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Evaluation of the Counseling, College and Career Specialist,  
and Social Work Programs in a  
Midwest School District

by

Shonda O. Ambers-Phillips

A Dissertation submitted to the Education faculty of Lindenwood University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of

Doctorate of Education

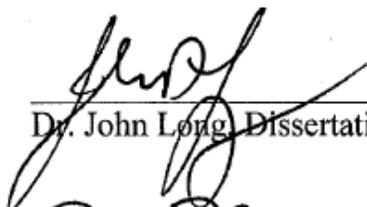
School of Education

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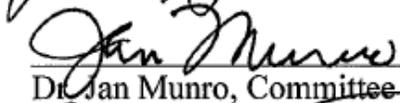
by

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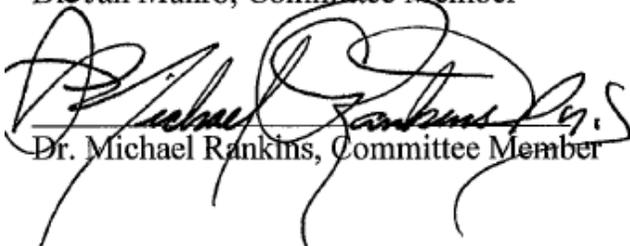
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degree of  
Doctor of Education  
at Lindenwood University by the School of Education

  
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### **Declaration of Originality**

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work here at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree here or elsewhere.

Full Legal Name: Shonda Omega Ambers-Phillips

Signature:

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Acknowledgements**

Throughout my formal education, I sought assistance from professional school counselors for social emotional needs when my father died in elementary school, career-related exploration during middle and high school and as a first generation college student to gain academic support to obtain a scholarship and understand the college going process. Being a first generation college student, my middle school and high school counselors were instrumental in my success.

I am extremely thankful to my committee for all of their assistance throughout this process. The content knowledge Dr. Jan Munro and Dr. Michael Rankins provided to support my counseling program evaluation study was invaluable and it was a privilege to work with them. Words cannot express how fortunate I am to have had Dr. John Long both as an advisor and as the chair of my committee. This work would not be possible without the professional school counselors, college and career specialist, school social workers and countless teachers, administrators, parents and students of Midwest School District who served on the program evaluation committee, input and design teams, responded to surveys or helped with the data collection. It was clear that Midwest School District views guidance and counseling as an integral part of a school's total education process and this dissertation would not be published without this commitment. Special thanks to Dr. Bragg Stanley, State Director of Guidance, for his time and service as an independent expert evaluator and helping to guide this work. It is my hope that future districts and professional school counselors will benefit from the contributions of these great people.

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## **Abstract**

In education, much emphasis is placed on academic achievement without fully understanding the role counseling programs can have to ensure all students are learning at high levels and are college and career ready. The staff of Midwest School District believes that guidance and counseling is an integral part of each school's total education program. As a commitment to this belief, the district developed a program evaluation plan to both consistently and effectively evaluate district programs. An essential component of a school counseling program's accountability is to provide evidence that what school counselors do makes a measurable difference in the lives of students, particularly academic achievement and school success. The purpose of Midwest's guidance and counseling evaluation was to examine the current reality and establish expectations related to programming and design, K-12 alignment of services, and best meet student needs. The district program follows the Missouri Comprehensive Model Guidance Program (MCMGP) and addresses the academic, personal/social, and career planning of every Midwest student. At the end of the program evaluation, the school district and other educators will have an assessment of the professional school counselors, college and career specialist and school social workers as well as considerations for improvements and a perspective on the service delivery models employed by the district to address the needs of K-12 students.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **Background, Purpose, and Direction of the Study**

Since the introduction of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2001, there has been an increasing amount of attention given to the performance of students in America's schools. NCLB was a federal law that authorized federal spending on programs to support K-12 schooling to improve educational equity for students from specific student subgroups, including low-income families, students with disabilities, English language learners, and major ethnic and racial groups such as African American and Hispanic. School accountability in the form of standardized test scores, graduation rates, attendance, closure of the achievement gap, college and career readiness and other measures have played an important role in current educational reform movements because of NCLB legislation. While there has been much debate on the benefits and cost of the NCLB, the purpose was to ensure that all children had a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and state academic assessments (U.S. Department of Education, 2015, sec. 1001).

In Missouri, school district performance was reviewed annually by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MODESE) based upon standards of the Missouri School Improvement Program-5 (MSIP-5) with accreditation being determined by performance criteria. The intent of the MSIP-5 rule was to encourage improvement in student performance by implementing an accountability system for Missouri public school districts. With student performance being the major focus in reform and school improvement efforts, professional school counselors must have also

asked themselves what impact their guidance and counseling programs had on relevant student outcomes (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [MODESE] Division 20, 2014).

Midwest School District (a pseudonym) was a suburban district located in St. Louis County with high student achievement, outstanding teachers and staff, and great community support. The district enrollment data for the 2014-2015 school year was 21,251 making it the third largest school district in the state of Missouri. Of this enrollment data the racial demographics were as follows: White 79.40%, Asian 6.4%, Hispanic 2.9%, Black 9.4% (roughly 7% or 1700 Midwest students were from St. Louis city neighborhoods whose families participated in the voluntary desegregation transfer program). The mission of Midwest School District was “We do whatever it takes to ensure all students realize their potential.” Part of the commitment to this mission included Midwest’s dedication towards continuous improvement by evaluating all district programs to ensure efficiency. This dissertation provides a model for other school districts on how to evaluate guidance and counseling programs to determine if what counselors do really makes a difference. Guidance and Counseling was one such program, which provided an integral part of the school district’s total education program. The Guidance and Counseling department, consisting of professional school counselors, college and career specialists, and school social workers utilized a comprehensive and developmental approach in its K-12 program to ensure all students succeed.

Program evaluations in Midwest School District followed an outlined, board-approved process (Midwest School District Program Evaluation Plan [MSIP 8.1.1], 2007). Conducting a program evaluation is an intentional process, initiated for a specific

purpose or to answer specific questions (Borders & Drury, 1992). The district had the responsibility to ensure that students continued to strive for excellence in an increasingly competitive world, emerging college and career ready, prepared to meet the challenges of the 21st century. A common practice of effective school districts was to frequently monitor progress on a continuous basis utilizing both qualitative and quantitative sources of data. Program evaluation results as a best practice are used to determine the impact of the counseling program and to gain feedback that can be used to implement necessary changes for program improvements (Hatch, 2014). Evaluation was a critical component that ensured accountability for developmental guidance and counseling programs.

Historically, professional school counselors would usually keep track of the services they offered by tallying the number of students they served and indicating the service provided. Guidance calendars, newsletters, or bulletin boards also communicated how the professional school counselor's time was used. After the *Nation at Risk* (1983) revealed the catastrophic state of public education, reforms took place holding school districts accountable for the academic achievement of the students they served and education transformed, including school counseling programs (as cited in Dollarhide & Saginak, 2012). The process data professional school counselors previously collected, such as the number of contacts and services rendered, only accounted for time spent but failed to reveal actual effectiveness. This data merely provided the details of who, what, when, where and how long student services or interventions had taken place. Although, this provided pertinent information, in isolation, it was not enough meaningful data. Dimmitt (2009) emphasized that educators and mental health professionals were under increased scrutiny to demonstrate evidence of effectiveness. Completing tasks because it

was believed to work or because things had always been done that way were no longer legitimate rationales.

An essential component of a school counseling program's accountability was to provide evidence that what school counselors did made a measurable difference in students' lives, particularly academic achievement and school success (Cobia & Henderson, 2006). In order to facilitate this process, Midwest School District developed a Program Evaluation Plan to both consistently and effectively evaluate district programs. The goals of the Program Evaluation Plan were as follows:

- to provide a structured method of annually evaluating the effectiveness or quality of specified programs and forms of student data;
- to identify school personnel responsible for formally evaluating various programs and student performance;
- to promote the identification of recommended strategies for improving specified programs and student performance;
- to provide a means for the board of education to formally review specified programs and student performance data each year;
- to meet the requirements of Missouri School Improvement Program (MSIP, 2007, p. 1)

At least biennially, the district reviewed the goals and objectives of each program and service; received reports of the effectiveness; and, developed action plans to ensure that these programs efficiently achieved their goals (MSIP, 2007, p. 1).

Initial cautionary guidance from Midwest School District warned when conducting a program evaluation that care must be taken to ensure that the evaluation

goals were addressed. Program evaluations should be fair and balanced with sufficient, accurate, and valid information provided to aid sound decision-making by the board of education (Gysbers, Stanley, Kosteck-Bunch, Magnuson, & Starr, 2011). To ensure validity and reliability, multiple data sources and data types should be obtained to corroborate the findings whenever possible (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2012). Steps should also be taken to avoid bias and informational resources should follow ethical and research driven guidelines. In cases where bias or other problems were unavoidable, then those weaknesses should be clearly identified so that decision makers could draw valid conclusions. A result of the program evaluation process should yield proposed recommendations and encourage additional follow up with identified action plans for improvement to the overall program. The evaluation process should highlight strengths of the guidance and counseling program and identify areas of weakness to better meet the needs of students. Both short-term and long-term procedural and process goals should be established with clear effective practices in place for program and student growth. Evaluation should be continuous in the Midwest School District, an ongoing and organic component in what happens daily to support student achievement and the assessment of programs and services not just an event that takes place during the evaluation cycle.

Four categories of evaluation questions were answered as a result of this program evaluation. These are the research questions for this dissertation.

1. Does the Midwest School District Guidance and Counseling Program meet the program standards?

2. How does Midwest School District comprehensive guidance program address the issue of impact and overall effectiveness on student outcomes as a result of the work of the guidance and counseling program?
3. Do the K-12 services and programs currently in place in Midwest School District adequately address students' social/emotional needs and academically ensure that they are college and career ready?
4. What is the role and responsibilities of the professional school counselors, college and career specialists and school social workers in Midwest School District and how well are they performing these duties?

The guidance and counseling evaluation addressed K-12 alignment of services and answered questions related to programming options and structural design. Midwest School District's Board of Education (BOE) charged the Counseling Department with the task of completing a program evaluation of the comprehensive guidance and counseling program recommended by the Midwest National Education Association (NEA). This task was an outcome of the negotiation agreement with the board to review the current reality following the reduction in force of professional school counselors at the secondary level. Ten professional school counselors were eliminated district-wide; one at each of the four high schools and one at each of the six middle schools. Although this program evaluation was an outcome of discussions between the BOE and RNEA, taking a critical look at what school counselors do is a best practice and identifies how school counselors contribute in a meaningful way towards student achievement (Hatch, 2014).

In evaluating guidance programs, the process usually focused on the activities that professional school counselors did rather than the impact of those activities on student

behavior or outcomes. This was partially due to the view that the professional school counselor was a position only responsible for carrying out certain activities that may or may not have been related to the school performance. However, in terms of this writing, the focus and mindset was moving toward the direction of guidance and counseling as an overall program with unique content and student expectations. Once a school district or building had moved to a programmatic view of guidance and counseling, then it was possible to focus on relevant student outcomes.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Opportunity and access to education has the ability to change the trajectory of a student's life. School counselors and their comprehensive guidance programs can have a major role on students' choices and decisions about the future. School counselors are the vital gatekeepers to access information about career pathways and help navigate the college-going process, which can ultimately lead to productive lives as contributing members of society. Part of the work of the school counselor is to ensure that all students achieve regardless of resources, race or extenuating circumstances and reach their full potential. Given the important nature of this work, school districts must recognize the vital need for school counselors and the increasingly important role they play in producing successful student outcomes. Nationally, we must be intentional about our efforts to improve our school counseling practices and evaluate our comprehensive programs for effectiveness in order to compete on a global level by producing a highly skilled and educated workforce.

A counseling program evaluation was the recommended outcome of the 2012-2013 negotiation agreement process with the Midwest National Education Association as

a result of counseling positions being cut in Midwest School District. The Board of Education approved the process for the Coordinator of Guidance and Prevention Services to meet with professional school counselors to review the program philosophy, non-guidance responsibilities, clarify expectations, set priorities and discuss the meaning of the twenty-first century counselor. After this initial work was completed a more expansive full scale program evaluation was conducted during the 2013-2014 school year which included Professional School Counselors, College and Career Specialists and School Social Workers. The last program evaluation for the Guidance and Counseling Department in Midwest School District was previously completed a decade prior in 2004, making this request long overdue. During the 2010-2011 school year, the number of professional school counselors was reduced at the secondary level in Midwest district, eliminating 10 full time positions. Each of the six middle schools and four high schools lost a counseling position in their buildings. Student to counselor ratios shifted from desirable state standards of 375:1 to minimum standards of 500:1. The reduction in force caused a reorganization or shifting of staff members to new locations utilizing reassignment determined by tenure. Specific building and grade level vacancies were matched based upon counselor's certifications. This process meant many professional school counselors certified K-12 not only changed buildings but also the level of the students they were serving.

The recommendation from American School Counselor Association for the ideal school counselor to student ratio is 1:250 and 80% or more of a school counselor's time should be spent in the delivery systems component with direct and indirect services to students (ASCA, 2012). Guidance and counseling staff ratios were also a part of the

resource standards in MSIP-5. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MODESE) minimum standard for guidance and counseling was 1-500 ratio K-12, desirable was 1:375, however, the recommended ratio was 1-250 aligned with the national model. Research supported the belief that professional school counselors could make a positive difference when provided the resources and time to work with students and demonstrated the positive impact on student achievement in schools with lower guidance and counseling ratios (Gysbers et al. 2011). This program evaluation examined the current reality with the reduced staffing model on the overall program and established expectations that would best meet the needs of the students in Midwest School District.

As other school districts consider cutting student services personnel such as counselors, program evaluation becomes crucial for data-driven decision. This dissertation provides a model for evaluation of counseling programs. In order to evaluate school counseling programs effectively, districts must have a clearly identified measure in place to assess personnel through an appropriate instrument. Collecting process data allows districts to understand what was being done and the work of a school counselor. Another key component requires districts to examine school counseling programs from a perceptual data lens identifying what students received from these interactions in terms of their attitudes, skills and overall knowledge. Finally, districts must actively collect results data when evaluating counseling programs to measure whether if what they do really makes a difference and contributes to student achievement. With an increased emphasis on accountability and student achievement and the growing body of research supporting the difference school counselors can make on improving attendance and

achievement and decreasing behavior concerns districts must began to view school counselor as an integral part of the students total education.

### **Definition of Terms**

To best understand this study, its purpose, the research questions that drive the study and the research itself, the following terms must be understood:

**A+ Coordinator** - the A+ Schools Coordinator led the school-based A+ Schools Program and was responsible for developing, implementing and supporting the program objectives. In Midwest School District, the A+ Coordinators also served as building test coordinators responsible for the administration and coordination of district assessments at the building level.

**A+ Program** - The A+ program provided state funded scholarships to eligible high school graduates meeting the necessary requirements of 95% cumulative attendance, 2.5 grade point average, 50 hours of unpaid tutoring hours, good citizenship from a designated high school to attend a participating public community college or vocational/technical school, and certain private two-year vocational/technical schools.

**College and Career Specialist** – The College and Career Specialist was primarily responsible for matching high school graduates with appropriate post-high school experiences and assisting students to reach academic and life goals. College and Career Specialists primarily worked with juniors and seniors but met with any students grades 9-12 concerning college and career related needs. They worked with college admission representatives to schedule visits to the high school enabling students to have the opportunity to explore a variety of options. In addition, the College and Career Specialists hosted the Midwest School District College Fair, which rotated among each of

the four high schools in the district on a yearly basis. DESE does not require school district to staff high schools with college and career specialist however, the presence of personnel in this position is evident in higher performing school district. Missouri educator certification is not required but individuals should possess a background in post-secondary education.

**Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP)** - The Comprehensive School Improvement Plan was the tool school districts utilized to prioritize improvement needs for students to be academically successful and college and career ready. The local board of education and district leadership, in collaboration with the community, used qualitative data, quantitative data, and evaluation results to create a written, board-approved CSIP, which drove improvement in student learning and guided the overall improvement of its educational programs and services. The CSIP served as a long-range planning tool for addressing student performance and described a specific set of actions to be undertaken relative to these issues. The expectation of the Department was that all districts have a CSIP (DESE, 2014).

**Grade Level Expectations (GLE)** - Guidance and counseling K-12 grade level expectations in the areas of academic, career and personal-social development aligned with state and national guidance and counseling standards.

**Guidance Curriculum** - The guidance and counseling curriculum provided content based on the guidance and counseling standards to all students and their parents through classroom presentations and large group activities such as career days, college fairs, and parent workshops (Gysbers et al., 2011).

**Individual Planning** - Individual planning activities consist of assisting all students in exploring their post-secondary plans by developing Personal Plans of Study (PPOS). This process allows students in conjunction with parents and school counselors to plan, monitor, and manage their academic, career, and personal social development in either an individual or small group setting (Gysbers et al., 2011)

**Internal Improvement Review (IIR)** - The IIR was a tool designed for use by school districts on a voluntary basis to evaluate their comprehensive guidance and counseling programs. The IIR helps districts and individual schools determine the degree of implementation of the Missouri Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling Program based upon state standards. School districts are aided in their planning and design, degree of implementation, program and personnel evaluation and overall enhancement of their comprehensive guidance and counseling program. The results identify areas of strength and improvement to increase its implementation of the comprehensive guidance and counseling program to more positively impact the achievement of its students (as cited by Gysbers et al., 2011).

**Lethality Assessment**- was a Midwest School District board approved process and document developed for use by school personnel when dealing with a suicidal student. The lethality assessment was a key document used as a best practice that allowed professional school counselors, school social workers, administrators, or other mental health professionals to assess the severity of the suicide threat (Policies Midwest School District, 2015).

**Missouri Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling Program (MCGCP)** - The comprehensive guidance and counseling program was a K-12 developmental

program with sequential activities that address students' academic, career, and personal/social development. This program was designed to be implemented by professional school counselors in conjunction with all stakeholders' parents, teachers, administrators, and the community (Gysbers et al., 2011).

**Missouri School Improvement Plan 5 (MSIP 5)** – This was the fifth version of the Missouri School Improvement Program, the state's accountability system for reviewing and accrediting public school districts. MSIP-5 outlined the expectations for student achievement with the ultimate goal of each student graduating from high school ready for success in college and careers. The MSIP accountability system was established in 1990 and evolved with each version. The transition to MSIP 5 included revising the Resource, Process and Performance Standards for Missouri school districts. The Performance Standards were designed to recognize the achievement and continuous growth of all students as they prepare for a global economy. MSIP 5 Resource and Process Standards were designed to promote continuous improvement and innovation within each school district (DESE, 2014).

**No Child Left Behind (NCLB)** - The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) was the most recent iteration of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), the major federal law authorizing federal spending on programs to support K-12 schooling. ESEA was the largest source of federal spending on elementary and secondary education (MODESE, 2015).

