

# An Information Brief For Parents

## Strengthening School Counseling Programs in New York for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

### **What is School Counseling?**

School counseling is an integral part of each school district's total education program. It is a comprehensive program that includes sequential activities provided in pre-Kindergarten through grade 12. These activities are organized and implemented by certified professional school counselors with the active support of parents, students, teachers, and administrators.

The program is designed to address the needs of all students by helping them to acquire competencies in career planning and exploration, knowledge of self and others, and educational and vocational development. A primary goal of the program is to provide students with the skills necessary to meet New York State's Learning Standards.

### **The Need**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the United States and the State of New York will continue to undergo major changes in the areas of industry, occupations, society, and economics. The labor force and the world of work are changing rapidly. Violence is increasing in homes, schools, and communities. Divorce, substance abuse, teen suicide, and sexual experimentation are growing challenges families must face. These challenges are real and they are making a continual impact on the overall development of students. They also serve as primary impediments to students meeting the New York State Learning Standards.

### **A Response**

Comprehensive school counseling programs in New York, implemented by certified, professional school counselors working closely with parents, teachers, and administrators, are effective in assisting students in responding to a variety of challenges. Research conducted in other states during recent years has shown that when certified, professional school counselors have the time, the resources, and the structure of a comprehensive school counseling program to work in, they contribute to positive student academic and career development as well as the development of positive and safe learning climates in schools.

- Students in high schools with more fully implemented guidance and counseling programs (as judged by school counselors) reported that:
  - they had earned higher grades.
  - their education was better preparing them for the future.
  - their schools had a more positive climate (Lapan, Gysbers, & Sun, 1997).
- When middle school classroom teachers rated guidance and counseling programs in their schools when fully implemented, seventh graders in these schools reported that:
  - they earned higher grades.
  - school was more relevant for them.
  - they had positive relationships with teachers.
  - they were more satisfied with their education.
  - they felt safer in school (Lapan, Gysbers, & Petroski, in press).
- Schools counselors who rated their programs as more fully implemented indicated that they spend more time with students, parents, and teachers; that they are more visible to the public; and that they spend more time in classrooms (Gysbers, Lapan, & Blair, 1999).

## **The Keys to Success**

The keys to the successful development and implementation of effective school counseling programs in New York State include:

- the full support of all district administrators.
- a written district-wide pre-k-12 comprehensive school counseling program and a district-wide policy for school counseling that have been adopted by the Board of Education.
- a written district-wide comprehensive school counseling program that is fully implemented by certified, professional school counselors pre-K-12, spending 100 percent of their time working with students, parents, teachers, and administrators to carry out the program.
- strong state school counseling leadership that provides regular, ongoing training, resources, and technical support.
- a strong statewide professional association such as the New York State School Counselor Association.

## **Your Support is Needed**

- ✓ Talk to your school's counselors to learn about your school district's school counseling program.
- ✓ Serve on the community school counseling advisory committee.
- ✓ Learn about your children's strengths and how they can build upon them to maximize academic and career opportunities.
- ✓ Be actively involved in working with school counselors to integrate school counseling competencies into your classroom curriculum.
- ✓ Observe in the classroom when a school counseling lesson is being presented and carry it over into other classroom activities whenever possible.

## **References**

Gysbers, N.C., Lapan, R. T., & Blair, M. (1999). Closing in on the statewide implementation of a comprehensive guidance program model. *Professional School Counseling* 2(5), 357-366.

Lapan, R.T., Gysbers, N.C., & Petroski, G. (in press). Helping 7<sup>th</sup> graders to be safe and academically successful: A statewide study of the impact of comprehensive guidance programs. *Journal of Counseling and Development*.

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Document adapted from one originally presented by the Missouri School Counselor Association.

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