

School Counseling Programs: Comparing GEAR UP Schools with
Non-GEAR UP Schools

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Abstract

A survey was conducted using qualitative means to assess school counseling programs in Montana. Schools that were demonstration schools in a federal initiative, Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) were compared to non-GEAR UP schools. Several differences between GEAR UP and non-GEAR UP schools are noted and discussed.

School Counseling Programs: Comparing GEAR UP Schools with Non-GEAR UP Schools

Students from minority or low socio-economic status backgrounds have been considered at-risk for not attempting or succeeding at post-secondary training (Kaufman & Bradby, 1992; McMillan & Reed, 1994). Out of every 100 Native American kindergartners, only 58 graduate from high school and only 7 obtain at least a Bachelor's degree. This is contrasted with 93 out of 100 White kindergartners graduating from high school and 29 obtaining at least a Bachelor's degree. Forty-eight percent of students who graduate from college by the age of 24 are from high-income families whereas only 7% of those who graduate by age 24 are from low-income families (The Education Trust, 1999). As the attainment of post-secondary education becomes more necessary to succeed in today's society, it is essential for school counselors, teachers, teacher-educators, school personnel, and parents to work together in encouraging minority and youth from low-income families to seek out and succeed in post-secondary academic pursuits.

According to the U. S. Department of Education's report on at-risk students who make it to college, there are several factors that encourage at-risk students to stay in school and to go on to post-secondary education (Horn, Chen, & Adelman, 1998). These factors include (a) having parental involvement in school-related discussion, (b) having parental expectations of students' educational attainment, (c) having peers with plans to attend college, and (d) participating in college preparation and outreach activities. According to Horn, et al. (1998), the variable that most increased the odds of enrolling in a 4-year college was the number of friends with college plans. Compared to

students who reported having no friends with college plans, the odds of enrolling were four times higher for those reporting that most or all of their high school friends planned to enroll in a 4-year college. Having friends with college plans also doubled the odds of students enrolling in any postsecondary education over not enrolling at all. The importance that friends attributed to learning activities such as studying and getting good grades also increased the odds of enrolling in some form of postsecondary education. Johnson (2001) suggested that a theme emerges from these factors that he termed a *pro-college culture*. Students immersed in a pro-college culture are more likely to attempt post-secondary educational pursuits. School personnel and parents are vital in developing this culture and encouraging youth to succeed.

For the past four years Montana State University has participated with the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education in a national initiative titled *Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP)*. The purpose of GEAR UP is to give more minority and low-income students the skills, encouragement, and preparation needed to pursue postsecondary education. In Montana, the GEAR UP initiative has focused, in part, on helping schools to develop a “Pro-College” culture by implementing comprehensive school counseling programs that promote the skills and attitudes necessary for students to be successful. To date, school counselors from across the state have been participating in trainings and receiving materials to implement counseling programs that foster encouragement of postsecondary education.

Method

In order to increase understanding of components utilized in school counseling programs across Montana, and to compare differences between GEAR UP and non-

GEAR UP schools, an open-ended question survey was developed and completed. Twenty seven middle school and high school counselors practicing in Montana were questioned. Of the 27 counselors that participated in the survey, 14 counselors worked in GEAR UP schools; and 13 counselors worked in non-GEAR UP schools. Sample schools were randomly chosen, but do represent a cross-section of the state.

Additionally, all schools were considered rural. Telephone contact was made with those individuals identified as counselors at each school. Those willing to participate were asked a series of questions. Answers were hand recorded. Subsequent to questioning all counselors, the interviewer organized the data into broad themes and categories that represented a comprehensive compilation of all answers that were given.