**Non-Guidance and Counseling** - Non-Guidance and Counseling are duties other than fair share responsibilities that counselors may be performing currently but are not part of their program. These activities are beyond their role or additional expectations are

placed on them at a higher degree when compared to other staff members. These activities take time away from school counselors' ability to fully implement their comprehensive guidance and counseling programs. A few examples are substituting in a teacher's class during an absence, handling discipline issues or being required to performed more supervision duties than normal (Gysbers et al., 2011).

**Personal Plans of Study (PPOS)** - A personal plan of study (PPOS) was a working document that is very fluid in nature that serves as a master plan in achieving a student's post-secondary outcomes. This plan includes the sequence of coursework, assessments, certifications, extracurricular and related activities completed by the student based upon a chosen career pathway or cluster. The plan was initiated in middle school by the end of eighth grade year in collaboration with the student, school counselor, teachers and parents and reviewed annually, and revised as needed (Gysbers et al., 2011).

**Professional School Counselors (PSC)** - school counselors are certified in the area of student services through the DESE evaluation system and must hold a minimum of a master's degree from a university with an approved student services program and pass the Missouri Content Assessment or Praxis II. The PSC was responsible for implementing the Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling Program addressing the academic, personal/social and career development of all students through the delivery of the guidance curriculum, individual planning, responsive services and system support activities. PSC's were the primary school mental health providers delivering services to all students and families as well as serving as the point of contact for school social work and community based psychological services (Gysbers et al., 2011).

**Responsive Services** - Responsive Services included preparation for and delivery of individual counseling, small group counseling, consultation and workshops about specific student behaviors with teachers, administrators, parents, and other professional school staff, and outside referrals (Gysbers et al., 2011).

**Response to Intervention (RTI)** - Response to Intervention (RTI) was a multi-tier approach to support struggling learners. RTI involves an early identification process for students who are at-risk for not meeting behavior and academic expectations. The RTI process began with Tier I preventative instruction and universal screening of all children in the general education classroom setting. Students experiencing some risk move to the Tier II level and receive supplemental and strategic interventions. High risk, struggling learners transition to Tier III supports designated intensive interventions at the individual level to accelerate their rate of learning (Cisco Foundation, 2015).

**School Social Workers** – mental health professionals that served as liaisons for teachers, administrators, parents and students. School social workers help to bridge the gap between the school, home and the community to improve the overall learning experience for students through a wraparound approach. School social workers filled a unique niche in the school setting providing mental health services and resources students with more intensive emotional and behavior concerns, typically Tiers 2 and 3 interventions. School social workers must possess a Master's in Social Work and necessary practicum experience (School Social Work Association of America, 2015).

**System Support** - System Support included those activities completed by a professional school counselor that supported the implementation and delivery of the comprehensive guidance and counseling program as well as other educational programs

in the school and/or district. Examples include serving on building and district committees, conducting professional development, advocacy for the counseling program, fair share responsibilities and program evaluation and management (Gysbers et al., 2011).

**Time Task Analysis** -the goal of the time task analysis was to obtain a representative sample of the professional school counselor time spent in carrying out the comprehensive guidance and counseling program. The data was used to determine the extent to which time was appropriately divided between the components of the school's comprehensive guidance and counseling program. When used in conjunction with the Internal Improvement Review (IIR), the data can provide information about how fully the comprehensive guidance and counseling program was implemented. The time task analysis was intended to be conducted periodically throughout the school year. All school counselors in the district selected the same five (5) days spread throughout each semester to conduct the time task survey. These five days should reflect typical days within the month that contain a variety of guidance and counseling program activities within the four components as well as any non-guidance and counseling activities that may be present. (Gysbers et al., 2011).

**Voluntary Inter-District Choice Corporation (VICC)** - the Voluntary Inter-District Coordinating Council oversaw the implementation of the 1983 Settlement Agreement and became a non-profit corporation in 1999. Approximately 1,800 students attended Midwest School District from St. Louis City during this program evaluation period (Voluntary Interdistrict Choice Corporation, 2015).

**Voluntary Transfer Program** - the St. Louis Student Transfer Program was established to increase racial integration in metropolitan area public schools under a

Settlement Agreement reached in the St. Louis desegregation case and approved by the Federal Court in 1983. This Settlement Agreement allowed African-American students residing in the City of St. Louis to attend one of several participating school districts in St. Louis County, provided certain eligibility requirements regarding residency and behavior records were met. The program also provided for non-African-American students who lived in participating suburban school districts to transfer into St. Louis Magnet Schools in the city (Voluntary Interdistrict Choice Corporation, 2015).

### **Rationale for the Study**

The Midwest School District program evaluation of Professional School Counselors, Social Workers, and College and Career Specialists was initiated with the essential question, “How does guidance and counseling impact student performance?” However, before this question could be fully addressed the district had to determine first “Was there a program in place that can have an impact on relevant student outcomes?” Secondly, the knowledge level and expertise of the personnel or professional school counselors, college and career specialists and school social workers implementing the program must also be determined. Finally, Midwest School District addressed the important question as to the extent that relevant student data was being utilized to measure the impact of the program on student outcomes. Performance-based evaluation should be carried out with the focus being on the extent and quality of implementing and delivering the comprehensive guidance program consisting of the guidance curriculum, individual planning, responsive services, and system support. Once it was determined the extent to which the comprehensive guidance program was in place, the next part of the equation was to ask who was managing and implementing the program, and were they

being evaluated on the appropriate criteria for fully implementing a comprehensive guidance program? In Missouri, a tool existed for conducting an appropriate performance-based evaluation that directly related to the work of the professional school counselor.

The guidelines for the performance-based Professional School Counselor evaluation were available for school counselors and administrators on DESE's website. Most schools in the state of Missouri were using this tool or something comparable that focused on the work of the professional school counselor in carrying out a comprehensive guidance program. Midwest School District utilized the Counselor Evaluation Instrument (CEI), which was closely aligned with the state model.

Having a program in place got the program evaluation committee halfway there, but that was still not quite enough. Next, it must be determined if that program was influencing the relevant student outcomes that have been deemed important to Midwest School District. In other words, was the program impacting in a positive way the academic, career, and personal social development of Midwest's students and how was it measured or documented? In Midwest School District, students were overwhelmingly successful as demonstrated by the high graduation rates and transitions to post-secondary institutions, but to what degree did the guidance and counseling programs impact these positive student outcomes?

Accountability for professional school counselors was never more important. Missouri schools had the tools and resources that allowed schools/districts to measure their impact on relevant student outcomes without making the process intimidating. Schools have a tremendous amount of data tracking information such as attendance,

behavior and grades, which in the past was the challenge not fully realizing how to utilize it. Using data was important in the process of fully implementing the guidance program, providing much-needed information to identify if what counselors are doing was making a difference with students and could help guide the direction of the program. The proper use of data helped to focus energy on activities that could make a difference on goals, objectives, and outcomes that were deemed important by students, parents, teachers, administrators, school board members, and the community in general.

For example, Midwest School District had a set standard that indicated that all students would have a Personal Plan of Study, a required component of MSIP 5. For a personal plan of study to be developed, students needed requisite skills, which was a part of the elementary and middle school curriculum. Processes must be in place at the elementary and middle school level to help students develop the knowledge and skills necessary to be competent at developing their Personal Plan of Study. This standard appeared connected to middle and high school only, but, in fact, has an impact on the elementary curriculum and activities. Once the knowledge and foundational skills have been developed, students can develop Personal Plans of Study possibly impacting achievement related skills and behaviors such as course selection and individual advisement patterns. Midwest School District's individual planning system was in place around a career path and or cluster where students took courses that had a direct impact on their post-secondary transitions. The goal was for students not to merely take courses because they were viewed as easy or that they primarily meet graduation requirements. Students were supported to develop a clear focus and take appropriate courses and become involved in related activities that would assist in their post-secondary transition.

In terms of student achievement outcomes, if more students were taking advanced classes through individual planning efforts, then students would be developing greater skills that in turn may produce improved test scores, and completion of college admission requirements. In completing a guidance and counseling program evaluation there are three types of data available to professional school counselor to use in evaluation, planning and implementing recommendations: process data, perceptual data, and performance data (Hatch, 2014). Process data was exactly as the name implied addressing who, what, where, and how types of questions. Process data tended to focus more on the action of the professional school counselor rather than that of the student. In this study, several forms of process data were included such as time task analysis, social workers' statistics, child abuse and neglect reports, and district lethality assessments. Perceptual data indicated what students perceived to have gained or to be happening. For the purpose of this study, district-administered surveys were reviewed engaging student voice such as the senior exit survey, school climate and character education surveys, and the Missouri Student Survey. The last type of data was performance data, which helped to uncover whether the work of professional school counselors actually made difference. Performance data described results, outcomes or behaviors. As a part of this program evaluation, MSIP 5 data used to calculate AYP for No Child Left Behind such as grades, test scores, attendance, graduation and dropout rates was included. This program evaluation could serve as a model for other school districts needing to evaluate guidance and counseling interventions.

**Limitations**

One limitation of this study was the sample demographics because the focus of the study was solely in the Midwest School District, and no other school district was included. However, other districts with similar populations or geographically close in proximity could have been referenced as a comparison. This Midwest school district has a relatively high social economic status when compared to other regions of the state. Increased access to resources provides families with greater opportunities for academic success and meaningful post-secondary transitions. The district also provides low diversity in some areas being made up roughly of 80% White making this a very homogenous group with some degree of Asian, Hispanic and African American students. The state of Missouri Department of Guidance and Counseling was consulted to ensure Midwest's comprehensive guidance and counseling program met the standards of the MODESE.

Another limitation of the study was the fact that early childhood was not considered as a part of the program evaluation process. The early childhood program did not employ professional school counselors and was staffed with three school social workers to support students and families. The early childhood social workers rotate to support the needs of the two early childhood centers in the district located on opposite sides of the district geographically. Since programmatically the framework was different it was decided not to include the early childhood component in the program evaluation process.

Another limitation was time. A study conducted over a certain interval of time was a snapshot dependent on conditions occurring during that time. The study was

conducted over the period of a single school year, 2013-2014. Although longitudinal data was not analyzed from a span of several years, the Midwest School District comprehensive guidance and counseling department 2004 program evaluation could be referenced for trends or comparisons.

### **Delimitations**

Initially, when the program evaluation was first explored it included the role of the Homeless Coordinator who at the time was also a licensed school social worker. It was subsequently decided that although the last time a program evaluation was conducted on the Homeless Program was in 2008, this area was removed from the comprehensive guidance and counseling program evaluation. The McKinney Vento Act governed the Homeless Program, therefore all recommendations and guidelines must be within compliance with federal statute. Due to these circumstances beyond the district's control, the design committee determined it was more appropriate to exclude this from our study and focused more on the areas with internal control (U.S Department of Education, 2015).

Another delimitation of this study was the criteria of participants allowed to enroll and participate. Only educators in the geographic regions of the State of Missouri and the Midwest School District were involved. Although the findings could be generalized to professional school counselors employed in another public school district, private or charter school or in another state besides Missouri only staff in Midwest School District were a part of the program evaluation.

**Assumptions**

One assumption made was that students, when responding to surveys responded thoughtfully and truthfully. In order to justify that this assumption was “probably” true, great care was taken to ensure anonymity and confidentiality be preserved and that the participants were all provided with opportunities to opt out or withdraw from the study at any time and with no ramifications.

**Summary**

Schools are facing the challenge of balancing their budgets and increased measures of accountability for student achievement. During times of high scrutiny to ensure fiscal responsibility of local taxpayer dollars for public education, districts must be certain evaluation systems are in place to determine the effectiveness of their programs on student achievement. In order to make informed data driven decisions school counseling programs must; make sure that a program is actually in place, staff work in defined roles with an appropriate assessment instrument, examination exist of what students received from interactions with counselors, and results data is collected to measure if what counselors do really makes a difference.

This dissertation will highlight the student-counselor relationship and how the quality of this relationship can have dire consequences with certain minority populations in achieving success. Today’s job market is becoming increasing fueled by the need for a 21st century skilled workforce in order to compete globally and produce adults who are productive contributing members of society. School counselors and their comprehensive programs focusing on academic, social-emotional and career development can ensure that students get the necessary support they need to consider their options, make decisions,

navigate the collegiate process, and take the necessary steps to reach their goals. However, far too often students are not provided access to a fully implemented counseling program or the benefit of school counselors who feel well versed on the college process or have the time and resources to implement their programs. This dissertation seeks to identify state and national standards that provide the framework for school counseling programs and best practices that school districts and buildings can utilize to evaluate their programs to identify their strengths or what is working well and highlight the gaps or weaknesses to improve upon their practice.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

### **Uneducated or Undereducated Workforce**

When deciding to pursue the process of a program evaluation an essential component was understanding the importance and significance of the work. The researcher should have some idea of what they hope to find and how students are better as a result of the work of the counseling program. The Midwest guidance and counseling program evaluation sought to answer some essential questions about the overall structure of the program and program effectiveness. First, it was important to understand how students were served academically and socially by schools and if they graduated prepared for the workforce and career related transitions. Many students transitioning from high school are ill equipped to handle the rigorous expectations at the collegiate level, if they make it to college at all. This greatly affects not only their quality of life through their potential employment and living wages but the contributions they make to society as a whole. Minorities are impacted at higher rates of failing to graduate from high school and transitioning on to higher education thus increasing the opportunity gap between minorities and their white counterparts. Many minority students may be the first in their families to attend college and more dependent on school officials to gain access about college and financial aid information. Numerous factors influence a student's ability to attend college such as a lack of expectations, inadequate preparation from teachers and school counselors, and the absence of parental encouragement. However, research supports that fully implemented comprehensive guidance and counseling programs can greatly improve attendance and academics and decrease behaviors. National and state counseling associations help to define best practices and guidelines for model guidance

and counseling programs. This chapter will outline the need and positive outcomes professional school counselors can have on students' lives in transitioning to higher education, the world of work or fulfilling their post-secondary plans.

Fallon (1997) and Reese (2010) stated that the United States had experienced rapidly changing social conditions, which had drastically affected the field of education. A well-educated workforce was essential for maintaining economic competitiveness and strengthening the United States economy (National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance [NCEE], 2009). Reports on educational reform have discussed the tremendous financial loss an uneducated youth poses for the United States (Fallon, 1997). In order for the United States to continue with its economic competitiveness, college success was necessary and hinges on the shoulders of today's students. The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimated that jobs requiring higher education skills would nearly double those of non-degree jobs (Corrigan & Hartle, 2007). This further stressed the importance of having an educated and qualified workforce to ensure there were capable and qualified individuals to fill these roles. According to the National Center for Education and Regional Assistance, the economy was dependent upon the ability of the United States' educational system to produce a highly educated workforce (NCEE, 2009). As technological expertise demands increase, the menial jobs that the uneducated and undereducated have traditionally held have also decreased (Fallon, 1997). The current global economy required increased demands for higher educated students to circumvent the changes in demographic shifts despite our current educational system's failure to keep up (Spellings, 2008).

Despite the increased demand for higher educated and well-prepared students with greater skill sets, the educational system found it difficult to keep up consistently producing qualified students. In 1983, United States Department of Education Report *A Nation at Risk*, found that about 13% of the United States 17-year-olds were functionally illiterate, standardized test scores were decreasing, and students required a wide array of remedial coursework at the collegiate level (Spellings, 2008). The nation's dropout rate stood at 27%; however, for minorities, the figures were more staggering: 44 % of Latino's, 46% of African –Americans and 49% of Native Americans never finish high school (Mulrine, 2010). African American youth were plagued with high rates of unemployment and incarceration and low graduation rates with low occupational outlooks for potential improvements. Due to perceived discrimination, racism and restricted privilege to certain groups' minorities saw educational attainments as out of reach; therefore, career counseling must become a priority if things are going to change (Parris, Owens, Johnson, Grbevski, & Holbert-Quince, 2010). Statistics from 2006 compiled by the Education Trust indicated that out of every 100 Latino kindergartners, 63 graduated from high school and only 11 obtained at least a bachelor's degree. Out of every 100 African American kindergartners, 87 graduated from high school and only 18 obtained at least a bachelor's degree (Thorngren, Downey, & Nelson, 2006). Minorities made up a disproportionate amount of students who were unsuccessful in school and subsequently earned a lower living wage. This was in contrast to their counterparts, 93 out of 100 White kindergartners graduated from high school and 33 obtained at least a bachelor's degree (Thorngren et al., 2006). An individual's quality of education had a direct correlation to one's earnings which adversely affected whether they were

unemployed, underemployed, living in poverty, receiving public assistance, incarcerated, on death row, unhealthy or single parents (Spelling, 2008). Education was said to be the great equalizer but when faced with unsurmountable odds the cycle of poverty was perpetuated and students were unable to overcome their circumstances. The William T. Grant Foundation published a report, "The Forgotten Half" that spoke of the then 20 million non-college bound youth and cautioned the public that given their skill set they may be denied full participation as productive members of society (Harvard Graduate School of Education, 2011). A significant number of the nation's uneducated or undereducated youth are drawn from minority populations (Fallon, 1997).

Students must be equipped with the skills necessary to work with others, academically and technically for the 21st century (Jones, 2010). Public criticism addressed the overall lack of knowledge and skills of high school graduates demonstrated by the failure of many at the collegiate level and those who were ill prepared to meet the needs of post-secondary training (Johnson & Thurlow, 2003). Nearly half of the students entering community college required some form of educational remediation (Mulrine, 2010). Criticism had been expressed that schools were not meeting the needs of high school students, of those that progressed towards graduation many individuals were ill prepared for college and post-secondary training (Cecil & Cobia, 1990). The number of students receiving specialized educational services had increased over the last three decades with an estimated 13% of the population having individual education plans resulting in placement in remedial education classes and perceived by school personnel as having limited career potential (Adkison-Bradley et al., 2007). As a result, minority students were enrolling nationwide on college campuses with different backgrounds than

the traditional European, middle class college student (Fallon, 1997). Many of the United States' high school graduates were unable to complete college with only a 40% graduation rate (Mulrine, 2010). Minority students were entering college campuses underprepared and finding little assistance getting themselves caught up and on par with their peers, eventually matriculating towards graduation. Colleges and institutions of higher learning were failing to consistently produce graduates that could function at a high level in today's technological society (Cecil & Cobia, 1990). Many jobs previously held in manufacturing have disappeared, which was particularly hard on individuals with low skills sets, therefore strides must be taken to increase the number of students attending college (Derarvics, 2009). The need was clear and evidence supports the demand for highly skilled employees in the 21st century yet the supply of well-prepared and ethnically diverse students transitioning to college has not kept up which raises the question of why more students are not aspiring to attend college.

### **Lack of Students Aspiring to Attend College and Navigating the Process**

Across the country, many U.S. schools were becoming dropout factories producing higher numbers of students that failed to thrive educationally. Secondary schools produced modest numbers of high school graduates and many of those who managed to graduate were still unprepared for college and the military as well (Derarvics, 2009). Research indicated that low-income, first generation students had high college aspirations yet many factors limited their enrollment rates in postsecondary institutions, such as inadequate high school preparation, low expectations, guidance and encouragement, lack of knowledge about the college planning process and limited

understandings about financial aid thus making it impossible to achieve their dreams (Corrigan & Hartle, 2009; Schaeffer, Akos, & Barrow, 2010; Thorngren et al., 2006).

