

Internship Final: Spring 2014

Vision Statement & School Culture Intervention

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School Counseling Vision Statement

I believe all students need and deserve a solid educational foundation, as well as a dependable support system within the school, to grow into responsible, successful adults. As a school counselor I will use the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Model to ensure I am creating a holistic program that reaches all students' academic, career, and social/emotional needs via individual counseling, small group work, and classroom lessons. My school counseling program will work to empower all students to challenge themselves to meet their fullest potential and maximize their success in school and post-graduation. Students will smoothly transition from the secondary education environment to either the workforce, military or postsecondary education pursuits. They will carry with them the tools that they gained from the school counseling program to ensure continued success across the life-span.

It is of great importance to me to involve parents, families, staff, students, and community members in the school counseling program so that we, as an educational community, can work together to engage all students in the learning process. I will provide resources in my office, online, via emails, and through newsletters. I will also provide assessments of the programs run to ensure the school counseling program is data-driven and successful in meeting the needs of the school community. I strongly believe that support and collaboration with teachers and administrators is essential to build a counseling program that reaches the needs of all students. To ensure this, I will work diligently to advocate for my school counseling program; keeping the school staff, as well as the greater educational community, informed of the impact that the counseling program is having on students via written and verbal communication.

I am committed to upholding the highest ethical and legal standards, as well as participating in professional development to keep up-to-date with the best practices in the field of school counseling. I hold myself, as well as my students, to high standards of learning. I have committed myself to having a life of continued learning.

Area of Concern: School Climate

School climate is an area of importance and something that impacts all students, educators, school staff, and the overall community. It has been defined as “the quality and character of school life” (National School Climate Center, Center for Social and Emotional Education, & National Center for Learning and Citizenship at Education Commission of the States, 2007; National School Climate Center, n.d.), as well as “the related factors of attitude, feeling, and behavior of individuals within the school system” (Hernandez, T.J., & Seems, S.R., 2004).

School climate is a topic that has been discussed by educators and parents for over a hundred years. The first educational leader to write about school climate was Arthur C. Perry, Jr. Ph.D. in 1908. With that said, research on this topic did not begin until the 1950s and even then it was just from observations, rather than data (National School Climate Center, n.d.). Over the last 30 years research on school climate and the potential impact has increased dramatically due to the development of “scientifically sound school climate assessment tools” (National School Climate Center, et. al., 2007). There are four areas that almost all researchers have agreed are essential areas when looking at a school’s climate: safety, relationships, learning, and institutional environment (National School Climate Center, n.d.; Thapa et al., 2013). The school improvement process is a dimension that is sometimes included in the research, as well (Thapa et

al., 2013). All of these parts are interconnected and impact each other as well as the school climate as a whole.

There are many benefits to focusing on school climate and its reform. It has been identified as a “a data-driven strategy that promotes healthy relationships, school connectedness, and dropout prevention” by the Centers for Disease Control (Thapa et al., 2013). School climate reform is also seen as an important component of bully prevention and a school improvement strategy. A school’s climate can impact many areas of a student’s life, including but not limited to: mental and physical health, self-esteem, self-criticism, self-concept, level of substance use, school absenteeism, and number of suspensions (Thapa et al., 2013).

Intervention addressing School Climate

Since there are many aspects of school climate, as well as many areas of impact, there are a number of positive, effective interventions. I am going to focus on a safety intervention that impacts school climate. One aspect of safety within the school climate has to do with rules and norms. “One of the most important explicit or implicit norms in schools relates to “witness-related” behaviors: either being a passive bystander who, knowingly or not, colludes with and supports bully-victim behavior or being an upstander who, directly or indirectly, says “no” to bully-victim behavior” (Thapa et al., 2013). Bullying interventions is a topic that is prominent in education dialogue in the United States. Teacher-implemented school-wide intervention bullying prevention programs have been shown to improve classroom behavior, increase test scores, and reduce aggression.

Harrisonburg City Public Schools in Virginia implemented a bullying prevention program in their elementary schools this year and in the 2014-2015 school year the middle and

high schools will begin following the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, as well. Many school districts in Virginia have adopted this program because it addresses the bystander. This intervention is also a school-wide program implemented and supported by all staff members. I have personally spoken to staff members in Clarke, Stafford, and Page counties about the results they are seeing with this program. The staff members I have spoken with, including administrators and counselors, have been pleased with the positive results they have seen within their schools. Because of their feedback and the programs alignment with the research on school culture I would choose to implement the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program as my intervention to improve school culture.

Intervention Effectiveness and Evaluation

At the beginning of the school year students will be asked to complete the Olweus survey and I will create a survey for teachers to complete. This will allow me to not only get the students perspective about safety and bullying within the school, but also gather the opinions of the staff. At the end of the year students and staff will again be asked to complete the survey. This will allow me to evaluate the effectiveness of the survey at the school-wide level. Individual student outcomes would be measured by behavior referrals and individuals in the counseling office due to bullying.

Incorporating Standards

Olewus focuses on four different levels to ensure success: school-wide, classroom, individual, and community (Hazelden Publishing, n.d.). One important aspect of the Olweus program is the incorporation of class meetings. This is where I imagine I would be able to incorporate standards easily. As a school counselor my goal would be to join at least one class

meeting a week, if not more. Below are standards that I believe would be met during the classroom meeting time:

ASCA Standards:

PS: A1.5 Identify and express feelings

PS: A1.6 Distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate behavior

PS: A2.2 Respect alternative points of view

PS: A2.6 Use effective communications skills

PS: A2.7 Know that communication involves speaking, listening and nonverbal behavior

VA School Counseling Standard:

EP12. Use strategies for handling conflict in a peaceful way.

VA 4th grade English SOL:

4.1 The student will use effective oral communication skills in a variety of settings.

b) Contribute to group discussions across content areas.

c) Seek ideas and opinions of others.

f) Communicate new ideas to others

Diverse Learners

Since the curriculum is designed to meet the needs of students grades K-12 I believe it would be easy to adapt the program to meet the needs of diverse learners. This program is not only implemented in the classroom, but also as a school-wide and community program as well as

addressing the needs of an individual. When working with an individual the vocabulary and approach will be adjusted depending on the developmental needs of a student. In the classroom I will do the same, as well as scaffolding definitions and incorporating visual cues to ensure all students are learning the lesson's objective.

Engaging Stakeholders

As with any program implementation there will be strengths and challenges to engage stakeholders. I believe that the biggest strength of the Olweus program is that many schools have produced data with positive results, as well as experienced noticeable results in behavior within the schools. I believe encouraging conversations between school administrators and counselors who are currently using the program with my school leaders will assist in getting stakeholders on board with this program. By showing the research that is available on this program, as well as school climate, will also help encourage stakeholders to try the Olweus program.

Of course there will be some challenges along the way. I interned at both Keister Elementary and Skyline Middle in Harrisburg, Va as they prepared to implement the program during the following school year. One of the most challenging part of engaging stakeholders was the idea of change. Teachers will be asked to make room for certain things in their schedule, such as the classroom meetings. Initially there is a training for staff that takes place during the summer. Scheduling this training can prove challenging due to people's vacation schedules and not wanting to give up time over the summer break. Finding school administrators, counselors, teachers, and staff to be on the Olweus school-wide committee who want to be part of changing a school climate can be a daunting task, as well.

References

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