

Running head: CURRICULUM REVISION

Curriculum Revision:

Lower Valley School District Proposal for Change

Lisa Kirchner

Action Research

School Counseling, Licensure Only

Portland State University

May 20, 2005

Professional Responsibility: This project has been reviewed by collegial professional peers and has been submitted for on-line publication before being evaluated by faculty members from Portland State University. I am the author and take full responsibility for the project's contents and quality. This work serves as a baseline for my professional school counselor skills and demonstrates what I have done to develop and/or assess my actions directed towards serving students and schools. In other words, this is a snapshot or one indicator of my work at this stage of my career.

Citation: Kirchner, L. (2005). Curriculum Revision: Lower Valley School District Proposal for Change. Retrieved [Date], from Portland State University, Counselor Education, School Counseling Specialization, School Counseling in Action, Intern Projects 2005. Web site: <http://www.ed.pdx.edu/coun/sca.htm>

Table of Contents

Purpose of this project.....	4
Human Subjects.....	5
Methods.....	5
Participants.....	6
Instruments.....	6
Procedures.....	6
Results.....	7
Mission Statement.....	7
Program Philosophy.....	7
Audit Checklist.....	7
Discussion.....	8
Implications for School Counselors.....	9
Limitations.....	10
Conclusions.....	10
Appendix A.....	12
Appendix B.....	13
Appendix C.....	14
References.....	15

The American School Counselor Association states that 70% of school counselors' time should be devoted to direct services to students with the maximum student to counselor ratio of 1:250 (ASCA, 1999). The reality at Williams Middle School, and throughout the Lower Valley School District, is student to counselor ratios of 1:475 and over 50% of the counselors time is spent on quasi administrative tasks. This issue is extensively debated in literature (Bemak, F. 2000, Rowley, Stroh & Sink, 2005), and led, in part, to the creation of *The ASCA National Model: a Framework for School Counseling Programs* (American School Counseling Association, 2003) and eventually state level models including Oregon's Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling Framework (Oregon Framework) (Oregon Department of Education, 2003). While these models were extensively researched, the actual effectiveness of the models is still in question.

The Oregon Framework clearly states that Guidance and Counseling is essential for student success (2003). Variations on the guidelines outlined exist throughout the state of Oregon to best meet the needs of the individual students within a given community. The current K-12 Guidance and Counseling Curriculum for the Lower Valley School District (LVSD Plan) was adopted in 1990. There is a need to revisit the current plan and make revisions based on the changing needs of our students, staff and community. Research implies that a strong guidance and counseling curriculum benefits the large majority (Gysbers, Hughey, Stan & Lapan, 1992; Rowley, Stroh & Sink, 2005).

The benefits of this research study will be an updated K-12 LVSD Plan that will adequately meet the high expectations that have been set forth for by our constituents. It will provide our district the opportunity to align ourselves with the Oregon Framework.

After a preliminary review of our current LVSD Plan, it appears that many components of the Oregon Framework are currently being met. The emphasis of our current plan is on the academic success of students, but it is also imperative that we teach students appropriate social behaviors and how they can be part of something bigger than themselves. Community involvement is not clearly addressed in our plan. Teaching students how to be a part of their community and demonstrating the strength that comes from building relationships among families, schools and communities is extremely important. It is my belief that at the end of this project, our team of counselors and administrator will have a clear, precise LVSD Plan that guide our daily practices, including demonstrating community involvement.

Purpose of this project

This project was developed to revise the LVSD Plan in order to meet the evolving needs of our students and community. Three research questions were addressed in this study. The first question addressed the lack of a mission statement, the second looked at the revision of our program philosophy and lastly we used the audit checklist included in the Oregon Framework to uncover areas of our plan to be revised.

This study utilized information collected from each grade level counseling team, elementary, middle and high school. Specifically it looked at the current guidance and counseling curriculum and compared it to Oregon Framework. Once each team met and agreed upon revisions, the teams worked together to create a mission statement and revised program philosophy that incorporated ideas from the Oregon Framework that will benefit our school and community.

Human Subjects

Before beginning this project it was necessary to submit a HSRRC Application Proposal. It was determined that revising the LVSD plan did not require a review by the HSRRC because there was no contact with human subjects in this project. One area that needed to be considered, was the time required by participants in the revision committee. It was extremely important to respect the length of the required meetings and to give participants ample time to complete tasks between meetings.