Students must tackle difficult choices such as choosing a school that is a “good fit” and determining how to fund their post-secondary education (Johnson & Rochkind, 2010). Students deciding on post-secondary options were influenced by several variables that affected their decision-making process and subsequent choices. These variables included perceived educational expectations, exposure to college preparation, socio-economic status, parental encouragement, parental educational attainments, rigor of high school course work, identified disabilities and minority status (Fallon, 1997). Through the process of individual advisement, professional school counselors and college and career specialist could work collaboratively with students to achieve the best possible choices for each unique situation despite their backgrounds.

School counselors could have a positive impact on students navigating the college and career pathway in terms of aspirations, college choices and the rate of aspirations (McDonough, 2005). For some students the barrier to higher education was abundantly apparent and manifested itself through the lack of information and simply not understanding the college process. College related sources of information for high school students were primarily family members and friends, teachers, counselors, career centers, and web-based resources (Bell, Rowan-Kenyon, & Perna, 2009). Students who were more fortunate were involved in conversations about college in their homes early and often, usually accessible from multiple conduits. Many students lacked the social capital of educational villages of support to help navigate the college process because they were first generation and are limited by a lack of well-informed allies. The role of the

professional school counselor was to assist all students, especially first-generation college-bound students, who rely so heavily upon their guidance to access a better life (Bryan, Holcomb-McCoy, Moore-Thomas, & Day-Vines, 2009; Fallon, 1997). Students of first generation families relied more heavily on professional school counselors and schools to provide this information often feeling that they, as parents, lacked the necessary knowledge to advise their children (Fallon, 1997). Parents of first-generation students viewed professional school counselors as the authority figure on navigating the college process that possessed first-hand knowledge and experiences to get their children there. Professional school counselors were practitioners working every day in the field, which provided parents the basic assumption that the staff member was well versed in the area, and based upon the job specifications the most appropriate person to offer counsel.

Professional school counselors do not have to be experts in all areas but must know where to go to ask for help in supporting at risk students. When problem solving, it may have been necessary to extend outside the educational system to the family or community to identify supports that a student may require and benefit from such as mentor programs, tutoring, job opportunities, or summer enrichment (Hayhurst, 2012). The importance of supporting at risk students and minority populations is explained in more detail in the next section of this literature review.

### **The Relationship Between Minorities and the Collegiate Setting**

African Americans made up 13% of United States population with half living in urban areas and 35% of children 18 years and under living in poverty, suggesting an over-representation of African-Americans amongst lower socioeconomic, urban, school-aged populations (Butler, 2003). African Americans constituted the most disadvantaged

racial and ethnic group in the United States even though they were the second largest racial minority group. Compared to their Caucasian counterparts, African Americans were still underrepresented at every level of higher education, maintained higher unemployment rates and even when they managed to succeed educationally earned less than their Caucasian counterparts with comparable educational backgrounds (Parris et al., 2010).

Professional school counselors were critically important in fostering achievement of many African American students residing in urban areas (Butler, 2003). This relationship was vitally important for all students but extremely necessary for more dependent first-generation minority students with limited resources outside of the educational setting. Despite this fact, some professional school counselors felt ill equipped to handle the needs of urban African American high school students, citing the need for relevant training in their education programs (Butler, 2003). Many counseling education programs had limited opportunities at best, in the area of coursework or related experiences, to provide counseling students with tools to support African-American students in post-secondary planning. In fact, literature suggested that African American students received less resources and time, especially in college planning, despite the fact that they benefit greatly from it (Farmer-Hinton & Adams, 2006). Essentially, the students who entered school with the least tended to receive less support while those who had the most continued to get more which further exacerbated the problem, widening the gap between the “haves” and the “have not’s.”

Most vulnerable students have indicated they often felt no real purpose in life making them at a higher risk of dropping out of high school or not transitioning on to

post-secondary education. Students' feelings of worthlessness or not being needed allowed apathy and lack of motivation to set in causing a learned helplessness, which contributed to a lack of student success (Hayhurst, 2012). Over the past 40 years, college enrollment rates had increased, but gaps still existed and rates were lower for first generation, low income African American and Hispanic students compared to their more affluent white peers (Corrigan & Hartle, 2007). This was particularly important given the changing demographics of the makeup of society as a whole. With many at risk students, the focus for minorities was on high school graduation at best versus college matriculation. Minority students' graduation rates were troubling in that half of the incoming freshmen did not graduate on time by their senior year (Spelling, 2008). For the first generation student who made it to the collegiate setting, many often failed to realize how to select classes, plan their schedules, take notes, budget their time or even approach their professors, even though the assumption from universities was that they were knowledgeable (Fallon, 1997). Students reported several obstacles that prevented them from obtaining a post-secondary education varying from family influences, personal perceptions, environmental factors, lack of academic skill set and financial difficulties (Thorngren et al., 2006).

Many students were denied access to post-secondary education because of financial restraints; however, reliable, timely and informed advisement about the cost of attendance and the financial aid process drastically increased minority enrollment (Lautz Hawkins, & Perez, 2005). President Obama's initiative to improve college completion rates involved investing in need based student aid and expanding outreach services and programs at the community college level allowing students to get started in higher

education (Derarvics, 2009). Need-based scholarships helped to level the playing field and allow access to college for those students who would not have the opportunity otherwise. Many families at or below the poverty level were reluctant to take out loans to attend postsecondary schools without certainty that they could ever repay the debt incurred. The federal government had sought to address the issue of underrepresentation of minorities in the collegiate landscape with recommendations such as the National Commission of the Future of Higher Education, which sought to increase the Pell Grant covering 70% of the cost of attendance for public college tuition (Corrigan & Hartle, 2007). Students lacking funds to financially support their college aspirations now had a means to finance their education through need-based grants without the fear of repayment versus loans with varying term-limits.

African American who were fortunate enough to enter postsecondary schools have success rates which lagged behind their counterparts with many unable to progress on towards graduation. Findings suggested that early awareness about college, cost of attendance, and financial aid could provide the catalyst engaging students in other college preparatory behaviors (Bell et al., 2009). Exposing minority students to activities that familiarize them with the college process, increases the odds that they will attend college, and ensures they are well informed about their options and the impacts their choices play in their lives. Historically Black colleges and universities have been a viable option for African American students, with their record of promoting greater access and success, graduating more students than their predominantly White counterparts, and giving students the confidence to transition on to the graduate level (Derarvics, 2009).

The “Browning of America” or demographic shift was predicted in 2020 when people of color will outnumber Caucasians for the first time emphasizing the need for multicultural education training (Parris et al., 2010). Literature suggested that African American students received less resources and time, especially in college planning (Farmer-Hinton & Adams, 2006). High school graduation rather than college planning was often emphasized in poor, minority or working class families and when college was offered usually it was directing students to the local community college (McDonough, 2005). The expectation that professional school counselors and teachers held for students also impacted the amount of information they exposed them to and their ability to succeed (Bryan et al., 2009). Students must complete several steps simply to enroll in college such as taking college entrance exams, searching for colleges, writing essays, applying for financial aid and scholarships, submitting applications, and ultimately selecting a college (National Commission on Excellence in Education [NCEE], 2009). Much of college admissions involve student achievement factors including college admissions exams, GPA, etc., therefore increasing student achievement is important not only for schools as a whole to meet accountability guidelines but also for individual students to achieve their postsecondary aspirations. When students fail to succeed academically schools must examine their practices to determine why this has occurred and what can they do differently in the future to prohibit this from continuing to happen.

### **Contributing Factors: Expectations and Exposure**

Student achievement can be influenced by several factors including school size, climate, structure, curriculum, programs and resources, teachers, support staff, and families (Militello, Carey, Dimmitt, Lee, & Schweid, 2009). Imposing middle class

values for all students like grading systems based on homework when some students have limited time, lack of support or barriers with adequate space and accommodations set students up to fail. Educational institutions must work to eliminate systemic pitfalls that defeat students such as counterproductive grading systems (Hayhurst, 2012). Identifying times during the school day for students to accomplish their goals provides the necessary support to unmotivated or at risk students. School counselors could provide academic guidance to students in a variety of ways such as: (a) consulting with teachers to infuse culturally relevant material into the curriculum that was appealing to minority students; (b) reinforcing positive messages received from members of the student's cultural group in regards to academic, social and racial self-concepts; (c) encouraging active participation from parents and family members; and (d) providing interventions to encourage cultural pride in academic achievement and career aspirations through mentorship programs between students and professionals (Bryan et al., 2009; Butler, 2003). There was a narrow gap to prepare students for college while still in high school due to limitations of time constraints (NCEE, 2009). School districts must take advantage of this optimum time to discuss post-secondary transitions with students and assist them in making connections between the courses they take in high school and options that exist after graduating. During ninth grade or earlier, schools must ensure students are on a college bound track which was consistent with the recommended timeframe from both national and state counseling program models (ASCA, 2012; Fallon, 1997; Gysbers et al., 2011). Making sure students were aware of and exposed to the steps necessary to prepare them for college helped them to achieve their educational goals (NCEE, 2009).

Schools fail to give many intelligent students exposure to a college prep curriculum that would have provided them with the academic skills necessary for college success (Fallon, 1997). Every student should leave high school with the necessary skills to be successful in a post-secondary institution without the need for remediation (NCEE, 2009). This is extremely important if students are to achieve their goals and the United States is to maintain its economic competitiveness. The Obama administration's Blueprint for Reform addressed the issue of college and career readiness of high school graduates and aimed to prepare all students to meet this standard by 2020 (Mulrine, 2010). In addressing the issue of college and career readiness and post-secondary planning, it was extremely critical and necessary that reformation took place (ACT, 2010; NCEE, 2009). College readiness standards were developed primarily to bridge the gap from K-12 and higher education institutions for a seamless transition by adequately preparing students for the collegiate level, especially underrepresented populations (Yamamura, Martinez, & Saenz, 2010). Even though this was the intended goal of college readiness standards in many cases it was still going unfilled based upon the numerous students graduating unprepared. ACT, in its 2010 report, *The Condition of College and Career Readiness*, found that of 28 states, 40% of all high school graduates took the ACT, and in only one state did more than 50% of their ACT-tested graduates meet at least three of the four college readiness benchmarks. Average ACT composite scores for White, Asian American, Pacific Islander and American Indian increased between 2006 and 2010. However, Hispanic graduates ACT composite scores remained the same while those of African Americans declined by .02 (ACT, 2010). Implications of this research suggested the need for more attention to minority, lower socio-economic status and first generation

students should be given in assistance with quality academic preparation, college planning and career development (Bryan et al., 2009; NCEE, 2009).

Involvement of parents is important for all high school students, but this can be challenging. Not all parents or guardians attended college or even finished high school. The process of applying for financial aid and even applying for college admission can be daunting. Counselors play a key role not only in the lives of students but also in supporting parents as well.

### **Parental Encouragement**

Obtaining a post-secondary education was the most important investment that an individual could make for future success, yet many low-income households expected students to take the lead in navigating this pathway (Corrigan & Hartle, 2007). Of all of the factors that contribute to a child developing college aspirations parental support and encouragement of the college-going process was found to be the most important factor (Bryan et al., 2009). With parental influence weighing so heavily in a student's decisions and eventual transition to post-secondary institutions, it may have been difficult to understand why some parents failed to urge their children to attend school and steer them in this direction. Students who were first generation and had no prior knowledge in their household of a collegiate experience had many differences from a second-generation student whose parents were college-educated (Fallon, 1997). High school graduation rather than college planning was often emphasized in poor, minority, or working class families and when college was offered usually it was directing students to the local community college (Tobolowsky, Outcalt, & McDonough, 2005). This was in stark contrast from affluent parents who provided their children with access to more resources

such as private counselors and constantly communicating expectations of earning a college degree to their children (Fallon, 1997).

Many minority families were not as persistent about their children going to college for various reasons (Fallon, 1997). The parents may:

1. lack the economic resources that are necessary to fund a college education;
2. be concerned with the child failing to return to their home community;
3. have not attended college themselves and fail to see the need;
4. have concerns about the potential lack of income that the child could contribute to the family household should he stay;
5. want to protect their children from perceived failure should they not be successful;
6. lack the planning resources to prepare children for and expose them to how to become eligible for college (Bryan et al., 2009; Fallon, 1997).

Although various factors contribute to parents' failure to encourage their children to attend college lack of information and access to resources was a major contributor to most of their concerns and faulty thinking. School counselors and college and career specialists help to circumvent most of the concerns parents may have and work individually with students to develop career plans that lead to specific pathways to meet their goals. Career planning is a part of the comprehensive guidance and counseling program and involves working with students to determine their skills, interest, and abilities and aligning coursework to prepare them for post-secondary transitions including college.

### **Career Counseling and the Role of the College and Career Specialist**

Researchers such as Jones (2010) have indicated that career counseling at an early age can combat some of the obstacles of race, ethnicity and one's socioeconomic status. The Missouri Guidance and Counseling Comprehensive Program curriculum, established as a model in Reese (2010) utilized the nine "Big Ideas" that included developing goals, applying career exploration and planning, and educational skills. Professional school counselors were vital gatekeepers to implement career counseling in schools (Jones, 2010). In most building, school counselors almost exclusively are responsible for exposing students to career and post-secondary planning. Lautz and colleagues (2005) indicated the need for college counseling staff and resources, particularly in lower socioeconomic areas, which tended to have fewer connections with post-secondary institutions relying primarily on counselors or a smorgasbord of programs to address needs. Career counseling developed the decision-making skills students needed for future success in their careers (Jones, 2010).

Counseling allowed students to gain an awareness of post-secondary options by exposing them to a wide range of pathways and their requirements from training and certification options to more formalized college and degree programs (Jones, 2010). Increased exposure takes the fear out the process by making the students more comfortable and able to make an informed decision in regards to post-secondary transitions and allows students to practice and explore in a less intimidating manner. Counselors could incorporate career planning activities into their curriculum in a classroom guidance setting, individual or group activity. This could be done by administering career assessments; teaching career and employment skills; assisting

students to develop career goals; and providing information about career and technical education programs and post-secondary educational institutions (Adkison-Bradley et al., 2007).

Career education components should manifest during middle school, ensuring that students have sufficient time to establish the aptitudes, skills and interest necessary to make an informed decision regarding their chosen career (Jones, 2010). Middle school was the optimal time, between elementary and high school, for introducing students to career planning and providing them with an excellent opportunity to develop their skills, beliefs and knowledge base about careers (Jones, 2010). Students identified professional school counselors and college and career specialist as experts in the field equipped with the necessary tools for them to achieve success. This social capital was an asset, which improved the student's life outcomes and expectations for the future. Professional school counselors used their social ties with students to act as "change agents" possessing resources about college access (Farmer-Hinton & Adams, 2006). When surveyed, students reported viewing their counselors as having the most complete knowledge of the college application, scholarship information, and financial aid process (Bell et al., 2009). Schools should expose students to the college process as early as middle school, informing them of the necessary academic preparation to meet admission standards, providing knowledge about how to obtain scholarships and financial aid, understanding the role of standardized testing, reviewing criteria when selecting a post-secondary institution, and exploring the post-secondary opportunities that exist. Jones (2010) suggested that counselors at middle and high school levels should have more dialogue about the level of services offered in reference to career counseling to ensure a seamless

transition between eighth and ninth grades. Furthermore, Bell and colleagues (2009) suggested students tend to become more familiar with the college planning process in terms of academic requirements, college of attendance, test preparation, and financial aid process in higher grade levels. Even though it is best practice, school counseling programs in middle and high schools hindered by time constraints found it difficult to meet the challenge of exposing students to opportunities essential to their development and future success while keeping up with the technological advances and changes within the labor market (Feller, 2003). Professional school counselors and college and career specialist could use programs and resources to work not only with first generation students but all students attempting to transition to higher education. For example, gaining early awareness and readiness for undergraduate programs (GEAR UP) has made tremendous strides, graduating more students from high school and enrolling in college at higher rates for low income students (Derarvics, 2009). Also, the KnowHow2Go multimedia campaign targets students underrepresented at the post-secondary level in grades 8 to 10 and their parents, encouraging them to become involved in the college preparation process early (Corrigan & Hartle, 2007).

Career planning and external resources can be extremely helpful in bridging the gap for students and families in terms of individual planning. At times, minority or at risk families also face social-emotional or crisis related situations and support is needed for basic needs. This instability can impact student learning and not only are professional school counselors pivotal but school social workers also are instrumental in helping families find hope.

### **School Social Workers**

School social workers work in tandem with the professional school counselor in supporting students social-emotional needs. Professional school counselors work proactively with all students with universal supports at the Tier I level while school social workers provide more in-depth or intensive services at the Tier II and Tier III level. School social workers serve all students in need of additional services or support in an educational setting. The role of the school social worker was to connect and coordinate families to community support services. Many provided mental health intervention services to students and families either individually or in groups providing psycho-social evaluations and consultation (Gysbers, et al., 2011). Although, many districts did not employ school social workers, it had become an increasingly common and critical component in student services given the overwhelming needs of students and families (Fitch, 2004). In the Response to Intervention (RTI) model the lower Tier I consisted of universal supports and programming for all students. School social workers provided some services in the Tier I area. Traditionally, the Tier II and Tier III areas were where most of their time was spent. These efforts were more strategic in identifying students with barriers to academic success and providing targeted interventions that could transition to more intensive services and supports. It was in this area where school social workers maintained a unique niche providing mental health services for a targeted number of students with increased social –emotional needs (Gysbers et al., 2011).

Given the fact that social-emotional concerns have risen in school buildings and districts throughout the nation it can be extremely beneficial to have a school social worker to support student needs in conjunction with the counselor. The comprehensive

guidance and counseling program consists of four components: individual planning, guidance curriculum, system support, and responsive services. In many cases, school counselors could spend all of their time in responsive services addressing a crisis and have difficulty fully implementing their comprehensive counseling program because of the high responsive services need and prioritizing their work. School social workers primarily work in the area of responsive services, which frees up the professional school counselors time to provide attention to other aspects of the program. The national and state models for school counseling programs provide an overall framework that buildings and districts can compare their programs after.

### **American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model**

School guidance counselors have played an integral role in the development of students in public schools in the United States of America. Collaboration with all stakeholders to foster strong school, family, and community partnerships and the facilitation of small group lessons to increase student success and advocate for equity for all students was an expectation for professional school counselors (Young & Miller-Kneale, 2013). The American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2012) National Model supported comprehensive counseling and guidance programs through career planning, social, and personal development and student's academic achievement (Reese, 2010). A comprehensive school counseling program, which was data-driven, standards-based, and promoted student achievement was an integral part of a school community (ASCA, 2012). "The ASCA (2012) National Model:

- ensures equitable access to a rigorous education for all students

- identifies the knowledge and skills all students will acquire as a result of the K-12 comprehensive school counseling program
- is delivered to all students in a systematic fashion
- is based on data-driven decision making
- is provided by a state-credentialed school counselor” (p. 11).

