

# RECOGNIZING PROMISING MODELS OF SCHOOL COUNSELING FOR INDIANA

## SUMMARY & FINDINGS

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CENTER OF EXCELLENCE  
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## SUMMARY & FINDINGS

As a follow-up to the Indiana Chamber of Commerce (ICC) Foundation study, *The Indiana School Counseling Research Review*, released in spring 2014, the ICC collaborated with the Center of Excellence in Leadership of Learning (CELL) at the University of Indianapolis and Fleck Education on a study to identify and document exemplary models of school counseling programming and to develop a framework of practices that schools may replicate. This project was commissioned by Lilly Endowment, Inc.

To better understand emerging innovative counseling structures, a review of promising practices across the country, including Indiana, was conducted within the following domains:

- Promising Practices in delivery of services,
- Promising Practices in financing services over time,
- Promising Practices in evaluating counselors, and
- Promising Practices in professional development and pre-service training programs for counselors.

Research, including a literature review and national landscape review, served as the foundation for site visits and/or interviews with schools in Indiana and across the country. These schools varied in type, size, and student demographics.

### **Delivery of Services**

College and career counseling was a primary focus of all programs reviewed; however, academic and social-emotional counseling information also was collected and reviewed. It was evident that a commitment to the importance of quality counseling services by district and building leadership positively affected the services offered by the counseling department. Many schools have developed innovative delivery methods for services that free up counselors to provide more individualized attention for assigned students. In some instances, this includes specially trained teachers serving in an advisory role, college/career coordinators, parent volunteers in college/career centers, and well-equipped websites with access to college/career software, such as Naviance. Use of non-counseling certified staff to provide support to counselors helps to finance more services for students. Examples that will distribute noncounseling duties away from counselors include utilizing social workers, testing coordinators, school psychologists, staff from mental health or wellness centers, assistants overseeing college application/financial aid support, and use of community resources.

### **Financing Services over Time**

Some schools with exemplary programs use funds for additional staff even if this does not reduce student-counselor ratios. Additional staff members may be specialists or administrative support staff who do not require a school counselor license but are able to provide supplementary services.

Funding sources may be from program-specific grants, and schools may contract some counseling services to outside community providers.

### **Evaluation of Counselors**

Schools evaluate counselors with tools that follow national or state counseling models, locally developed instruments, or local tools with some state and/or national components. Unlike some schools in Indiana, the schools highlighted in this study used counselor-specific evaluation tools rather than those used to evaluate teachers or other non-counseling staff.

### **Professional Development for Counselors**

Professional development includes attendance at state and national events but also involves local educational opportunities such as externships in area businesses. Counseling staff in some districts are included in the school or district leadership teams and are active members of professional learning communities.

### **Online Surveys**

Surveys collected input from those at postsecondary institutions that provide pre-service counseling training as well as from students and parents from the high schools in this study. The low survey participant numbers limited the strength of generalizations that could be made, but several themes did arise. Pre-service providers sense a difference between the valuable services counselors are trained to deliver and the tasks they must practice in their jobs. Many parents and students appreciated their counselors for academic support and college/career preparation and planning, while others felt that the access to their counselors was less than they needed and sometimes difficult to schedule.

Concepts and strategies gleaned from school visits, the literature review, and survey results were integral to the development of the “Framework to Identify Promising Practices and Structures within School Counseling: Elements of Service and Programming.” This framework is intended to serve as a guide for schools as they make decisions to transform or augment their counseling programs.

# Framework to Identify Promising Practices and Structures within School Counseling: Elements of Service and Programming

The following framework was developed based on recognized practices of schools that participated in this study and the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model. This framework will be an aid for the development of tools and resources for schools to inform, modify, and strengthen school counselor programs in the following domains: delivery of services, financing services over time, evaluating counselors, and pre-service training and professional development.

Each domain includes a definition, characteristics of promising practices, and examples from schools included in the study.