Methods

Facilitating a major revision of our LVSD Plan will be a logistical challenge. In the fall of 2004, I submitted a Proposed LVSD Guidance and Counseling Revision Timeline to the Assistant Superintendent. She was very supportive of the project and coordinated meetings and required attendance of all school counselors, child development specialists and school psychologists in our district. This combined to ensure that all grade levels provided their input into the final draft of the mission statement, program philosophy and LVSD plan. The counselors indicated their reluctance to undergo this project because of the perceived time commitment. At the first meeting the revision committee members received a copy of the revision timeline (Appendix A). The timeline organized the project into smaller, more manageable tasks. It was my intent that all participants would meet to discuss the mission statement and program philosophy, but high school counselors would not be sitting with elementary school counselors as they developed their part of the program. Instead, I we held monthly meetings with all participants. They were asked questions and then allowed to separate into grade level counseling teams to complete the tasks by the next meeting date. As the project

developed, specific, time restricted meetings allowed each team to share with the other teams what revisions and additions they suggest and how to improve transitions from elementary to middle school and middle to high school.

Participants

The revision committee consisted of two school psychologists, three high school counselors, two middle school counselors, four child development specialists and our Assistant Superintendent. There were three male and nine female participants with the number of years of experience ranging from zero-26. Each participant was asked to contribute to three main components: Mission Statement, Program Philosophy and complete the Program Audit.

Instruments

The instruments used in this project were the current LVSD Plan, guided discussions based on the revision timeline and the audit checklist from the Oregon Framework.

Procedures

Individual participants analyzed the services they currently provide their students and how that fits into their role as a school counselor. After reflecting on what services they are providing and what they believe should be happening at their school, revisions were expected to be made to the LVSD Plan. We established dates and times for meetings; met once a month for five of six consecutive months for approximately two hours. The meetings began with a round table check in, and then we would start working on the assigned task according to the timeline. Discussing the audit checklist provided helpful information, including many options, in order to address student needs.

Results

As a result of this action research project, the revision committee approved a mission statement and a revised program philosophy (Appendix B).

Mission Statement

The LVSD Plan did not have a mission statement. We reviewed different options, but were satisfied with what the Oregon Framework used as their sample mission statement. As a team, we decided that their example put it succinctly and it went along with what we believed.

Program Philosophy

As a committee, we agreed with the current program philosophy, but made some revisions. After we reviewed other program philosophies and participated in guided discussions, one counselor took control of the task and asked that we all e-mail her our suggestions. She wrote a rough draft and we finalized it at our next meeting.

Audit Checklist

The results of the audit checklist varied (Appendix C). We agreed to numerous changes. First, we wrote a mission statement and then updated our program philosophy. We saw a number of areas that needed revisions, but due to time constraints, we narrowed our focus to concentrate on the first two tasks. Between meeting dates, our Assistant Superintendent contacted a different school district that was part of a pilot revision program. That district agreed to share their information once their revision was complete, so we decided to revisit our revision plan after receiving information from this district.

Discussion

In light of the decision made by our superintendent, I adjusted my project to focus on the mission statement and revision of the program philosophy as previously discussed in the methods sections. The goal of this project was to create a revised Guidance and Counseling Curriculum. While this goal was not met, an unexpected outcome of this project was the increase in district wide communication. In the 2003-2004 school year, the counselors did not meet as a district wide group; this year we met five times vastly improving our communication. We wrote a mission statement, revised our program philosophy and are currently in the process of revising our curriculum. The Oregon Framework audit checklist provided helpful information in looking to see what areas of the whole student need to be met and one option of how those needs could be met. In addition, I used the audit checklists completed by counselors and psychologists that work with grades six through eight to make recommendations for only those grade levels.

In reviewing our sixth through eighth grade plan, I found that numerous areas were not addressed at Williams Middle School. Some areas that needed adjustments were: Peer helper program, Presentation of Standardized Testing, Career Day, goals for quarter grades, Japanese Culture/Sister city and explaining academic exploratory classes. After seeing where we were not meeting the current plan, I developed some new tools to alleviate the problems and made some recommended improvements to the plan to ensure the correct person provided the correct instruction and guidance. In addition, I am currently researching different peer mentoring options. For the first time in two years, I created a course catalog to describe the academic exploratory classes to be sent home with each incoming sixth grader and also available to any student or parent that would

like one. Career Exploration is an underutilized tool in helping eighth graders transition to ninth grade. Our district is currently in the process of implementing Oregon Career Information System (Oregon CIS) district wide. I also worked with the Eighth Grade Reading teacher to develop a Career Curriculum and a career day.

