

# MISSOURI SCHOOL COUNSELORS BENEFIT ALL STUDENTS

## HOW IMPLEMENTING COMPREHENSIVE GUIDANCE PROGRAMS IMPROVES ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT FOR ALL MISSOURI STUDENTS

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# INTRODUCTION

## Missouri School Counselors Benefit All Students: How Implementing Comprehensive Guidance Programs Improves Academic Achievement for All Missouri Students

**S**tudent academic achievement is at the heart of every school's mission. Since the mid-1980s, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), the Missouri School Counselor Association (MSCA), and counselor educators from all of the Missouri higher education institutions that train professional school counselors have worked together to revitalize and enhance the work of school counselors in Missouri schools. Together they have enabled school counselors to make substantial contributions to the achievement of their schools' missions. The overriding goal is to transform school counseling from an ancillary support service to a program central to the academic mission of every school in Missouri. Missouri is the only state with such a longstanding partnership among these groups and is recognized across the country as a leader in transforming the work of school counselors.

The primary vehicle for transforming the work of Missouri school counselors is a fully implemented comprehensive guidance program in every school district and building. In the mid-1980s, DESE recommended the Missouri Comprehensive Guidance Program (MCGP) as the organizational structure to use for this purpose. When comprehensive guidance programs are fully implemented in the schools using this structure, school counselors spend 100 percent of their professional time providing students with guidance activities and services organized and delivered through the four interrelated program components identified at right. The activities and services in each of these program components are individualized to meet each school's unique circumstances.

1. **Guidance Curriculum** – School counselors work closely with teachers going into classrooms to present guidance lessons on topics such as conflict mediation, career and educational planning, and alcohol/drug abuse prevention.
2. **Individual Planning** – School counselors provide effective educational and career planning services that help all students create meaningful career directions and organize their personal plans of study around personally valued career goals.
3. **Responsive Services** – School counselors assist parents, teachers, and administrators to help students who are experiencing problems that interfere with their success in school.
4. **Systems Support** – School counselors carry out guidance program management and evaluation work, community collaboration, committee work, and a fair share of administrative tasks.



# STUDY PURPOSES

The first purpose of this study was to investigate if the level of implementation of the MCGP in school buildings in Missouri makes a difference in student academic achievement and in important student behaviors that affect academic achievement. The second purpose was to investigate how Missouri school counselors are spending their professional time. The third purpose was to explore the impact of more fully implemented comprehensive guidance programs in schools with substantial minority student enrollments.

The findings of the study are reported as follows:

- Part One of this document examines the benefits to students when comprehensive programs are more fully implemented in their school buildings.
- Part Two describes how Missouri school counselors are spending their professional time working in the program.
- Part Three focuses on issues related to guidance program implementation in schools with substantial minority student enrollments.
- Part Four offers a number of recommended action steps for boards of education, administrators, teachers, parents, and school counselors to take to ensure that comprehensive guidance programs are fully implemented in their school buildings and districts.



**“Students attending high schools with more fully implemented school counseling and guidance programs have significantly higher 10th grade MAP Mathematics scores.”**

# PART ONE

## What are the benefits for Missouri students when comprehensive school guidance programs are more fully implemented in their school building?

In the fall of 2005, Missouri school counselors and school administrators completed an Internet survey in which they rated the extent to which the MCGP had been implemented in their school buildings during the 2004-2005 school year. Completing this survey were 617 school counselors and 141 school administrators from approximately one-third of the school buildings in Missouri. The sample was representative of Missouri's ethnic, cultural, geographic, population, and socioeconomic diversity. The results of the survey indicated the degree of implementation in each school building. The score obtained from the survey served as the independent predictor. Student outcome data for each school building was obtained from archival data collected by DESE as part of its data system for the 2004-2005 school year. These data represent the critical markers of educational success that DESE collects for each school building in Missouri (e.g., test scores, discipline problems, and Adequate Yearly Progress scores to meet the requirements of No Child Left Behind). School building scores for the student outcome data served as the dependent variables.

