

HOW NORTH CAROLINA SCHOOL COUNSELORS SPEND THEIR TIME

Introduction

Educational reform and accountability, such as that found in the North Carolina ABCs process, affect all program areas including school counseling. Yesterday's guidance program was defined by service and responding to crisis. Today, the movement is toward a planned, comprehensive, competency-based program that is accountable in terms of program implementation and student success.

According to research conducted by the National Consortium for State Guidance Leadership (Author, 2000), 70%-80% of a school counselor's time should be devoted to direct service to students. Guidelines for school counseling programs, established by the American School Counselors Association (Author, 1997), indicated that direct student service should be provided in three broad categories:

- Academic development
- Career development
- Personal/social development

Studies completed by the National Consortium of State Guidance Leadership, (Author, 2000), resulted in recommended percentages of time that counselors should spend in each of four major function areas:

- Guidance curriculum
- Individual planning
- Responsive services
- System support

These data were used to make comparisons to the results of the August, 2000, survey of North Carolina school counselors. Approximately 3,100 surveys were sent to student services personnel, including:

- Elementary school counselors
- Middle school counselors
- High school counselors
- Career Development Coordinators
- Other student services personnel

Fifty-seven (57) per cent of the surveys were returned and included in this report.

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this report, selected terms and titles were defined to clarify their meaning and use.

Elementary school: Those schools which contained grades K-5. Also included were schools that have a K-8 grade arrangement.

Middle school: Those schools which contained grades 6-8. Also included were those schools with a 7-9 grade arrangement.

High school: Those schools which contained grades 9-12.

Student Services Personnel: This group included school social workers, dropout prevention coordinators, substance abuse prevention coordinators, alternative school counselors, and some counselors who are assigned to work only with exceptional children.

Guidance curriculum: Contains statements as to the goals for guidance instruction and the competencies to be developed by students at each grade level. It is designed to serve all students and is implemented through a team approach. The curriculum is primarily delivered by teachers with counselors providing resources and assistance as needed.

Individual planning: Activities provided for all students and are intended to guide students in the development and implementation of their personal, educational, and career plans.

Responsive services: Provide special help to students who are facing problems that interfere with their healthy personal, social, career, or educational development.

System support: Includes management activities necessary to support the comprehensive school counseling program and the total educational program.

Major Findings

The following findings are noted:

- Over 50% of the school counselors who responded to this survey have five or fewer years of counseling experience.
- Fewer than half of the North Carolina school counselors spend the nationally recommended amount of time in the major function areas of a comprehensive school counseling program.
- Testing coordination responsibilities have taken more and more of the elementary, middle, and high school counselors' time.
- One-third of the elementary counselors spend between 10%-30% of their time on test coordination activities.
- More than one-third of middle school counselors spend between 10%-40% of their time on test coordination activities.
- More than one-third of high school counselors spend between 10%-40% of their time on test coordination activities.
- Registering students, maintaining cumulative records, and transferring student records took away from counseling activities for middle school counselors.
- Student schedule changes also took up high school counselors' time.

Demographic Information

The survey answered two types of questions. The first type was demographic information, and the second type was specific to how school counselors spend their time. Table 1 reported the distribution of counselors who completed the survey. A total of 1772 (57%) completed surveys were returned.

Table 1
Number of Student Services Personnel by Category

COUNSELORS	NUMBER
All	1772
Elementary	483
Middle School	301
High School	676
Career Development Coordinators	198
Other Student Services Personnel	114

Beginning with Table 2, results were reported as percentages. The total did not always equal 100, because every respondent did not answer every question. Table 2 showed the distribution of years of experience in education for responding counselors, including their years as a counselor. It might be noted that approximately 50% of the school counselors have had at least ten years of experience in education

Table 2
Years of Education Experience of Counselors

YEARS	ELEMENTARY	MIDDLE SCHOOL	HIGH SCHOOL
0-5 years	22.6%	26.6%	19.5%
6-10 years	21.1%	15.3%	14.5%
11-15 years	16.1%	15.9%	14.3%
16-20 years	13.5%	15.3%	13.3%
> 20 years	26.3%	26.9%	38.2%

It should be noted in Table 3, that over 50% of the school counselors have had five or fewer years of counseling experience.

