

ACTE Position Paper

The Contributions of Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling Programs to the Career and College Readiness of all Students

Professional school counselors recognize that each student possesses unique interests, abilities and goals that will lead to many future opportunities. Collaborating with students, families, educational staff and the community, the professional school counselor works to ensure all students develop an academic and career plan reflecting their interests, abilities and goals and including rigorous, relevant coursework and experiences appropriate for the student (American School Counselor Association, 2012).

The Need for College and Career Ready Students

In the second decade of the 21st century, the United States continues to undergo rapid and complex changes economically and socially. These changes are having substantial impact on the requirements for individuals to be competitive and successful in the new workplace. As a result “today’s students need relevant and rigorous educational programs that integrate academic, technical, employability and career decision-making skills that provide the support and guidance necessary to connect them to the hopes, dreams, and realities of their futures” (Association for Career and Technical Education, 2008, p. 1).

In January 2006, the Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE) released a position paper titled *Reinventing the American High School for the 21st Century*. In it they advocated for “clearly focusing American high schools on the goal of preparing EVERY student for full participation in a spectrum of college opportunities, meaningful work, career advancement, and active citizenship” (Association of Career and Technical Education, 2006, p. 1). To accomplish this goal the position paper identified and described nine recommendations the authors believed would reinvent the American High School. Within these recommendations there was an emphasis on the need to prepare all students with the readiness to go directly to work and/or to engage in some form of postsecondary education. There also was an emphasis on involving all students in the process of academic and career awareness, employability, skill development, relationship skill development, and exploration and planning skill development so that they would be able to relate their interests to employment opportunities and planning for all forms of postsecondary education. The development by students of individual plans (college and career readiness plans) for graduation and beyond was stressed. The position paper also promoted the need for creating a school culture in which all students believed that adults in the school cared about their learning as well as about them as individuals. The position paper closed with the plea that schools adopt a new mission, one that prepares “EVERY young person for meaningful work, lifelong learning and career advancement, and active citizenship” (Association for Career and Technical Education, 2006, p. 24).

In 2011, the Harvard Graduate School of Education published *Pathways to Prosperity* which in essence reinforces the ideas found in *Reinventing the American High School for the 21st Century*. *Pathways* stresses the idea that our schools need to do a better job of developing multiple pathways to post-secondary experiences and the world of work. To accomplish this the authors

recommend strengthening CTE programs, removing the cultural bias regarding CTE, and strengthening career counseling in the schools. In regards to school counseling the authors state:

In the U.S. our goal should be to assist every young adult beginning at the end of middle school to develop an individualized pathway plan that would include career objectives; a program of study; degree and/or certificate objectives; and work-linked learning experiences. ...The merits of the approach are obvious. Young adults simply can't chart a course if they don't have a goal. (p. 28)

Then in 2012, the National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education Consortium published the *Introduction to the Common Career Technical Core*. In it the authors stressed that "Career Ready Practices should be taught and reinforced in all career exploration and preparation programs. . ." (p. 1). The 10th Career Ready Practice was titled "Plan education and career path aligned to personal goals." This practice states:

Career-ready individuals take personal ownership of their own educational and career goals, and they regularly act on a plan to attain these goals. They understand their own career interests, preferences, goals and requirements. They have perspective regarding the pathways available to them and the time, effort, experience and other requirements to pursue each, including a path of entrepreneurship. They recognize the value of each step in the educational and experiential process, and they recognize that nearly all career paths require ongoing education and experience. They seek counselors, mentors and other experts to assist in the planning and execution of career and personal goals (p. 2).

Also, in 2012, The Career Readiness Partners Council, in their publication *Building Blocks for Change: What it Means to be Career Ready* defined career readiness as follows:

"A career-ready person effectively navigates pathways that connect education and employment to achieve a fulfilling, financially-secure and successful career. A career is more than just a job. Career readiness has no defined endpoint. To be career ready in our ever changing global economy requires adaptability and a commitment to lifelong learning, along with mastery of key academic, technical and workplace knowledge, skills, and dispositions that vary from one career to another and change over time as a person progresses along a developmental continuum. Knowledge, skills and dispositions that are inter-dependent and mutually reinforcing." (p. 2)

The Role of Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling Programs in the Career and College Readiness Process

It is important to remember that students will not master these college and career readiness skills by themselves. They will need to be active learners in rigorous and relevant academic programs, career and technical education, and comprehensive guidance and counseling programs. All three programs must work collaboratively to provide all students with these skills so that they can become career and college ready.

It is equally important to remember that comprehensive guidance and counseling programs featuring career development do provide important substantial, specific, and unique value-added contributions to the college and career readiness process. This is accomplished through a program framework of the guidance curriculum, individual student planning, responsive services, and system support. The content, activities, and services of the framework are designed to facilitate the career development of all students so that they are college and career ready. This means that they will have the requisite academic and technical knowledge and skills as well as the personal/social soft skills to enter and succeed in our highly skilled workforce or go on for more education in a variety of post-secondary settings, including college and then enter and succeed in our highly skilled workforce.

The Content and Activities of the Program

The career development content of comprehensive guidance and counseling programs is contained in the career domain. Additional knowledge and skills vital to students' career development are contained in the academic and personal/social domains. The content of these domains align with all twelve career ready practices but particularly Practice 10 as outlined above in the *Introduction to the Common Career Technical Core* (National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education Consortium, 2012, p. 2). The content of these domains also aligns with the definition of career readiness found in *Building Blocks for Change: What it Means to be Career Ready* (The Career Readiness Partners Council, 2012, p. 2)

Although these domains are sometimes portrayed as being separate, in actual practice, they are delivered through the program interactively and holistically to students. They are not three separate silos. The content from all three domains is required to prepare students to become career and college ready.

