THE DESIGN OF A SCHOOL COUNSELING PROGRAM
FOR A CHARTER SCHOOL SERVING
AT-RISK STUDENTS GRADES 7-12

by

Rita Gail Edwards

A Master’s Research Project submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirement for the degree

Master of Arts

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January 2000

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has been approved

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to design a school counseling program to assist at-risk students in grades 7-12 attending a small charter school with their social, emotional, and academic development. This objective will be attempted to help students become successful contributing members of society.

The methodology used was a descriptive design to determine guidelines for a secondary school counseling program. The data obtained includes information on the charter school involved, the benefits to students, the counselor, and staff, and how to address the needs by following state and national guidelines. Two documents that tested the design’s guidelines were Arizona Comprehensive Competency-Based Guidance Handbook(s) and the National Standards for School Counseling Programs.

Since the content of this study will result in a newly implemented program there will be an ongoing assessment, as needed, to up-date, modify, and adjust the program in an attempt to enhance the program. Measurable outcomes will include: Student achievement in academic areas, increase in high school graduates, continuing education, positive social interaction and integration, employment, behavioral and life skills, and success in vocational occupation skills that lead to employment. Measurable success in the three main areas covered by the state and national standards of academic, career, and personal/social will provide evidence of the success of this school counseling program.
The certified school counselor will caretake all results and findings. The counselor will present pertinent data to the faculty and administration on a bi-annual basis. The faculty, administration, and counselor will then adjust or modify the program as needed to meet the desired outcomes.

Recommendations will be derived through the assessment and evaluation process. It is recommended that the evaluation and assessment process take place once a semester. Success can then be measured based upon whether or not the program is meeting the needs and objectives outlined in the school counseling program. The program may at any point be modified to insure optimum success.
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CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM

Introduction

A school counseling program may be needed to address the needs and issues of at-risk students attending charter schools. Developing such a program may best be accomplished by evaluating current secondary counseling programs in the United States and conforming to the Arizona Comprehensive Competency-Based Guidance Handbook and the National Standards for School Counseling Programs. The goal of such a program would be to assist at-risk students in their social, emotional, career, and academic development.

The American School Counseling Association (ASCA) states that "counseling is a process of helping people by assisting them in making decisions and changing behavior" (ASCA, 1997, p. 8). Statistics from the 1988 U.S. Census data reveal the level of assistance needed by teenagers in our society. For instance, the following statistics are a daily average that gives an idea of how serious the problems are:

1. 2,795 teenagers become pregnant
2. 211 children are arrested for drug abuse
3. 437 are arrested for drinking and drunken driving
4. 3,288 run away from home
5. 6 commit suicide. (Sears & Coy, 1991, p. 1)

The duties of a school counselor should aid in alleviating some of these conditions. However, to be effective, the role of secondary counselors must change from what it has been in the past. To influence positive change in this area, school counselors must assume a more active role in the design and implementation of more student-centered programs. One obstacle in the past was principals dictating counselors' roles by assigning administrative or quasi-administrative duties such as counting credits, keeping track of attendance, and maintaining discipline (Sears, 1991). When national standards are enlisted as a guideline, school counselors' job descriptions will need to be restructured to reflect the duties for which they were trained—both individual and small group counseling, team teaching developmental learning activities in the classrooms, consulting with parents, teachers, other educators and community agencies, developing active staff/community public relations programs through newsletters, local media, and presentations, and develop rating scales/surveys to evaluate the program (Sears, 1991).

One of the best places to test and evaluate restructuring secondary school counseling programs is a charter school. Charter schools began in 1991 in Minnesota and have currently spread to 34 states and D.C. totaling over 1,200 schools (DeSchryver, 1999). Charter schools provide a process that allows for most state and local regulations that govern public education to be relaxed or waived. These schools then gain the freedom to redesign or reinvent public education (Barr & Parrett, 1995). Once a state establishes charter legislation, individuals, which may include teachers, parents, or business persons may in essence become the legal equivalent of a mini school district (Barr &
Parrett, 1995). Therefore, charter schools may be a fertile ground for educational reform and for the redesign of secondary school counseling programs.

Youth who are considered at-risk are not only in danger of failing and dropping out of school, but also of entering adulthood illiterate, dependent upon drugs and alcohol, unemployed or underemployed, as a teenage parent, dependent on welfare, or adjudicated by the criminal justice system (Barr & Parrett, 1995). Therefore, these youth are referred to as at-risk because they may leave school underprepared for further education for the kinds of jobs available. The impact of their lives on society will be one of alienation and dependency (Barr & Parrett, 1995).

Development of the Problem

The future lives of at-risk students and the continued health and success of the United States will likely be negatively affected if increasing numbers of at-risk students are going out into society underprepared for adequate employment and lacking basic life coping skills. School counselors are faced with the enormous task of creating programs that will help these individuals develop into contributing members of society (ASCA, 1997).