There were seven middle schools and seven high schools in the GEAR UP sample, and six middle schools and seven high schools in non-GEAR UP sample. The sample of both GEAR UP and non-GEAR UP schools were located throughout the state of Montana. In order for a school to qualify as GEAR UP school and become part of the grant, the school must have at least 50% of the student population qualify for the federal free and reduced lunch program. This variable was used as a means to define the school as serving a majority of low socio-economic status students. The non-GEAR UP school sample was chosen to be a representative sample of middle and high school from throughout the state. School counselors from each school were contacted by phone and asked a series of questions.

Survey Questions

1. What does the counseling program in your school include?
 - On what philosophy or principles is it based?

- Is there a particular structure to your program?
2. In what ways does your counseling program engage in activities targeted at:
 - Academic Development
 - Career Development
 - Personal/Social Development
 3. What percentage of your time is spent in each of these areas of development?
 - Academic
 - Career
 - Personal/Social
 4. Are there other areas (in addition to academic, career, and personal/social) of focus that you consider to be important?
 5. In what area(s) would you like more resources or training?
 6. What are one or two effective strategies for encouraging students to seek post-secondary education?

Survey Responses

Survey responses were compiled and organized as a GEAR UP or non-GEAR UP school responses. Response themes or categories were developed as thematic trends appeared during data analysis.

1. *What does the counseling program in your school include?*
 - *On what philosophy or principles is it based?*
 - *Is there a particular structure to your program?*

*Non-GEAR UP Middle Schools**Classroom related activities.*

These included making presentations in classrooms, teaching study skills, and working to meet the needs of teachers through counseling-related activities. For example, if teachers noted specific problems such as conflict resolution or academic deficits that needed to be addressed, counselors would respond with an appropriate activity or tutoring.

Administrative duties.

These included conducting observations to determine possible special education status of students, coordinating tests such as the ITBS, and scheduling classes for students. Also noted was the duty of helping to ensure that the school atmosphere was one that felt safe for all students.

Counseling activities.

These included conducting one-on-one counseling sessions with students, running groups with topics such as “friendship,” advocating for students, and helping students develop problem solving skills.

Career development activities.

These included administering interest inventories to students and helping with the coordination of school Career Fairs.

Summary.

It should be noted that none of the six counselors surveyed described a *specific* structure or philosophy related to their counseling programs. It appeared that the bulk of time was spent on administrative and counseling activities. One counselor noted that

she had met with much initial resistance to developing a counseling program. She has been countering that resistance by attempting to meet the needs of the teachers and making counseling useful for them as well as the students.

Non-GEAR UP High Schools

Administrative duties.

These included scheduling classes, prepping students for the ACT exam, monitoring grades, and serving as members of IEP teams.

Career development activities.

These included helping students assess and meet post-high school goals, engaging in one-on-one career counseling, helping teach career development units, and assisting students in understanding their individual strengths and weaknesses.

Counseling activities.

One-on-one counseling was mentioned by only two of the seven counselors interviewed. Group counseling did not appear to be a modality that was utilized.

Summary.

While the majority of high school counselors described administrative and career development activities as their priorities, three of the seven counselors specifically noted that there was no specific structure to their programs. Two counselors punctuated the importance of looking at each student as an individual and helping all students succeed in whatever way possible. The philosophy of “doing what is needed” seemed to permeate all the high school counselors’ responses. This may have influenced the lack of formal structure that characterized the counseling programs of those schools that were surveyed.

GEAR UP Middle Schools

Career development activities.

Four of the seven counselors who were surveyed specifically described the GEAR UP program as being pivotal to their counseling curriculum. Discussed in depth were the concepts of helping students develop an awareness of multiple career opportunities early in their middle school education, and helping students overcome negative perceptions of themselves not being able to succeed in particular careers.

Counseling activities.

These included one-on-one counseling, group counseling, and crisis counseling.

Philosophy.

Some counselors described philosophies that were important in their program. One philosophy was “service to all.” That included helping students, teachers, staff and community members help one another. Another prevalent philosophy was that of building relationships with students, working for their best interests, and facilitating learning and growth for all.

Issues.