## ***Domain I - Promising Practices in Delivery of Services***

**Definition:** *Administration vision and strategic plan for the school and the school's counseling services should include postsecondary outcomes for students, while supporting academic, social, and emotional development. This vision should guide all programs and services provided to students through counseling staff. The district should use data to guide decisions and make programmatic changes. The school environment should reflect a college- and career-focused atmosphere. The school's website should provide online access to resources for students and their families to assist with planning for college and career.*

### **Career/Postsecondary Counseling Characteristics:**

Schools have a dedicated staff to provide college- and career-readiness services.

Administrative leadership drives a culture that insists on postsecondary success. Ideally counselors are a part of this leadership team to lend voice to the needs of students.

Services are based on postsecondary placement for all students. Schools have a tracking mechanism throughout grades 9-12 (and earlier for junior high and elementary campuses) to identify potential career paths along with documenting progress toward and along these paths.

Schools have developed partnerships with local businesses or industry to expose students and teachers to a variety of industry needs and career opportunities.

Schools may choose to use an advisory period with teachers (trained by counseling staff) to deliver curriculum associated with college and career planning, to lead activities associated with social and emotional needs, and to facilitate completion of financial aid forms, college applications, and interest inventories.

Examples:

- A school uses a coordinator of educational exploration/apprenticeships to build relationships with businesses, run its internship program, and start college/career exploration in 9<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> grade.
- A school has counselors train advisory teachers on a college/career curriculum to deliver to all students.

### **Academic Counseling Characteristics:**

Schools have a dedicated staff when available. When specialization falls outside of the primary counselor responsibilities, efforts are made to approach student interventions as a team. Utilizing developmental considerations of students is recommended when assigning students to counseling staff.

Examples:

- A school has graduation coaches who work with their most at-risk and struggling students on improving academic skills.
- A school has teachers and staff assigned to small school teams who meet monthly to catch and address student academic issues proactively instead of waiting until the semester ends.

### **Social/Emotional Counseling Characteristics:**

Schools have a dedicated staff or contract with local community organizations (when regionally available) to respond to social and emotional counseling needs of students.

School models use counselor specialization in some specific areas, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach.

Consideration may also be given to mental and physical health services provided by partners in the community such as local hospitals and/or mental health providers. Such partnerships should also include preventative care (not limited to reactionary care).

Examples:

- A school utilizes behavior interventionists for social-emotional needs.
- A school utilizes multiple counseling and school counseling interns for social-emotional counseling, as well as a safety advocate.
- A school has a licensed social worker on staff to counsel students through social and emotional issues.

### **Data and Technology Utilization Characteristics:**

Many schools utilize a variety of online tools or proprietary software to provide additional tools and resources to students and families. No single online service/resource is used by all schools.

Many schools use Naviance®, one of several college and career readiness software systems that districts can purchase to assist with housing, tracking, and analyzing student information. As described by Naviance®, it is “a platform that helps connect academic achievement to postsecondary goals. Our comprehensive college and career readiness solution empowers students and families to connect learning and life and provides schools and districts with the information they need to help students prepare for life after high school. It also allows students to create a plan for their futures by helping them discover their individual strengths and learning styles and explore college and career options based on their results.”

Schools may also purchase a subscription to the National Student Clearinghouse to assist with obtaining and managing data for students who graduate from high school and enter into a postsecondary institution. This can help schools understand longitudinal data and, therefore, make programmatic changes based on the data. National Student Clearinghouse data can also be accessed through Naviance® for an additional fee.

Schools may utilize the various college and career planning tools that are available through ACT and The College Board, including PSAT results, depending on which assessment(s) (in some cases both) a student takes. The College Board offers an interactive College Planning portal on its website, bigfuture®, in which students can research specific areas such as finding colleges, exploring careers, paying for college, etc. ACT also has a college and career planning area of its website that students can use to read information about planning for college or a career.

Many schools have also created robust websites. Providing access to information, such as LearnMore.org, and other online tools on a school website enables students and their families to quickly access information online at their convenience.