### Analyses

School buildings differ in many ways besides the work being carried out by school counselors. Before we could test to see if the relationships between the implementation of the MCGP and critical student outcomes were statistically significant, these differences needed to be taken into account. Therefore, in all our analyses, key differences among school buildings were removed statistically to see more accurately the relationship between guidance program implementation and student achievement.

In the first step of our analyses, we statistically removed differences among school buildings in student outcomes resulting from some schools spending considerably more money per student than other schools. Second, the difference in enrollments among school buildings was controlled. Third, the difference between school buildings in the percentage of students receiving free and reduced lunch was removed statistically. Fourth, because school buildings differ in the instructional quality offered to students and the staffing patterns in each building, we wanted to estimate this and remove its impact on critical student outcomes. Therefore, data on the following variables were entered next in our analyses: percentage of courses in each building taught by highly qualified teachers, teacher to student ratios, school administrator to student ratios, school counselor to student ratios, teachers' average yearly salary, teachers' years of teaching experience, and the percentage of teachers in each school building with a master's degree).



On the fifth step of the analyses, we entered our estimate of the extent to which a comprehensive school guidance program was being more fully implemented in each school building. Taking these steps allowed for a very rigorous test of whether MCGP program implementation has a unique role in significantly impacting critical educational outcomes for students, including student academic achievement.

### High School Results

Figure 1 shows that more fully implemented comprehensive guidance programs had a significant impact on student achievement. We found that more fully implemented comprehensive guidance programs uniquely accounted for 4 percent of 10th grade students' scores on the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) Mathematics test.

Other variables also had an impact on 10th grade students' MAP Mathematics test scores as shown in Figure 1. For example, we found that money spent per student accounted for 4 percent of 10th grade student scores on the MAP Mathematics test. We also found that

school size accounted for an additional 6 percent of student scores. In addition, we found that schools with more students on free and reduced lunch accounted for an additional 30 percent of student scores. (Students on free and reduced lunch had lower test scores.) Finally, we found that quality of instruction and staffing patterns accounted for an additional 4 percent of student scores on the MAP Mathematics test.

We also estimated how well high schools were progressing in their efforts to meet the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). To do this, we created a variable that is a ratio of the number of NCLB categories a high school met divided by the total number of NCLB categories that the high school was required to meet by DESE. While this variable may make it more difficult for high schools that have more NCLB categories to meet, we statistically controlled for this by entering enrollment size and percentage of students receiving free and reduced lunch before the effects for guidance program implementation were examined.

## Effect of Fully Implemented Comprehensive Guidance Programs on Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) Mathematics Scores