Two issues that were mentioned by counselors as being highly influential in their programs were those of poverty and safety. Poverty appears to influence the perceptions that students have of themselves regarding what they can accomplish. Feeling safe in school was described as a key element that supercedes other learning experiences.

Summary.

It appears that GEAR UP is influential in shaping the structure of these middle school counseling programs. While the GEAR UP philosophy is aimed at students from poor socio-economic backgrounds, it appears that even more work needs to be done regarding poverty and the stigma that accompanies it.

*GEAR UP High Schools**Career development activities.*

Five of seven counselors surveyed described career counseling as being a key component of their programs. GEAR UP was specifically mentioned as being particularly helpful. One counselor indicated that career development was a unit covered in the English class. Other career development activities included contacting college recruiters, disseminating information via bulletin boards and brochures regarding careers, helping students complete scholarship applications and actively recruiting businesses in the community to give scholarships to a wide range of students.

Counseling activities.

These included one-on-one counseling, maintaining an “open door policy” for student use, and mediating conflicts between students and between students and teachers.

Administrative duties.

These included monitoring seniors to ensure they met requirements for graduation, reviewing transcripts, scheduling the appropriate sequence of classes, and advising students in regard to choosing particular classes.

Issues.

Specific issues that counselors mentioned as being pertinent included being aware of Native American cultural influences and incorporating that which is familiar to students, helping students maintain regular attendance, and helping students with drug and alcohol issues on a personal as well as familial level.

Summary.

It should be noted that while there were similarities across programs in GEAR UP and non-GEAR UP schools, middle school counselors involved in GEAR UP described career development and counseling more frequently and with more intensity than those in non-GEAR UP programs.

It should also be noted that career development activities and counseling were key elements in the majority of GEAR UP high school programs that were surveyed. Administrative duties were a close second; however, these duties were primarily related to career development. For example, monitoring transcripts to ensure timely graduations and developing appropriate sequences of courses are integral to helping students prepare for post high school endeavors. While still evidenced as being part of high school counseling programs, personal counseling appeared to be less of a focus than career preparations.

Middle School

High School

<i>Non-GEAR UP</i>	<i>GEAR UP</i>	<i>Non-GEAR UP</i>	<i>GEAR UP</i>
Classroom related activities	Career development activities	Administrative duties	Career development activities
Administrative duties	Counseling activities	Career development activities	Counseling activities
Counseling activities	Philosophy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Service</i> • <i>Building relationships</i> 	Counseling activities	Administrative duties
Career development activities	Issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Poverty</i> • <i>Safety</i> 		Issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Culture</i> • <i>Drugs & Alcohol</i>

2. *In what ways does your counseling program engage in activities targeted at:*

- *Academic Development*
- *Career Development*
- *Personal/Social Development*

Non-GEAR UP Middle Schools – Academic

Future planning.

This included developing four year plans with students and subsequently scheduling appropriate classes, helping students look at requirements for specific colleges, and working on scholarship applications with students.

Remediation.

This included participating in team meetings regarding students who were struggling academically, and filling out academic progress reports for students.

Skill Building.

This included teaching study skills to students and helping students prepare for tests such as the ACT or SAT.

It should be noted that the bulk of work in the academic area was of a remedial nature. Primarily, counselors worked on academic development in those students who were considered to have deficits or weaknesses academically. Only one counselor described teaching study skills and prepping students for tests as a primary duty. It should also be noted that all the counselors who responded seem to maintain a fairly close working relationship with teachers to assess and help students academically.

*Non-GEAR UP High Schools – Academic**Individualized attention.*

Meeting one-on-one with students to assess strengths, weaknesses and interests, and scheduling classes/developing four year plans were the areas most cited in this category. Reviewing transcripts, helping students prepare for technology school, and helping with scholarship applications were also included.

Classroom activities.

These included working with students and teachers in the classroom (tutoring, etc.), visiting classes to make presentations regarding study skills, etc., and encouraging students to take advanced placement courses.