Table 3
Years of Experience as a Counselor

YEARS	ELEMENTARY	MIDDLE SCHOOL	HIGH SCHOOL
0-5 years	57.6%	59.5%	52.2%
6-10 years	23.0%	19.3%	21.2%
11-15 years	14.9%	10.0%	13.4%
16-20 years	2.1%	6.0%	6.0%
> 20 years	2.2%	5.0%	7.2%

The counselors who responded to the survey provided information about the size and configuration of their schools. More than 90% of the school counselors in this survey serve only one school. However, 70% of the Career Development Coordinators and 60% of the other student services personnel serve only one school. As reported in Table 4, over 50% of the schools in this study had at least two counselors.

Table 4
Number of Counselors Per School

NUMBER	ELEMENTARY	MIDDLE SCHOOL	HIGH SCHOOL
0	20.7%	7.3%	2.2%
1	55.3%	28.2%	9.5%
2	19.3%	40.2%	22.8%
3	1.9%	18.6%	25.0%
4 or more	2.5%	5.6%	39.2%

Table 5
Type of School Schedule

TYPE	ELEMENTARY	MIDDLE SCHOOL	HIGH SCHOOL
Block	15.7%	42.5%	74.3%
Traditional	82.6%	57.5%	25.7%

Table 6
Size of the Student Body

STUDENTS	ELEMENTARY	MIDDLE SCHOOL	HIGH SCHOOL
0-300	10.9%	9.6%	3.6%
301-600	46.6%	15.6%	9.3%
601-900	31.5%	44.9%	18.6%
901-1200	8.5%	23.3%	25.9%
> 1200	2.0%	6.3%	41.4%

To facilitate future communication with student services personnel in the local school systems, data were collected about access to technology. Table 7 provided information that may assist with future communication efforts. At least 85% of the counselors who responded to this survey reported that they had a computer in their office and over 75% of them have Internet and e-mail access. It should be noted, however, that the survey did not collect information about the quality of the equipment or the reliability on online services.

Table 7
Counselors' Access to Technology

ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY	ELEMENTARY	MIDDLE	HIGH
Have a computer in their office	85.5%	88.7%	98.2%
Have Internet access.	76.8%	77.4%	90.4%
Have access to e-mail	76.8%	77.4%	88.0%

Results

The data on how school counselors spend their time were analyzed and the following results were obtained. The key responsibilities for school counselors vary by grade level, therefore, the results were reported in Table 8 for all student services personnel who responded to this survey. In addition, the results for each major group are reported separately. There are national standards for the amount of time that school counselors spend in major job function areas. Where this information was available and applicable, it has been included in the shaded area.

A copy of the survey is included in the Appendix. Information about the tasks included in each activity can be found there.

Table 8
Time Spent on Specific Activities by All Student Services Personnel

ACTIVITY	NATIONAL PERCENTAGE	<10%	10-20%	20-30%	30-40%	>40%
Curriculum	N/A	37.8%	29.0%	13.5%	8.2%	6.8%
Individual planning	N/A	33.9%	24%	14.7%	10.6%	12.4%
Responsive services	N/A	21.2%	23.4%	20.8%	15.2%	14.3%
System support	N/A	32.2%	29.0%	13.5%	8.2%	6.8%

According to the data displayed in Table 9, only 17.6% of the elementary school counselors in North Carolina are spending an appropriate amount of time on curriculum activities. At the time of the survey, the state-wide guidance curriculum was being revised. Additionally less than 20% of the counselors spend the suggested amount of time in responsive services and less than 30% of the counselors spend the suggested amount of time on system support. They did, however, spend an appropriate amount of time in the area of individual planning.