At charter schools that deal mainly with extreme at-risk students, special areas of concern must be addressed to maximize the rate of success, including excessive absences, attention span difficulties, behavior problems, family dynamics, and substance abuse. To best address these issues and assist such students with education, support, and coping mechanisms for the problems at hand, a school counseling program must be tailored to
their needs in order to be successful. National Standards for School Counseling Programs are based on three areas of student development: 1. Academic, 2. Career, and 3. Personal/Social. Thus, to enhance knowledge of each of these areas the National Standards for School Counseling Programs provide the following:

a. create a framework for a national model for school counseling programs;

b. identify the key components of a school counseling model program;

c. identify the knowledge and skills that all students should acquire as a result of the K-12 school counseling program;

d. ensure that school counseling programs are comprehensive in design and delivered in a systematic fashion to all students;

e. establish school counseling as an integral component of the academic mission of the educational system; and,

f. encourage equitable access to school counseling services for all students, provided by a credentialed school counselor. (ASCA, 1997, p. 2)

The average school counselor today is responsible for approximately 580 students (ASCA, 1999). With such a heavy case load and assigned administrative duties as well, it is understood that minimal contact with each student is made. Quite often, students slip through the cracks with regard to academics, attendance, and social problems due to the lack of availability of quality counseling time. It is important that each child be given the attention and assistance he or she needs to succeed. The charter schools, as a whole, have an opportunity to provide the one-on-one and special programs because of a smaller student population. The counselor and the student can take time to develop rapport that is not afforded by the traditional public school system. One of the issues stressed in the National Standards is the importance of providing these counseling services
to all students.

**Need for the Study**

The reason it is important to design and create a student-centered school counseling program is because more and more at-risk students are enrolling in charter schools because of the lack of support they have received at the larger public schools (Hook, 1997). Therefore, the need for the study is established because these at-risk students, their parents, and teachers are not receiving the services and desired outcomes from the traditional public school system.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to design a school counseling program to assist at-risk students in grades 7-12 attending a small charter school with their social, emotional, and academic development. This objective will be attempted to help students become successful contributing members of society.

**Research Question**

What is the content of a school counseling program which meets the needs of the at-risk students attending a 7-12th grade charter school?
CHAPTER 2

THE LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The content of this literature review focuses on several areas. The first is the ripe environment for educational reform which the charter school movement has helped spearhead. A closer look at at-risk indicators identifies more closely the factors that place students in this category. Seven myths that can negatively impact school reform are addressed followed by 13 interventions to help reduce the dropout rate. Finally, the developmental state and national standards are covered to establish the basis for a proactive student-centered program of school counseling.

Era of Reform

Since the charter school movement began in 1991, the United States has begun to embrace educational reform (DeSchryver, 1999). As with private industry, those in the field of education are seeking innovative and effective ways to improve upon the end product. In education, that product is the country's future work force--the next generation. Charter schools are allowed to operate without the rules, regulations, and bureaucracy of larger school districts (Barr & Parrett, 1995). Their focus is on a positive end result. The way it is achieved is determined by the charter's mission statement and philosophy of effective methods.
In view of this era of educational reform and society's demand for accountability in education, it is understandable that the United States and Arizona have implemented standards for school counseling programs.

**Factors that Place Students at Risk**

A review of the following list makes it quite obvious that any child may become at-risk. Factors that place students at risk:

1. Attempted suicide during the past year
2. Used drugs or engaged in substance abuse
3. Has been a drug “pusher” during the past year
4. Sense of self esteem is negative
5. Was involved in a pregnancy during the past year
6. Was expelled from school during the past year
7. Consumes alcohol regularly
8. Was arrested for illegal activity
9. Parents have negative attitudes toward education
10. Has several brothers or sister who dropped out
11. Was suspended from school twice last year
12. Student was absent more than 20 days last year
13. Parent drinks excessively and is an alcoholic
14. Was retained in grade (i.e. “held back”)
15. One parent attempted suicide last year
16. Scored below 20th percentile on standardized test
17. Other family members used drugs during past year
18. Attended three or more schools during past five years
19. Average grades were below “C” last school year
20. Was arrested for driving while intoxicated
21. Has an IQ score below 90
22. Parents divorced or separated last year
23. Father is unskilled laborer who is unemployed
24. Mother is unskilled laborer who is unemployed
25. Diagnosed as being in special education
26. English is not language
27. Lives in an inner city, urban area
28. The mother is only parent living in the home
29. Is year older that other students in same grade
30. Mother did not graduate from high school
31. Father lost his job during the past year
32. Experienced a serious illness or accident. (Barr & Parrett, 1995, p. 14)

Research cautions against the use of set indicators to identify at-risk youth, asking that instead the schools begin addressing the overall structure that negatively impacts youth on the edge (Barr & Parrett, 1995, p. 17). The factors involved can be generalized into five problem areas:

1. Personal pain
2. Academic Failure
3. Socioeconomic situation of the family
4. Family instability
5. Family budgeting. (Barr & Parrett, 1995, p. 15)

It is apparent that three of the areas are beyond the control of the school. The two that the school can assist with are personal pain and academic failure. Schools can do a better job, but first they need to address school mythology. Below are listed seven myths that can have a negative impact on the policies and procedures of school reform (for complete text, see appendix A).

1. At-risk youth need slow learning.

2. At-risk youth should be retained during the early grades until they are ready to move forward.

3. At-risk youth can be educated with the same expenditures as other students.

4. Classroom teachers can adequately address the needs of at-risk youth.

5. Some students can’t learn.

6. The most effective way to improve instruction for at-risk youth is to reduce classroom size.

7. Students who are having learning difficulties probably need special education. (Barr & Parrett, 1995, p. 35-37)
Other areas that inhibit the progression of at-risk students are inequity in school funding, expulsion, retention, tracking, and remedial pullout programs.