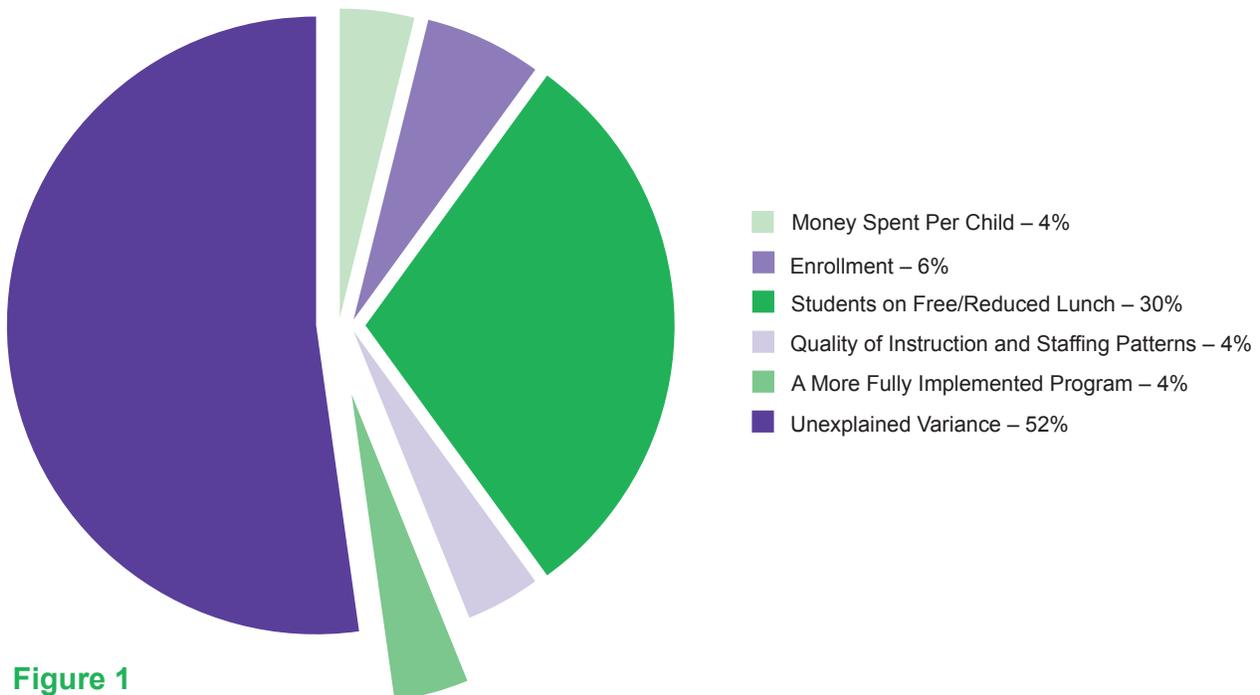


Figure 1



While the trend was in a positive direction, overall guidance program implementation did not significantly predict the AYP variable. However, and very importantly, high schools that provided students better educational and career planning services (individual planning) as part of comprehensive guidance programs had significantly higher AYP scores. Helping students to explore and develop educational and career goals accounted for an additional 3 percent of how well high schools were meeting the AYP requirements of NCLB.

In addition to examining the impact of more fully implemented guidance programs on 10th grade MAP Mathematics test scores and high school attainment of AYPs, we also investigated the impact of more fully implemented guidance programs on a number of other critical markers of student success. Using ratings by high school counselors in 221 buildings, we found that students attending Missouri high schools with more fully implemented guidance programs were more likely to:

- have higher 11th grade MAP Communication Arts test scores
- graduate from high school
- have better attendance
- have fewer discipline problems.

#### **Middle/Junior High School Results**

At the middle and junior high school level (112 school buildings), using middle/junior high school counselor ratings, we found that students attending schools with more fully implemented guidance programs were more likely to:

- have better attendance
- have fewer discipline problems.

#### **School Administrators' Ratings and Results**

School administrators from 141 elementary, middle, and high schools in Missouri completed the survey. From their perspectives, we found that students attending middle schools and high schools with more fully implemented guidance programs were more likely to:

- have better attendance
- have fewer discipline problems.

**“High schools that provided students better educational and career planning services as part of comprehensive school guidance and counseling programs made significantly more progress in meeting their Adequate Yearly Progress requirements for No Child Left Behind.”**

