Missouri School Counselors Benefit All Students

Description:
How implementing comprehensive guidance programs improves academic achievement for all Missouri students. This study was sponsored by a partnership of the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, the Missouri School Counselors Association, and the University of Missouri-Columbia. By Richard Lapan, Ph.D.; Norman Gysbers, Ph.D.; and Marc Kayson, M.A.

Link:

Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling Services

Research
Lower counselor ratios were significantly associated with higher graduation rates and lower disciplinary incidents.

As the percentage of students receiving free and reduced lunch increased across schools, lower student to counselor ratios became an important ingredient for promoting student success.

In high poverty schools, those schools that met the ASCA criteria of having at least one professional school counselor for every 250 students had better graduation and school attendance rates and lower disciplinary incidents.

ASCA recommended ratio of 250 students for every school counselor is (with enrollment size and free and reduced lunch held constant at their mean values) associated with a high school graduation rate of 89.9%.

For every increase of 50 students, there is a .8% decrease in graduation rates in our sample.

Five basic premises undergird the organization and management of guidance and counseling in schools. These premises are the point of departure for developing, managing, and evaluating comprehensive school guidance and counseling programs.

- Guidance and counseling is a program.
- Guidance and counseling programs are developmental and comprehensive.
- Guidance and counseling programs feature a team approach.
- Guidance and counseling programs are developed through a systematic process of planning, designing, implementing, evaluating and enhancing.
- Guidance and counseling programs have established leadership.
Results indicate that school counselors have a direct positive impact on student achievement; adding one full time equivalent counselor to a school increases boys’ reading and math achievement by over one percentile point, and reduces disciplinary infractions by boys and girls by approximately 20 percent.

In addition, calculations suggest that hiring a school counselor is approximately twice as effective as hiring an additional teacher.

Both the number of school counselors in a school and students contact with the school counselor for college information appear to have an effect on college application rates. Number of school counselors had statistically significant positive effects on students applying to two or more colleges.

These findings in part support previous research documenting the relationship between the number of school counselors and the college process (McDonough, 2005a; Perna et al., 2008) and are particularly noteworthy given the research that suggests application to multiple colleges may increase the likelihood of acceptance to a 4-year institution (Roderick, Nagaoka, Coca, & Moeller, 2008)

The adoption of state-funded counselor subsidies or minimum counselor-student ratios:

- reduces the fraction of teachers reporting that their instruction suffers due to student misbehavior;
- reduces the fractions reporting problems with students physically fighting each other, cutting class, stealing, or using drugs;

These findings imply that there may be substantial public and private benefits derived from providing additional elementary school counselors.

When school counselors in Missouri worked in schools that have more fully implemented guidance and counseling programs they make significant contributions to overall student success. Specifically, they found that in these schools students had higher 10th grade standardized achievement test scores in 10th grade mathematics scores, in 11th grade language arts and communication arts scores, better attendance, as well as fewer discipline problems and out-of-school suspensions.

Research found that lower ratios decreased the disciplinary incidents and recurrence of disciplinary problems for Florida school children. Effects were strongest for low income and minority youth.
When middle school classroom teachers in small, medium and large middle schools in Missouri rated guidance and counseling programs as more fully implemented, seventh graders reported they felt safer in their schools, earned higher grades, understood school to be more relevant for them, had more positive relationships with teachers, and were more satisfied with their education.

Students in small, medium and large high schools in Missouri with more fully implemented guidance and counseling programs as judged by school counselors reported that they had earned higher grades, their education better prepared them for the future and their schools had a more positive climate.