**Proposed Interventions**

Charter schools are fertile ground for educational reform. At charter schools dealing predominately with at-risk students, special areas of concern must be addressed to maximize the rate of success. These areas include excessive absences, attention span difficulties, behavior problems, family dynamics, and substance abuse. Quite often, students slip through the cracks in traditional public school because of the lack of individual attention. It is important that each child be given the attention and assistance they need to succeed. Charter schools as a whole have better opportunity to provide one-on-one and special programs needed by at-risk clients due to the student to teacher ratio. The student and school staff can take time to develop rapport that is not afforded in the larger traditional public school system. Arizona is one of the front runners in the nation for the charter school movement with approximately 340 charter schools in operation.

Many of the problems that manifest during adolescence have their roots in the primary grades. Going a step further, it is evident that many of the problem areas can develop before a child reaches school age. The following are interventions proposed to help reduce the dropout rates of at-risk students.

1. Early intervention to help potential dropouts experience more success in school and develop more positive attitudes in elementary and intermediate schools.
2. Alternative opportunities such as schools-within-a school, magnet schools, career academies, in-school suspension programs, street academies, high school outpost, and storefront schools.

3. Smaller schools and classes that can facilitate more personal contact between students and teachers.

4. Vocational education opportunities that might enhance motivation and provide more experience of success for potential dropouts.

5. Employment linkages to provide part-time employment and skill training, along with other possibilities to improve the transition to work and adulthood.

6. Independent study and alternative credit opportunities to complete high school subjects outside of regular classes and hours.

7. Counseling and special services and programs, such as those for delinquents or pregnant girls.

8. Revisions in curriculum and instruction to make education more relevant, motivating, and successful for disinterested and/or alienated students.

9. Experiential learning opportunities that facilitate active learning outside the regular classroom.

10. Contact with successful adult mentors with similar racial/ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds.

11. Assignment to tutoring tasks and other responsibilities for helping younger students.

12. Coordination of educational and social services that can help alienated students.


**Development of Standards**

The origin of the push for national standards coincided with other educational
reform. In June of 1994, Dr. Carol Dahir began research for the standards project for the American School Counseling Association. As a result, Dr. Dahir and her co-author, Dr. Chari Campbell drafted national standards. The standards were finalized in August 1997 (Mariani 1998, p. 1). For the first time, counselors have a national model to use as a guideline for designing school counseling programs. The developmental approach is the focus of the national standards. "Developmental school counseling programs are focused on teaching and learning, rather than on crisis-intervention and remediation" (Paisley & Peace, 1995, p. 7).

Emphasized throughout the standards is the need to provide all students with school counseling services. "School counseling is for all students, not just the student in crisis at the moment, not just the student planning on college, and not just the student about to drop out of school" (Dahir, cited in Mariani, 1998, p. 2). The ASCA standards for school counseling programs accomplish the following:

1. create a framework for a national model for school counseling programs;

2. identify the key components of a school counseling model program;

3. identify the knowledge and skills that all students should acquire as a result of the K-12 school counseling program;

4. ensure that school counseling programs are comprehensive in design and delivered in a systematic fashion to all students;

5. establish school counseling as an integral component of the academic mission of the educational system; and

6. encourage equitable access to school counseling services for all students, provided by a credentialed school counselor. (Dahir, 1997, p. 2)
The framework provided by the United States and Arizona simplifies the task of creating a school counseling program which addresses the needs of all students.

**The Standards**

Not surprising is the fact that the Arizona State Standards are very similar to the ones that the United States has set forth. Following is the mission statement of the Arizona Department of Education:

**Mission of Guidance:** The mission of guidance is to ensure that each person regardless of race, sex, religion, economic condition, mental or physical handicaps, or geographic location will acquire the competencies for constructive participation in society. *(AZ Dept. of Ed., 1997, p. 16)*

It is apparent that the state’s goals are inclusive of all students. Therefore, the nation and state are in agreement on who will receive the services of a developmental school counseling program.

If compared, the areas to be covered with each student by the state and national standards are similar.

**The Arizona Department of Education Guidance Goals:**

**1. Educational Goals**

All students in Arizona public schools will acquire and demonstrate competencies in developing an educational program that fulfills their individual learning style, goals, and objectives to provide skills to constructively deal with and contribute to society.

All students in Arizona Public Schools will develop an educational program that matches their self-characteristics.

**2. Career Goals**

All students in Arizona Public Schools will acquire and demonstrate competencies
in planning and preparing for a career that relates to their career/occupational goals and objectives and to their assessed aptitudes, attitudes and interests.

All students in the Arizona Public Schools will gain competencies needed to develop a process for life career planning.

(3). Personal/Social Goals--

All students in Arizona Public Schools will acquire and demonstrate competencies in effective interpersonal communication and in recognizing the contributions of self and others.

All students in the Arizona Public Schools will develop effective human relationship skills that will enhance participation in all life roles including those of students, worker, family member and community member. (AZ Dept. of Ed., 1997, p 25)

American School Counselor Association Standards for School Counseling Programs:

Academic Development--
   a. Students will acquire the attitudes, knowledge and skills that contribute to effective learning in school and across the life span.
   b. Students will complete school with the academic preparation essential to choose from a wide variety of substantial post secondary options including college.
   c. Students will understand the relationship of academics to the world of work, and to life at home and in the community.