# PART TWO

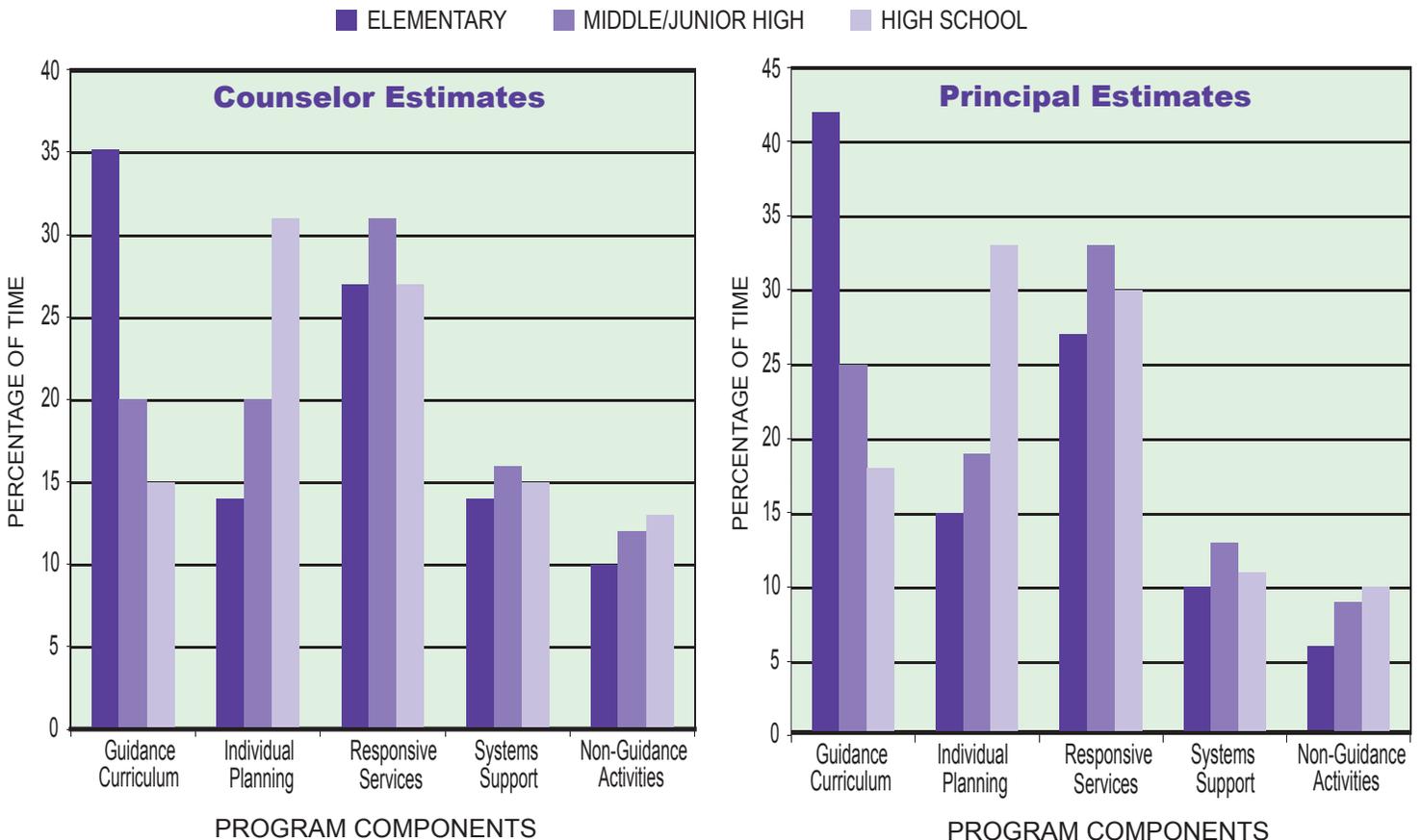
## How are school counselors spending their professional work time?

**D**ESE provides guidelines for how school counselors should allocate their professional work time among the four program components of the MCGP. These suggested ranges change across the K-12 years to accommodate students' developmental needs. Figure 2 displays both school counselor and school administrator estimates of how counselors are spending their time. For example, elementary school counselors reported spending approximately 35 percent of their work time delivering guidance classroom curriculum activities whereas high school counselors reported spending about 32 percent of their time helping

students develop educational and career plans (individual planning). School administrators thought that high school counselors used 33 percent of their work time to carry out individual planning activities with students. For both counselors and administrators, these percentages are within the ranges suggested by DESE.

At the same time, Missouri school counselors reported they were spending an inordinate amount of time carrying out clerical and administrative tasks that were beyond their fair share and were unrelated to the full implementation of the MCGP. Doing so pulls school counselors away from providing all

**Percentage of Time Spent on Program Components**



**Figure 2**

students with the full range of expert services (e.g., career planning, group counseling, guidance curriculum, and family outreach) that professional school counselors have been trained to deliver to all students. To illustrate, high school counselors reported spending 13 to 14 percent of their total work time performing non-guidance tasks. Doing this restricts their ability to spend their time on comprehensive guidance program tasks that have a substantial, positive impact on student success including academic achievement. This is 14 percent less time school counselors have to spend with students to help them improve their academic achievement.