Diversity is an integral part of our school. Nearly 50% of our students are English Language Learners; many of their parents are migrant farm workers that return to Mexico for up to three months out of every school year. It is necessary for us to address this population and find ways to meet their unique needs, while also respecting their heritage and their choice to miss school every year. Some of the students I work with are living apart from their family, all in hopes of gaining an education and a better life for themselves. This is a difficult position for any person to be in, especially a young student. At this point, this segment of our population is not addressed in our LVSD plan. It is my hope that, as a district, we more clearly define our goals for helping these students achieve personally, academically and socially so that they can continue become self-confident, happy individuals that contribute to society.

Implications for School Counselors

Defining the role of a school counselor is easier with a clearly defined mission statement and program philosophy, what we do on a daily basis should relate directly back to these documents. The results of this study show that the participants are aware of what their roles should be and are working towards aligning what they believe their role is, to their actual daily practices. During the course of this project, LVSD received funds to hire an additional high school counselor for the 2005-2006 school year. This will bring

our district closer to meeting the ASCA recommended counselor to student ratio at the high school.

As the research continues to grow on the effectiveness of the Oregon Framework and the ASCA National Model, LVSD will continue to make adjustments and revisions to reach the ultimate goal of helping students to succeed personally, socially and academically.

Limitations

Participants on the revision committee were limited to child development specialists, school counselors and school psychologists. Teachers, building administrators, parents and teachers were not involved. Meeting dates and times limited teacher and building administrator involvement. We determined that our role as a school counselor was to advocate for the students and we felt confident that we were able to objectively work on the revised plan.

The revision committee deemed it necessary to change the LVSD Plan based on the evolving community of Lower Valley. We had no hard data to determine whether the previous plan was working. During our discussions, we determined that we would keep a guided log of how effective our revised plan was in helping students to succeed and then evaluate our progress on an annual basis.

Conclusions

This study led to the creation of a mission statement, revised program philosophy and recommendations for sixth through eighth grade LVSD Plan. This is a work in process and while I wanted to complete this project, I was only able to make recommendations and wait for other counselors to do the same. It is yet to be determined

if the board will accept the revisions or if we will need to continue to make changes before the new curriculum is adopted.

Meetings positively improved our counseling community. Many of us work in isolation and do not have people to share ideas with, or ask for help on a daily basis. The increase in face to face contact time, led to an increased comfort level with other child development specialists, counselors and school psychologists within our district. Hence, more phone calls and e-mails regarding questions and or the need for help with referrals and other problems that we encounter on a daily basis. Meetings allowed us the opportunity to see what others were doing at their schools, what was working and what was not working, how we can improve transitions and what we can be doing to make the learning environment as continual as possible. If this communication continues, we will be able to track families, get histories and see the progress that students have made as they move through our school system. It is my hope that we will be able to rectify situations before they become major problems. I feel like through these meetings we were able to seek the support that we need as counselors dealing with tough situations on a daily basis. Communication is key to helping students, parents, teachers, counselors, community members and administrators work together to create a community that works with and for each other.

Appendix A

LVSD Guidance and Counseling Curriculum Revision Timeline

- 12/9/04 **School Counselor/Psychologist Meeting**
- ❖ Brief overview of Revision Project
 - ❖ Hand out materials
 - For each grade level team
 - 1 copy of the District wide Counseling and Guidance Curriculum
 - For each School Counselor/Psychologist
 - 1 copy of their grade levels curriculum
 - 1 Program Audit checklist taken from the Oregon Framework of the Guidance and Counseling Pre Kindergarten through Twelfth Grade
 - Copies of sample Mission Statements
 - Project Timeline
 - ❖ Tasks for each School Counselor/Psychologist
 - Complete Program Audit Checklist by January 13, 2005
 - Read sample Mission Statements and critique
 - Think about suggestions for our Mission Statement
 - Review Program philosophy – Make revisions if necessary
- 1/13/05 **School Counselor/Psychologist Meeting**
- ❖ Program Audit Checklists returned to Lisa
 - ❖ Work on Mission Statement
 - ❖ Review Program Philosophy – Work on revisions if necessary
- 2/22/05 **In-service Day**
- ❖ All counselors work on a draft of the Mission Statement
 - ❖ All counselors work on a draft of the Program Philosophy
 - ❖ Divided into Grade Level Teams – Review Program Audit Checklists and work on revisions to existing Counseling and Guidance Curriculum
 - ❖ Submit revisions and additions
- 3/10/05 **School Counselor/Psychologist Meeting**
- ❖ Review finalized Mission Statement
 - ❖ Review finalized Program Philosophy
 - ❖ Hand out revised Counseling and Guidance Curriculum for review
 - ❖ Tasks for each School Counselor/Psychologist
 - Review revised Counseling and Guidance Curriculum by May 5, 2005
- 5/5/05 **School Counselor/Psychologist Meeting**
- Make any necessary changes to Counseling and Guidance Curriculum