Career Development--
   a. Students will acquire the skills to investigate the world of work with relation to knowledge of self and to make informed career decisions.
   b. Students will employ strategies to achieve future career success and satisfaction.
   c. Students will understand the relationship between personal qualities, education and training, and the world of work.

Personal/Social Development--
   a. Students will acquire the attitude, knowledge and interpersonal skills to help them understand and respect self and others.
   b. Students will make decisions, set goals and take appropriate action to achieve goals.
   c. Students will understand safety and survival skills. (ASCA, 1997, p. 3)
By comparing the state and national standards one may conclude that both agree in regard to student achievement. Arizona has a new vision for school counseling as presented in Comprehensive Competency-Based Guidance. The traditional school counseling program of the past is compared with the new design to be implemented for school counseling programs (Figure 1).

**Figure 1.**
Comparison of Traditional versus Comprehensive Competency Based Guidance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>From Traditional Guidance</th>
<th>To Comprehensive Competency Based Guidance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Reactive</td>
<td>1. Proactive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Process</td>
<td>2. Outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Deductive</td>
<td>3. Inductive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Services</td>
<td>4. Curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Subjective Evaluation</td>
<td>5. Objective Evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Students Learn the Same</td>
<td>7. Students Learn Differently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Students Initiate</td>
<td>8. Counselors Initiate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Figure 1 derived from AZ Dept. of Ed., 1997, p. 10

It can be reasoned that a greater number of students, the goal being all, will benefit from implementation of this new school counseling program.

**Benefits of the Developmental School Counseling Program**

All students are the target of these newly set standards being marketed by the nation and state. Although there is agreement on similar standards, there is a slight variation in the list of expected benefits to the students. Arizona’s Perceived Benefits are included in Figure 2.
Figure 2.
Arizona’s Perceived Benefits

1. Increases number of students able to participate in the guidance process.
2. Increases opportunities for consistent counseling services throughout the school year.
3. Increases opportunities for counselor-student interaction.
4. Increases classroom performance.
5. Increases knowledge of our changing world.
6. Increases knowledge of self and others.
7. Develops decision-making skills.
8. Promotes knowledge and assistance in career exploration and development.

Source: AZ Dept. of Ed., 1997, p.11

The ASCA’s perceived benefits are included in Figure 3.

Figure 3.
ASCA’s Perceived Benefits

1. Prepares students for the challenges of the 21st century through academic, career, and personal/social development.
2. Relates educational program to future success.
3. Facilitates career exploration and development.
4. Develops decision-making and problem solving skills.
5. Assists in acquiring knowledge of self and others.
6. Enhances personal development.
7. Assists in developing effective interpersonal relationship skills.
8. Broadens knowledge of our changing world.
9. Provides advocacy for students.
10. Encourages facilitative, co-operative peer interactions.
11. Fosters resiliency factors for students.
12. Assures equitable access to educational opportunities.

Source: ASCA, 1997, p. 7

One underlying difference in the benefits list for students is that the Arizona appears to place more emphasizes on current student activities whereas the ASCA standards project beyond the current benefits to those in later life. However, the suggested goal is that all students become positive contributing members of our society.
To broaden the perspective on how various groups will profit by incorporating the standards into their school counseling programs, the benefits for teachers, administrators, and school counselors can be examined by reviewing the list in Appendix B. To achieve the intended benefits, it takes a collaborative effort on the part of administrators, teachers, and counselors to promote an effective school counseling program.

Summary

The charter school movement began in 1991. Charter schools are allowed to operate without many of the rules, regulations, and bureaucracy of larger school districts. Thus, charter schools are more concerned with the positive end result than the method of how this result is achieved. The unique environment of the charter school setting provides an excellent opportunity to implement and evaluate the standards for a school counseling program to assist at-risk students grades 7-12.

Any student may be at-risk of dropping out of high school; however, factors that increase the risk, including drug abuse, pregnancy, unemployed parents, family issues (i.e. divorce, death, gangs) and poor performance in school. Misconceptions and myths about student performance exist, for instance, believing that at-risk students need slower learning. However, students benefit from being academically challenged. Thus, accelerated, not slow learning should be emphasized. In addition, there are proposed interventions to help reduce the dropout rate. Among the proposed interventions is counseling and special services and programs, such as those for delinquents or pregnant girls.
The ASCA began to develop a set of school counseling standards in June of 1994. The standards were completed in August of 1997, and school counselors have a national model to use as a guideline for designing school counseling programs. The developmental approach is the focus of the national standards. This provides a proactive rather than reactive basis for school counseling programs. An important aspect provided by this approach is the ability to reach all students not just those in trouble or going through crisis.

The standards cover academic, career, and social developmental areas. Arizona Department of Education (AZ DOE) standards are aligned with the national standards. Benefits for counselors, teachers, and administrators have been established with implementation of these standards.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to design a school counseling program to assist at-risk students in grades 7-12 attending a small charter school with their social, emotional, and academic development. This objective was designed in order to help these students become successful contributing members of society. The research question was, “What is the content of a school counseling program which meets the needs of at-risk students attending a 7-12th grade charter school?”