Table 1 reports the non-guidance tasks that high school counselors and their school administrators

said that the counselors were carrying out. For example, 40 percent of the high school counselors said that they were doing testing for special education and gifted programs even though school administrators did not report this as a significant activity taking up their counselors' time. Additionally, high school counselors said they were coordinating the schoolwide testing program, handling transcripts, maintaining permanent records, and calculating GPAs, class ranks, and honor rolls. None of these tasks are part of the MCGP. With their time encumbered by these clerical and administrative tasks, high school counselors reported significantly lower levels of comprehensive counseling program implementation than did either elementary or middle/junior high school counselors.

**Table 1 – Non-Guidance Tasks in High School**

**School Counselors**

<b>Tasks</b>	<b>% Doing the Task</b>
Coordinating testing program	74
Testing for Special Education and Gifted Program	40
Coordinator/manager 504 files	34
Balancing class loads	59
Maintaining permanent records	52
Handling transcripts	66
Calculating GPA, class rank, honor rolls	50
Developing and updating student handbooks and course guides	47
Building the master schedule	59
Copying/ mailing new student enrollment records	31
Managing schedule changes	83

**School Principals**

<b>Tasks</b>	<b>% Doing the Task</b>
Coordinating testing program	42
Balancing class loads	47
Handling transcripts	40
Calculating GPA, class rank, honor rolls	38
Building the master schedule	40
Managing schedule changes	58

**“High school counselors, by spending an inordinate amount of their time carrying out clerical and administrative tasks, have limited ability to deliver effective services to their students.”**

# PART THREE

## Program implementation in schools with substantial minority student enrollment

**W**e disaggregated the data and examined differences in student outcomes for schools that have more than 15 percent minority student enrollment and either have or have not implemented a comprehensive guidance program. We found significant advantages for minority students attending schools with more fully implemented comprehensive school guidance programs. It is important to note that there were no differences between high and low implementing schools in terms of money spent per student, enrollment, percentage of students on free and reduced lunch, percentage of minority students in attendance, courses taught by highly qualified teachers, teacher salary, teacher qualifications, teacher experience, student to teacher ratio and student to school administrator ratio. However, students attending middle/junior high and high schools with more than 15 percent minority student enrollment and with more fully implemented comprehensive programs had better academic, career, and social/emotional outcomes.

In **middle/junior high schools** with more than 15 percent minority student enrollment with more fully implemented comprehensive school guidance programs, the students had:

- fewer discipline problems and suspensions
- higher attendance rates.

It should also be pointed out that the ratio of school counselors to students in high implementing schools was one counselor for every 362 students, whereas the ratio in low implementing schools was one counselor for every 415 students.

In **high schools** with more than 15 percent minority student enrollment and more fully implemented comprehensive guidance programs, the students were more likely to:

- graduate from high school
- score higher on their ACT Composite scores
- score higher on their 10th grade MAP Mathematics tests
- score higher on their 11th grade MAP Communication Arts tests
- have fewer discipline problems
- have better attendance.

Figure 3 shows that in high schools with more than 15 percent minority student enrollment and more fully implemented comprehensive guidance programs, students were more likely to:

- take the ACT College Entrance Test
- score above the national average on the ACT test
- graduate from high school
- attend a school that was doing a better job meeting the AYP requirements of NCLB.

Figure 4 shows that graduates of high schools with substantial minority student enrollment (15 percent or more) were much more likely to be attending a four-year college one year after graduating from high school if the schools had more fully implemented comprehensive guidance programs. In low implementing schools, only 28 percent of graduating seniors were attending a four-year college one year after graduating, whereas almost half of all graduating seniors (47 percent) from high schools with a more fully implemented comprehensive program were doing so. This is a very hopeful sign to a critical national problem. It appears that a more fully implemented comprehensive school guidance program is a largely unrecognized and underutilized vehicle through which the minority achievement and college attendance gaps in Missouri and across the United States could be significantly reduced.

Unfortunately, compared to all schools in our sample, overall implementation of comprehensive guidance programs in Missouri appears to be lagging in middle/junior high schools and high schools with larger minority student enrollments.