Examples:

- A school offers Naviance® to students for college and career planning, but counselors also use it to track data.

### ***Domain II - Promising Practices in Financing Services Over Time***

**Definition:** *Districts should consider funds for additional staff even if this does not reduce student-counselor ratios. Additional staff could be specialists or fill supportive roles that do not require a school counselor license. Funding sources could be from grants and/or local community partners.*

Grants, both short-term and program-specific, are viable options to provide start-up funds or augment certain areas of counseling. These funds also could be used to support short-term staff time to develop programming (summer contracts or hours).

Examples:

- A school received an Imagine Grant for a College Prep Bootcamp summer program between 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade.
- A school is utilizing grant money to fund an essay review workshop for students the week before the beginning of their senior year of high school.

A commitment from the district to fund programs, activities, and events is evident within exemplary counseling departments.

Title 1 funds can help with interventionist positions, behavioral and academic, as both are supporting roles to counselors.

Community or business partners can help with sustainability of programs that also benefit the region where the school district is located. Monetary contributions are not the only way for local partners to be involved with the school. The donation of talent and time to college and career counseling services are of value; participation on advisory boards, evaluating curriculum content, marketing/promoting programs and services, and providing connections to service providers in the community are examples that can be utilized widely.

Examples:

- A school partners with local businesses to support events that are mutually beneficial and to provide staff professional development.
- A school uses local business professionals to meet with students during their career fair and to educate about different fields.
- A school collaborates with local businesses to start a 529 Plan for every student.

Cost-saving options may include contracting with outside counseling agencies to provide no cost mental health counseling or services billed to insurance by the provider.

Passing a local referendum to alleviate costs associated with hiring additional staff is an option that could be utilized in some school corporations.

Fundraising through parent and faculty organizations to assist the school in targeted areas is another option.

Examples:

- A school staffs its College/Career Center with a non-certified aide to mitigate costs.
- A school utilizes a retired counselor in a half-time position to add increased college/career support for seniors.

*Note: A separate financial report was prepared by an external consulting group exploring and estimating costs of a variety of counseling roles and services within different school settings.*

### **Non-Counselor Duties**

Throughout the course of this study, many counselors related that they are engaged in “non-counselor duties.” In the online survey of pre-service counselor educators from Indiana postsecondary institutions, one faculty member indicated, “Often there is a disconnect between what students (counselors) are trained to do and how they are used in school.” These duties are an inadequate use of a formally-trained professional’s expertise and time. Some Indiana schools have found ways to use support staff and optimize counselors’ time to focus on their most important responsibilities. According to ASCA, many activities may be classified as appropriate or inappropriate activities for school counselors. See the following web page for more information: <http://schoolcounselor.org/asca/media/asca/home/appropriate-activities-of-school-counselors.pdf>

Example:

- A school uses an administrative assistant to coordinate student achievement testing programs.

### ***Domain III - Promising Practicing in Evaluating Counselors***

**Definition:** *The evaluation tool utilized for counseling positions reflects overall good counseling practices, as exemplified by the ASCA National Model’s National Instrument and Indiana School Counselor Effectiveness Rubric revised by Fleck Education, as well as district goals and strategic plan outcomes. The evaluation tool considers the collection of student-level placement data.*

Some schools do not use counselor-specific evaluation tools; however, such tools do exist. A school district may choose from several appropriate tools to evaluate the efficacy of counselors and the counseling department. Examples follow:

ASCA National Instrument of School Counselor Competencies

State Instruments-

- Indiana School Counselor Association (ISCA) Professional School Counselor Effectiveness Rubric
- Indiana School Counselor Effectiveness Rubric revised by Fleck Education (combines elements of the Indiana School Counselor rubric with those of the RISE model)

Many states across the nation have a state-specific evaluation tool for evaluating counselors such as the Tennessee TAP Model for School Counselors and the Iowa Evaluation Supplement for School Counselors.