Research Design

The methodology used was a descriptive design to determine guidelines for a secondary school counseling program. The data obtained includes information on the charter school involved, the benefits to students, the counselor, other staff, and how to address the needs by following state and national guidelines. Two documents that tested the design’s guidelines were Arizona Comprehensive Competency-Based Guidance Handbook(s) and the National Standards for School Counseling Programs. According to Merriam & Simpson (1995), several types of data may be used to develop the guidelines for the school counseling program. All four types were utilized in this research process:
1. collection of facts that describe existing phenomena;
2. identification of problems or justification of current conditions and practice;
3. project or product evaluation; or
4. comparison of experience between groups with similar problems to assist in future planning and decision making. (Merriam & Simpson, 1995, p. 61)

School Population

The proposed school counseling program for a charter school in Cottonwood, Arizona, will be provided for grades 7-12. The school consists of 121 students, one administrator, one secretary, one teachers aid, one special education teacher, one behavior coach, and eight regular education teachers. The administrator and three of the teachers are also the governing board members. The student population is predominately at-risk. However, the school also attracts a number of students who are not viewed as being at-risk. These students chose to attend for a variety of reasons such as smaller class size, a shorter school day, and more individualized attention. This diversification of students is explained in the charter’s abstract contained in Appendix D.

The reason the majority of students attend this charter school can be generalized into five problem areas; noted by

1. Personal pain
2. Academic failure
3. Socioeconomic situation of the family
4. Family instability
5. Family budgeting. (Barr & Parrett, 1995, p. 15)

Many students come from single parent homes or dysfunctional blended families.

Cottonwood is a small town in a beautiful rural setting. Teenagers residing here experience some of the same pressures as those in the inner city. The biggest culprits
facing students are drug and substance abuse. Not only have the majority of students
admitted to regular drug and alcohol use, but many have divulged that their parents also
have issues in this regard. Many of the students are academically behind standards and
have had difficulties with appropriate behavior and attendance. The local high school and
middle school in the Cottonwood area actually refer students that are not succeeding for
behavior and/or attendance issues. Approximately 10 to 15 percent of the students at this
charter school are on juvenile probation because of law violations. The crimes range from
drug abuse and minor consumption to robbery and assault. The low socioeconomic
situations these students come from are often passed on generation after generation by
poor life choices, lack of healthy role models, and teen pregnancy.

Selection of the student population for which this model is designed was made on
the basis of purposive sampling. This is a type of nonprobability sampling in which the
researcher uses his or her own judgement in the selection. It is sometimes referred to as a
judgmental sample. Purposive sampling is an appropriate method in selecting a sample
based on knowledge of the population and elements--given the nature of this research
(Babbie, 1992). The charter school selected was one that already fit the definition and
characteristics of an “at-risk population.”

Assumptions and Limitations

The basic assumption of this study was that the state and national standards are
adequate to design a workable school counseling program. In designing this program, the
assumption was made that Arizona and the United States have established all areas of
concern regarding the duties of a secondary school counselor.

One limitation was the lack of comparable programs that are currently following the guidelines. Due to the relative newness of the standards, it may be difficult to draw accurate conclusions on its total effectiveness. The researcher is also employed as a teacher and governing board member, this may have some affect on the validity of the outcome of this research.
CHAPTER 4

SCHOOL COUNSELING CURRICULUM

Demographics of the School

The proposed school counseling program for a charter school in Cottonwood, Arizona will be provided for grades 7-12. Cottonwood is a rural community that has a population of approximately 14,000. The school consists of 121 students, one administrator, one secretary, one special education teacher, one behavior coach, and eight regular education teachers. The administrator and three of the teachers are also the governing board members. One school counselor will be designated to direct the school counseling program. The student population is predominately at-risk. The current teacher to student ratio is no more than 1 to 15 with the overall goal being 1 to 12.

Data on the make up of the student body was obtained from the administrator of the charter school. This same documentation is used in reporting that is required by the AZ DOE. The ratio of male to female students is approximately 50/50. The total is 59 females to 62 males. Of course, these numbers fluctuate slightly throughout the year. The student population is predominately white. Native Americans and Hispanics are closely proportioned with only one student of Asian heritage in attendance. There are currently no students of African American descent (see Table 1). All current students speak English.
<table>
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<th>White</th>
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Product Design

This school counseling program for at-risk students grades 7-12 will be phased in on a part-time basis for selected students the first year. This will allow those evaluating the program (counselor, teachers, and administrators) to establish benchmarks for long-term goals to help monitor progress. A calendar will be developed to help balance programs throughout the year to coordinate with other school activities (Dahir, Sheldon, & Valiga, 1998, p. 30).

School Counseling Curriculum

The design for a school counseling program should follow the competency-based guidance texts developed by the AZ DOE. A text is provided for each grade level 7-12. They cover a selection of competencies to be addressed. These competencies will be taught in every classroom once a week by a certified counselor and reinforced by the teacher throughout the week. An overview of specific topics that activities center around and the grade levels at which these concepts are introduced is listed below.