### Student Outcomes and Program Implementation in High Schools With More Than 15 Percent Minority Students Enrolled

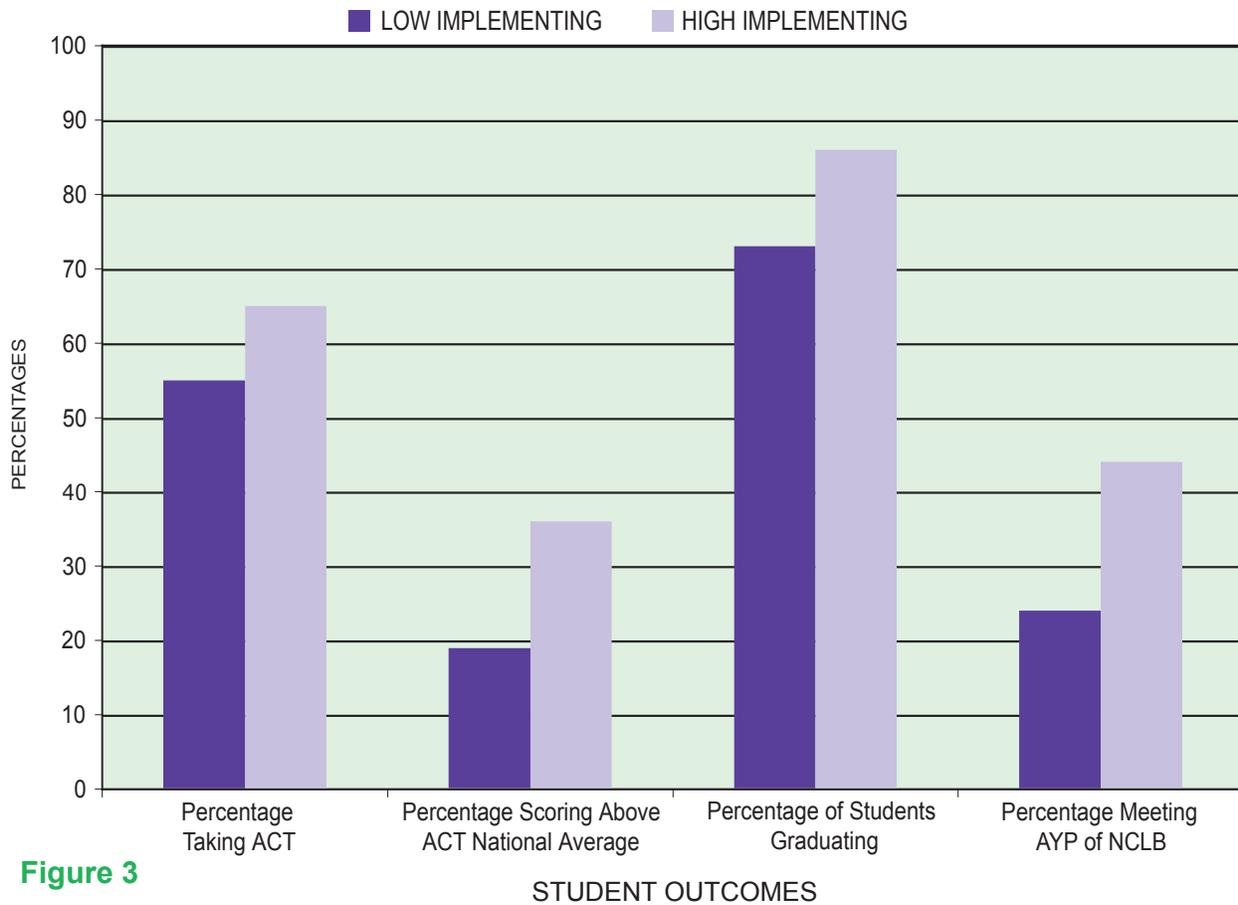


Figure 3

### Four-Year College Attendance Rates for Students From High Schools With More Than 15 Percent Minority Student Enrollment and Program Implementation