The ASCA (2012) National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs has had a tremendous impact on the school counseling program since its release over 10 years ago. The model has been updated, keeping up with current trends to provide the most effective guidance for the development of comprehensive school counseling programs.

The ASCA model was divided into four components: Accountability, Delivery Systems, Foundations, and Management Services. Within the broader categories were subcomponents that emphasized the four characteristics of the 21st century school counselor: advocacy, leadership, collaboration, and systemic change (ASCA, 2012). School districts and professional school counselors used this framework as a blueprint to provide guidance for structuring and implementing their comprehensive guidance and counseling programs. The American School Counselor Association recommended a school counselor to student ratio of 1:250 and that school counselors spend 80% or more of their time in the delivery systems component with direct and indirect services to students (ASCA, 2012). Missouri’s comprehensive guidance and counseling program was modeled from the national model and was highly respected in the field of school counseling among other states. Conducting research under this topic in a state touted to be a leader in the field of counseling aided in the research providing a working

knowledge of what constitutes a fully implemented program and the importance of having one in place.

### **Missouri Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling Program**

The Missouri Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling Program (MCGCP) was an integral part of a school district's total educational program and was often proclaimed as a "gold standard" for the development and implementation of effective programs (Oliver, 2011). Many states had developed similar programs based upon the Missouri Model, which was highly respected among professional school counselors nationally. It was developmental and included sequential activities implemented by school counselors with the active support of stakeholders. The MCGCP consisted of three major elements: content, organizational framework and resources (Gysbers et al., 2011). Guidance and counseling content was identified by three areas: academic development, career development, and personal social development (Gysbers & Henderson, 1994). Exposing students to this rich curriculum allowed them to compete successfully in a globally diverse technological society. The organizational framework of the MCGCP contained six structural components, four program components and suggestion distributions of the school counselor's time (Gysbers et al., 2011). The six structural components were as follows: program definition and philosophy, guidance and counseling program facilities, advisory council, guidance and counseling resources, staffing patterns, and budget.

Missouri, among other states across the country, re-conceptualized guidance and counseling based on six premises that underpinned the organization and management of comprehensive guidance and counseling programs in schools. These premises were as follows:

1. Guidance and counseling was a program. Its characteristics were similar to other programs in education and include the following:

- Student grade level expectations (GLEs) (academic, career, and personal/social development)
- Activities and processes to assist students in achieving these grade level expectations
- Professionally certified personnel
- Materials and resources
- Program, personnel, and results evaluations

2. Guidance and counseling programs were developmental and comprehensive.

They were developmental in that guidance and counseling activities were conducted on a regular, planned, and systematic basis to assist students to achieve guidance and counseling related grade level expectations.

Although students' immediate and crisis needs must be met, a major focus of a developmental program was to provide all students with experiences to help them grow and develop. Guidance and counseling programs were comprehensive in that a full range of activities and services were provided such as assessment, information, consultation, counseling, referral, placement, follow-up, and follow-through.

3. Guidance and counseling programs assisted all students to complete a college and career ready curriculum to earn a diploma that ensured them of being prepared for multiple opportunities after high school.

4. Guidance and counseling programs featured a team approach, a comprehensive, developmental program of guidance and counseling based on the assumption that all school staff members were involved. At the same time, it was understood that professionally certified school counselors were central to the program. School counselors not only provided direct services to students but also worked in consultative and collaborative relationships with other members of the guidance and counseling team, members of school staff, parents/guardians, and members of the community.
5. Guidance and counseling programs were developed through a systematic process of planning, designing, implementing, evaluating and enhancing. This process assured intentional delivery of a program designed to address established priorities.
6. Guidance and counseling programs have established leadership. This ensured accountability for the program and for the quality of the performance of program staff (Gysbers et al., 2011, p. vii).

This program met the needs of the whole student: academic, career, and personal/social development. Schools that create safe learning environments with positive climates and culture where students feel connected to the school itself and caring adults within are aided by having comprehensive counseling programs in place. The program was delivered through the following four program components:

- Guidance and Counseling Curriculum - structured group and classroom presentations

- Individual Student Planning - appraisal, development of Personal Plans of Study, and successful post-secondary transitions
- Responsive Services - individual counseling, small-group counseling, consultation, and referral
- System Support - program management, program evaluation, fair-share responsibilities, professional development, staff and community relations, consultation, committee participation, community outreach, and research and development. (Gysbers et al., 2011, p. 3)

The table below displays the content strands of the Missouri Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling Program. The comprehensive guidance and counseling program manual identifies the structural components as an essential part of the organizational framework. Specifically, structural components help to define the program, communicate the overall rationale, while identifying the necessary resources, including materials, staff, and equipment to effectively develop and manage the program (as cited by Gysbers et al., 2011). Program components are: guidance and counseling curriculum, individual student planning, responsive services and system support. The first three provide direct services to students and parents and was where a professional school counselor should spend the majority of their time with variance based upon the level or setting; elementary, middle or high school.

Table 1

*Structural Components, Program Components and Sample Processes*

Guidance Curriculum	Individual Planning	Responsive Services	System Support
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Classroom Presentations</li> <li>•Structured Groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Appraisal</li> <li>•Educational and Career Planning</li> <li>•Development of Personal Plans of Study</li> <li>•Post-Secondary Transition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Individual Counseling</li> <li>•Small Group Counseling</li> <li>•Consultation</li> <li>•Referral</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Program Management</li> <li>•Program Evaluation</li> <li>•Fair Share Responsibilities</li> <li>• Staff and Community Relations</li> <li>•Consultation</li> <li>•Committee Participation</li> <li>•Community Outreach</li> <li>•Program Advocacy</li> </ul>

*Note.* Gysbers et al., 2011.

The recommendation for school counselors based upon ASCA’s national standards was to spend at least 80% of their time in direct services with students and families, which average out to a similar percentage in Missouri’s state model. The fourth component, system support, reflected the district level management and services needed to support a program and include indirect services. The last category, resources, included the human resources or stakeholders, financial resources including budgets or funding streams and political resources, which included local, state, and federal policies.

Table 2

*Resources*

Human Resources	Financial Resources	Political Resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Counselors</li> <li>•Teachers/Staff</li> <li>•Administrators</li> <li>•Parents/Guardians</li> <li>•Students</li> <li>•Community Members</li> <li>•Business/Labor Partners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Budget</li> <li>• Materials</li> <li>•Equipment Facilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•School Board Policies</li> <li>•National and State Laws, Rules, and Regulations</li> <li>•Local School District Administrative Guidelines</li> <li>•Professional Association Guidelines and Ethical Standards</li> </ul>

The Missouri Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling Program identified the recommended amount of time school counselors should spend in each of the four program

component areas. The distribution of time was broken down into suggested intervals based upon the individual school levels of elementary, middle, and high. Each category offers a range of time that the professional school counselor activities should fall within on the average day. It is important to note that situations may prohibit a counselor’s time from being distributed within these specified guidelines due to situational factors that may occur. Examples include a loss of a student causing the need for all efforts to shift immediately to responding to the crisis or responsive services or for programming needs such as registration or course scheduling timeframes at the secondary level.

Table 3

*Suggested Use of Counselor Time: Percentage Rate*

	Elementary School	Middle/Junior High School	High School
Guidance and Counseling Curriculum	35-45	25-35	15-25
Individual Student Planning	5-10	15-25	25-35
Responsive Services	30-40	30-40	25-35
System Support	10-15	10-15	15-20
Total	100	100	100

*Note: 100% of a school counselor’s time should be devoted to the implementation, delivery, and management of the guidance and counseling program.*

Great educational leaders knew the best thing they could do was hire the best people to do the job in their buildings. They realized that people not programs made the difference in student outcomes. Ineffective people cannot implement any program successfully (Ming, 2012). The work of the professional school counselor within the framework of the Missouri Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling program was multifaceted. Professional School Counselors should reduce barriers to learning, help students with transitioning to the world of work or postsecondary schools, assist students selecting their academic schedules by encouraging all to take demanding and challenging

coursework and help students find purpose in academic, career and personal social development. Until this point, we have highlighted the positive impacts school counselors and fully implemented guidance and counseling programs can have on positive outcomes. However, it is important to note that the reverse was also true and the inadequacies or unwillingness of school counselors to assist students or have fully implemented counseling programs in place can have detrimental effects on student success, especially those who are considered at-risk.

### **Inadequacies of Counselors**

Public Agenda 2010, for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, conducted a survey of young adults age 22 to 30, which revealed results about how they viewed professional school counselors and the role of school systems in ensuring their academic success (Johnson, Rochkind, Ott, & DuPont, 2009). The majority of students believed that the advice of their counselor was inadequate and impersonal feeling much like just another face in a crowd (Johnson et al., 2009). The relationship between a professional school counselor and student must be based upon mutual trust and a shared understanding. Students must see the staff member as someone who valued them, cared about their success, and was collaboratively working to help the student reach their dreams. Whitaker affirmed that great educators treated students with dignity and respect (Ming, 2012). In other words, students must view professional school counselors as genuinely and consistently interested in them, believing they could succeed and respecting them as unique individuals. Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs suggested that basic needs must be met in order for students to reach self-actualization (McLeod, 2015). Relationships and connections occurred when students felt safe, valued, and

respected which impacted success with unmotivated students (Hayhurst, 2012). Not all students come to school ready to learn some are truly unmotivated. Some students lack the skills and knowledge of how to learn best and how to complete homework while others may have personal problems that affect the learning environment.

Professional school counselor's time must be spent on the tasks they were educated and trained to perform. Duncan reported (as cited in Reese, 2010), that counselors were stuck with older concepts of their roles by spending most of their day on non-guidance tasks, such as supervision duty, secretarial functions, administering discipline, and filling in to substitute teach. When it comes to these tasks, school districts must ask themselves what is the best use of the professional school counselor's time and what systems are in place that impedes against their desired outcome. School size, student counselor ratios, and the percentage of free and reduced lunch population all had a negative effect on the role of professional school counselors, resulting in lower matriculation rates to four-year postsecondary institutions (Lautz et al., 2005). To further complicate the issue, counselors nationwide had caseloads of nearly 475 for every one professional school counselor (Reese, 2010). This was in contrast to the ASCA and MSCA desirable recommendations of 1:250. High need schools with fewer resources and larger populations that exceed recommended counselor student ratios were less likely to offer college information and quality college access options to students (Lautz et al., 2005). Therefore, those students who were traditionally underserved and could potentially benefit from additional support were often provided less direct individual counseling in comparison to their counterparts. Urban schools with higher enrollments of minority and immigrant populations faced increased incidences of psychosocial,

emotional, and academic problems including poverty and violence (Owens, Pernice-Duca, & Thomas, 2009). Professional school counselors spent most of their time in urban schools responding to these concerns and providing interventions. Research indicated that professional school counselors often felt overworked and underprepared to meet the needs of the students they served in terms of post-secondary plans (Johnson, Rochkind, Ott, & DuPont, 2010). On the other hand, schools that educated students from affluent families tended to focus on college and post-secondary planning often providing many resources and manpower in the form of a college and career counselor specifically to address the needs of the college-bound student population (Fitch, 2004).

High school counselors should be the leading advocates for students pursuing two-year and four-year college degrees (Reese, 2010). Encouraging students to explore their interest and abilities and match them with postsecondary institutions was a primary focus of the secondary school counselor. Many high school counselors operating under time constraints reported feeling ill equipped and underprepared to assist students with financial aid matters, relying primarily on college admission officers to deliver information to students (Lautz et al., 2005). Most professional school counselors during their graduate coursework took very little, if any classes, to equip them with the knowledge to assist students in the college-going process, understanding financial aid, and alternative funding sources and were simply not exposed to training through professional development (MODESE, 2015). To combat this gap in their learning, high school counselors could treat the college admission officer's visit as a professional development in-service, providing the reciprocal opportunity for admission officers to learn about the high school and high school counselors to learn about the admission

process (Lautz et al., 2005). Despite the opportunities that existed within this structural and collegial framework, this mutually beneficial potential often went untapped. High school guidance counselors and college admission officers often overlooked each other in collaboration thus failing to maximize the benefits of the relationship although they were working toward the same goal, transition to postsecondary education for students (Lautz et al., 2005). Assessment of professional school counselors training needs indicated necessary revisions to the counselor education program to incorporate (a) more opportunities to work with students who had challenging and diverse needs; (b) greater emphasis on career development and non-traditional career opportunities; and (c) assistance in addressing behavioral problems such as poor social skills, in school truancy and interpersonal conflicts (Owens et al., 2009). Evaluating the role of the professional school counselor, social worker, or college counselor is only one component of a school counseling program. We have moved away from the days when only the people or personnel in the position in the counseling office were viewed solely as the program. In effectively evaluating a comprehensive guidance and counseling program, the formula includes the program plus personnel, which equals to the results. It is necessary to take an intentional look at school counseling program to determine their overall effectiveness as a means to continue to improve upon their practices.

### **Evaluation of Effectiveness of School Counseling Programs**

Evaluation in general terms referred to the systematic collection and analysis of data or information used for documenting effectiveness, outcomes of programs, overall impact, to identify needs and improvement and establish accountability. Program evaluations were intentional and purposeful planning conducted to answer specific

questions so the results would provide information relevant to the purpose of the evaluation (Borders & Drury, 1992). Evaluation results should essentially communicate what systems and processes in place are currently working or if interventions were needed. Mental health providers and educators were facing increasing scrutiny in the accountability area to demonstrate evidence of effectiveness (Dimmitt, 2009). Evaluation results provided evidence to the Midwest School District's stakeholders such as parents, school boards, administrators, and community members identifying the value of the work of professional school counselors and justified resources for counseling programs.

In this study the evaluation asks, "Does the Midwest School District program make a difference for students in this district?" with a goal of providing useful feedback in this context (Dimmitt, 2009). Evaluation was a critical component of a developmental pre-K-12 guidance and counseling program and ensured accountability. Accountability could be demonstrated through the measured effectiveness of the delivery of the comprehensive guidance and counseling program (Gysbers & Henderson, 1994). Research indicated there was a correlation between successful systems and evidence of accountability. This was not only true in the business sector but also in educational arenas, as well where one might argue the stakes were higher given the results could change lives. Midwest School District prided itself on being a successful educational system supportive of students needs and invested in student success demonstrated by measured outcomes.

Osborne and Gaebler (1992) stated:

What gets measured gets done. If you don't measure results, you can't tell success from failure. If you can't see success, you can't reward it. If you can't reward

success, you're probably rewarding failure. If you can't see success, you can't learn from it. If you can't recognize failure, you can't correct it. If you can demonstrate results, you can win public support. (p. 146)

Midwest School District wanted to highlight their strengths or recognize the success and identify their weaknesses or failures to correct upon them and continuously improve.

Schools should evaluate their guidance programs in all areas (system support, individual planning, responsive services, and guidance curriculum) developing a needs assessment to rate themselves to determine how they were performing and to locate where improvements need to be made to ensure student success. Professional school counselors must collect process data identifying the service population, perception data detailing stakeholder beliefs on how they are affected by the program, and lastly outcome data demonstrating effectiveness of their programs and how the services impact improvements to attendance, behavior and student achievement (ASCA, 2012).

Evaluations were generally collected for three primary reasons: needs assessments to identify goals, formative evaluations as the program unfolds to identify strengths and weaknesses, and summative evaluations communicating overall program effectiveness (Borders & Drury, 1992).

The National Office for School Counselor Advocacy (NOSCA) conducted a survey titled *True North: Charting the Course to College and Career Readiness* and found that schools with the lowest rates of college going students also had no system of accountability (National Office for School Counselor Advocacy [NOSCA], 2012). An additional finding identified after controlling variables such as caseloads, experience levels and professional education was that a correlation existed between higher college

attendance rates and certain types of school counselor accountability. Essentially, when school districts have processes in place to evaluate professional school counselors and their practices students fair better. Arne Duncan, Secretary of Education, in his remarks at the STATS DC 2010 National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Data Conference stated, “Data is an essential ingredient in the school reform agenda” (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, para. 7). However, having the data is not enough. It’s essential to use the data to drive student achievement. Educators had access to a multitude of data points and tracked or monitored student progress and programs in numerous capacities but the larger issue was how will this data be used to benefit students and produce meaningful outcomes? The Missouri Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling Program manual, conducted a statewide study conducted in 2005 and found that schools with more fully implemented comprehensive guidance and counseling programs showed an increase in student academic achievement and a positive impact on attendance and discipline issues (Gysbers et al., 2011).

Program standards were required in order to conduct a program evaluation. Program standards were an established measurement or criteria used to evaluate the adequacy of the nature and structure of the program as well as the degree of implementation (Gysbers, 1994). A responsibility of the school counselor as a part of their program component was to develop specific, measurable, attainable, results-oriented and time-bound (SMART) goals (Young & Miller-Kneale, 2013). The more professional school counselors evaluate their programs and put accountability measures in place the greater the likelihood that students will find success. Based on current research and best practices, supervisors of counseling programs could articulate the current realities and

desired outcomes for school counseling programs. Supervisors developed visions and goals by utilizing data driven decision making and strategic plans to communicate to school counselors and stakeholders how these goals will be implemented (Kaffenberger & Young, 2013). It was the hope of the Midwest School District that the program evaluation was proactive in nature serving as a framework to improve the quality of their programs, determine the overall effectiveness district wide, and provide feedback on the impact of counselor cuts at the secondary level on student achievement. A best practice in the evaluation process was looking at exemplary models in the field, and learning from others. Time invested examining dynamic school counseling programs offers models to aspire to be without reinventing the wheel and uncovers how this work directly impacts stakeholders.

### **Best Practice of Comprehensive School Counseling Programs**

Comprehensive guidance and counseling programs made a difference. In the state of Utah, a study conducted in 2007 of 247 public secondary schools revealed positive outcomes from those buildings where a comprehensive guidance and counseling program was implemented (Nelson, Fox, Haslan, & Gardner, 2007). Research indicated that students in the advisement process had more targeted course selection that resulted in students taking higher level and STEM related coursework. Students in highly implemented comprehensive guidance and counseling schools made better decisions about education and planning for the future and achieved higher levels of success academically (Nelson et al., 2007). To further support this point, in Missouri similar outcomes were achieved with 236 small, medium, and large size schools with approximately 22,964 students where professional school counselors believed they had

fully implemented programs. Analysis revealed students had higher grades and believed their education was preparing them for the future and identified their schools as having a positive climate (Lapan, Gysbers, & Sun, 1997). Although, these findings were acquired by professional school counselors providing perceptual data about their own programs, similar results were found by staff members evaluating guidance programs in their buildings. In a Missouri middle school setting, teachers who rated their school buildings as having a fully implemented guidance program reported seventh graders had higher grades, felt safe in school, had positive relationships with their teacher, were satisfied with their education and believed it was relevant to them (Lapan, Gysbers, Patroski, 2001). In fully implemented guidance and counseling programs Missouri's professional school counselors found that academic achievement had significantly increased with students performing higher on state assessments, fewer discipline problems were reported and an increase in attendance rates (Lapan, Gysbers, & Kayson, 2005).