7th Grade--School Skills/Career Skills

1. I Can Be Happy for Hours Just...
2. Your Feelings and Your Health
3. The Bucket and the Dipper
4. Using the Classified Ads
5. Cooperation
6. Traditional and Non-traditional Careers
7. "Who Would You Let Go?"
8. Pay Day

8th Grade--Career Exploration Part I

1. Career Cluster Explanation
2. Career Awareness: Why People Work
3. The Party Game
4. Skills and Interest
5. Assessing My Career Interest
6. Career Selection: The Big 10
7. Career Information and Research
8. Career Information and Research
9. What Do You Value in a Career?
10. Career Clusters
   (C.E.D., 1998, #1, p.3-4)

9th Grade--Decisions! Decisions!
Sessions

1. Self-Portrait
2. Self-Portrait
3. Work: A Four-Letter Word, But Then So Is "Love"
4. Decision Making Through The Problem Solving Method
5. Practicing The Decision Making Model
6. Stumbling Blocks To Decision Making
7. Transferable
9. Expectations
10. My Personal Plan of Action
   (C.E.D., 1991, #3, p. 4)

11th Grade--Finding A Job You Like
Sessions

1. Taking an Interest Test
2. Comparing Jobs and Lifestyles
3. Identifying Nontraditional Occupations
4. Planning Your Life
5. Researching a Career
6. The Importance of Volunteer Experience
7. Writing a Resume
8. Selling Myself on the Job Application
9. Selling Myself in the Job Interview
10. Looking at Post Secondary Career Skills Development
   (C.E.D., 1991, #5, p. 4)

9. Transferable Skills
10. To The Future
   (C.E.D., 1998, #2, p. 6-7)

10th Grade--Career Exploration Part II
Sessions

1. 20th High School Reunion
2. Values Auction
3. The Saga of Bubba and Bubba Ann
4. Job Satisfaction/Lifestyle
5. Identifying Attitudes and Information Needs
6. Six Work Categories
7. Formal Interest Inventory
8. Putting it All Together and Getting on With It
9. Exploring an Occupation
10. Clarifying My Educational and Career Plans
   (C.E.D., 1991, #4, p. 5-6)

12th Grade--Finding A Life You Like
Sessions

1. Who Would You Hire?
   Who Would You Fire?
2. Survey Yourself
3. Startling Statements
4. What Job Fits Me?
5. Where the Information Is
6. Letter of Inquiry
7. My Career Plan
8. Economics of a Paycheck
9. Understanding Financial Aide
10. Problems on the Job
   (C.E.D., 1991, #6, p. 4-5)
Program Evaluation

The evaluation of this program will be an ongoing process. Success will be determined upon observation, and demonstration of measureable learning of both the students and the staff. A measureable success would be an increased number of students displaying competency in the three target areas of academic, career, and personal skills. This evaluation will take place over a number of years to make a determination as to what is working with the program and whether or not any modifications are necessary.

The ASCA and Arizona Department of Education standards are measures of student growth and accomplishment. It has been established that the ASCA and AZ DOE standards align with one another. Therefore, the design for a school counseling program should follow the competency-based guidance texts developed by the AZ DOE. A text is provided for each grade level 7-12. They cover a selection of competencies to be addressed. These competencies will be taught in every classroom once a week by a certified counselor and reinforced by the teacher throughout the week. An overview of specific topics that activities center around and the grade levels at which these concepts are introduced is included in Chapter 4 and Appendix C. After successful completion of the AZ DOE standards for secondary school counseling, students shall be able to demonstrate the following competencies:

Domain: Self-Knowledge

Competency 1: Understanding the influence of a positive self-concept.
Competency 2: Skills to interact positively with others.
Competency 3: Understanding the impact of growth and development.
Domain: Educational & Occupational Exploration

Competency 4: Understanding the relationship between educational achievement and career planning.
Competency 5: Understanding the need for positive attitudes toward work and learning.
Competency 6: Skills to locate, evaluate and interpret career information.
Competency 7: Skills to prepare to seek, obtain, maintain and change jobs.
Competency 8: Understanding how social needs and functions influence the nature and structure of work.

Domain: Career Planning

Competency 9: Skills to make decisions.
Competency 10: Understanding the interrelationship of life roles.
Competency 11: Understanding the continuous changes in male/female roles.
Competency 12: Skills in career planning.

(AZ DOE, 1997, p. 31-32)

The evaluation process will be conducted by counselors, teachers, and administrators. They will determine how the program has affected student behavior, academic, and career achievement. Success will be determined upon observation, and demonstration of measurable learning of both the students and the staff. A measurable success would be an increased number of students displaying competency in the three target areas of academic, career, and personal skills. This evaluation will take place over a number of years to make a determination as to what is working with the program and whether or not any modifications are necessary.

Evaluation and assessment of this school counseling program will be ongoing. Measurable outcomes will include: student achievement in academic areas, increased high school graduates, continuing education, positive social interaction and integration, employment, behavioral (i.e. fewer students on probation), improved life skills, and
success in vocational occupation skills that lead to employment.

The certified school counselor will caretake all results and findings. The counselor will present pertinent data to the faculty and administration on a bi-annual basis. The faculty, administration, and counselor will then adjust or modify the program as needed to meet the desired outcomes.
CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The purpose of this study was to design a school counseling program to assist at-risk students in grades 7-12 attending a small charter school with their social, emotional, and academic development. This objective will be attempted to help students become successful contributing members of society.

The charter school movement began in 1991. Charter schools are allowed to operate without many of the rules, regulations, and bureaucracy of larger school districts. Thus, charter schools are more concerned with the positive end result than the method of how this result is achieved. The unique environment of the charter school setting provides an excellent opportunity to implement and evaluate the standards for a school counseling program to assist at-risk students grades 7-12.