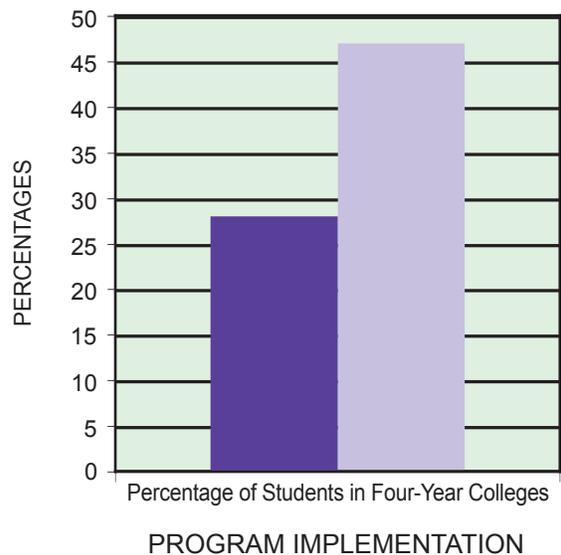


Figure 4

Figure 5 shows that as minority student enrollment increases in middle/junior high schools, counselors are much less likely to provide responsive services to students. Both school counselors and their school administrators strongly agree on this issue. Also, as minority student enrollment goes beyond 15 percent of the student body, middle/junior high school counselors are less likely to implement a comprehensive guidance program. One reason may be that school counselors in these schools are more likely to carry out more non-guidance duties, such as administering discipline, providing supervision for bus loading and unloading, coordinating and managing the IEP process, monitoring school assemblies, and providing supervision in restrooms. While these duties may be necessary, administrators need to find other ways to accomplish them in order for school counselors to best contribute to student success.

### Minority Student Enrollment and Responsive Services in Middle/Junior High School

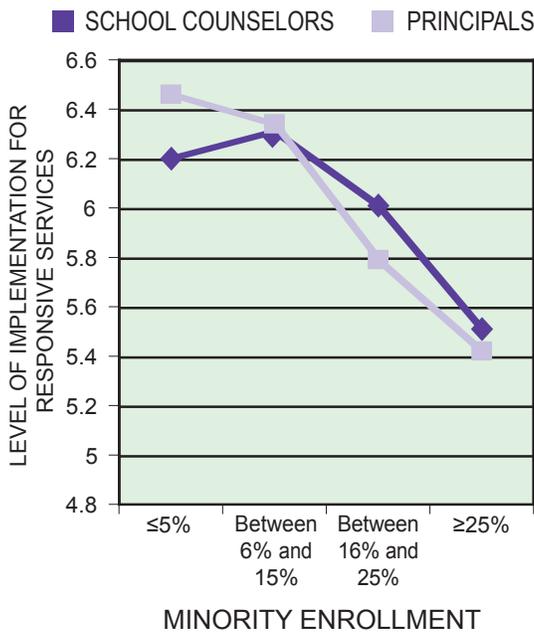


Figure 5

Figure 6 details how the delivery of individual planning services goes down in Missouri high schools as the percentage of minority students enrolled in those schools goes up. Again, as minority student enrollment goes beyond 15 percent of the student body, school counselors are less likely to use their time helping students develop educational and career plans. In schools with high minority student enrollments, high school counselors are less likely to be implementing a comprehensive school guidance and counseling program, perhaps due in part to the non-guidance tasks they are required to complete.