Table 9
Time Spent on Specific Activities by Elementary School Counselors

ACTIVITY	NATIONAL PERCENTAGE	<10%	10-20%	20-30%	30-40%	>40%
Curriculum	30-40%	13.7%	29.2%	21.7%	17.6%	16.4%
Individual planning	5-10%	61.9%	22.4%	8.7%	2.9%	1.2%
Responsive services	30-40%	10.8%	22.6%	28.2%	19.7%	17%
System support	15-20%	13.6%	29.0%	22.0%	18.0%	16.0%

According to Table 10, fewer than half of the middle school counselors spend an appropriate amount of time in curriculum, individual planning, and responsive services activities. Just over 50% spend the suggested amount of time of system support.

Table 10
Time Spent of Specific Activities by Middle School Counselors

ACTIVITY	NATIONAL PERCENTAGE	<10%	10-20%	20-30%	30-40%	>40%
Curriculum	20-30%	44.5%	31.9%	10.3%	3.6%	3.6%
Individual planning	15-25%	49.5%	26.9%	11%	4.7%	2.3%
Responsive services	30-40%	7.3%	17.6%	26.6%	18.3%	24.6%
System support	15-20%	24.2%	31.6%	19.9%	11.6%	3%

Data reported in Table 11 showed that fewer than 50% of high school counselors spend the suggested amount of time on each of the major counseling functions.

Table 11
Time Spent on Specific Activities by High School Counselors

ACTIVITY	NATIONAL PERCENTAGE	<10%	10-20%	20-30%	30-40%	>40%
Curriculum	15-25%	53.6%	26.2%	9.2%	3.8%	2%
Individual planning	25-35%	14.3%	28.8%	20.7%	15.8%	15.7%
Responsive services	25-35%	22.8%	30%	18.6%	14.5%	8.9%
System support	15-20%	40.6%	33.4%	11.8%	6%	2%

Data was also analyzed for Career Development Coordinators (Table 12) and all other student services personnel (Table 13). The group of student services personnel included school social workers, dropout prevention counselors, substance abuse prevention counselors, alternative school counselors, and some counselors who are assigned to work only with exceptional children.

Table 12
Time Spent on Specific Activities by Career Development Coordinators

ACTIVITY	NATIONAL PERCENTAGE	<10%	10-20%	20-30%	30-40%	>40%
Curriculum	N/A	24.7%	11.2%	18.2%	10.6%	3.5%
Individual planning	N/A	4.0%	10.6%	17.7%	21.7%	42.9%
Responsive services	N/A	67.7%	15%	6.6%	2.0%	1.5%
System support	N/A	25%	32%	21%	9.5%	6.5%

Table 13
Time Spent on Specific Activities by Other Student Services Personnel

ACTIVITY	NATIONAL PERCENTAGE	<10%	10-20%	20-30%	30-40%	>40%
Curriculum	N/A	50.8%	21.1%	6.1%	2.6%	8.8%
Individual planning	N/A	42.1%	17.5%	8.8%	8.8%	13.2%
Responsive services	N/A	12.3%	18.4%	11.4%	14.9%	29.8%
System support	N/A	28%	16.6%	21%	11.4%	10.5%

Tables 8-13 showed the analysis of how counselors spend their time in the four specific functions of a school counseling program. The results showed that fewer than half of the

North Carolina school counselors spend the nationally recommended amount of time in these areas. The following tables displayed the non-counseling activities that counselors have been asked to perform. The national standards indicate that none of these tasks should be included in a school counselor's job function.

For elementary, middle, and high school counselors, responsibility for test coordination has taken more and more of their time. Narratives that were sent along with the surveys by many of the counselors supported the data. Registering students, maintaining cumulative records, and transferring student records took time away from counseling activities for middle school counselors. High school counselors' time was also taken up with student schedule changes.