Any student may be at-risk of dropping out of high school; however, factors that increase the risk include drug abuse, pregnancy, unemployed parents, family issues (i.e. divorce, death, gangs) and poor performance in school. Misconceptions and myths about student performance exist, for instance, believing that at-risk students need slower learning. However, students benefit from being academically challenged. Thus, accelerated, not slow learning should be emphasized. In addition, there are proposed interventions to help reduce the dropout rate. Among the proposed interventions is
counseling and special services and programs, such as those for delinquents or pregnant girls.

The ASCA began to develop a set of school counseling standards in June of 1994. The standards were completed in August of 1997, and school counselors have a national model to use as a guideline for designing school counseling programs. The developmental approach is the focus of the national standards. This approach provides a proactive rather than reactive basis for school counseling programs. An important aspect provided by this approach is the ability to reach all students not just those in trouble or going through crisis.

The methodology used was a descriptive design to determine guidelines for a secondary school counseling program. The information obtained includes information on the charter school involved, the needs of the students, staff, and counselor, and how to meet these needs by following state and national guidelines. Two documents that tested the design's guidelines were Arizona Comprehensive Competency-Based Guidance Handbook(s) and the National Standards for School Counseling Programs.

The standards cover academic, career, and social developmental areas. Arizona Department of Education standards are aligned with the national standards. Benefits for counselors, teachers, and administrators have been established with implementation of these standards. The content for a school counseling program to assist a charter school with at-risk students grades 7-12 maybe based on a set of competency-based guidance texts developed by AZ DOE. There is a text for each grade level which provides appropriate curriculum and activities to assist the counselor. A list of competencies that the
students are to acquire with this program will help to evaluate its success in the future.

Many students come from single parent homes or dysfunctional blended families. Cottonwood is a small town in a beautiful rural setting. Teenagers residing here experience some of the same pressures as those in the inner city. The biggest culprits facing students are drug and substance abuse. Not only have the majority of students admitted to regular drug and alcohol use, but many have divulged that their parents also have issues in this regard. Many of the students are academically behind standards and have had difficulties with appropriate behavior and attendance. The local high school and middle school in the Cottonwood area actually refer students that are not succeeding for behavior and/or attendance issues. Approximately 10 to 15 percent of the students at this charter school are on juvenile probation because of law violations. The crimes range from drug abuse and minor consumption to robbery and assault. The low socioeconomic situations these students come from are often passed on generation after generation by poor life choices, lack of healthy role models, and teen pregnancy.

Conclusions

Since the content of this study will be a newly implemented program there will be an on going assessment, as needed, to update, modify, and adjust the program in an attempt to enhance the program. Measurable outcomes will include: Student achievement in academic areas, increase in high school graduates, continuing education, positive social interaction and integration, employment, behavioral and life skills, and success in vocational occupation skills that lead to employment. Measurable success in the three
main areas covered by the state and national standards of academic, career, and personal/soci

al will provide evidence of the success of this school counseling program.

Recommendations

Throughout the literature review the importance of contact with each student is emphasized. The intent of the standards for the school counseling programs is to insure counselors contribute to the growth of all students, not just those in trouble. Student contact is of vital importance in this endeavor. Therefore, a higher ratio of counselors to students is imperative for success. Charter schools are in the optimum position to excel in this area because of their small student population and ability to implement innovative alternative programs.

Due to the fact that a larger number of the students enrolling in charter schools are considered at-risk, it would be of great value to employ professionals that are sensitive to the special needs of these students. At-risk students need facilitators who are not judgmental, moralistic, or easily shocked by their behaviors or life styles. Patience and caring must be attributes of the facilitators' character. The staff must be willing to show respect, coupled with genuine caring and strength, to students that will do everything possible to prove to the facilitators that they (at-risk students) do not deserve to be respected.

Groves (1998) quotes a student at an alternative school in North Carolina:

Many of the students attribute their learning and success in the program to the small class size and the adaptability of the teachers. One student who will be graduating from the program this year on the honor roll said: I learn more here because the classes are smaller and I get more attention from the teachers. The
teachers aren't as hateful as the ones at the day school. They take time out for you and give you encouragement. They are nicer and explain things better to give you a better understanding. (p. 5)

Recommendations will be derived through the assessment and evaluation process.

It is recommended that the evaluation and assessment process take place once a semester. Success can then be measured based upon whether or not the program is meeting the needs and objectives outlined in the school counseling program. The program may at any point be modified to insure optimum success.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

SEVEN MYTHS
1. At-risk youth need slow learning--We know that at-risk children and youth benefit from being academically challenged in an environment of high expectation. They need accelerated, not slow, learning if they are ever to function effectively in public education and later in adult life.

2. At-risk youth should be retained during the early grades until they are ready to move forward--... retention poses an overwhelming obstacle to graduation. Rather than repeating a grade, at-risk youth need intense, accelerated, non-graded elementary classrooms that provide for the application of mastery learning and attention to their specific needs.

3. At-risk youth can be educated with the same expenditures as other students--... they require new and creative ways of allocating existing education funds. The good news is that long-term cost analyses of public education show that providing early, intensive educational prevention and intervention is the most cost-effective means of confronting the massive problems at-risk children and youth face.

4. Classroom teachers can adequately address the needs of at-risk youth--The problems of at-risk youth are often so complicated, so pervasive and so long term, so rooted in the home, community, culture, and socioeconomic conditions that it is all but impossible for a classroom teacher alone to significantly address the needs of at-risk youth.

5. Some students can’t learn--... there is hugh evidence that suggest that many teachers and school administrators not only doubt that fact but seem motivated to ensure that these “dumb kids” don’t interrupt or interfere with those students who indeed can learn.