Testing.

This included helping students prepare for the ACT or SAT and proctoring the ITBS.

Remediation.

This included being part of intervention teams and working one-on-one with students who were struggling academically.

It should be noted that a majority of responses fell into the category of individualized attention. It appears that most of the counselors who were surveyed respond to individual student needs versus implementing activities designed to target students in general.

*Non-GEAR UP Middle Schools – Career**Assessment activities.*

These included administering interest inventories, proctoring the ITBS exam, helping students conduct internet searches regarding various careers, and informally assessing likes and dislikes of students.

Information sharing.

This included classroom presentations on career exploration, helping teachers with units on career development, and arranging guest speakers from the community or universities.

Experiential activities.

These were activities utilized in conjunction with classroom units and lectures regarding career development. They included having students complete research papers on a chosen career, creating resumes, and conducting mock interviews.

*Non-GEAR UP High Schools – Career**Classroom activities.*

These primarily consisted of working with classroom teachers to develop and implement units on career development. Two counselors described a student portfolio that was started in the eighth grade and re-emphasized during the junior year. Others described units in career development being presented during the sophomore or junior years.

Experiential activities.

These activities consisted of working with teachers or independently as counselors to set up mock interviews, job shadowing, resume development workshops. Other activities included arranging for students to attend various career fairs.

Testing.

These included administering tests such as the ASVAB and helping students utilize the MCIS. Counselors were also involved in scheduling visits to colleges and contacting college and military representatives to visit the school. The School-to-Work program was also noted as a useful career development asset.

*Non-GEAR UP Middle Schools – Personal/Social**Counseling activities.*

These included one-on-one counseling, group counseling, and informal counseling, also described as an “open door policy.”

Classroom activities.

These included classroom presentations on topics such as bullying, violence, and getting along, arranging guest speakers on topics such as drug and alcohol use, consulting with teachers regarding pertinent topics, helping with activities in the classroom, and encouraging students to stay in class and finish their assignments.

Skill building and information giving activities.

These included implementing the SAFE program (targeted at violence), and teaching students conflict resolution skills.

Philosophy.

While all the counselors surveyed described a number of activities in which they engaged to promote personal and social development, some also described personal philosophies that they considered crucial to fostering personal development in their students. Sincerity with students, visibility to all students, and “keeping kids busy” were each named as important variables in the philosophical structure of these counseling programs.

*Non-GEAR UP High Schools – Personal/Social**Counseling activities.*

These primarily included one-on-one counseling, as described by 5 of seven counselors, and group counseling. Both “formal” and “informal” or open-door counseling policies were described. Two counseling issues described were drug and alcohol problems and helping adolescents successfully separate from their parents.

Classroom activities.

These included making classroom presentations and arranging for guest speakers to highlight special topics.

Barriers and assets.

While a majority of counselors said that personal and social development was a part of their counseling curriculum, several noted that this was an area of weakness in their programs. Some noted that these types of skill were more of a pertinent focus in earlier grades, and one counselor noted that lack of privacy precluded conducting one-on-one sessions. Counselors did note, however, that they have received counseling

referrals from students with whom they had worked and that teachers were cooperative in allowing students to participate in counseling activities.

Summary.

Although these components were not always specifically mentioned in the initial question regarding program structure, it appears that all middle school counselors in non-GEAR UP schools who were surveyed engage in activities that promote academic, career, and personal/social development in the students with whom they work. It should also be noted that the bulk of the academic and career development work is done in conjunction with classroom units or activities. Personal development is primarily promoted through one-on-one and group counseling.

It appears that all high school counselors who were surveyed are involved in implementing activities that target academic, career, and personal/social development in the students in their schools. Frequently, these activities are coordinated with classroom teachers. Academic and career development, in particular, appears to be facilitated in the classroom. Personal and social developmental issues are primarily the responsibility of the counselor. However, this is an area that some counselors felt was a weakness in their programs. It may be of use to help counselors develop further resources for strengthening this component.