School counseling programs that were exemplary in college preparation, application, and placement of low income students had several characteristics including: effective program management, external partnerships, counselors were viewed as school leaders, college focused interventions with low-income students, achievement oriented climates, parental academic and financial outreach programs, multi-level interventions, incorporation of data driven decision making, developing policies, and limited mundane aspects of the job (Militello et al., 2009). According to the National Association for College Admission Counseling as found in Lautz et al. (2005), nationwide private schools were four times as likely to devote staff to personalized college counseling than public schools. Students who attended schools with a College and Career Counselor

expressed a greater deal of confidence in the knowledge, reliability, and helpfulness of this person when accessing guidance on college planning (Bell et al., 2009). Schools that educated students from affluent families tended to focus on college and post-secondary planning, often providing many resources and manpower in the form of a college and career counselor, to address the needs of the population (Bryan et al., 2009). Even with documented benefits of having college and career counselors in place state programs do not require school districts to staff for this position. Therefore, it is absent in most public school systems as opposed to resource rich private schools. Schools with fewer resources and diverse demographics were less likely to offer quality college access options to students (Bryan et al., 2009). High poverty schools, large schools, and schools with higher counselor student ratios were also less likely to offer college information (Farmer-Hinton & Adams, 2006).

The Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE) reported that the role of guidance counselors was shifting, resulting in complex and fast-approaching changes to academic and career and technical education (Reese, 2010). Vocational education and workforce preparation was an ever-changing aspect of the professional school counselor duties and expectations (Reese, 2010). A professional school counselor's role in regards to career development was to assist students with educational planning, encourage and provide opportunities for students to explore options, and make appropriate decisions regarding career development (NCEE, 2009; Farmer-Hinton & Adams, 2006). This could be facilitated through conducting guidance lessons, individual planning, scheduling, continual exposure to college and post-secondary options and utilizing strategies to achieve success (Schmidt, 2003). Creating a college-going culture

in high schools was a necessary component in an effort to increase college enrollment rates. Although there was no set of standard definitions key components included rigorous academic preparation, college information and resources, college expectations, comprehensive guidance model, family involvement, partnerships with higher education, college curriculum and testing, faculty involvement, and continuous articulation (Yamamura et al., 2010). Understanding the importance of having a fully implemented guidance and counseling program in place even willing schools and districts are often unsure on how to proceed in evaluating their programs. In response to this problem, the State of Missouri designed the Internal Improvement Review to serve as a rubric or instrument to effectively evaluate comprehensive guidance and counseling programs based upon specific benchmarks.

### **Internal Improvement Review**

In 2005, a statewide study in Missouri, conducted by Lapan et al. from the University of Missouri-Columbia, found that schools where a fully implemented comprehensive guidance program was in place showed a measurable positive impact on student achievement, attendance and discipline issues (Gysbers et al., 2011). The IIR was developed collaboratively by the guidance and placement staff within the Division of Career Education in the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MODESE) aided by input from the Missouri School Counselor Association (MSCA), and in cooperation with counselor educators, and professional school counselors from throughout the state. Comments and suggestions were obtained over a two-year period from presentations, workshops and meetings held throughout the state and were used to further revise the IIR. This collaborative effort proved invaluable resulting in the current

2011 version. The current version had been used with a number of districts around the state including the Midwest School District. A concern that was raised during the Midwest School District program evaluation process was how to measure a fully implemented program in a building or district to address to the issue of accountability for comprehensive guidance and counseling programs. In response to this concern, Dr. Bragg Stanley recommended in a phone conference that the Midwest School District administer the Internal Improvement Review (IIR) to realistically determine the degree to which the MCGCP had been implemented. In order to hold professional school counselors accountable for their program in helping students achieve positive outcomes, it was imperative that all parties concerned knew the degree to which the program was actually implemented within their building and district where they worked (Lapan et al., 2005).

Completion of the IIR is not mandated by the state, in fact this process was voluntary for buildings or districts. This self-imposed approach was selected because of the safeguard it provided buildings or districts that decided to complete, analyze, and utilize the IIR, which takes a critical look at the current degree of implementation of its comprehensive guidance and counseling program without worrying about outside scrutiny and perceptions (Gysbers et al., 2011). Many districts realized they had gaps in their programming or level of services that were offered to students and, in the spirit of continuous improvement, asked what more could they do to better meet the needs of students. Positive student outcomes were still possible without full implementation of the guidance program; however, it was reasonable to expect that a greater impact would be achieved when the comprehensive guidance program had been fully implemented. Results from the IIR provided this much-needed data identifying the extent to which the

program was actually being implemented and additional services that could support students in school and plan for future educational and career goals (Lapan et al., 2005). The Midwest School District shared the results of the IIR data with stakeholders within the community informing them about the comprehensive guidance and counseling program and garnering support for its mission of helping students achieve positive outcomes. Communicating and sharing with stakeholders the work of guidance and counseling program and how students are impacted by the work they do was identified as a need highlighted during the program evaluation process. The results of the IIR could help to determine areas of strength and identify areas in need of improvement, which are extremely helpful in planning for the future of the Midwest School District comprehensive guidance program.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

### **Background of the School District**

The purpose of this program evaluation study was to determine the degree in which guidance and counseling impacts student performance. Before this question could be answered the district had to determine if there a program in place, the knowledge level and expertise of the personnel implementing the program, and the extent that relevant student data was being utilized to measure the impact of the program on student outcomes. Guidance and Counseling is a one such program designed developmentally K-12 and comprehensively in scope with preventative and intervention aspects in place. Programs delivery promotes student achievement, relies on student data, and has standards and grade level expectations in academic, career, and personal-social development.

The Midwest School District was characterized by excellence, quality, and high expectations. The district's mission was, "We do whatever it takes to ensure all students realize their potential." The vision stated that by continuously improving in every aspect of their performance, the Midwest School District empowered students to command their future. The Midwest School District accreditation level was: Distinction in Performance with High Achievement from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. The district's official enrollment was 21,951 in 2014 and included 19 elementary schools, six middle schools, and four high schools with separate campuses for Gifted, Early Childhood, and Alternative High School Education. The school district's 30 schools and supporting programs collectively made up one of the highest performing school districts in the country.

**Research Perspective**

The purpose of this program evaluation was to examine the role of the professional school counselor, college and career specialist, and school social worker program in Midwest School District. The Principal Investigator (PI) examined the current reality and established expectations that would best meet the needs of Midwest School District students. The evaluation addressed K-12 alignment of services and answered questions related to programming and design. In the 2011-2012 school year, 10 secondary professional school counseling positions were cut at the middle and high school level. This change in staffing resulted in the counselor-student ratio in buildings being staffed at 1:500 based upon the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education minimum standards. Previously, all buildings were staffed at desirable standards of 1:375.

A further impact at the middle school level was the removal of grade level counseling since the reduction in force left only two counselors in the sixth through eighth grade buildings at five of the six locations throughout the district. An additional focus of this program evaluation centered on how the counseling and social work program influenced student achievement in Midwest School District and the perception of the program from the view of stakeholders. At the conclusion of this evaluation, Midwest School District will have an assessment of Professional School Counselors, College and Career Specialist, and School Social Workers considerations for improvement, as well as a perspective on the service delivery model employed by the district to address the needs of K-12 students. This information could be used to shape future planning related to the Midwest Professional School Counselors, College and

Career Specialist, and School Social Work Programs. The program evaluation utilized a mixed-methods approach, which supported collecting, analyzing, and combining both quantitative and qualitative research and methods to better understand the research problem. Other school districts could follow this model to implement their own program evaluation of their particular counseling and guidance programs.

### **Program Evaluation Team**

The program evaluation committee consisted of 43 participants who served in two capacities either on the input team or on the design team. The design team members were appointed based upon their district level positions and relevant relationship to the program evaluation. The 12 members of the design team were as follows: the Superintendent, Executive Director of Learning and Support Services, Executive Director of Elementary Schools, Executive Director of Secondary Schools, Executive Director of Student Services, Director of Differentiated Services, Coordinator of Guidance and Prevention Services, Guidance and School Climate Facilitator (K-5), Guidance and School Climate Facilitator (6-12), Homeless Coordinator, Communications Coordinator, and the Director of the Data Analysis and Continuous Improvement.

The input team was assembled based upon volunteers who represented the respective target groups for diversity and an emphasis on having representation from all stakeholders. An email was sent to all Professional School Counselors, College and Career Specialist, Social Workers, and Principals requesting volunteers interested in serving on this committee. Members were then selected in chronological order until the desired number was reached in each category. Parent volunteers were solicited through the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) and classroom teachers were selected through the

Guidance Advisory Council (GAC). The final input team was comprised of 31 members representing the following areas: (4) Elementary Principals, (3) Middle School Principals, (2) High School Principals, (4) Elementary Counselors, (3) Middle School Counselors, (2) High School Counselors (2) College and Career Specialist, (1) 504/SSD Coordinator, (1) Social Worker (1), Alternative School Social Worker, (3) Classroom Teachers and (5) Midwest School District Parents. The input team gathered information, reviewed data and provided specific ideas and feedback to the Design Team. Four large group meetings were conducted monthly during the first semester of the 2014-2015 school year between September and December dedicated to this work. Participants reviewed the school counseling, college and career specialist, and social work programs and gained a better understanding of the expectations of these roles. An academic awareness of all student service areas within a school system was gained through this process.

### **Participants**

The participants in the study consisted of students grades K-12 who took any of the three surveys administered in the district and referenced in this dissertation. At the elementary level, the Character Education and School Climate Surveys were administered districtwide at all 19 locations in a K-2 and 3-5 format. Results from the 3-5 versions in response to the question who students felt they could talk to about a problem were examined as a part of this research. Of the provided options, 4,656 students responded to teacher, 4,390 responded to counselor and 3,423 identified principal.

For the Missouri Student Survey the participants included approximately 66,609 students in the state of Missouri with roughly 4,415 completed in Midwest School District. The percentages of students in each grade level was as follows: sixth grade

11.1%, seventh grade 23.5%, eighth 12.3%, ninth 17.1%, 10th 14.2%, 11th 13.6%, and 12th 8.2%. Surveys were administered locally in health and physical education classes because of the alignment of the topics with the curriculum. Passive parental letters were sent home providing parents and students an option to opt out of the administration.

The Senior Exit Survey was administered to students at all four high schools that were classified as seniors in high school. Out of the approximately 1,300 students in Midwest School District in 12th grade, 741 responded to the Senior Exit survey administered from all four high schools in May 2013 and 659 in May 2014.

### **Instrumentation**

The intent was to strive to review multiple forms of data from various sources, both qualitative and quantitative. The data included DESE statistics on College or Vocational Enrollment, Attribution, Completion and Placement Data; the Senior Exit Study; Time on Task in the program completed by professional school counselors, and the Internal improvement Review (IIR) survey results completed at each elementary, middle, and high school. This study sample was composed of 29 buildings broken down into three different levels of elementary, middle, and high school that included 51 full time counselors, seven part-time counselors, five district social workers, and six college and career specialists. The two early childhood centers, talented and gifted center and alternative high school were not included in the IIR findings. The IIR was a supplemental document that provided analysis for conducting program evaluations composed by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MODESE) and available in the Missouri Model Guidance and Counseling Program manual. The design team, after consulting with Dr. Bragg Stanley, Director of Guidance for the state of Missouri,

decided to administer the IIR to include counselors', social workers', and principals' voices on whether their buildings had a fully implemented guidance and counseling program.

Quantitative data included lethality assessments, child abuse and neglect reports, social worker statistics, and the school climate survey. The district routinely tracked data on the number of lethality assessments or threats of suicidal behaviors that were administered, reports to the Division of Children Services (DCS) for child abuse and neglect concerns, social worker's interactions with students working in defined categories and elementary school climate, safety and sense of belonging surveys results. The Missouri Student Survey (MSS) data was also reviewed focusing on domains related to the research questions. This survey was administered every even year in Midwest School District in collaboration with the University of Missouri-Columbia (MU) Office of Social and Economic Data Analysis (OSED). The survey results provided valuable information about students' tobacco, drug, and alcohol use as well as bullying and mental health information that helped Midwest School district plan prevention activities. Comment cards and questionnaires completed by the input team committee during the program evaluation also provided data referred to during this process.

### **Procedure**

When conducting a program evaluation in Midwest School District, a formalized set of guidelines must be adhered to based upon district policy. Much care was taken by the Principal Investigator to ensure that the evaluation goals were addressed and that sufficient, accurate, and valid information was provided to aid in sound decision making by the board of education. One of the initial steps was to develop a steering committee to

guide the evaluation. For the purpose of this study, the Principal Investigator referred to this group as the design team. The design team was composed of a small group of district staff members possessing needed expertise to establish specifications for the program evaluation. The Principal Investigator identified the job of the design team, which included: discussing the key questions to be answered by the evaluation, organizing the effort of who did what, conducting or directing information gathering activities and analyzing the information to be summarized for recommendations for the Board of Education who were ultimately the decision-maker.

The second key group of stakeholders was a larger group referred to as the input team. The input team was intentional in targeting members representing groups of the areas being evaluated. The Principal Investigator sent an email to all Professional School Counselors, College and Career Specialist, Social Workers, and Administrators requesting volunteers, which were selected in chronological order to fill the respective categories. Parent volunteers were solicited through the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) forum and classroom teachers were selected through the Guidance Advisory Council (GAC). The input team gathered information, reviewed data and provided specific ideas and feedback to the Design Team. The Principal Investigator served on both teams and created the structure and relevant topics of discussion for the Input Team meetings with opportunities for feedback from the group. Four large group Input Team meetings were conducted during first semester dedicated to this work, one each month. The focus of the first meeting was to: welcome the input team and thank them for their participation; discuss the purpose of the program evaluation; define the roles and responsibilities of the input team and the design team and provide a general overview of

the program evaluation process. The program evaluation committee broke into small groups and identified the strengths and challenges of the program; reviewed relevant data; discussed the role of the independent expert; brainstormed student needs and identified external parameters that affect the work. Comment cards were left at each table during the initial meeting for input team members to leave a question or to request further information in a specific area. The second meeting consisted of: a review of relevant research, and responses to key questions from the previous meeting comment cards. Identification of the Independent Expert, Dr. Bragg Stanley, Director of Guidance for the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MODESE) was revealed including his background, level of support he would provide, a recap of the conference call with him and his recommendation that the district complete the Internal Improvement Review (IIR). A discussion about what could be inferred from the data was held and a mock review of the (IIR) evaluation document was completed during small group work by the Input Team on the guidance program structural areas. The third meeting focused on the review and analysis of the actual survey data received from the IIR after assessment were completed at the building levels. An overview from the design team face-to-face meeting with the Independent Expert was also shared, discussing next steps and the beginning process of making recommendations for the counseling review. The fourth and final meeting date included the development of the 14 final recommendations for the program evaluation in seven identified categories: Policy and Definition, Administration, Curriculum, Communications, Evaluation, Professional Development and Staffing. Written minutes from the input team meetings were provided and uploaded to the district website on the Guidance and Counseling page under the committee section.

The design team identified the steps of the program evaluation process and placed a targeted completion date of December. The committee identified necessary resources for each step to take place, which included money, time, and personnel. The design team was initially scheduled to meet ten times but the Principal Investigator added additional meeting dates as needed. One of the additional dates included the Principal Investigators desire to consult and meet with the independent external evaluator, Dr. Bragg Stanley, Director of Guidance for the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MODESE) in person as a part of the program evaluation. Additional activities completed during the design team meetings involved finalizing the input team membership, reviewing current research, discussing the current reality, selection of the independent evaluator, consulting the Midwest Model for conducting program evaluations, reviewing data from the IIR, surveys, comment cards and other relevant sources to the program evaluation, recommendations being brought forth, and the review of the Principal Investigators final presentation to the Board of Education. The design team meetings were held in closed session and minutes were not made public as a part of the program evaluation.

### **Data Analysis**

The data was derived from various sources of secondary data. Demographic data and the Missouri School Improvement Plan -5 (MSIP-5) Annual Performance Review (APR) data was obtained from Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MODESE) data management system gathered for evaluative purposes for the district's report card. The Senior Exit Survey, School Climate Survey, and Internal Improvement Review (IIR) survey was given electronically utilizing Survey Monkey

administered through the testing and assessment department in Midwest School District. The testing and assessment department analyzed the data and provided disaggregated reports of the surveys administration to guide decision making surrounding programmatic outcomes and next steps. The MU Office of Social and Economic Data Analysis (OSED) disaggregated the MSS survey results utilizing non-weighted data not based upon a random sample. Once the survey window closed, reports were generated by OSED within six weeks provided building and district level results. The Administrative Assistant to the Executive Director of Learning and Support Services compiled results from comment cards and questionnaires completed by the Input Team program evaluation committee into a report utilized for this study. A transcript of the interview with Dr. Bragg Stanley was also consulted for the purpose of the program evaluation.

The program evaluation process was a daunting and intimidating undertaking but also extremely beneficial to the groups evaluated, the students and parents who profit from this work, and to district leaders who have formalized processes in place to evaluate the effectiveness of the counseling program and the impact on student achievement. Having a formal process in place is a best practice of highly effective schools and districts and serves as a way to monitor progress and commitment towards continuous improvement. The districts guidelines provide a format to serve as roadmap but with much flexibility for the Principal Investigator to add systems in place like the consultation of the Independent Evaluator, completion of the IIR and analyzation of the wide range of data relevant to this work.

The next chapter will provide a clearer snapshot of the district providing demographic and MSIP 5 data to better understand the population served. Data routinely

tracked by the district will be discussed such as counselor's time on task analysis, social workers stats, child abuse and neglect referrals and lethality assessments. Survey results relevant to the program evaluation are included from the elementary, middle and high school levels to access student's attitudes, skills, and experiences because of the comprehensive guidance and counseling programs. The transcript of the interview of the external independent evaluator provides a non-bias perspective on the districts counseling program strengths and provides suggestions on additional steps the district can take to improve upon their counseling practices. During this process, the Principal Investigator captured the Input Team thoughts on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that existed in the counseling, social worker, and college specialist programs as well as identification of student needs.

## Chapter Four: Results

### Demographic Data

After the first Input Team Meeting, many participants on the committee requested through comment cards left at each table to review the district's demographic data to help respond to the question of student need in the evaluation process. This report identified the percentage of students and their demographic characteristics over the last three years. All numbers were reported as of September 25th, which is the official enrollment count dates for each respective year of 2011, 2012, and 2013. The results were shared with the Board of Education in Midwest School District and updated demographic information from 2014 was included in the presentation.

Table 4

#### *Midwest Enrollment by Racial/Ethnic Demographics*

Midwest	2011	2012	2013	2014
Asian	5.6%	5.9%	6.1%	6.4%
Black	10.6%	10.3%	9.9%	9.4%
Hispanic	*	*	*	*
Indian	*	*	*	*
White	81.2%	80.6%	80.2%	79.4%
Total	22,568	22,268	22,018	21,609

*Note.* \* data suppressed for small subgroup

The data indicates that Midwest School District student population averaged around 80% White, 10% Black, 6% Asian, and 4% other. It is important to note that approximately 7% of the Black population of students was attending from St. Louis City through the VICC program. The Midwest School District lacked diversity in many of its locations due to concentrations of ethnic communities residing in certain geographic areas within the school attendance boundaries. The inclusion of minority students

attending from St. Louis City through (VICC) program added diversity to those areas without strong African-American resident populations and increased the African-American population districtwide.