Appendix B
Mission Statement

The Guidance and Counseling Program of the Lower Valley School District is an integral component of the District's total program, supporting the education and development of each student by promoting individual uniqueness, multicultural diversity, and maximum development of each student's potential. The program assists in the educational, career, and personal/social growth and community involvement of each student. The ultimate goal of the program is that each student will graduate with the personal, academic, and career-related skills and knowledge to be able to make self-directed, realistic, and responsible decisions in an increasingly complex world.

Program Philosophy

The Lower Valley School District recognizes that every individual grows, matures, and experiences life at different times and rates. Consequently, individual instruction and guidance must be available to satisfy this need. All staff members in the school have a responsibility to support the guidance program in its efforts to help students understand their unique psychological, cultural and social traits, and to be aware of the effects that heredity, environment and experience all have on social development, and subscribe to the belief that they can be effective influences in the lives of children. Guidance and counseling is an integral part of each school's total educational program.

We believe that the academic, career, personal-social, and community involvement skills and knowledge that students need for success in school and in life are attainable when guidance and counseling is consistent and includes sequential activities organized and implemented by counseling staff with the support of teachers, administrators, students, parents and the community. The program content must be integrated into the curriculum and other services and must involve parents and the broader community.

Lower Valley's Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling Program, when fully implemented, will:

- Address the needs of 100 percent of the student population;
- Be an integral part of the instructional program and the total educational experience;
- Include structured activities based upon the needs of each student, including developmental, preventative, and remedial services;
- Provide accountability and continuous improvement through annual review of student progress and program and staff evaluation;
- Include appropriate professional development for all staff to maintain a quality program;
- Depend upon the support and collaboration of administrators, teachers and other personnel, students and the community;
- Be coordinated and implemented by licensed school counselors;
- Provide triage, intervention, referral, and coordination of services for students and their families experiencing particular difficulties.

Appendix C

Compiled List of Audit Checklists

Rewrite Mission Statement

Philosophy – ok, but make sure current mandates are included

People weren't sure if School Board was updated etc. as far as district policy.

Guidance and Curriculum-

Elementary section needs to be rewritten to reflect 2nd Step and Grants

Middle School – 1 add in community

1 indicators and delivery strategies are in progress

Individual Planning-

Middle School- Implementing CIS in progress

High School- Lower the student/counselor ratio

Responsive-

Some people think it needs to be revised/updated; each building should have their own

System Support-

Looks good, ongoing process

Student advocacy-

Yes, but confidentiality varies widely

Professional Staff

Looks good – there are several grants

we need to try to lower student/counselor ratio

Collaborative Structure-

Looks good – District-wide is starting this year

Materials and facilities-

There is a need for additional space and offices – especially at the high school

Management Systems-

We need to update school district and local community

Student Progress-

Questions on this section

Continuous Improvement-

Need to review and possibly update performance standards for each position

Program Planning and Evaluation-

Some completed, but most say they are old and need to be revised

References

- American School Counselor Association. (1999). *Role Statement: The School Counselor*. Alexandria, VA. Author.
- American School Counselor Association. (2003). *The ASCA National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs*. Alexandria, VA: Author.
- Bemak, F. (2000). Transforming the role of the school counselor to proved leadership in educational reform through collaboration. *Professional School Counseling*, 3, 323-331.
- Gysbers, N., Hughey, K., Starr, M. & Lapan, R. (1992). Improving school guidance programs: A framework for program personnel and results evaluation. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 70, 565-570.
- Oregon Department of Education. (2003). *Oregon's Framework for Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling Programs pre-Kindergarten through Twelfth Grade*.
- Rowley, W., Stroh, H. & Sink, C. (2005). Counseling guidance and counseling programs' use of guidance curricula materials: A survey of national trends. *Professional School Counseling*, 8, 296-304.