GEAR UP Middle Schools – Academic

Administrative duties.

These included enrolling students in classes, coordinating registration procedures, and scheduling the appropriate sequencing of courses.

Classroom activities.

These included coordinating with teachers regarding what was needed in each classroom, weekly visits to each classroom, and teaching a study skills unit in the classroom.

Individualized plans.

These included utilizing GEAR UP funds to develop and implement after-school tutoring programs, seeking out students who were failing courses and offering them encouragement/help, and encouraging students to enroll in the AIM Right camps focused on math and science advancement.

Vision.

Though not tied to a particular set of activities, many counselors described the importance of creating a “vision” for students. The vision included an understanding of how courses and grades were related to future career decisions. Some counselors worked on vision enhancement individually with students, while others tried to promote a healthy vision throughout their schools.

Issues.

Two issues that one counselor described as being almost at crisis levels were low reading ability and high percentages of student academic failure. The counselor stated that over 50% of the eighth graders in the school could not read at a fourth grade level. The counselor hypothesized that lack of parental involvement contributed to this problem.

*GEAR UP High Schools – Academic**Future planning.*

This included helping students prepare academically for whatever future career choices they made. Counselors discussed the importance of helping students connect their coursework with their career goals. Strategies to achieve this were focused on interviewing students regarding their plans and goals and helping them enroll in appropriate classes.

Remediation.

This included sending deficiency reports to students who were struggling academically, preparing monthly report cards, providing individual tutoring and re-arranging schedules to better meet the needs of students.

Individualized plans.

This included reviewing each student's transcripts and developing academic plans that met each student's needs.

*GEAR UP Middle Schools – Career**Testing/assessment activities.*

These included utilizing MCIS, Career Scope, and a variety of formal and informal interest inventories.

Classroom activities.

These included working with the career teachers to develop and present units on career development, and arranging for guest speakers to talk with students regarding various career options. GEAR UP resources and activities were mentioned by multiple

counselors. One counselor uses the GEAR UP resource manual in conjunction with character education modules.

Experiential activities.

These included helping students develop resumes and arranging job shadowing opportunities. Additionally, one school requires students to research a particular university and make a power point presentation to other students in the career class. Thus, students are engaged in information gathering as well as presenting, both of which are considered job skills.

GEAR UP High Schools – Career

Testing/assessment.

Administering tests and providing access to guided inventories via the World Wide Web were the career development strategies most described by the counselors who were interviewed. Tests and programs that were utilized include the MCIS, JMG, CISCO, and the ASVAB. Counselors also described using informal interest inventories to match student interests with appropriate courses. The GEAR UP manual was named as a valuable tool in helping students explore and develop career interests.

Classroom activities.

These included working with classroom teachers to develop and teach units on career development, arranging for guest speakers to present on various types of employment, and assigning students to complete research papers regarding their career choices.

*GEAR UP Middle Schools – Personal/Social**Counseling activities.*

These included one-on-one and group counseling.

Classroom activities.

These included working with both Health and Physical Education teachers to promote healthy lifestyles and social skills. Character education modules were also described as being important to personal and social development. One counselor described a school wide program in which all students engaged in work on a designated social skill for twenty minutes each day in their homeroom class.

Issues.

Two issues were named as important influences on personal and social development. The first was that of parent involvement. One counselor specifically described an event during which students and their parents ate dinner together at the school and discussed scholarship applications. Multiple counselors stressed the importance of involving parents in the healthy development of their children. Lack of confidentiality was another issue cited by counselors that is an impediment to working with students.

*GEAR UP High Schools – Personal/Social**Counseling activities.*

These included one-on-one counseling and group counseling. Six of seven counselors placed a high degree of importance on individual counseling. Both formal types of counseling and informal or open-door policies were described.

