

## DEFINITION OF A SCHOOL COUNSELING PROGRAM

The Office of School Counseling of Baltimore County Public Schools supports the 1997 definition of a school counseling program developed by the American School Counselors' Association.

A comprehensive school counseling program is developmental and systematic in nature, sequential, clearly defined, and accountable. It is jointly founded upon developmental psychology, educational philosophy, and counseling methodology (ASCA, 1994). The school counseling program is integral to the educational enterprise. The program is proactive and preventive in its focus. It assists all students in acquiring and using life-long learning skills. More specifically, school counseling programs employ strategies to enhance academics, provide career awareness, develop employment readiness, encourage self-awareness, foster interpersonal communication skills, and impart life success skills for all students. At the foundation of the school counseling program is the delivery of counseling, consultation, coordination and advocacy services to all students, parents and the school community. Individual and group counseling, classroom guidance, consultation, including meeting with parents, teachers, administrators, staff and community members, and coordination of special programs and initiatives are integral parts of all school counseling programs.

The school counseling program has characteristics similar to other educational programs, including a scope and sequence; student outcomes or competencies; activities and processes to assist students in achieving these outcomes; professionally credentialed personnel; materials and resources; and accountability methods.

School counseling programs are developed by design, based on assessed needs, identified indicator priorities from the *Essential School Counseling Program PreK-12*, state counseling standards, school system counseling program non-negotiables, and ASCA National Standards. These goals are aligned with school system priorities, strategies are selected to meet the goals, learning and growth are assessed, and program components are evaluated all designed with an emphasis on helping students to learn more effectively and efficiently. There is a commitment to individual uniqueness and the maximum development in three major areas: academic, career, and personal/social (ASCA, 1990).

Counselor skills, time, and energy should be focused on direct services to students. School counseling programs and the role of the school counselor should be determined by the educational, career, and personal development needs of students. The comprehensive school counseling program places the counselor in a key position to identify the issues that impact on student learning and achievement. The school counselor is at the core of school planning, school programs, and school environment.

As part of the school counseling program, counselors serve as student advocates and are committed to participate as members of the educational team. They consult and collaborate with teachers, administrators, and parents to assist students to be successful academically, vocationally, and personally. Through the development of an effective school counseling program school counselors are recognized as indispensable partners of the instructional staff in the development of good citizens and leaders. As schools and communities initiate and establish partnerships to address common concerns, it is important that these efforts are implemented in a manner which facilitates the educational process and the full use of school and other community resources on behalf of students and their families.

Effective school counseling programs and trained counselors reflect and are responsive to the diversity in our schools and communities. Effective school counseling programs serve all students, and acknowledge that diversity and individual differences are valuable to all. The programs and staff ensure that communication is open, and that the community is represented and involved as counseling programs are developed and implemented. Counseling programs help ensure equal opportunity for all student to participate fully in the educational process.

School counseling program models support and are compatible with *GOALS 2000* (1994). The School to Work Opportunities Act (1994), the Elementary Counseling Demonstration Act (1995), the *Children's Defense Fund Report* (1990), the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills, (U.S. Department of Labor, 1991) and the *National Career Development Guidelines* (NOICC, 1989) support the school counseling program and acknowledge the role of the school counselor as critical and essential to student success.

All school counselors in the Baltimore County Public Schools System are required annually to develop a needs-based school counseling program plan based on counseling non-negotiables. This program plan is to be shared with the building administrators, parents/guardians, school staff, and the Office of School Counseling. This plan is to be regularly evaluated through formative and summative assessments. It is recommended that school counselors develop a School Counseling Advisory Council to assist in the review of these assessments and in the formation of subsequent program plans.

**References:**

*The Essential School Counseling Program, PreK-12* (2005). Towson, MD: Baltimore County Public Schools.

*The National Standards for School Counseling Program* (1997). Alexandria, VA: American School Counselor Association.