Table 14
Non-counseling Activities by Elementary School Counselors

NON-COUNSELING ACTIVITY	NATIONAL PERCENTAGE	<10%	10-20%	20-30%	30-40%	>40%
Duty (bus, lunch, etc.)	0	81%	9.7%	2%	1%	.4%
Registrar Responsibilities	0	72.7%	10%	3%	2%	2%
Schedule Changes	0	84.1%	1.9%	.1%	0	0
Test Coordination	0	41.8%	22.6%	11.4%	8.7%	6.2%
Substitute Teaching (covering class)	0	84.9%	1.2%	1.0%	0	0
Other Non-Counseling	0	56.7%	7.5%	1.4%	1.4%	1.0%

Table 15
Non-counseling Activities by Middle School Counselors

NON-COUNSELING ACTIVITY	NATIONAL PERCENTAGE	<10%	10-20%	20-30%	30-40%	>40%
Duty (bus, lunch, etc.)	0	75%	11.9%	3%	1%	1%
Registrar Responsibilities	0	42%	23.9%	10%	9%	5%
Schedule Changes	0	31.9%	13.3%	6.0%	3.3%	2.0%
Test Coordination	0	36.7%	18.3%	10.6%	11.6%	11.3%
Substitute Teaching (covering class)	0	84.7%	1.7%	.1%	0	0
Other Non-Counseling	0	51.2%	7.3%	3.3%	1%	.1%

Table 16
Non-counseling Activities by High School Counselors

NON-COUNSELING ACTIVITY	NATIONAL PERCENTAGE	<10%	10-20%	20-30%	30-40%	>40%
Duty (bus, lunch, etc.)	0	81%	5.9%	.8%	.8%	1%
Registrar Responsibilities	0	33%	28.6%	12%	8%	5.9%
Schedule Changes	0	37.1%	29.0%	11.1%	7.4%	6.1%
Test Coordination	0	39.1%	19.1%	10.5%	7.7%	12.7%
Substitute Teaching (covering class)	0	81.7%	1.6%	1%	0	0
Other Non-Counseling	0	30.0%	6.3%	2.5%	0.6%	1.4%

Table 17
Non-counseling Activities by Career Development Coordinators

NON-COUNSELING ACTIVITY	NATIONAL PERCENTAGE	<10%	10-20%	20-30%	30-40%	>40%
Duty (bus, lunch, etc.)	0	75%	12%	1%	0.5%	0.5%
Registrar Responsibilities	0	20%	10%	2.5%	0.5%	0.5%
Schedule Changes	0	74%	6.6%	1.5%	1%	1%
Test Coordination	0	64.1%	14.6%	3.0%	2.5%	1.0%
Substitute Teaching (covering class)	0	79.3%	2%	0	0.5%	0
Other Non-Counseling	0	41.4%	4.0%	3.0%	2.0%	3.5%

Table 18
Non-counseling Activities by Other Student Services Personnel

NON-COUNSELING ACTIVITY	NATIONAL PERCENTAGE	<10%	10-20%	20-30%	30-40%	>40%
Duty (bus, lunch, etc.)	0	71%	8.7%	0	3.5%	2.6%
Registrar Responsibilities	0	63%	8.7%	5.0%	0.8%	1.7%
Schedule Changes	0	70.0%	5.2%	0.8%	3.5%	0.8%
Test Coordination	0	58.8%	11.4%	3.5%	3.5%	2.6%
Substitute Teaching (covering class)	0	71.1%	1.7%	1.0%	1.0%	1.0%
Other Non-Counseling	0	42.1%	7.0%	2.6%	4.4%	4.4%

Summary

The purpose of this report was to determine how North Carolina School Counselors spend their time in

- Guidance curriculum
- Individual planning
- Responsive services
- System support
- Non-guidance activities

The results revealed that school counselors in North Carolina are not dividing their time according to the suggested national standards and that a significant amount of time is spent on non-counseling activities, such as testing, covering classes, and registrar activities.