Classroom activities.

These included providing presentations on social skills, arranging for guest speakers to lecture on special topics and coordinating Red Ribbon Week.

Experiential activities.

These included arranging for students to visit potential job sites and universities.

Summary.

It should be noted that while all of the counselors in the middle schools surveyed described activities related to academic, career, and personal/social development, it was career development that appeared to be the most developed and utilized component. Several counselors also conveyed the importance of helping students achieve a vision of how their current coursework and school experiences are related to post high school endeavors. It may be that the importance placed on career vision may be influenced by the GEAR UP philosophy of developing a “pro-college culture” and expanding career options for all students.

High school counselors in GEAR UP schools aptly described activities that target academic, personal/social, and career development in their students. It should be noted that there was a clear emphasis on ways in which academic and personal/social development impacted career development. This appeared to be related not only to the age of the involved students, but also to the resources provided by GEAR UP funding.

Academic Development

Middle School		High School	
<i>Non-GEAR UP</i>	<i>GEAR UP</i>	<i>Non-GEAR UP</i>	<i>GEAR UP</i>
Future planning	Administrative duties	Individualized attention	Future planning
Remediation	Classroom activities	Classroom activities	Remediation
Skill Building	Individualized plans	Testing	Individualized plans
	Issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Poor reading ability</i> 	Remediation	

Career Development

Middle School		High School	
<i>Non-GEAR UP</i>	<i>GEAR UP</i>	<i>Non-GEAR UP</i>	<i>GEAR UP</i>
Assessment activities	Testing/Assessment activities	Classroom activities	Testing/Assessment
Information sharing	Classroom activities	Experiential activities	Classroom activities
Experiential activities	Experiential activities	Classroom activities	

Personal/Social Development

Middle School		High School	
<i>Non-GEAR UP</i>	<i>GEAR UP</i>	<i>Non-GEAR UP</i>	<i>GEAR UP</i>
Counseling activities	Counseling activities	Counseling activities	Counseling activities
Classroom activities	Classroom activities	Classroom activities	Classroom activities
Skill building and information giving activities	Issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Parent involvement</i> • <i>Confidentiality</i> 	Barriers/Assets <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Lack of time to do counseling</i> • <i>Referrals from students and teachers</i> 	Experiential activities
Philosophy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Sincerity</i> • <i>Visibility</i> 			

3. What percentage of your time is spent in each of these areas of development?

- Academic
- Career
- Personal/Social

Non-GEAR UP Middle Schools

Column heading numbers represent separate school counselor responses.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total	Average
Academic	30%	30%	40%	15%	40%	35%	190*	32%
Career	25%	20%	20%	10%	20%	15%	110*	18%
Personal/Social	45%	50%	40%	75%	40%	50%	300*	50%

* In these particular programs, there was an overall heavier emphasis on personal/social development followed by academic and career development respectively.

Non-GEAR UP High Schools

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total	Average
Academic	70%	70%	40%	33%	20%	33%	33%	299*	43%
Personal/Social	25%	10%	30%	33%	10%	33%	33%	174*	25%
Career	10%	20%	30%	33%	70%	33%	33%	229*	33%

* In these particular programs, the highest emphasis was placed on academic development followed by career development with personal/social development being the least emphasized.

GEAR UP Middle Schools

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total	Average
Academic	Unknown	33%	33%	20%	33%	40%	10%	169*	28%
Career	Unknown	33%	33%	05%	33%	40%	75%	219*	37%
Personal/Social	Majority	33%	33%	75%	33%	20%	25%	219*	37%

* Of those counselors who were able to break down the percentage of their time spent in each category, it appears that there was equal emphasis between personal/social and career development with academic development having less of an emphasis. However, the counselor who did not assign a percentage to each area clearly stated that personal/social development received the greatest emphasis in that program.