6. The most effective way to improve instruction for at-risk youth is to reduce classroom size--and while there is little question that reductions in class size can contribute to alleviating much of the daily stress and strain of classroom teachers, there is unfortunately little or no evidence that this practice alone provides for increased achievement of at-risk youth.

7. Students who are having learning difficulties probably need special education--If a student is not learning or is misbehaving, there is a strong tendency to define the child’s problem as a learning disability.

(Barr & Parrett, 1995, p. 35-37)
APPENDIX B

PERSPECTIVE ON BENEFITS
Benefits for Teachers:
1. Encourages positive, supportive working relationships with other teachers and counselors.
2. Provides a team effort to address student needs and core competencies.
3. Increases the likelihood of academic success. (AZ Dept. of Ed., 1997, p. 12)

Benefits of this Program for Teachers:
1. Provides an interdisciplinary team effort to address student needs and educational goals.
2. Provides skill development for teachers in classroom management, teaching effectiveness, and affective education.
3. Provides consultation to assist teachers in their guidance role.
   (ASCA, 1997, p. 8)

Benefits for Administrators:
1. Provides program structure with specific content.
2. Provides a means of evaluating the guidance program.
3. Enhances the image of the guidance program in the school and the community.
4. Promotes program accountability.

Benefits of this Program for Administrators:
1. Integrates school counseling with the academic mission of the school.
2. Provides a program structure with specific content.
3. Assists administration to use school counselors effectively to enhance learning and development for all students.
4. Provides a means of evaluating school counseling programs. (ASCA, 1997, p. 8)

Benefits for Guidance Personnel:
1. Clearly defines role and function.
2. Eliminates non-guidance functions.
3. Provides opportunities to reach all children.
4. Creates a tool for program management.
5. Clearly defines responsibilities and activities for specific student competencies and outcomes.
6. Creates public awareness and visibility of guidance program functions.
   (AZ Dept. of Ed., 1997, p. 11)

Benefits of this Program for School Counselors
1. Provides a clearly defined role and function.
2. Reduces non-counseling functions.
3. Provides direct service to all students.
4. Provides a tool for program management and accountability.
5. Enhances the role of the school counselor as a student advocate.
6. Ensures involvement in the academic mission of the school.

(ASCA, 1997, p. 8)
APPENDIX C

SCHOOL COUNSELING CURRICULUM
### 7th Grade--School Skills/Career Skills

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<td>9. What Do You Value in a Career?</td>
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(C.E.D., 1998, #1, p.3-4)

### 8th Grade--Career Exploration Part I

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<td>3. The Party Game</td>
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(C.E.D., 1998, #2, p. 6-7)

### 9th Grade--Decisions! Decisions!

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<td>8. Expectations</td>
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(C.E.D., 1991, #3, p. 4)

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(C.E.D., 1991, #4, p. 5-6)
11th Grade--*Finding A Job You Like*

**Sessions**

1. Taking an Interest Test
2. Comparing Jobs and Lifestyles
3. Identifying Nontraditional Occupations
4. Planning Your Life
5. Researching a Career
6. The Importance of Volunteer Experience
7. Writing a Resume
8. Selling Myself on the Job Application
9. Selling Myself in the Job Interview
10. Looking at Post Secondary Career Skills Development

(C.E.D., 1991, #5, p. 4)

12th Grade--*Finding A Life You Like*

**Sessions**

1. Who Would You Hire?
   Who Would You Fire?
2. Survey Yourself
3. Startling Statements
4. What Job Fits Me?
5. Where the Information Is
6. Letter of Inquiry
7. My Career Plan
8. Economics of a Paycheck
9. Understanding Financial Aide
10. Problems on the Job

(C.E.D., 1991, #6, p. 4-5)
APPENDIX D

CHARTER SCHOOL ABSTRACT
The concept for this charter school stemmed from the experiences of five teachers who have worked with other charter schools dealing with "at-risk" students and learning through those experiences what succeeded and what did not. Those experiences led us to the desire to initiate new concepts and a team approach at the governance of a school for this type of student.

It is our belief that for these students to be successful, it is imperative that the school also attract other students (not "at-risk") due to the unique curriculum and structure of the school. If all students see are other "at-risk: students, it is difficult for effective modeling to take place.

It is our belief that several philosophies and elements of curriculum must be integrated for success to occur. No one methodology or philosophy will be equally successful with each student. The methodology, philosophy and curriculum must be adaptive to the needs of the individual student.

It is our belief that parents, probation officers, community members, social service agency workers, as well as teachers and administrators must work together as a cohesive team to model successful community life skills.

The comprehensive program of instruction will meet the State Essential Skills and Standards requirements.

In addition to a comprehensive academic program, "School to Work" internships and work experience programs will be implemented. Career exploration, vocational assessment/counseling and training will be developed with community businesses and industries.

Measurable outcomes will include: student achievement in academic areas of high school graduation, continuing education, social interaction and integration, employment, behavioral and life skills as well as success in vocational occupation skills that lead to employability.

Of greatest importance is the concept that each student must be viewed from the perspective of his/her own uniqueness and diversity, thus allowing instructors varied opportunities to guide students in creative individual plans for learning. Teaching strategies will support and facilitate the unique and total growth of each individual.

(Charter, 1997, p.1)