Table 5

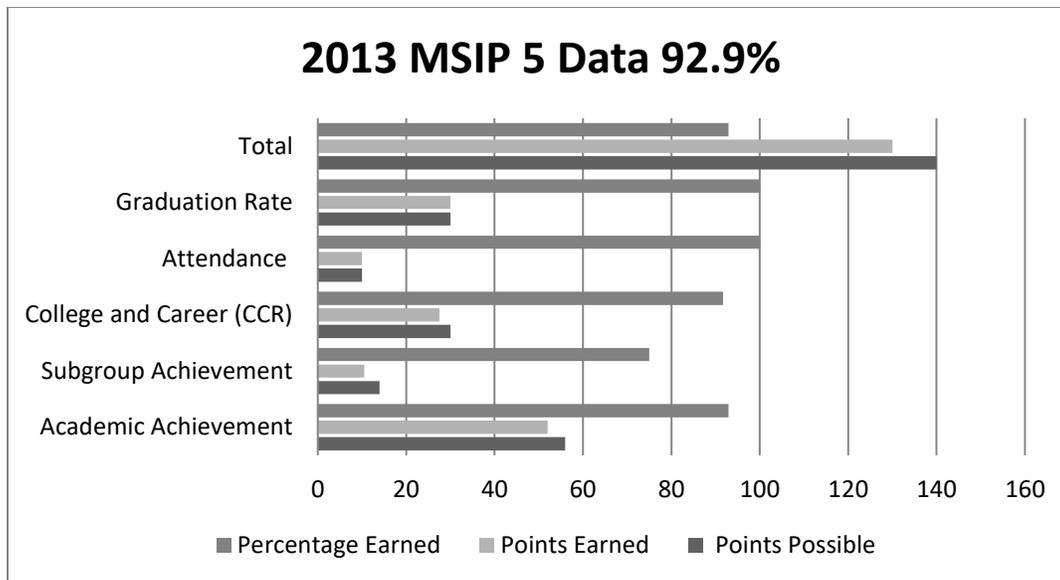
*Midwest School District Free and Reduced Lunch Population*

Midwest	2011	2012	2013	2014
Free or Reduced Lunch	14.8%	15.3%	15.2%	15.1%
Total Number	3190	3251	3199	3127

On average the district free and reduced lunch (FRL), population was around 15%. Although, the data did not indicate the ethnicity or status there was a disproportionate number of students from super-subgroups and those students residing in St. Louis City included.

**MSIP-5 APR Data**

MSIP-5 was the state’s school accountability system for reviewing and accrediting public school districts in Missouri. The standards for which districts were held accountable were academic standards, subgroup achievement, college and career readiness, attendance rate and graduation rates. The program evaluation committee primarily focused on subgroup achievement, college and career readiness, and graduation rates.



*Figure 1. 2013 MSIP 5 Data 92.9%*

Midwest School District in 2013 earned 130 of a possible 140 points towards MSIP 5 for a percentage of 92.9%. The district earned the maximum possible points of 10 for attendance and 30 for graduation rate earning 100% in both categories. Under the area of academic achievement, 52 of the possible 56 points were earned averaging to 92.9%. This area displays the percentage of students with proficient or advanced scores achieved and the MAP Performance Index (MPI) for all MAP assessments by subject area. The MPI was used to calculate status and progress measures for students. For college and career (CCR), 27.5 of 30 or 91.7% points was earned towards overall accreditation. Data from CCR included the following: the percent of graduates scoring at or above the state standard on the ACT, SAT, COMPASS or the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB), the percent of graduates who earned a qualifying score on the Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), or Technical Skills Attainment (TSA) assessments or a qualifying grade in AP, IB, early college, dual enrollment, or approved dual credit courses and the percentage of graduates who attended post-secondary education or training, enlisted in the military, or completed a department-

approved Career Education program and was placed in an occupation directly related to their training after high school (MODESE, 2015).

Table 6

*DESE Vocational Enrollment, Placement and Graduation Rates*

+	2011	2012	2013	2014
Graduation Rate	92.9%	93.7%	93.7%	93.8%
Asian	96.4%	96.0%	96.8%	97.1%
Black	82.4%	85.4%	86.8%	87.1%
Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	100.0%	84.4%	89.8%	83.8%
Hispanic	93.4%	94.2%	93.0%	93.6%
Indian	85.5%	80.3%	85.1%	92.4%
White	94.0%	94.6%	94.3%	94.3%
Multi-Race	92.2%	96.3%	95.4%	93.9%
Female	92.5%	93.3%	93.5%	93.6%
Male	93.3%	94.1%	93.9%	94.0%
Entering a 4yr. College/University	62.7	62.7	63.7	66.4
Entering a 2yr. College	25.9	24.7	23.2	22.4
Entering a Tech/Postsecondary Institution	0.2	1.1	0.9	1.0

For subgroup achievement, the district scored 10.5 of a possible 14 points which was the lowest percentage received earning 75% overall in this area. Super subgroup displays the percentage of proficient or advanced scores achieved on the MAP and the MAP Performance Index (MPI) by subject area for students who were included in the super subgroup (Hispanic, Black, FRL, IEP, ELL). The MPI was used to calculate both status and progress measures for students. Much like other districts in the state and nation, this Midwest school district understands and remains committed to ensuring that

the students representing the super-groups achieve at the same high level of success as their counterparts. Until all students are operating at or above grade level despite the high accreditation status there is still much work to do in this Midwest School District.

Midwest School District program evaluation sought to address the role the guidance and counseling department played in helping students reduce barriers to accessing educational opportunities. As students encountered problems they might face exploring their post-secondary options, the role of the professional school counselor should ultimately help them find success. Guidance programs that actively addressed issues that are a part of a district or school's CSIP process are an integral part to the total educational process supporting positive student outcomes.

### **Time Task Analysis**

One of the assessments used to determine whether professional school counselors were fully implementing the comprehensive guidance program was the time task analysis. This tool helped professional school counselors have greater control over how they spent their time by documenting where time was currently being spent. This process provided professional school counselors access to important data that can assist in planning, implementation, and improvement of their programs. DESE provided a download of a template for conducting a time task analysis in a spreadsheet format with formulas accessible through the Missouri Guidance e-Learning Center. School districts can utilize the document, which allowed for the calculation of time spent by the professional school counselors in each of the four delivery components as well as in non-guidance areas. Depending upon the activities or processes that professional school

counselors were involved in under the four program areas during the increments of time would determine which category was appropriate to document those efforts.

Midwest School District, for the purpose of this program evaluation, developed an internal system through the Testing and Assessment Office constructed to mirror the state model, which captured how the professional school counselors' time was spent in the comprehensive program areas. Counselors entered the data for the respective time task dates through a SharePoint site, which allowed reports to be compiled with both aggregated and disaggregated data. A detailed description of how and when to conduct a time task analysis was included for professional school counselors in the district newsletter and training was provided as a part of professional development for new counselors to the school district. A supplemental document was also provided to the professional school counselors outlining which category typical job functions fell under for consistency in reporting of counseling activities. A series of four (4) dates were designated for conducting time task analysis in the district, two during first semester and two during second semester. Utilizing guidance from state recommendations, the dates were consistent for all professional school counselors districtwide analyzing 10 total days five (5) days first semester and five (5) days second semester. The committee decided to average all four dates for the purpose of the program evaluation because they believed it to be more reflective of how a typical counseling day was spent. The table below represents the averages of time spent during all four (4) days second semester at each level based upon the category and the recommended state averages.

Table 7

*Midwest Spring 2013 Professional School Counselor Time Task Analysis*

	Guidance Curriculum	Individual Planning	Non-guidance Activities	Responsive Services	System Support
Elementary	29.88%	9.51%	2.55%	30.05%	28.01%
Recommended	35-45%	5-10%	0%	30-40%	10-15%
Middle	9.23%	20.31%	0.77%	51.38%	18.31%
Recommended	25-35%	15-25%	0%	30-40%	10-15%
High	7.29%	54.08%	0.54%	23.72%	14.36%
Recommended	15-25%	25-35%	0%	25-35%	15-20%
District Average	17.44%	26.97%	1.46%	32.98%	21.15%

*Note.* \*averages are included from the four time task dates

State and national models provided recommendations on how much of a counselor's time should be spent at each level (elementary, middle, and high) and in each area. The recommendations for elementary schools were as follows: Guidance Curriculum 35-45%, Individual Planning 5-10%, Responsive Services 30-40%, and System Support 10-15% (Gysbers et al., 2011). In comparing Midwest professional school counselors based upon these guidelines, each area yielded ranges within the recommended percentages with the exception of the category of System Support. Elementary professional school counselors reported the highest numbers in the areas of System Support and Non-Guidance duties, which is consistent with the concerns raised during the input team meetings. This may be partially due to the elementary school counselor's additional responsibility of being building 504 Coordinators, supervision duties, and serving on various building and district committees.

Middle school professional school counseling state recommendations were; Guidance Curriculum 25-35%, Individual Planning 15-15%, Responsive Services 30-40% and System Support 10-15% (Gysbers et al., 2011). Midwest School District Middle

School Professional School Counselor totals yielded numbers that were unbalanced in all areas except Individual Planning. More than half of the middle school counselors' time was spent in responsive services responding to crisis or addressing student needs leaving little time to spend on implementing the guidance curriculum in classrooms. High school professional school counseling state recommendations were: Guidance Curriculum 15-25%, Individual Planning 25-35%, Responsive Services 25-35% and System Support 15-20% (Gysbers et al., 2011). High School Professional School Counselors data revealed an overwhelming amount of time being spent in the area of individual planning. All of the other ranges for the remaining three programmatic areas of guidance curriculum, system support and responsive services are below the recommended averages. Responsive services and system support are just slightly outside the range in contrast guidance curriculum totals are less than half the recommended average.

### **Professional School Counselor and College and Career Specialist Caseloads**

Midwest School District had 19 elementary buildings, six middle schools, and four high schools staffed with professional school counselors. The enrollments of the building varied greatly but the district had committed to staff a full time employee (FTE) in every building regardless of size for the smaller elementary buildings. The larger elementary buildings received one full time professional school counselor for every 500 students or a 1:500 ratio. In addition, to the full time counselor buildings over 500 also received a staffing of a part-time counselor for one day a week or .2 FTE and those over 600 received two days a week or .4 FTE to assist with curriculum, small groups, and career planning. Retired elementary counselors who previously worked in the district or first year counselors who interned in Midwest School District primarily staffed these

positions. At the secondary level, one counselor was cut at each location in the 2011 school year resulting in buildings moving from desirable staffing standards to meeting minimum staffing standards. Most middle school buildings were staffed with two full time counselors with exception of two buildings. The ratios for Midwest School District buildings for the 2012-2013 school year were as follows:

Table 8

*Elementary Professional School Counselor Staffing Ratios*

Elementary School	Staffing	Enrollment/Caseload
1	1 FTE, 1 day a week (1.2)	556
2	1 FTE, 1 day a week (1.2)	542
3	1 FTE	445
4	1 FTE	311
5	1 FTE	447
6	1 FTE, 2 days a week (1.4)	605
7	1 FTE	320
8.	1 FTE, 1 day a week (1.2)	512
9	1 FTE, 2 days a week (1.4)	607
10	1 FTE	452
11	1 FTE	438
12	1 FTE, 1 day a week (1.2)	594
13	1 FTE	417
14	1 FTE	439
15	1 FTE, 1 day a week (1.2)	534
16	1 FTE	483
17	1 FTE, 1 day a week (1.2)	566
18	1 FTE	446
19	1 FTE	489

One building followed the elementary model of receiving a .2 FTE with a student population of 1,000 and the other building was staff with three full time counselors with a student population of 1,236. DESE's recommended minimum state standards for counselor-to-student ratio is 1:500, and the desirable counselor-to-student ratio is 1:375.

This mirrors ASCA’s national standard with a recommended ratio of 1:250 to fully implement a comprehensive guidance and counseling program.

Middle schools in Midwest School District were staffed in the same way as elementary buildings based upon enrollment utilizing the 1:500 ratio. Because Building 3 had an enrollment of 1,000 students, and was therefore allotted a .2 or one day a week counselor to assist usually with guidance curriculum or special projects. Building one being the largest of the six middle schools lost a counseling position like the other buildings, however, being initially staffed with four full time counselors it dropped down to three still making the ratio above the desirable guidelines. Counselors at the middle school level experienced the most transitions when the reductions took place resulting in professional school counselors to move to other locations based upon seniority or vacancies created through retirement and attrition.

Table 9

*Middle School Professional School Counselor Ratios*

Middle School	Status/Staffing	Enrollment
1	3 FTE	1236
2	2 FTE	941
3	2 FTE, 1 day a week (2.2)	1000
4	2	755
5	2	742
6	2	756

One building followed the elementary model of receiving a .2 FTE with a student population of 1,000 and the other building was staff with three full time counselors with a student population of 1,236. DESE’s recommended minimum state standards for counselor-to-student ratio is 1:500, and the desirable counselor-to-student ratio is 1:375. This mirrors ASCA’s national standard with a recommended ratio of 1:250 to fully implement a comprehensive guidance and counseling program.

Middle schools in Midwest School District were staffed in the same way as elementary buildings based upon enrollment utilizing the 1:500 ratio. Because Building 3 had an enrollment of 1,000 students, and was therefore allotted a .2 or one day a week counselor to assist usually with guidance curriculum or special projects. Building one being the largest of the six middle schools lost a counseling position like the other buildings, however, being initially staffed with four full time counselors it dropped down to three still making the ratio above the desirable guidelines. Counselors at the middle school level experienced the most transitions when the reductions took place resulting in professional school counselors to move to other locations based upon seniority or vacancies created through retirement and attrition.

Table 10

*High School Professional School Counselor Staffing Ratios*

School	Status/Staffing	Enrollment (students per counselor)
1	4	*2087 (521)
2	5	1974 (395)
3	5	2278 (455)
4	3	1271 (423)

*Note.* \* A full time counselor was added to school 1 in the 13-14 school year changing the average caseload to 417.

The staffing disparity of one college and career specialist at school 1 as contrasted with two college and career specialists in place at school 2, despite lower enrollments, was discussed during the input team meetings surrounding equitable services and administrator autonomy.

Professional school counselor ratios at the high school level were divided based upon the alphabetic last name as evenly as possible, with fewer students assigned to the department chair of the department.

### **Social Worker Case Management**

School social workers sought to ensure equitable educational opportunities for all students. They worked to support students emotionally, mentally, and physically in the classrooms and promoted respect and dignity for all students. Midwest School District employed nine district social workers: five full-time social workers at the K-12 level, one at the alternative high school, and three at the two early childhood center. For the purpose of this program evaluation, data from the three early childhood social workers was not included in the K-12 program evaluation. These positions were funded by early childhood with specificity and tailored tasks designed to meet the needs of the community. The student caseload ratios for each of the K-12 social workers, the categories and descriptions to track their work, and the number of open cases by quarter at the elementary, middle, and high school level were provided for the five district social workers. The social worker assigned to the alternative school assisted students with social-emotional and mental health needs without the staffing of a professional school counselor in place as opposed to the other buildings where professional school counselors were in place. The alternative school maintained an enrollment average of 60 students with high needs, but at its maximum could accommodate 90.

The five district social workers caseloads were divided utilizing a system that considered geographic quadrants, number of locations, size, and anticipated need. Midwest School District covered a large geographic area divided into four quadrants each with a high

school with respective middle and elementary feeder schools. Four of the five district social workers were assigned a high school and the fifth received the largest middle school, which was only 40 students less in enrollment than the smallest high school. The remaining five middle schools were assigned to the social worker from the respective high school where middle school students had transitioned. The 19 elementary schools were divided in a similar manner keeping with feeder patterns, number of locations, and needed supports. The chart below provides a visual representation of assignments with the number of students at each location per caseload.

Table 11

*District Social Worker: Assigned Buildings and Caseload in Each Location*

	Elementary	Middle	High	Total	Caseload
Social Worker Quadrant A	3 ES (11/11/25)	1 MS (63)	1 HS (106)	5	216
Social Worker Quadrant B	2 ES (40/20)	1 MS (60)	1 HS (107)	4	227
Social Worker Quadrant C	2 ES (12/11)	1 MS (23)	1 HS (122)	4	168
Social Worker Quadrant D	4 ES (17/19/10/21)	1 MS(81)	1 HS (108)	6	256
Social Worker Quadrant B/C	8 ES (9/26/16/2/13/14/26/14)	2 MS (38/15)	0	10	173
Total	19 ES (elementary) 317	6 Middle 280	4 High 443	29 Schools	1040

*Note.* \* ES: Elementary School, MS: Middle School, HS: High School, (): number of students on caseload

The primary function of the Midwest School District social worker was to strengthen the home-school-community partnership, mitigating barriers between these areas that may have interfered with student performance. They also assisted with early identification, prevention, intervention, counseling, support, and advocacy for students and families. The district social workers tracked the number of actions they took in each

setting under several categories: academics, attendance, behavior, basic needs, child abuse and neglect, family problems, medical, mental health and a category for other duties as assigned. In order to be documented, the incident must fit the criteria of a separate action; however, it could involve the same child or family group on multiple days. All district social workers received training on how to track their data, and the descriptions were agreed upon in each category for consistency. The data was tracked daily during the 2013-2014 school year over the four quarters of the school year. The descriptions were as follows:

- Academics: Homework, grades, tutoring, graduation credits, test anxiety, study skills
- Attendance: Absences, educational neglect, truancy
- Behavior: Office referrals, detentions, suspensions, attitude, peer relations, runaway, anger, aggression.
- Basic Needs: Assistance (utility, housing, food, clothing), transposition issues, homelessness, employment
- Child Abuse and Neglect (CAN): Consultation with staff regarding possible child abuse and neglect reports and supports with follow up contact.
- Family Problems: Divorce, death, relationship issues, family dynamics, parenting problems
- Medical Health: Glasses, immunizations, physicals, pregnancy, asthma, long-term illness, substance abuse, medication issues, ADHD
- Mental Health: Depression, anxiety, suicide, obsessive-compulsive disorders, bipolar disorder, psychosis not otherwise specified

- Other: any other duties as assigned (any duties that extended beyond the social workers normal job functions for example supervision or faculty meetings)

Data was compiled by level (elementary, middle, and high) to safeguard the identity of specific locations. At each level, the total number of occurrences was tallied and a district average was provided for each area per quarter. Social Workers tracked data daily through the RTI process mostly through referral sheets from administrators or professional school counselors and turned in quarterly statistics of their activities.