GEAR UP High Schools

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total	Average
Academic	Close to 100 %	40%	33%	Majority	40%	25%	40%	178*	37%
Career	Used to promote academic	35%	33%	Unknown	20%	25%	30%	143*	29%
Personal/Social	Used to promote academic	25%	33%	Unknown	40%	50%	30%	178*	37%

* Of those counselors who were able to break down the percentage of their time spent in each category, it appears that there was equal emphasis between academic and personal/social development with career development receiving just slightly less of an emphasis. However, the two teachers who did not assign a percentage to each area both stated that the emphasis in their program was on academic development.

Summary

In general, it appears that in both GEAR UP and non-GEAR UP schools, there is a primary emphasis on personal/social development during the middle school years and a primary emphasis on academic development during the high school years. It should be noted that a majority of high school counselors surveyed did state that academic

development is very closely related to career development and the emphasis on academic achievement was meant to bolster healthy career development.

It should be noted that in some instances the percentages of time assigned to a particular area of development contradicted answers to the open-ended questions described earlier. This appears to be due to two factors.

First, a majority of counselors struggled with differentiating between academic, personal/social, and career development. There was agreement among most that the areas were closely related and that growth in one often influenced growth in the others. Counselors could not always label a particular activity or experience as promoting only one area of growth. Thus, percentages were typically “rough estimates” with the caveat that all the elements were intertwined.

Second, some counselors stated that the percentage of time spent in an area did not necessarily equate to the degree of importance placed on the area. Some counselors spent more actual time on administrative duties related to academic development i.e. registration or scheduling, but placed an equal or greater emphasis on the importance of personal or career development.

	Middle School		High School	
	<i>Non-GEAR UP</i>	<i>GEAR UP</i>	<i>Non-GEAR UP</i>	<i>GEAR UP</i>
Academic	Second	Third	First	First
Career	Third	Second	Second	Third
Personal/Social	First	First	Third	Second

4. *Are there other areas (in addition to academic, career, and personal/social) of focus that you consider to be important?*

The counselor’s responses are combined and recorded in the following categories.

Topics/Issues	Skills
Violence	Working with parents/families
Anger management	Crisis counseling
Dealing with emotions	Understanding cultural issues
Decision making skills	Community outreach/presence
Divorce	Record keeping
Peer tutoring/support	College related procedures & financial aid
Conflict resolution/mediation	Interpreting test scores
Drug & alcohol issues	
Getting along with peers	
Health information i.e. STD's	
Self esteem	
Life skills/SAFE program	
Issues	Recommendations
More time for counseling	Incorporate GEAR UP in all schools

Summary

It should be noted that while several of the counseling topics/issues that were named could be considered components of personal/social development, many counselors thought these topics were of particular importance. Some thought they needed additional training to be able to effectively deal with these issues. Learning to include parents and family members was named by a significant number of counselors as crucial to implementing a successful school counseling program. Those who responded in this manner also requested additional training. Training in understanding

the communities in which their students live, awareness of cultural dynamics, and incorporating family work into school counseling programs was also requested.

Several counselors noted that academic, career, and personal/social development were comprehensive enough to include all components of a successful school counseling program; however, they desired more time to implement activities in each area. Counselors particularly noted the lack of time they could dedicate to personal counseling. Some counselors recommended that the GEAR UP curricula be implemented in all schools as it was considered comprehensive and very useful.

5. *In what area(s) would you like more resources or training?*

Specific Recommendations for Trainings

- A live demonstration of someone working with families in a school setting
- Any experiential training that demonstrates specific skills
- Facilitation of a group of students, teachers, and counselors working together to develop programs for their schools
- University representative presenting to school counselors what universities can offer to students and appropriate application procedures
- Cross training between elementary, middle school, and high school counselors to facilitate understanding of the roles that each are taking.

