Effectiveness of School Counseling: Research

By the American School Counseling Association for The Guidance Channel

Many states have made important strides in class-size reduction, higher academic standards, greater accountability and improved teacher preparation. The important missing link in these initiatives to improve student learning is the need for more school counselors and other student support services, such as school psychologists, school social workers, and school nurses. In many states, students' access to counselors varies by grade level, and some school districts have no counseling programs at all. When counseling programs exist, counselors are often asked to add administrative duties such as testing, supervising and class scheduling.

School counselors provide counseling programs in three domains: academic, career and personal/social. Their services and programs help students resolve emotional, social or behavioral problems and help them develop a clearer focus or sense of direction. Effective counseling programs are important to the school climate and a crucial element in improving student achievement.

Following is a collection of sources addressing the effectiveness of school counseling and other student support services, including their contribution to the personal and academic success of students.

Reviews of the research on school counseling show that the services of school counselors have a positive effect on children.


Quantitative analyses of research (meta-analyses) also substantiate the beneficial effects of school counseling programs.


Several studies find that elementary guidance activities have a positive influence on elementary students' academic achievement.


Children who are experiencing family problems report being helped by school counselors.


School counselors help connect the family as a whole to the educational process.


School counseling programs designed to teach students peer mediation skills are highly effective. In fact, studies show that students trained in peer mediation use these skills in other settings (e.g., at home).


**School counseling programs have significant influence on aggressive and hostile behaviors as well as discipline problems.**


**Health and mental health care services can play an important role in violence prevention at all levels (primary, secondary and tertiary), including preventing problem behaviors from developing; identifying and serving specific, at-risk populations; and reducing the deleterious effects of violence on victims and witnesses.**


**School counselors were effective in reducing victimization by assisting victimized children, reducing bullying behaviors and modifying the school climate and structure.**


**Research indicates that school counselors are effective in teaching social skills.**


**School counselors are very effective in assisting children in the area of career development.**


**Child group interventions such as Guidance/Educational, Counseling/Interpersonal Problem-Solving, and Psychotherapy/Personality Reconstruction have shown positive results in the school setting.**

**School counseling interventions have reported success for helping students reduce test anxiety.**


**School counseling interventions have reported success for children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.**


Studies show effective counseling programs are based on human development theories. Program content, goals, and interventions should reflect this theoretical foundation. A developmental program is proactive and preventive, helping students acquire the knowledge, skills, self-awareness and attitudes necessary for successful mastery of normal developmental tasks. Developmentally-based programs increase the visibility of the counseling program and ensure that more students are served (Myrick; Shaw & Goodyear). There is also substantial empirical evidence that these programs promote student development and academic success.


**School counselors have proven effective in preventing students from committing suicide. The most effective prevention programs start with younger students and portray suicide as a mental health problem, not a dramatic way of ending a life. It is essential that counselors involve the parents of troubled students in the counseling process.**


**School counselors in collaborative efforts can implement both systemic and programmatic changes in schools and communities to prevent students from dropping out of school.**


**Studies on high school attrition indicate that preventive counseling, occurring before students are in crisis, reduces the risk of these students dropping out later.**


*Counseling decreases classroom disturbances.* Counseling services support teachers in the classroom and enable teachers to provide quality instruction designed to assist students in achieving high standards. Students in schools that provide counseling services indicated that their classes were less likely to be interrupted by other students, and that their peers behaved better in school.