Table 12

*Elementary Social Work Statistics 13-14 School Year*

Elementary (19)	1st Quarter	2nd Quarter	3rd Quarter	4th Quarter
Academics	145 (7.6)	155 (8.2)	132 (6.9)	172 (9.1)
Attendance	187 (9.8)	246 (12.9)	222 (11.7)	277 (14.6)
Behavior	263 (13.8)	200 (10.5)	122 (6.4)	150 (7.9)
Basic Needs	256 (13.5)	236 (12.4)	204 (10.7)	226 (11.9)
Child Abuse	71 (3.7)	102 (5.4)	67 (3.5)	78 (4.1)
Neg. Family	349 (18.4)	328 (17.3)	269 (14.2)	337 (17.7)
Medical	152 (8)	197 (10.4)	160 (8.4)	160 (8.4)
Mental Health	141 (7.4)	158 (8.3)	123 (6.5)	168 (8.8)
Other	31(1.6)	51 (2.7)	0 (0)	47 (2.5)

Unlike the professional school counselor who tracked their data only 10 days throughout the school year, case management, monitoring, and documentation of interventions was a regular aspect of the social workers role. The social workers tracked numbers utilizing a excel spreadsheet format on a self-reported basis.

At the elementary level the top three areas where social work time was spent was attendance, basic needs, and behavior concerns. In the 19 elementary buildings districtwide, the total number of actions were divided by the number of sites and an average was reached for the quarter in each area. Social workers were responsible for

reporting suspected incidents of educational neglect due to parents violating compulsory attendance laws if student’s absences were chronically unexcused. District social workers initiated actions at different intervals in written and verbal correspondence followed by an eventual referral to Children Services. Basic needs are also more evident at the elementary level where social workers worked to provide food through the backpack program and utility assistance resources. Student behavior referral needs are mostly initiated by classroom teachers, counselors, or by building administrators.

Table 13

*Middle School Social Worker Statistics 13-14 School Year*

Middle School- 6	1st Quarter	2nd Quarter	3rd Quarter	4th Quarter
Academics	215 (35.8)	246 (41)	274 (45.6)	347 (57.8)
Attendance	199 (33.2)	214 (35.7)	294 (49)	360 (60)
Behavior	245 (40.8)	219 (36.5)	216 (36)	299 (49.8)
Basic Needs	283 (47.2)	284 (47.3)	261 (43.5)	323 (53.8)
Child Abuse	49 (8.2)	65 (10.8)	61 (10.2)	58 (9.6)
Neg. Family	353 (58.8)	328 (54.7)	337 (56.2)	484 (80.6)
Medical	257 (42.8)	244 (40.6)	212 (35.3)	282 (47)
Mental Health	172 (29.7)	369 (61.5)	191 (31.8)	280 (46.6)
Other	54 (9)	65 (10.8)	0 (0)	81 (13.5)

At the middle school level, the data suggested the top three categories where social work time was spent were in the areas of attendance, mental health, and basic needs. At the middle school level attendance concerns of educational neglect usually resulted in a referral either to children services or family court if students are incorrigible. Basic needs still exist at the middle school level and can include homelessness, loss of parental employment or clothing needs. Mental health concerns were high at the middle school level examples included high levels of anxiety, students dealing with suicidal ideation, referrals for community based psychological services, and other social-

emotional concerns. Unlike elementary, other categories had high percentages as well such as medical, behavior and academics. In addition, during fourth quarter in most categories at the middle school level numbers represented during this timeframe were the highest for the year.

Table 14

*High School Social Worker Statistics 13-14 School Year*

High School (5)	1st Quarter	2nd Quarter	3rd Quarter	4th Quarter
Academics	394 (78.8)	590 (118)	565 (113)	764 (152.8)
Attendance	299 (59.8)	293 (58.6)	414 (82.8)	443 (88.6)
Behavior	322 (64.4)	389 (77.8)	439 (87.8)	444 (88.8)
Basic Needs	517 (103.4)	620 (124)	540 (108)	687 (137.4)
Child Abuse	59 (11.8)	84 (16.8)	56 (11.2)	78 (15.6)
Neg. Family	483 (96.6)	614 (122.8)	604 (120.8)	725 (145)
Medical	186 (37.2)	241 (48.2)	277 (55.4)	295 (59)
Mental Health	569 (94.8)	508 (101.6)	318 (63.6)	544 (108.8)
Other	111 (18.5)	134 (26.8)	21 (4.2)	143 (28.6)

*Note.* \* data represents a combination from all sites (4 high schools and alternative school). The first number indicates the total occurrences and the second number represents averages.

At the high school level, the top three areas where social workers time was spent was in the areas of academics, basic needs, and mental health. In comparison to the elementary and middle school level, social workers spent more time on academics working with credit deficient students not on track for graduation and mental health needs that manifest themselves in greater intensity at this level. High school locations not only have more students on the social worker’s caseload because of larger student populations but more actions initiated on a quarterly basis. It is important to note that family concerns were consistently high at all levels; however, it was mentioned separately because social workers working with sibling groups at different levels efforts were documented in both areas which duplicates and skews the numbers. This data

supported some of the common themes discussed during the input team meetings when social workers strengths and challenges were documented during the input team meetings.

### **Senior Exit Survey**

Dimmitt (2009) suggested surveying high school seniors about the school counseling program, specifically components under the area of individual planning. Key areas of interest could focus on college and career counseling, selecting courses, planning for their future and overall support. This data provided valuable information about the structures, perceptions and overall effectiveness of the guidance and counseling program. In Midwest School District, 12th graders were given a senior exit survey prior to graduation on a voluntary, anonymous basis in the spring semester during the month of May. This survey took a comprehensive look at student's experiences as it related to college and career planning. Graduating seniors were asked to identify whether structural components of the program were in place and the overall effectiveness of each area. This data helped to support the comprehensive counseling programs and make changes to improve the services provided to the students and families, thus better meeting their needs. The Senior Exit survey also asked graduating seniors about their educational experience and their knowledge of different resources that they could utilize (see survey in the appendix). The data provided for the purpose of this program evaluation was from the class of 2013 and 2014. Two years of data was provided for review because one site provided the senior exit survey to the graduating seniors after the last day of school, lowering the response rate.

Out of the approximately 1,300 students in Midwest School District in 12th grade, 741 responded to the Senior Exit survey administered from all four high schools in May 2013 and 659 in May 2014. Students were given the opportunity to take the survey during the academic day at most locations, and links to the survey were also sent out electronically in the principal’s newsletter and on the district website after the last day for seniors. Teachers and counselors were given a script to read prior to the administration, communicating the districts attempt to gather data to evaluate the effectiveness of the K-12 comprehensive counseling program and overall level of service to students. Participants were informed that their participation in the survey was voluntary, and they could opt out of taking the survey. The home schools for students completing the survey are as follows in random order:

Table 15

*Senior Exit Survey Responses 12-13 & 13-14 School Year*

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<u>High School</u>	<u>12-13</u>	<u>13-14</u>
School A	242	292
School B	40	70
School C	289	103
School D	170	194

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The survey was taken electronically utilizing the online tool Survey Monkey. Although demographic information was asked, no personally identifiable information was gathered to link the survey to the participant. The demographic information of the participants in the survey was broken down in several key areas: length of time in the district, gender, domicile, ethnicity, disability and grade point average. The data from each survey window is as follows:

Table 16

*Q. 21 Senior Exit Survey*How many years have you attended the high school you are graduating from?

Number of attendance years	12-13	13-14
1	23 (3.1%)	9 (1.37%)
2	15 (2.0%)	23 (3.49%)
3	13 (1.8%)	20 (3.03%)
4	682 (92%)	604 (91.65%)
5	8 (1.1%)	3 (0.46%)

Data indicated that Midwest School District retained on average 92% of their incoming freshman who go on to become graduating seniors. Out of those who responded, data revealed very low numbers for fifth year seniors indicating that most seniors graduate within the recommended four-year plan. Given the fact that most of the respondents have been educated in the district all four years of their high school experience adds validity to their level of response.

Table 17

*Q 22. What is your gender?*

Gender	12-13	13-14
Male	376 (50.7%)	306 (46.3%)
Female	365 (49.3%)	353 (53.7%)

In the 2013-2014 results, there was an increase in the number of female respondents as opposed to the more evenly distributed numbers the year prior based upon gender. However, the increase in female respondents was consistent with the actual division of all seniors during the 2013-2014 school year.

Table 18

*Q. 23 Senior Exit Survey*

Q23. Where do you live?		
Region	12-13	13-14
St. Louis County	640 (86.4%)	563 (85.43%)
Jefferson County	37 (5.0%)	36 (5.46%)
St. Louis City	42 (5.7%)	44 (6.68%)
Other	22 (3.0%)	16 (2.43%)

The majority of respondents completing the senior exit survey for both administration years indicated St. Louis County as their residence, which was where the high schools were located. The bordering Jefferson County provided a very similar number of respondents each year. The St. Louis City population numbers were most likely representative of surveys completed by students participating in the Voluntary Inter-district Choice Corporation (VICC) program through the desegregation agreement. The population of students who selected other could be identified as homeless through McKinney Vento Federal Act receiving transportation to the district, foster placements, or students attending under limited choice, which allows district employees to bring their children to school who reside in other school districts.

Table 19

*Q. 24 What is your ethnicity?*

Ethnicity	12-13	13-14
African American	49 (6.6%)	39 (5.93%)
Asian	31 (4.2%)	38 (5.78%)
Hispanic	23 (3.1%)	17 (2.58%)
White	606 (82.1%)	543 (82.52%)
Other	29 (3.9%)	21 (3.19%)

When comparing the district demographic data based upon the results of the senior exit survey for the respective years the surveys indicated a slightly higher percentage of response rates for White students. Adversely, there was a lower response rate for Asian and especially African American students. The percentages of White and Asian students completing the senior exit survey were slightly higher when compared to the DESE demographic totals yet lower findings were found for Black students. Since the data was suppressed for Hispanic students in DESE reporting due to a low sample size it was difficult to determine if the findings were representative.

Table 20

*Q. 25. Do you have a disability for which you have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP)?*

IEP Status	12-13	13-14
Yes	51 (6.9%)	74 (11.25%)
No	652 (88.3%)	553 (84.04%)
I don't know	35 (4.7%)	31 (4.71%)

The majority of students responding to the senior exit survey indicated they did not have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) requiring any accommodations or modifications. In the 2013-2014 data there was an increase in the number of the students who self-identified as having an IEP. A similar number of students in both years responded that they were unsure whether they had an IEP or not.

Table 21

*Q. 27 What is your grade point average?*

Grade Point Average	12-13	13-14
2.0 below	19 (2.6%)	12 (1.82%)
2.01-3.0	171 (23.2%)	144(21.88%)
3.01-4.0	409 (55.4%)	365 (55.47%)
Above 4.0	139 (18.8%)	137 (20.82%)

More than half of the respondents had a grade point average of a 3.0 or better and 93% or greater had a 2.0 or higher in both survey periods. Furthermore, a little more than an average of 2% of students with a grade point average of 2.0 or below completed the survey missing a critical voice of the student population who could potentially benefit from the support of the professional school counselor.

Students were asked to respond to a series of 26 questions, seven provided demographic information and 19 were content specific questions. The survey on average took about 10 minutes to complete. For the purpose of the program evaluation, the committee focused on questions that fell under the domains of study and provided support for our research questions and desired outcomes. The questions focused on the relationship and interactions of the students and the professional school counselor and college and career specialist.

Table 22

*Q. 1 How often did you meet with your counselor?*

Number of Meetings	12-13	13-14
1-2 times per year	440 (57.1%)	366 (53.82%)
3-5 times per year	245 (31.8%)	237 (34.85%)
Monthly	49 (6.4%)	41 (6.03%)
Weekly	8 (1%)	6 (0.88%)
Other (specify)	29 (3.8%)	30 (4.41%)

The majority of students indicated that they met with their professional school counselor once or twice a year, which was the district-recommended minimum. This process allowed a student who would not otherwise sign up to see their counselor to be called in once each semester for individual planning activities or check-ins. Roughly a third of the students who completed the survey were being seen more than the minimum amount. Students with more significant social-emotional, mental health, or family problems may require monthly if not weekly visits supported by the survey data. The final category labeled “other” asked students to be specific in their responses, which ranged from the majority stating they never meet with their school counselor, to meeting only for scheduling or students indicating they met daily to work through personal issues.

The responses provided a glimpse of the high school students’ relationship and interactions with the guidance and counseling staff within the district. The initial qualitative data provided information on the number of meetings students had with their professional school counselor but the ranking qualitative data provided a more in-depth view on the quality and overall efficiency of those interactions.

Table 23

*Q2, 11, & 13 Rate the following statements regarding your interactions with your counselor(s):*

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	N/A	Rating Average	Total Number
I felt comfortable meeting with my counselor	12-13: <b>50.2%</b> (387)	12-13: 40.2% (310)	12-13: 6.1% (47)	12-13: 2.1% (16)	12-13: 1.4% (11)	12-13: 3.41	12-13: 771
	13-14: <b>52.79%</b> (359)	13-14: 37.21% (253)	13-14: 5.44% (37)	13-14: 3.24% (22)	13-14: 1.32% (9)	13-14: 3.41	13-14: 680
I felt welcomed when I came in the guidance Center	12-13: <b>46.3%</b> (357)	12-13: 41.0% (316)	12-13: 8.4% (65)	12-13: 2.9% (22)	12-13: 1.4% (11)	12-13: 3.33	12-13: 771
	13-14: <b>55.29%</b> (376)	13-14: 34.41% (234)	13-14: 6.47% (44)	13-14: 1.91% (13)	13-14: 1.91% (13)	13-14: 3.46	13-14: 680
My counselor was effective in helping me during advisement with my Personal Plan of Study (5 Year Plan)	12-13: 21.0% (157)	12-13: <b>32.4%</b> (242)	12-13: 12.9% (96)	12-13: 6.3% (47)	12-13: 27.4% (205)	12-13: 2.94	12-13: 747
	13-14: 15.84% (105)	13-14: 31.07% (206)	13-14: 14.03% (93)	13-14: 7.69% (51)	13-14: <b>31.37%</b> (208)	13-14: 2.80	13-14: 663
My Counselor was effective in helping me choose appropriate courses for graduation requirements and post-secondary plans.	12-13: 32.9% (246)	12-13: <b>41.1%</b> (307)	12-13: 10.7% (80)	12-13: 4.8% (36)	12-13: 10.4% (78)	12-13: 3.14	12-13: 747
	13-14: 32.43% (215)	13-14: 39.97% (265)	13-14: 9.65% (64)	13-14: 5.73% (38)	13-14: 12.22% (81)	13-14: 3.13	13-14: 663
I'm aware that the counseling department offers assistance with anxiety, stress and relationships.	12-13: 29.8% (222)	12-13: <b>43.8%</b> (327)	12-13: 12.3% (92)	12-13: 7.2% (54)	12-13: 6.8% (51)	12-13: 3.03	12-13: 746
	13-14: 35.75% (237)	13-14: <b>45.10%</b> (299)	13-14: 8.90% (59)	13-14: 4.68% (31)	13-14: 5.58% (37)	13-14: 3.19	13-14: 663
I'm aware that the counseling department offers information on bullying, suicide prevention, and substance abuse.	12-13: 32.2% (240)	12-13: <b>45.7%</b> (341)	12-13: 9.9% (74)	12-13: 5.6% (42)	12-13: 6.6% (49)	12-13: 3.12	12-13: 746
	13-14: 37.41% (248)	13-14: <b>45.40%</b> (301)	13-14: 7.54% (50)	13-14: 4.07% (27)	13-14: 5.58% (37)	13-14: 3.23	13-14: 663
In times of crisis, I feel comfortable talking with my counselor.	12-13: 20.9% (156)	12-13: <b>25.5%</b> (190)	12-13: 21.0% (157)	12-13: 14.7% (110)	12-13: 17.6% (133)	12-13: 2.64%	12-13: 746
	13-14: 22.47% (149)	13-14: <b>30.32%</b> (201)	13-14: 19.0% (126)	13-14: 14.03% (93)	13-14: 14.18% (94)	13-14: 2.71	13-14: 14:663

Table 23, continued

*Q2, 11, & 13 Rate the following statements regarding your interactions with your counselor(s):*

I used my counselor as a resource in the building (academics, bullying, suicide & substance abuse)	12-13:	12-13:	12-13:	12-13:	12-13:	12-13:	12-13:
	19.8%	<b>25.9%</b>	14.7%	15.3%	24.3%	2.66	746
	(148)	(193)	(110)	(114)	(181)		
	13-14:	13-14:	13-14:	13-14:	13-14:	13-14:	13-14:
	21.27%	22.78%	14.93%	15.08%	<b>25.94%</b>	2.68	663
	(141)	(151)	(99)	(100)	(172)		

Overall, the majority of respondents (90%, both years) responded feeling comfortable meeting with their professional school counselor and visiting the guidance center. In terms of the services provided, both surveys revealed large numbers of students, roughly 30%, who indicated when asked about the counselor's effectiveness in providing advisement with the Personal Plan of Study (PPOS) that it did not apply and another 20% either disagreed or strongly disagreed. The PPOS was a document that followed the students from the middle school, which was reviewed and revised annually to assist students in making connections between the courses they took in high school and their post-secondary attainments. It was not only applicable to every student regardless of ability but a MSIP expectation and extremely necessary for students to become college and career ready.

Another area to highlight was the relationship between the high number of students who indicated an awareness of knowing the counselor can provide assistance for social-emotional, substance abuse and mental health concerns but the relatively small number of students who indicated that either they do not feel comfortable accessing those services or they did not use that assistance when needed. Students' mental health was identified as vitally important to the program evaluation committee. District social workers and professional school counselors wanted students to feel comfortable seeking

out support. The high school guidance and counseling department indicated this as an area to target for improvement.

Table 24

*Q. 5 Rate the following statements.*

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	N/A	Rating Average	Rating Count
I felt comfortable meeting with my college specialist.	12-13: <b>44.5%</b> (338)	12-13: 38.3% (291)	12-13: 4.9% (37)	12-13: 3.3% (25)	12-13: 9.1% (69)	12-13: 3.36	12-13: 760
	13-14: <b>47.01%</b> (315)	13-14: 38.06% (255)	13-14: 4.33% (29)	13-14: 2.09% (14)	13-14: 8.51% (57)	13-14: 3.42	13-14: 670
Phone calls & emails were returned in an efficient manner to me/my parents from the College Center	12-13: 35.9% (273)	12-13: <b>37.2%</b> (283)	12-13: 5.9% (45)	12-13: 2.9% (22)	12-13: 18% (137)	12-13: 3.30	12-13: 760
	13-14: 35.67% (239)	13-14: <b>40.3%</b> (270)	13-14: 4.78% (32)	13-14: 2.09% (14)	13-14: 8.51% (57)	13-14: 3.34	13-14: 670
I felt welcomed when I came into the college center	12-13: <b>43.7%</b> (332)	12-13: 39.2% (298)	12-13: 6.2% (47)	12-13: 2.0% (15)	12-13: 8.9% (68)	12-13: 3.37	12-13: 760
	13-14: <b>47.01%</b> 315	13-14: 38.51% (258)	13-14: 4.18% (28)	13-14: 1.64% (11)	13-14: 8.66% (58)	13-14: 3.43	13-14: 670

The data from both survey administrations showed the College and Career Specialists in a highly favorable light. In response to feeling comfortable with the college specialist and welcome in the center, similar to the counselor findings, the majority of the respondents agreed with that assertion. Equally important, in terms of the responsiveness and efficiency of the college specialist the respondents evaluated them in a positive manner. On an observational note, in seeking to understand the rationale for respondents marking the not applicable (n/a) section as it relates to College and Career Specialist an

evaluator error was uncovered. The question only referenced College Specialist not the full title of College and Career Specialist, which was a recent change since their role supported all students with transitions to universities, two-year colleges, military and the world of work. This may have influenced some of the results for respondents not transitioning from high school to college who therefore marked not applicable.