General Topics of Interest

- Working with parents and families; understanding family dynamics
- Facilitation of healthy decision making and goal setting
- Drug and alcohol issues
- Effective communication and relationship building with adolescents
- Awareness of current trends/issues affecting adolescents
- Motivating students to learn and grow
- Suicide prevention
- Grief
- Native American cultural issues
- Interpreting test scores
- Personality disorders in adolescents
- Dealing with adolescents' emotions

- Counselor self-care/dealing with the multiple tasks of the school counselor
- Character Education
- Additional career development information
- Creating safe schools

Resources Desired by Counselors

- Contact information of other counselors and personnel across the state that could help with developing and implementing counseling curricula.
- Web site for counselors including information pertinent to schools and contact information of other counselors and agencies involved with youth.
- Access to data management and record keeping programs.
- Access to confidential meeting places for personal counseling.

Summary

While some counselors made recommendations for specific trainings in which they would like to participate (see above), the majority of counselors described general topics on which they would like more information. The top three responses in that category were: 1) working with families; 2) helping students develop healthy decision making skills and goal setting strategies; and, 3) responding to issues related to drug and alcohol use among adolescents and their families.

Counselors also described specific resource materials that they would like to have made available. It should be noted that multiple counselors in GEAR UP schools stated that it would be useful for all schools across the state to have access to GEAR UP resources.

6. *What are one or two effective strategies for encouraging students to seek post-secondary education?*

Invite Guest Speakers to the School

- People engaged in various careers of interest to students
- Former students who have gone to college
- Military recruiters
- College recruiters

Experiential Activities

- Life Fairs/Money Runs – these involve giving students hypothetical careers and then having them engage in certain hypothetical “life” activities, i.e. building homes, getting married, meeting unexpected debts, etc. and budgeting the money from their career to meet expenses (described by 3 counselors)
- Attending job or college fairs (described by 5 counselors)
- Job shadowing (described by 3 counselors)
- Research universities or specific careers
- Develop “maps” of careers engaged in by family members
- Develop money making businesses within the school, i.e. woodworking & shop,

Providing Information

- Informing parents and students of opportunities for scholarships, financial aid, enrollment procedures, etc. In some cases student/parent nights were hosted in the school. They included eating dinner followed by a discussion of college and military options for students. (7 counselors noted the importance of parent involvement.)

- Having brochures regarding careers and colleges available for students
- Seeking out students and reminding them to fill out scholarship applications
- Increase exposure to career and education options (described by 5 counselors)
- Provide access to internet searches

Personal Counseling

- Building relationships with students (described by 4 counselors)
- Assessing interests and connecting them with career paths (described by 6 counselors)
- Sharing personal experiences related to career decision making (described by 3 counselors)
- Help students prepare for college entrance exams

Favorite Resources

- GEAR UP manual and funds (described by 4 counselors)
- Teachers – coordinate career development with course work (described by 2 counselors)
- School-to-Work Program
- Local businesses – encouraged to provide scholarship money

Summary of Survey Results

Results of this survey indicate that, overall, Montana school counseling programs lack a specific structure and philosophical underpinning. While the components outlined by the GEAR UP program, e.g. fostering academic, career, and personal/social development were cited as useful and comprehensive, most counselors still described situations whereby they “do what is needed” or “meet the individual needs of students and teachers.” Though the flexible nature of approaches such as these may be useful, it appears that a more guided structure would benefit counselors and alleviate the responsibility of creating programs “as they go.”

It is not recommended that counselors be forced to adhere to a strict set of guidelines, but rather that they be encouraged to collaboratively develop a set of common goals and/or a flexible structure for their programs. Several counselors cited the need for increased contact with other counselors and resource personnel. Many felt somewhat lost and unsure of how to develop and implement successful counseling programs.

It should be noted that despite the lack of common structure or philosophy, all counselors demonstrated a high degree of knowledge and competency in implementing activities designed to enhance student growth. Many felt, however, that having more structure and guidance would lend efficiency to their programs and enable them to spend more time with students.

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