Demographic information revealed that

- More than half of the counselors in this study have five or fewer years of counseling experience.
- 85% have a computer in their office.
- 75% have Internet access and e-mail.
- 57% of the counselors completed the survey and returned it.

Conclusions

Some conclusions were drawn from the results of this study. The first is acknowledging the key role that counselors should have in directing students in successful school experiences. Other conclusions include:

- Counselors want their voice to be heard as evidenced by the 57% return rate for the survey and by the number who wrote supporting documents and made phone calls to thank the researcher for doing the study.
- Staff development activities to help principals and counselors schedule their time appropriately and to increase understanding of the major function areas.
- A study on how support personnel can be used to eliminate non-counseling duties.
- Resources to eliminate non-counseling functions is needed.
- A revised guidance curriculum for the school counseling program is needed.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made:

- Results of this study might be made available to local education agencies, counselors, professional organizations, as basis for individual program improvement efforts.
 - Results of this survey should be made available to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee (The Studies Act of 2000) as they study issues related to school counselors and social workers.
 - Encourage LEAs to provide appropriate staff development for school counselors.
 - Guidelines for local school systems be developed for the review, implementation, and evaluation of North Carolina's Comprehensive School Counseling Program.
 - Review and revision of the School Counselor Performance Appraisal Instrument.
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References

- American School Counselor Association (1997). National Standards for School Counseling Programs. Alexandria, VA: Author.
- National Consortium for State Guidance Leadership (2000). Status and Impact of Guidance and Counseling Programs on Student Academic Achievement. Columbus, OH: Author.

Appendix A
THE SURVEY INSTRUMENT

**HOW SCHOOL COUNSELORS SPEND THEIR TIME
2000-2001**

As a part of the revision of the school counseling curriculum, please indicate how you, a school counselor, spend your time.

- Please answer the ten questions and complete the table below.
- Mail your response (envelope provided) to:
Betty Jo Wimmer
NC Department of Public Instruction
301 North Wilmington Street
Raleigh, NC, 27601
- If you have questions, please call 919-715-9658.

1. I am a(n) (a) *elementary*, (b) *middle*, (c) *high school* counselor. I am (d) *a high school* or (e) *a middle school* Career Development Coordinator.
2. I have (a) *0-5*, (b) *6-10*, (c) *11-15*, (d) *16-20*, (e) *more than 20* years of experience.
3. I have been a counselor (or CDC) in my present school for (a) *0-5*, (b) *6-10*, (c) *11-15*, (d) *16-20*, (e) *more than 20* year(s).
4. There are (a) *0*, (b) *1*, (c) *2*, (d) *3*, (e) *4 or more* counselors in my school.
5. Our school is on a (a) *block*, (b) *traditional* schedule.
6. We operate (a) *traditional*, (b) *year-round* classes.
7. I (a) *have*, (b) *do not have* a computer in my office.
8. I (a) *have*, (b) *do not have* Internet access.
9. I (a) *have*, (b) *do not have* e-mail access.
10. This school has approximately (a) *0-300*, (b) *301-600*, (c) *601-900*, (d) *901-1200*, (e) *more than 1200* students

Appendix A (page 2)

WORKSHEET

Please read each of the following tasks and determine what percentage of your time you would typically spend on that task. Use the following scale and transfer this information to the corresponding number at the left: (a) less than 10%, (b) 11%-20%, (c) 21-30%, (d) 31%-40%, (e) more than 40%.