### Minority Student Enrollment and Individual Planning Services in High School

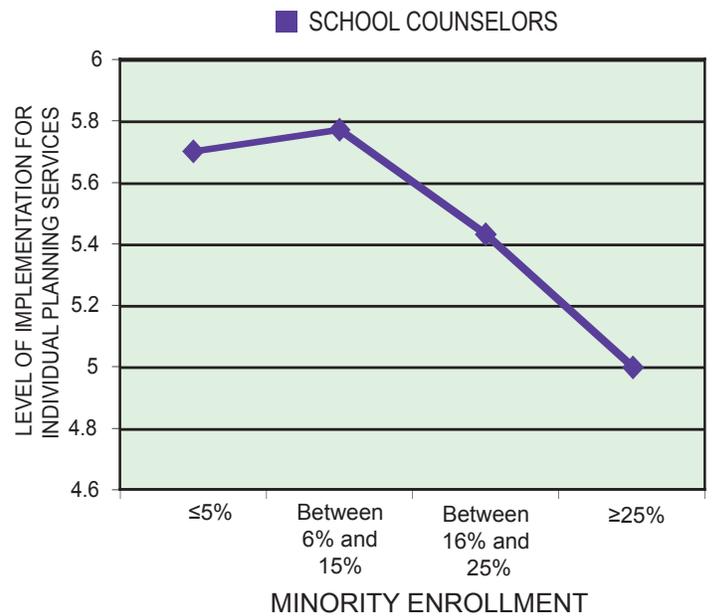


Figure 6

**“In our sample, almost half (47 percent) of Missouri students who graduated from a high school with more than 15 percent minority student attendance and a more fully implemented comprehensive guidance program were attending a four-year college one year later. However, only 28 percent of students graduating from high schools with more than 15 percent minority student enrollment but lacking a fully implemented comprehensive program were attending a four-year college one year after graduating from high school.”**

# PART FOUR

Given the major finding of this study that comprehensive guidance programs make significant contributions to student success (including academic achievement), Missouri school districts need to work at all levels to ensure that all students and their parents/guardians have access to and can participate in fully implemented comprehensive guidance programs staffed by professional school counselors. Below are recommended action steps that can facilitate the adoption and implementation of districtwide comprehensive guidance programs.

## Recommended Action Steps

### Boards of Education

- Adopt districtwide comprehensive guidance programs as official programs in your districts.
- Adopt policies that support guidance as an official program in your districts.
- Encourage and support the full implementation of comprehensive guidance programs in their districts.

### Administrators

- Support the full implementation of comprehensive guidance programs in the schools of your districts.
- Facilitate the work of professional school counselors in carrying out the full implementation of comprehensive guidance programs by enabling the counselors to spend 100 percent of their time on the preferred guidance tasks derived directly from your district's comprehensive guidance programs.
- Hire and provide for the supervision and evaluation of professional school counselors; use performance-based supervision and evaluation forms and procedures derived directly from the district's comprehensive guidance programs.

### Teachers

- Talk to your school's counselor to learn about your district's comprehensive guidance program.
- Serve on the school-community guidance program advisory committee.

- Learn about your students' strengths and how they can be built upon to maximize your students' academic and career opportunities.
- Become actively involved in working with school counselors to integrate guidance standards and grade-level expectations into your classroom curriculum.
- Observe in the classroom when a guidance lesson is being presented and then carry it over into other classroom activities wherever possible.

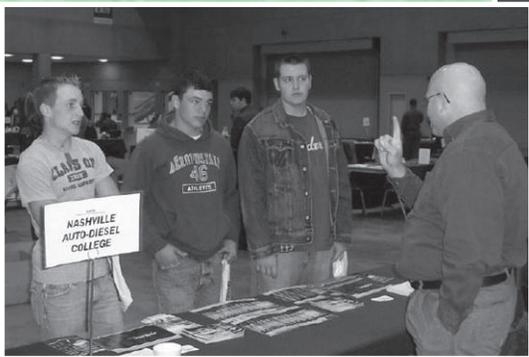
### Parents

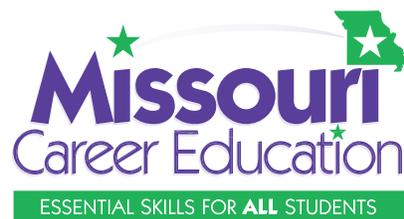
- Talk to the school counselor to learn about your school's comprehensive guidance program.
- Serve on the school-community guidance program advisory committee.
- Learn about your student's strengths and how these strengths can be built upon to maximize your student's academic and career opportunities.
- Become actively involved in your student's education.
- Encourage your student to do her or his best in school by selecting rigorous subjects tied to a career goal.

### School Counselors

- Work closely with administrators and teachers to fully implement comprehensive guidance programs in your district's buildings.
- Extend and expand student individual planning with the goal that all students will develop and use personal plans of study beginning in middle school.
- Extend and expand efforts to reduce barriers to learning in ways that enhance students' academic, career, and personal/social development.

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For more information about this study, contact:  
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