COUNSELING THE WHOLE CHILD

Colorado Dropout Prevention Framework

Develop data-driven, systemic school counseling programs and connections to intensive supports to encourage students in meeting academic, career, and personal development goals.

Robust school counseling programs include multiple layers of support designed to strategically and effectively respond to student academic, social-emotional learning (SEL), and mental health needs. They work in combination with supportive school cultures and relationships that embrace the importance of shared responsibility for student success and safety. School counselors, mental health providers, and support staff who carry out the mission and goals of school counseling programs have a unique opportunity to understand, identify, and assist students showing signs of dropout and disengagement. They play a critical role in developing and coordinating programs that integrate education, prevention, and intervention activities and serve as key connectors between students, parents/guardians, educators, and community members.

A data-driven, systemic school counseling program includes:

- Programs that are integrated across elementary, middle, and high schools to build alignment for student supports and services for postsecondary planning.
- Data use to identify students showing signs of being at risk for dropping out and support those students with necessary interventions.
- Schoolwide (Tier 1) student support efforts that include school counselors using comprehensive guidance or advisory curricula combined with SEL curricula.
- Systems to effectively triage students to appropriate services.
- Community partnerships to strengthen and broaden student supports.
- Mental health providers and/or effective partnerships with outside organizations to service students' mental health needs.
- Programs introducing counselors to students and parents/guardians as a supportive adult in the school environment.
- Parent/guardian training and community education sessions regarding effective student engagement and dropout prevention practices.
- Professional development activities for teachers and other staff on risk factors for dropping out, promising strategies for engaging and reengaging students, and effective ways of developing positive school climates.

How Counseling the Whole Child Supports Dropout Prevention and Student Engagement

- School counselors play a critical role in leading a school's dropout prevention efforts as they are equipped with the tools to advocate for and intervene with students who show signs of risk of failing or dropping out (Webber, 2018; White & Kelly, 2010).
- School counseling programs can monitor student progress and use data to help meet student needs and address individual, school, or community factors that are linked with dropping out (Dahir & Cinotti, 2018; Tromski-Klingshirn & Miura, 2017).
- Interventions by school counselors before middle and high school can increase student engagement and prevent students from dropping out (Ecker-Lyster & Nileksela, 2016; What Works Clearinghouse, 2017).

Learn more about the research behind this strategy in the *Counseling the Whole Child Research Synthesis.*

Implementation Considerations

The following considerations are provided to inform district and school planning and implementation of the Counseling the Whole Child strategy.

Strengthen Foundational Practices. The five foundational practices in the Colorado Dropout Prevention Framework guides districts and schools in building systems and practices that directly support this strategy. Review the *Dropout Prevention Foundational Practices and Strategies Crosswalk* for more information.

Provide Individualized Student Support. Individual support for proactive planning as well as intervention and response helps students navigate and succeed in a variety of situations. School counselors and other support staff work one-on-one with students to ensure students feel more connected to the school, have clear plans for their future, and have resources and supports when needed. School counselors should be involved in guiding the transition to high school, including the freshman orientation process, to ensure that students know who to go to when they may need additional help for both academic and personal reasons (Tromski-Klingshirn et al., 2017).

School counselors and school counseling programs are a critical first layer in effectively referring students to mental health providers who can provide more intensive supports. CDE's School Safety and Crisis Resources provides resources for school teams to better assist students who may be experiencing chronic stress and trauma. Furthermore, through the completion and utilization of the Individual Career and Academic Plan (ICAP) counselors can work with students and their families to capitalize on the utility of the ICAP to help keep students on track to graduate.

Implementation Considerations
• Strengthen Foundational Practices
• Provide Individualized Student Support
• Strengthen Counseling Programs
• Interweave Family, School, and Community Partnerships

Implementation Tools and Resources

- ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards & Competencies
- ASCA Student Standards: Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success
- COVID-19: Crisis & Mental Health Resources
- MTSS Resources
- A School Counselor's Guide to Promoting a Culture of Academic Success
- WWC Intervention Report: Check & Connect.
- ASCA Standards in Practice

Strengthen Counseling Programs. Comprehensive school counseling programs are designed to guide all students through a systematic series of supports, connect students to needed outside services, and provide resources to ensure students are ready for postsecondary education. Hosting professional learning sessions to educate teachers, school and district leaders, and parents/guardians on dropout prevention contributes to productive engagement and a positive school climate. Counselors are a part of teams that are identifying and/or designing student-level support. CDE's School Counselors and College Transition Specialists guide provides school counselors with tools and best practices specific to dropout prevention and student engagement to support the development of counseling programs and CDE's School Counselor Corps Grant Program for districts needing funding to hire school counselors.

Interweave Family, School, and Community Partnerships. Counseling services are best implemented when they have the support of school and district leaders, students, and their parents/guardians. School counselors are among the first people many parents/guardians and students interact with when a student is struggling, making it their responsibility to connect students to those in the school community who can help get students back on track. School counselors can use a collaborative leadership approach to build these partnerships and collectively problem solve, meet program goals, get buy-in from stakeholders, and lead programs that contribute to dropout prevention efforts.

Equitable Implementation of Counseling the Whole Child

Equitable counseling programs focus on the unique and changing student needs from year to year and support the development of staff to collectively meet student needs. To support equitable implementation of the Counseling the Whole Child strategy, districts and schools can consider the strategy through the lens of equity in access, representation, and quality.

Equity in Access. What processes or practices need to be in place to ensure students have equitable access to counseling programs?

- Ensure systematic implementation of individual and group efforts that impact all students.
- Set clear participation targets in activities based on student groups and grade levels.
- Conduct regular needs assessments to understand mental health and nonacademic needs and gaps in services.

Equity in Representation. What processes or practices need to be put in place to ensure school team representation reflects the demographics of the student population and community in counseling?

- Create a team that includes counselors and other support providers who represent the school community and understand individual student needs.
- Counseling programs and teams intentionally respond to the unique needs of individual students using a tiered model that targets the needs of students showing early warning signs of disengagement. School counselors are a core part of these teams.
- Counseling programs and teams have a clear system that allows them to quickly identify students who have disengaged or are at risk of disengagement and respond with evidence-based interventions.

Equity in Quality. What processes or practices need to be put in place to ensure students are provided high-quality experiences in school counseling that are meaningful and adequately prepare students for college and/or career?

- Develop clear standards and expectations for school counselors and the school counseling program.
- Develop defined roles for the need and expertise of mental health providers internal and external to the school.
- Analyze which students are served by which mental health providers to ensure that expertise meets individual student needs.
- Collect data from students about counseling experiences.
- Utilize ICAP to provide individual counseling to students showing early warning signs of disengagement.

References

Dahir, C. A., & Cinotti, D. (2018). Dropping out is not an option. *Journal of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, 2*(1).

Ecker-Lyster, M., & Nileksela, C. (2016). Keeping students on track to graduate: A synthesis of school dropout trends, prevention, and intervention initiatives. *Journal of At Risk Issues, 19*(2), 24–31.

Tromski-Klingshirn, D., & Miura, Y. (2017). School counselors' role in dropout prevention and credit recovery. *Journal of School Counseling*, *15*(4). https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1144756

Webber, K. C. (2018). A qualitative study of school social workers' roles and challenges in dropout prevention. *Children & Schools, 40*(2), 82–90.

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