TASK	% TIME
11. Curriculum	
• <i>Classroom activities:</i>	
Character education, School counseling curriculum activities, Awareness of opportunities (college, summer programs, financial aid, etc.).	
• <i>Group activities:</i>	
Technology activities (such as NCMentor, Career Explorer, NC Careers, or other computer information system), decision making, goal setting, planning, and problem-solving activities	
12. Individual Planning	
• <i>Individual advisement:</i>	
College information, career information, course selection, graduation requirements (transcript audit), sports eligibility.	
• <i>Individual assessment:</i>	
Administering inventories (interest, personality, values, etc.), interpreting results to students, parents, teachers.	
• <i>Placement:</i>	
Job shadowing, internship, apprenticeship, full-and part-time employment.	
• <i>Career Development:</i>	
Career awareness activities, career exploration activities, career inventories, career development plans (writing and revising).	
13. Responsive Services:	
Academic concerns, school-related concerns (tardiness, absence & truancy, misbehavior, school avoidance, dorp-out prevention), relationship concerns, physical/sexual/emotional abuse, substance abuse, grief/loss/death, family issues, sexuality issues, stress.	
14. System Support:	
Research, program development, staff development (sessions provided to staff and community), professional development (attending workshops, conferences), committee, partnership, advisory boards, school-based committee, school improvement team, program management and operation (Parent contact, business contact, public relations.	
Non-counseling activities:	X
15. Duty: Bus (arrival/departure), lunchroom, hall monitoring	
16. Registrar responsibilities (enrolling, transferring, cumulative folder monitoring, transcript preparation, etc.).	
17. Extracurricular activity sponsor.	
18. Schedule changes.	
19. Test coordination.	
20. Substitute teaching.	

We will be able to count responses received by September 22, 2000.

Appendix B
The School Counseling Expert Committee

Joan Bishop	Guilford County Schools
Shirley Cohen	Johnston County Schools
Andrea Farrow	Cabarrus County Schools
Alan Hardy	Rowan-Salisbury Schools
Ken Hayes	Rowan-Cabarrus Community College (and CACRAO)
Donna Henderson	Wake Forest University
Eleanor Herndon	Real Enterprises
Janet Huber	Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools
Sharon Nettles	Chatham County Schools
Joseph Petty	Brunswick County Schools
Phyllis Post	UNC-Charlotte (and NC Counseling Association)
Debra Preston	UNC- Pembroke
Laura Russell	NC JobReady
Kenneth Simington	Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools
Patricia Slagel	Hayesville High School
Carolyn Smith	Forestview High School
Eric Sparks	Wake County Schools (and NCSCA)
Glenda Till	Cumberland County Schools
Carol Walters	Wilson County Schools
Mary H. Williams	Edgecombe County Schools
Willa Wyatt	Madison County Schools

North Carolina Public Schools Consultant Staff

David Bryant
Sandra Peyser
Betty Jo Wimmer

Appendix C
SAMPLE COUNSELOR COMMENTS THAT ACCOMPANIED THE SURVEY

- "We need testing coordinators. These vast responsibilities are taking up nearly ALL of our time! We are no longer counselors!"
- "I am sending back the survey form. We have no counselor. We need one, but have no funds."
- "I am filling out this survey based on my responsibilities last year. I was the testing coordinator (counselor). Testing is a full time job. I would work most week-ends, Sunday mornings included, to keep my head above water. It was awful. This year my high school hired a test coordinator. I love counseling. This year I have seniors and I 'm working like a dog and it is great. Counselors should not be doing testing."
- "Counselors spend 60% of their time organizing and administering assessments. With the new Exit Exam, that will increase to 70%."
- "Thanks for doing this survey. However, NOTHING will change until principals stop giving counselors non-counseling duties. The principal needs other personnel to do these non-counseling duties. Unfortunately, the guidance curriculum has little or no effect on what counselors are being told to do."
- "I'm so glad that you are collecting this data. I think we have a problem state-wide with counselors not being able to do the counseling job they were supposed to be hired to do. So many children's individual needs are going unmet because school counselors are being forced to spend most of their time in classrooms, cumulative records, testing, committee meetings, etc. rather than focusing on the children's needs. I hope that you will use this data to remind school systems and school principals what the appropriate ;major functions of school counselors are. Thank you"
- "I don't know where the state of school counseling is going? I used to have 1500 students in 2 schools, and back then in 1979 I had more student contact, knew all my students/parents, had numerous classes/groups each day. Not now—all I do now is push paper/testing! Sad!!"