Career development content, infused with academic and personal/social knowledge and skills, is delivered by school counselors, teachers, and other educational personnel through the guidance curriculum of the comprehensive and counseling program beginning in elementary school. At the middle and high school levels, the activities of the guidance curriculum focus on empowering all students to become effective managers of their educational and career goals by providing them with career exploration, transition planning, and work-based learning opportunities including job shadowing, internships, employability skills, and career mentoring.

School counselors, teachers and other educational personnel also empower all students by helping them to develop, use, and update college and career readiness plans (individual graduation plans) beginning in grades 7 or 8 as part of the individual student planning component of a comprehensive guidance and counseling program. These plans are based on school developed programs of study emphasized in Career Ready Practice 10 (National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education Consortium, 2012, p. 2). This is done in close collaboration with parents or guardians. Responsive services, provided by school counselors, including individual counseling, small group counseling, consultation, and referral are available to all students if required. Through responsive services possible personal/social and emotional issues that may be barriers to students' overall development, including their career development are addressed. System support is an indirect service to students containing

management activities that support the operation and evaluation of the program as well as support other educational programs in the district (Gysbers and Henderson, 2012).

Impact on Student Learning

What impact do comprehensive guidance and counseling programs have on students? Empirical research conducted during the past 15 years has demonstrated that when professional school counselors have the time, the resources, and the structure of a comprehensive guidance and counseling programs in which to work, they contribute to positive student academic and career development as well as the development of positive and safe learning climates in schools (Dunham & Frome, 2003; Lapan, Gysbers, & Kayson, 2006; Lapan, Gysbers, & Petroski, 2001; Lapan, Gysbers, & Sun, 1997).

Research has also concluded that schools with more fully implemented comprehensive guidance and counseling programs have significant impact on student achievement. These programs fostered more targeted course selection resulting in more students taking a greater number of higher-level English, science, math, and technology oriented courses and students in these schools had higher ACT scores in every area of the test (Nelson, Fox, Haslam, & Gardner, 2007).

Finally, a research study conducted in Nebraska (Carey, Harrington, Martin, & Hoffman, in press), concluded that the student-to-counselor ratio has an impact on student outcomes in career and technical education as follows: “A more favorable student-to-counselor ratio was associated with an increase in student attendance, an increase in students’ proficiency in career and technical education and an increase in students’ program completion rates in career and technical education”.

School Counselors Are Ready to Lead

The College Board’s national Office of School Counselor Advocacy recently published the *2012 National Survey of School Counselors* (October 2012). The results from this study suggest that school counselors across the country have the necessary knowledge, skills, and confidence to promote the college and career readiness of all students, “given administrative support and resources.” (p. 5). In addition, principals agree that school counselors should “exercise leadership in advocating for students’ access to rigorous academic preparation as well as other college and career readiness counseling.” (p. 5). It is clear that school counselors are able and willing to fully implement comprehensive guidance and counseling programs featuring career development that help advance the college and career readiness for all students. It is time to give them the administrative support and resources to fulfill their mission.

ACTE’s Position on Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling Programs

- ACTE endorses the reconceptualization of guidance and counseling from a position/services orientation to a comprehensive program that is an integral part of the overall education system, serving *all* students and their parents or guardians.

- ACTE also endorses comprehensive guidance and counseling program terminology *and* supports the work of local school districts and their professional school counselors to develop, implement, and evaluate systematic and unified programs of guidance and counseling activities and services that serve *all* students and their parents or guardians.
- ACTE recognizes and supports comprehensive guidance and counseling program models for implementation that have been developed by state departments of education, local school districts, and guidance and counseling-related professional associations, and ACTE believes comprehensive guidance and counseling programs should be implemented in all elementary, middle, and high school across the country.
- ACTE recognizes the importance and need for local, state, and national leadership, policy, and resources to accomplish the goal of implementing comprehensive guidance and counseling programs in all elementary, middle, and high schools across the country.
- Due to the rapid and complex changes that are occurring in the work world and labor force today and tomorrow, ACTE recognizes and supports the need for initial and continued education for school counselors and other career development specialists at the pre-service and professional development levels to help them gain and maintain the knowledge and skills they need to assist all students to become college and career ready. Such education should include, but not be limited to, knowledge of business and industry, local, state, and national economic development trends and issues, usage of career assessments, work-based learning, and postsecondary transitions such as direct entrance into the workforce, apprenticeships, two year, four year college;/universities, and technical schools.
- ACTE recognizes and supports the need to include in federal legislation comprehensive guidance and counseling program terminology as follows:

Comprehensive guidance and counseling programs consist of subject matter and related techniques and methods organized to facilitate the academic, career, and personal/social development of all students K-12. In addition, comprehensive guidance and counseling program content assists all students and their parents in making informed educational choices that lead to more educational and career options; to become career and college ready. Comprehensive guidance and counseling programs also emphasize the development of academic and career awareness exploration and planning skills, employability skills, relationship skills, education and career decision making skills, work based learning, and the development and understanding of local, state, and national educational, occupational, and labor market opportunities, needs, and trends.

ACTE believes that when federal law uses this updated comprehensive guidance and counseling program terminology all professional school counselors will be helping all students become career and college ready. According to the *2012 National Survey of School Counselors*, they are ready, willing, and able to do so.

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In 2012 the Association for Career and Technical Education Board of Directors officially adopted a position paper titled “The Contributions of Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling Programs to the Career and College Readiness of all Students”. The position paper describes the need for all students to become career and college ready, highlights the role and impact of Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling Programs on the career and college readiness process, and offers specific recommendations to strengthen legislative language concerning these programs. Please take time now to read the position paper and then become an advocate and share it with your colleagues and members of the community.