The Three Levels of School Counselor Accountability

Amber R. Jackson

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

M.Ed. School Counseling
The Three Levels of School Counselor Accountability

Perhaps I held naïve expectations about the realities of the school counselor role when I entered my practicum site for the first time. I estimated that a 2006 RAMP counseling department would have significant support from administrators to offer comprehensive services for students. Instead, my mentors face daily lunch duty, which not only siphons time away from appropriate counseling duties, but conflicts with individual student appointments. In my own interaction with the administration, I experienced first hand the phenomenon school counselors face across the nation—the foggy and unsupported role of the school counselor: “Schedules and transcripts . . . Good school counselors should be actively involved in the schedule changes and transcripts of students. This is an academic institution, all that other stuff isn’t necessary.” Further observations made it increasingly clear that to many, school counselors offer no significant benefit to students and are merely “extra staff.”

Whiston (2002) suggests that the school counseling profession is “at risk” because school counselors fail to demonstrate accountability for their services. Similarly, Brigman and Campbell (2003) propose that school counselors should use empirical data interventions to convince decision makers to protect their time devoted to direct student services. I likewise agree that in order for school counselors to implement comprehensive counseling services, they need to accurately demonstrate accountability for their interventions on individual, departmental, and professional levels.

Accountability starts with each individual counselor. Because it remains difficult to quantify the impact of many subjective counseling interventions, school counselors should consciously devise strategies to record and track all interventions in some way. While not optimal, self-reports, observations, and tracking the number of students served may be the only way to collect data for qualitative issues, and thus should be used to complement quantitative data. However, as much as possible, school counselors should go beyond simple self-reports and
adopt scientific and statistical methods of evaluation including pre/post-tests with control and sample groups, longitudinal follow-ups, and repetition. Use of school reports data, e.g., attendance records, systemized test scores, or report cards can be useful in quantifying change and growth resulting from school counselor interventions.

As each school counselor collects data pertaining to his or her own interventions, counseling departments should compile the data to demonstrate school-wide change. In addition to evaluation of specific interventions offered by individual counselors, the department should clearly define and evaluate yearly departmental goals. Using the ASCA (2003) Results Reports, counseling departments can plan for and evaluate yearly curriculum. A program audit should be conducted annually to evaluate progress in the program goals. Counseling departments should also solicit feedback from students, parents, teachers, and administrators on a regular basis to understand areas of improvement not already addressed.

Perhaps the most influential level of accountability should come from professionals, or those who educate or supervise school counselors. Increased emphasis on teaching evaluation skills, particularly through statistical and scientific methods will equip emerging school counselors with the confidence, qualifications, and commitment necessary to implement research as an evaluation tool. Moreover, educators and supervisors can facilitate school counselor research by collaborating and consulting with local school counselors to develop and implement empirical studies of school counselor impact. Working as scaffolds to empirical research projects, they can instruct, monitor, and systemize research in support of school counselors.

By increasing and improving methods of evaluation and accountability, school counselors on individual, departmental, and professional levels can collaborate to convince decision makers of the importance of devoting time not to only schedules, transcripts, and other auxiliary duties within the schools, but to offering comprehensive and direct services to all students.
References