*Note: Some districts have also developed their own evaluation instruments for counselors based on a combination of district goals and ASCA competencies.*

#### ***Domain IV - Promising Practices in Professional Development and Pre-service Training Programs for Counselors***

**Definition:** *Professional development includes traditional and non-traditional opportunities. It allows for specialization that aligns with a district's goals and strategic plan. Professional development could also include participation in various professional learning communities within the school and community.*

Dedicated professional development time allocated for school counselors allows for the development and use of professional learning communities. Creating teams, which include administration and advisory teachers, to address student needs is a strategy that can be implemented to strengthen the services provided by the counseling department.

Utilizing training offered by external educational organizations or tapping into existing pre-service training that addresses the evolving job market will help provide high school students with up-to-date counseling services.

Examples:

- A school's counselors attend multiple professional development opportunities, both free and fee-based, offered by various organizations and other local school districts.
- A school uses its local business community to send counselors on "externships," where they learn up-to-date information on different careers.

Seeking training offered by external educational organizations or tapping into existing pre-service training that addresses interest, aptitude, and demand inventories for students and families is another option to provide students with relevant counseling services.

Examples:

- A school sends its college counselor to pertinent annual conferences (NACAC and IACAC) and to visit multiple postsecondary institutions every year to stay up-to-date to, in turn, provide relevant information to students.

In conclusion, the "Framework to Identify Promising Practices and Structures within School Counseling: Elements of Service and Programming" incorporates exemplary practices from each of the schools interviewed to create a comprehensive outline for an innovative school counseling program. Throughout the Part I study, many of the schools interviewed had elements of the framework, but no one school embodied all of the framework components. Schools will be able to use tools that are developed from the framework as a standard for redesigning, informing, and enhancing their counseling programs.

## Conclusion

School counselors are a vital part of the college and career success of students and are critical providers of social and emotional support services. These report findings reinforce schools' need for a framework and aspirational practices to develop, strengthen, and/or enhance school counseling programs. Effectively energizing and increasing the outcomes of school counseling programs will require a comprehensive, proactive approach. Strategies to promote promising school counseling programs will be most successful with a broad and collaborative community and business approach.

Additional strategies and considerations shall be contemplated during the convening event on October 2, 2015. Invitees include American Student Achievement Institute (ASAI), Corporate Partnership (CICP), Central Indiana Corporate Partnership (CICP), Central Indiana Community Foundation (CICF), Department of Workforce Development (DWD), Indiana Association for College Admissions Counseling (IACAC), Indiana Association of Public School Superintendents (IAPSS), Indiana Association of School Business Officials (IASBO), Indiana Association of School Principals (IASP), Indiana Association of United Ways (IAUW), Indiana Commission for Higher Education (ICHE), Indiana Department of Education (IDOE), Indiana INTERNnet, Indiana School Counselors Association (ISCA), Indiana Youth Institute (IYI), USA Funds, Complete College America, Indiana INTERNnet, and Lilly Endowment, Inc.

To be successful, the focus of any strategy will need to be broader than just school counseling programs and may even need to be more expansive than K-12 schools. Transformation may require reaching beyond schools to intentionally involve business and industry, youth organizations, professional associations, chambers of commerce, workforce and economic development, government, and communities with a combined vision in order to collaboratively reach the promise of transforming school counseling programs.

The partners of this project are committed to elevating the value of effective school counseling programs and services for Hoosier school children. ICC and CELL look forward to additional discussions with all stateholders to develop next steps that will provide opportunities to schools that are dedicated to increasing positive outcomes for students. Together, our organizations are devoted to continuing our work toward the promise of exceptional school counseling in Indiana.



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**For more information:**

Alisa Deck  
Director of College & Career Readiness  
Indiana Chamber of Commerce  
317.264.7548  
adeck@indianachamber.com

Trisha Włodarczyk  
Director of Strategic Initiatives  
Center of Excellence in Leadership of Learning  
(CELL)  
University of Indianapolis  
317.791.5708  
włodarczykt@uindy.edu