



Facilitating Career Development through Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling Programs K-12

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In this the first decade of the 21st century, Friedman (2005) declared that the “world is flat,” meaning that individuals and companies are collaborating and competing globally. According to Friedman the world is flat because of ten forces at work including the falling of the Berlin wall, the introduction of Netscape, work flow software, open-sourcing, outsourcing, offshoring, supply-chaining, insourcing, informing, and finally, by something he called the steroids – digital processing.

As the power of these forces continue to unfold, they are causing substantial and long lasting changes in the occupational, industrial, and social structures of the United States and countries around the world. Work and work places are becoming more global, characterized by technological change moving at near light speed. “More and more workers and the organizations in which they work are developing global identities” (Feller & Whichard, 2005, p. 23).

Responding to the Challenge of Change

Given these dramatic changes, it is imperative that young people today are prepared to make successful transitions within our educational system, to work, or to further education upon leaving our K-12 institutions. What knowledge, skills, and attitudes will be required of students for these purposes? The report of the National Center on Education and the Economy (2007) titled “Tough Choices Tough Times” recommended the following:

Strong skills in English, mathematics, technology, and science, as well as literature, history, and the arts will be essential for many; beyond this, candidates will have to be comfortable with ideas and abstractions, good at both analysis and synthesis, creative and innovative, self-disciplined and well organized, able to learn very quickly and work well as a member of a team and have the flexibility to adapt quickly to frequent changes in the labor market as the shifts in the economy become ever faster and more dramatic. (p. 8)

Knowledge, skills, and attitudes such as these do not appear suddenly on the day students are ready to leave school. They require substantial time and attention to develop, be assimilated, and used by students beginning in elementary school. Their development requires strong academic and career and technical education preparation as well as comprehensive guidance and counseling programs that feature career guidance and counseling and related academic and personal/social activities.

Programs that Feature Career Guidance and Counseling

Today, the major way to organize guidance and counseling activities and services in schools is the comprehensive guidance and counseling program (American School Counselor Association, 2003; Gysbers & Henderson, 2006; Johnson & Johnson, 2001; Myrick, 2003). The use of the comprehensive guidance and counseling program approach began in the 1980s. In 2003 the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) endorsed the program concept by publishing the ASCA National Model.

A comprehensive guidance and counseling program as described by Gysbers and Henderson (2006), consists of four elements: content, organizational framework, resources, and development, management, and accountability. The *content* element identifies the knowledge, skills, and attitudes considered important by school districts for students to master as a result of their participation in the district’s program. The *organizational framework* contains three structural components (definition, rationale, assumptions), four program components (guidance curriculum, individual student planning, responsive services, system support), along with a suggested distribution of school counselor time by grade levels across the four program components. The *resource* element consists of the human, financial, and political resources required to implement the program. The last element, *development, management, and accountability*, describes phases of putting the program into full operation as well as evaluating and enhancing it once implemented.

The Content for Career Guidance and Counseling

Today the ASCA national model (2003), the National Career Development Guidelines (America’s Career Resource Network, 2006), all state models, and all local school district models for comprehensive guidance and counseling programs feature career guidance and counseling content for students to master grouped under the domain of career or a related title. These models also feature content related to career grouped under the domains of academic and personal/social. Corresponding to other educational disciplines the content in these domains is increasingly being cast as standards. The standards are then subdivided into smaller units and are displayed by grade level or by grade level groupings as goals, indicators, or grade level expectations.

The use of the work standards to describe the career development knowledge, skills, and attitudes students acquire from their participation in comprehensive guidance and counseling programs is designed to align these programs with other instruction. The American School Counselor Association (2003) defined guidance standards as “those

statements providing a description of what students should know and be able to do at the highest level of expectation” (p. 32). Thus, the content base for career guidance and counseling consists of a number of standards each indicating a particular aspect of career development knowledge and skill students should acquire.

Delivering Career Guidance and Counseling Activities

The three major direct delivery components for career guidance and counseling are the guidance curriculum, individual student planning, and responsive services. The *guidance curriculum* consists of career guidance and counseling activities as well as academic and personal/social activities specified by grade levels and presented systematically K-12. The guidance curriculum “is a specific plan with identified lessons in an appropriate form and sequence for directing teaching” (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998, p. 4). It provides students with needed knowledge, skills, and attitudes. *Individual student planning* focuses on assuring that all students, beginning in middle school, develop and use personal plans of study. Students use the knowledge, skills, and attitudes acquired from their experiences in the guidance curriculum to develop and use personal plans of study to guide their work in school and to make successful transitions to work or post secondary education. *Responsive services* provide students with the opportunity to meet one to one with school counselors to discuss career and related academic and personal/social issues.

Advocacy: An Ethical Responsibility

A major goal for school counselors and other educational personnel, working within the framework of comprehensive guidance programs, is to help all students connect to school by being their advocates. This means helping all students find purpose and direction in their education and their future lives. Career guidance and counseling content and activities drawn from the career domain, and the related domains of academic and personal/social, play central roles in helping all students succeed in school and plan for the future.

The Preamble of the American School Counselor Association Ethical Standards for School Counselors (2004) stated that school counselors are advocates. The Standards go on to point out that students of all circumstances, backgrounds, and conditions have the right to access comprehensive career guidance and counseling programs. The Standards also emphasize that all students have the right to receive information and support as well as the right to understand their choices now and in the future.

Notice the emphasis on career guidance and counseling in these statements, particularly the statement that focuses on students understanding the impact of their choices. Notice also that these statements do not say it would be “nice” for these things to happen. These statements say students have “rights” to these things: they are “rights” that are due to students as delineated in ASCA’s Ethical standards.

The Benefits: Visibility and Integration

Career guidance and counseling activities can and are being delivered to students and their parents independently of the framework provided by comprehensive guidance and counseling programs. However, when these activities are delivered through the program framework, the potential for visibility and integration is much greater because the guidance curriculum and individual student planning components mandate that these activities are delivered K-12. Thus all students have the opportunities to participate and learn. At the same time, the components provide an opportunity to integrate career guidance and counseling knowledge, skills, and attitudes with those in the academic and personal/social domains since they all form the content base that supports student success. This allows all students to acquire knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to be successful in school and in planning for successful lives in the future.

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