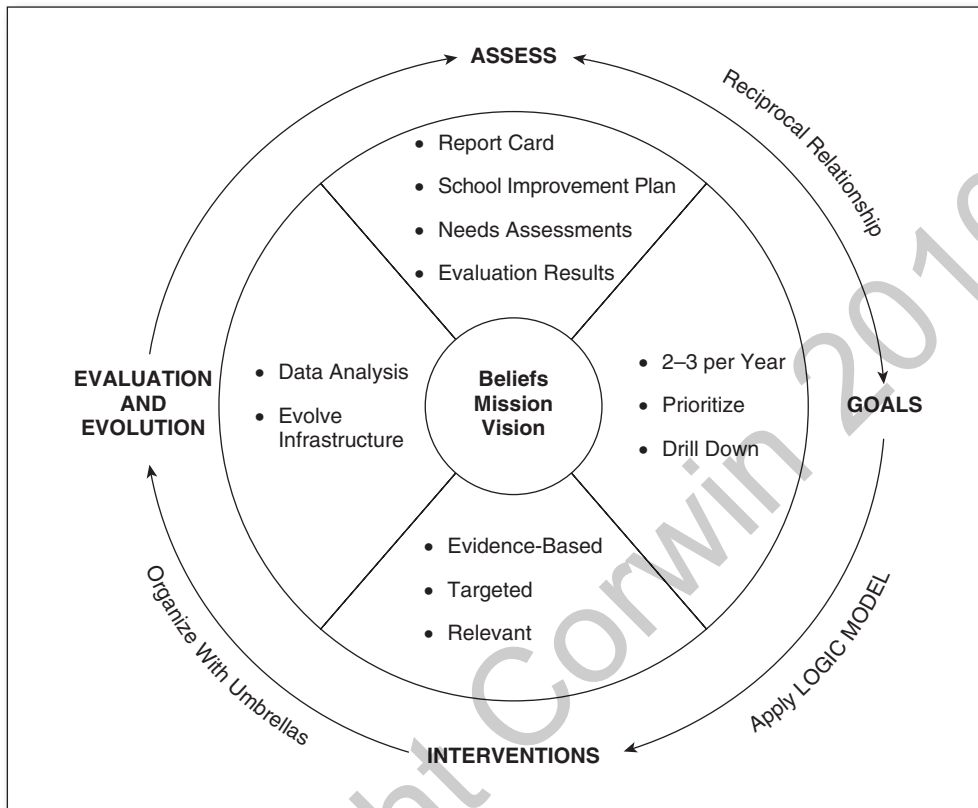
to connecting student-identified needs and student-identified barriers to success with the data previously mentioned. This data is needed both for decision-making and for designing an appropriate differentiated delivery system.

2. Setting school counseling program goals (see Chapter 3) using the data collected in Step 1. An important aspect of setting school counseling program goals is using the data collected from Step 1 to prioritize how to spend your time, targeting specific needs, which will (hopefully) result in specific outcomes. Steps 1 and 2, together, encapsulate a data-driven decision-making model, and the relationship between Steps 1 and 2 is reciprocal. That is, each step co-occurs, and one often informs the other. A logic model will be used to explain this process more clearly in Chapter 3.
3. School counseling program beliefs, mission, and vision define the direction of the program (see Chapter 4).
4. Choosing interventions strategically (evidence-based whenever possible) to meet student-identified needs (the outcomes), which consequently alter data prioritized by adults in schools (achievement data, achievement-related data, and competency-related data) (see Chapter 5). This step provides developmentally appropriate evidence-based interventions to meet students' needs. Again, the logic model is used to explain this process clearly.
5. Evaluating specific interventions (Hatch [2014] refers to this as the *flashlight approach*) to connect the intervention with outcomes. Strategies for organizing interventions using visual umbrellas and creating Excel spreadsheets for collecting data will be presented in Chapter 6. Further, strategies for evolving programs based on intervention evaluation will conclude this chapter.
6. Chapter 7 concludes the manual by connecting the evolution of the interventions to the first step of the manual—how to assess the school environment, how to evolve program goals, and how to refine the mission and vision of an evidence-based, data-driven comprehensive school counseling program.

This process is visually represented in Figure 1.1 on the next page.

We will use the process described above to “identify what needs to be addressed, which interventions or practices should be implemented, and whether the implemented intervention or practices were effective” (Dimmitt, Carey, & Hatch, 2007, p. 4).

Figure 1.1 Process for Building Evidence-Based School Counseling Program



Note: The arrows indicate the reciprocal relationship of various aspects of the process.

THE ASCA NATIONAL MODEL AND EVIDENCE-BASED, DATA-DRIVEN COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL COUNSELING

Evidence-based, data-driven comprehensive school counseling is easily organized using the American School Counselor Association’s academic, career, and social/emotional domains (ASCA, 2012). An organizational structure listing school counseling program interventions by domain (umbrellas) will be introduced in Chapter 5. Further, the Recognized ASCA Model Program (RAMP) (ASCA, 2014) evaluation rubric contains many components of evidence-based, data-driven comprehensive school counseling, such as a vision statement (Item 1), mission statement (Item 2), program goals (Item 3), a school counseling curriculum action plan (Item 8) and results report (Item 9),

a school counseling small-group results report (Item 10), a closing-the-gap results report (Item 11), and an overall program evaluation report (Item 12). Other items within the RAMP rubric, such as the annual agreement (Item 5) and calendars (Item 7), are valuable tools used to prioritize time and to organize implementation of evidence-based interventions throughout the school year. In addition, evidence-based, data-driven comprehensive school counseling programs create an intentional school counseling curriculum (Item 8) and intentional small-group interventions (Item 10). However, the curriculum and small groups are designed to meet student needs, as identified by students, within a logic model resulting in positive outcomes. Hence, of the twelve items included in RAMP submissions, eight are directly addressed through evidence-based, data-driven comprehensive school counseling programs, two are valuable assets to organize evidence-based, data-driven comprehensive school counseling programs, and two others are used in alternative formats within evidence-based, data-driven comprehensive school counseling programs. If the RAMP process is indicative of the focus of ASCA programs, then it is clear that making data-driven decisions and using evidence-based interventions to build a comprehensive program to remove barriers to student success is indeed a priority.

Results from the Utah and Wisconsin studies of the 2012 special edition of *Professional School Counseling* highlight the positive impacts of a more fully implemented ASCA National Model, with positive correlations with increased ACT scores, increased percentages of students taking the ACT, and enhanced student achievement in math and reading (Carey, Harrington, Martin, & Stevenson, 2012). In recent years, the ASCA has published resources to assist school counselors in data management (Kaffenberger & Young, 2013; McDougal, Graney, Wright, & Ardoin, 2010) and also provided training materials on the ASCA website to assist school counselors in managing data and choosing interventions (e.g., ASCA U's school counseling data specialist course and the Power of SMART Goals webstream) (see www.schoolcounselor.org). You must be a member to take advantage of the resources organized under the "Professional Development" and "Pubs, Periodicals, and Podcasts" sections of the ASCA website.

DEFINITIONS

The following definitions are important for understanding concepts and processes explained in this manual:

American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model.

This refers to the third edition of a model that has evolved to provide

“components of a comprehensive school counseling program” (American School Counselor Association, 2012, p. xii). The focus is on improving student achievement.

Recognized Recognized ASCA (American School Counselor Association) Model Program (RAMP). This is a designation for schools that have earned recognition from the ASCA for having a program that meets twelve components illustrating that the school counseling program aligns with the ASCA National Model. Schools must apply for the designation and submit a self-study indicating how their programs meet the twelve components detailed in the RAMP Rubric (American School Counselor Association, 2014).

Data-Driven Decision-Making. This is “a school improvement approach that uses quantitative data analysis techniques to help describe problems and to direct activities and resource allocations” (Dimmitt, Carey, & Hatch, 2007, p. 17).

Evidence-Based Interventions. Within this text, the term evidence-based interventions will be interchangeable with the term *research-based interventions*, which “refer to interventions that have evidence of effectiveness from high-quality outcome research” (Dimmitt, Carey, & Hatch, 2007, p. 49).

Comprehensive School Counseling Program. “Comprehensive in scope, preventative in design and developmental in nature,” these school counseling programs focus on meeting the needs of all students through academic, career, and social/emotional programming and interventions (American School Counseling Association, 2012, p. xii).

Logic Model. This is a visual representation of a process that represents the relationship between variables or factors that lead to some outcome. It can often be a diagram or flow chart.

Umbrellas. Umbrellas are program organization tools. They are visual representations of interventions targeting issues identified using data. The interventions are organized under the three domains represented in a comprehensive school counseling program: (a) academic, (b) career, and (c) social/emotional.

Measurable. Quite simply, for the purposes of planning assessment of a school counseling intervention, one must ask, Can it be measured? Can the success or failure of the intervention be evaluated?

Results or Outcome Data. This data reflects behavior change. Related to achievement, it “reflects the academic learning and progress of students”

and can include data from state achievement tests, other standardized achievement tests, SAT and ACT or other college entrance exams, algebra passing rates, grade point averages, college acceptance rates, completion rates for college-preparatory activities, advanced-placement test scores, and others (Dimmitt, Carey, & Hatch, 2007, p. 29). This data reflects how students' behaviors are leading to different outcomes, hopefully due to a combination of your interventions and others. Stone and Dahir (2010) provide an excellent list of various types of data in the appendix of *School Counselor Accountability: A MEASURE of Student Success*.

Perception Data. This type of data is useful to understand students' knowledge, attitudes, and skills (Hatch, 2014). Perception data measures “whether (a) students' attitudes or beliefs changed or shifted as a result of an activity or intervention, (b) students learned the skill (attained the competency), or (c) students' knowledge increased (Hatch, 2014, p. 75).

Process Data. This is the who, what, when, and where of data collection. This data is vital for informing others about what the school counselor did and with whom. As Hatch (2014) suggests, this data provides the who, what, when, where, and how often but *does not* address the question, So what happened as a result of the activity? (How did behaviors change? How are student different?)

Global Data. For the purposes of this manual, global data refers to data that is provided in a manner that does not relate to student level. For example, state report cards detailing how many students are achieving competency in math is global data; it does not reflect why individual students are not achieving competency. To learn the reasons a student is not achieving competency, specific data about the student is needed.

Specific Data. This is student-level data that reveals information about strengths of the student or barriers to student success. Some examples of specific data are demographics, individual results from a needs assessment, or results from participation in a focus group. Specific data is useful for intervention planning. It provides direction and focus and helps determine which intervention might be most effective. Whereas global data might let us know a problem exists, specific data will help us define the problems and explore possible solutions. It might also help us identify existing strengths upon which to build intervention.