### **Internal Improvement Review (IIR)**

Program evaluations should address the question of whether the comprehensive guidance and counseling program was being fully implemented and to what extent.

Before exploring whether or not the guidance program in Midwest School District was having an impact on student performance, it was necessary to first determine whether there was a program in place to have an impact on relevant student outcomes.

Professional school counselors should spend an adequate amount of time in direct service with students, parents, and teachers in the implementation of their programs. Dr. Bragg Stanley, the district's independent expert for the program evaluation process and the Director of Guidance for the State of Missouri recommended completing the IIR to measure the extent the guidance and counseling program were actually in place in Midwest School District. DESE developed the Internal Improvement Review (IIR) to help districts and schools like Midwest with this work. In participating in this process, Midwest School District program evaluation committee and the guidance and counseling staff were able to take a realistic look at where it stood in the implementation of a comprehensive guidance program without punitive consequences and evaluation from DESE. Individual schools and the district were not concerned with appearances of how

things looked or being negatively impacted in anyway by using the IIR. The spirit of the instrument is one of continuous improvement committed to growth.

The IIR was specifically designed to be completed by a team of professional school counselors and administrators to identify areas of strengths and areas of improvement within the guidance program and then to establish a plan for improvement toward a fully implemented guidance program (Gysbers & Henderson, 1994). One of the most important aspects of the IIR was the development of an action plan, which outlined specific steps to be taken to improve the comprehensive guidance program. Midwest School District's focus on improvement and fully implementing the comprehensive guidance program allowed professional school counselors to effectively use their time in promoting the academic, personal/social and career development for all students. The IIR was divided into five sections: Overview, Curriculum, Individual Planning, Responsive Services, and Systems Support, and was developed using the framework of the Missouri School Improvement Program (MSIP) Guidance Standard. Each section was broken down into elements with detailed criteria that communicate what was necessary for implementation at each level. Each element can be rated as 4- fully implemented, 3- substantially implemented, 2- moderately implemented, or 1 - minimally or not implemented. The rubric that accompanied the IIR helped to provide assistance in determining the rating for each element within a section. The rubric identified conditions that would indicate full implementation or evidence that would need to exist according to the criteria listed on the rubric for that element. The Substantial category was where most responses were expected to fall and indicated that most of the implementation had occurred. Moderate indicated there was some degree of implementation but a

considerable amount was still needed. Finally, minimal meant that little or no implementation of an element had taken place.

Some of the areas may be difficult for guidance programs to achieve based upon their current conditions but the standard provided a status to aspire to reach to improve the overall comprehensive program and ultimately increase student success. Ratings should be based upon professional judgment, documented evidence and the systems in place within the comprehensive program. The use of the summary sheet assisted in compiling and analyzing scores, which provided the district with a sense of the degree the comprehensive guidance program was actually being implemented. It allowed Midwest to identify areas of strength where the guidance program was already being implemented to a high degree. The IIR also allowed the district program evaluation committee the opportunity to identify and select areas where improvement efforts were needed and should be directed. The team completing the rating scored the column for that particular element consulting sources identified by the district to help determine what rating a particular element was given. The scoring summary page was also referenced in compiling and analyzing results and determine meaning.

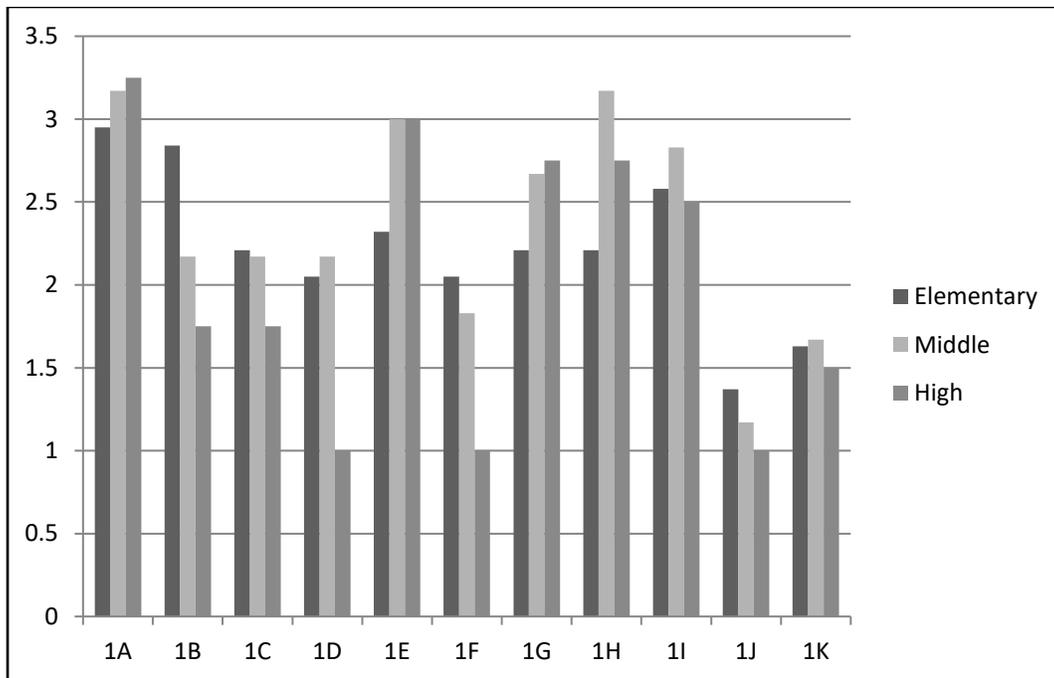
Before using the IIR, the program evaluation committee determined what level would be evaluated and how that work would take place. Since Midwest School District's program evaluation was district wide K-12 evaluation, it was determined that each individual building would be rated and district averages composed by level. This allowed individual buildings an opportunity to have access to their own data and develop action plans to address growth opportunities at the building level while providing a comprehensive programmatic view on where Midwest stood as a district. The next

discussion point for the committee centered around who would complete the rating.

DESE recommended the professional school counselor and administrator in collaboration complete the IIR. The district recommended the IIR be completed at the building level by the leadership team, which consisted of the principal or assistant principal, professional school counselor, school social worker and the district school climate and counseling facilitator for that level or as availability allowed. This enabled the administrators to be more aware of the extent to which the comprehensive guidance program was being implemented in their buildings.

The first section of the IIR was the overview, which included the content and organizational framework of the comprehensive guidance and counseling program, and the building and district Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP) plans. The overview looked at the structure of the guidance program and instructional objectives. The guidance and counseling program must support the attainment of CSIP goals at the building and district level in order to be considered an integral part of the total educational plan and related to student performance data. Another consideration was having a current curriculum supported by state and/or national standards and grade level expectations integrated with the school's instructional program. How the program was evaluated was also addressed under the overview section, which included evaluation of the program itself, the personnel who implemented the program, and the results that were shown by the actions and interventions of professional school counselors also referred to as Program + Personnel = Results. The program evaluation process, time task analysis, or MSIP 5 process standard checklist were evaluative tools for the program in place. The Counselor Evaluation Instrument (CEI) was the standard by which professional school

counselors are judged professionally. The results based counseling projects and pre and post assessments during classroom guidance activities were just some of the ways counselors evaluated their overall effectiveness on student outcomes. The following indicated the percentage points earned on Midwest School District Fall 2013 Internal Improvement Review (IIR) overview section.



*Figure 2.* Percentage of points earned RSD IIR- fall 2013 overview.

The program evaluation committee reviewed the results of the IIR focusing on areas receiving a score of one (1) indicating minimal or no implementation or two (2) moderate implementation. Areas scoring within this range would help to identify the gaps in Midwest School Districts programming thus uncovering areas for continuous improvement and overall growth. Within these areas the recommendations were put forth to the board of education for consideration. Overview element 1B, 1C, 1D, 1F and 1J all referenced components of a guidance manual which were not in place at the time.

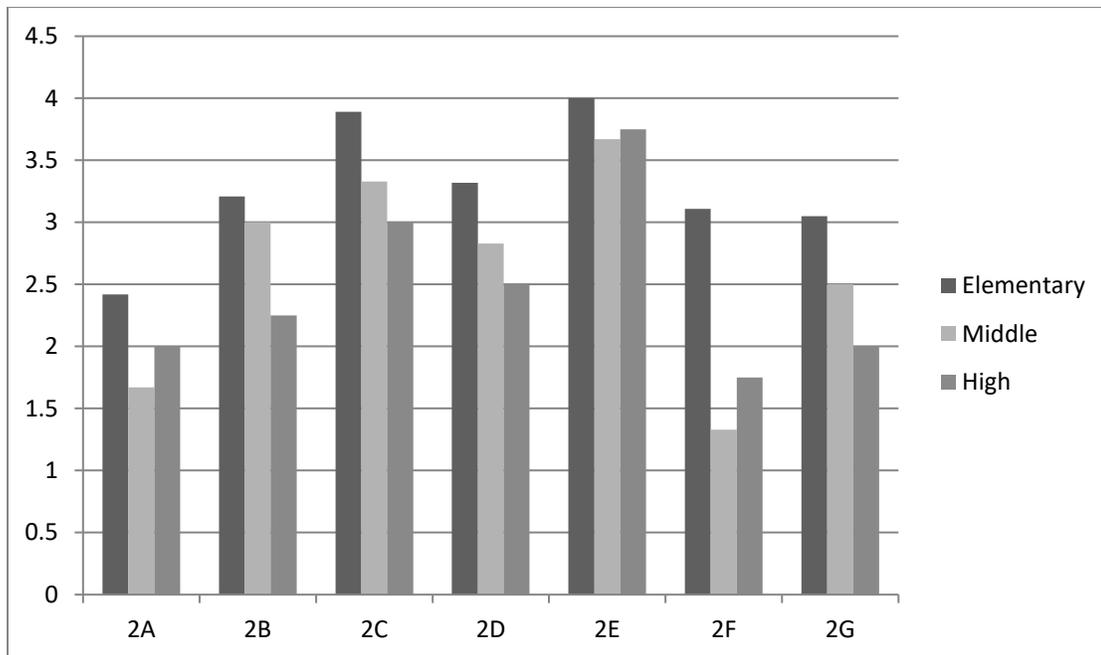
Fragmented pieces were present but not all organized in a centrally located area

accessible to counselors. Element 1B drew attention to the fact that a current guidance and counseling policy was not in place in Midwest School District. Element 1K, examined staffing ratios and all areas districtwide identified either moderate or minimal implementation based upon nationally recommended standards. The sentiments around staffing were also echoed in the input and design team meetings from all stakeholders surrounding alignment with state and national standards and equitable staffing models among district buildings.

The second major section of the IIR was the comprehensive guidance curriculum, which was based upon the current standards and grade level expectations in the areas of personal and social development, academic development and career development. Under this section the district must also consider how the comprehensive guidance program provided content in a systematic way to all students within the building or district K-12 while being sensitive to individual needs and necessary modifications. Curriculum must be reviewed and revised on a regular basis with articulations at each grade level with identified objectives that were developmentally appropriate. Adequate resources must be in place to fully implement the curriculum including instructional supplies, space and personnel. In Midwest due to district budgetary restraints, the full curriculum evaluation process was put on hold and guidance, and counseling curriculum was last updated in 2005, which will most likely influence results. Ordinarily the full-scale curriculum timeline was on a six-year cycle with content areas reviewing and revising yearly for minor tweaks and changes.

The results for the Curriculum Section of the IIR for Midwest School District for the most part were mixed. There were marked differences in the responses from

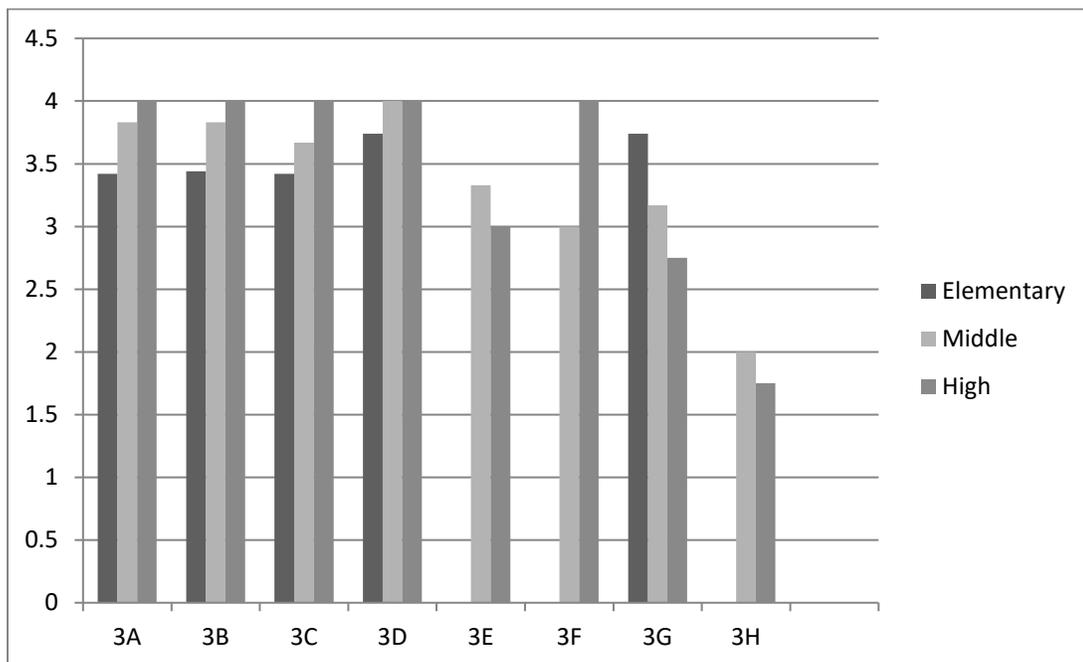
elementary professional school counselors who ranked some elements as substantially implemented (3) or fully implemented (4) versus high and middle school professional school counselors who responded as minimal or moderately implemented. During the Input Team meetings, guidance curriculum was identified as an area to improve for overall consistency and K-12 alignment. The results are as follows:



*Figure 3.* Percentage of points earned RSD IIR- fall 2013 curriculum.

The next section was Individual Planning, which involved assisting students in the planning, monitoring and managing of their academic, personal-social and career development. This component was more commonly implemented at the middle and high level and associated more with secondary students; however, it was equally important at the elementary level. Professional school counselors at the secondary level spent a great deal of time scheduling, course selections and recommendations, communicating credit status, and making connections with students current coursework and activities as it related to post-secondary plans. The personal plan of study was a tool that enabled students to set their own goals to address their career needs and were required by DESE

to be in place by the end of eighth grade. It is also important to note that these goals and plans needed to be reviewed annually and revised as necessary each year with parental involvement. In the Individual Planning process, elementary counselors also had a major foundational role where different types of grade appropriate activities were conducted at each level for a comprehensive approach. The analysis of the individual planning component of the IIR for Midwest School District yielded the following results:



*Figure 4.* Percentage of points earned RSD IIR- fall 2013 individual planning.

Individual Planning was identified as a strength for Midwest School District Guidance and Counseling department. Secondary schools provided the highest scores in this area more than any other element. Several areas identified for growth opportunities were the development of a districtwide Personal Plan of Study (PPOS) and updating the district Career and Educational Planning Guide.

The next component was responsive services, which addressed the immediate needs and concerns of students in crisis and their availability if needed to access services.

Responsive services was an area where Midwest professional school counselors and district social workers indicated a great deal of time was spent. When working directly with students and prioritizing work students in crisis were always first. It was important to have different types of services available to assist students and families dealing with various concerns and when necessary to refer outside for services. Services such as responding to grief and loss, substance abuse and misuse concerns, non-suicidal and suicidal self-injury, conflict resolution, eating disorders, and housing assistance, just to name a few. A list of resources should be available to aid professional school counselors in referring students and families when appropriate. The district had a resource referral database of psychiatrists and psychologists along with a directory of external agencies to refer students and families. The St. Louis County Children Service fund accessible to all St. Louis County residents operated based upon a 1/4 cent tax that allowed families to access resources free for children up to age 19. Procedural guidelines should also be in place to support accomplishing referrals both within and outside of the school setting. In Midwest, the standard was to provide three referrals to students and families whenever possible without endorsement of services. The IIR results for the Midwest School District's responsive services component were as follows:

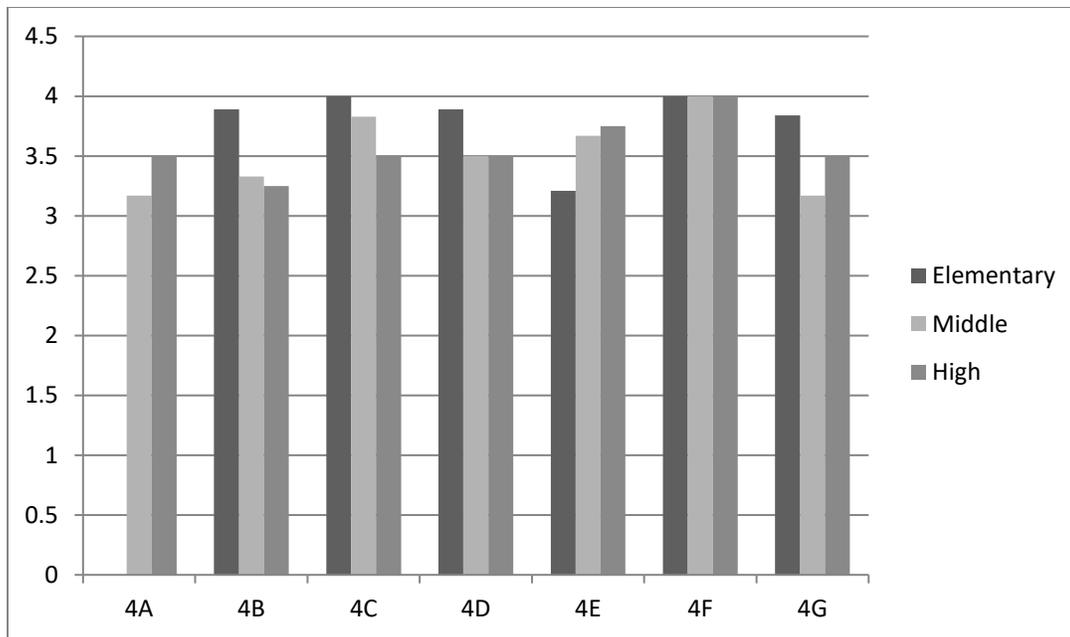


Figure 5. Percentage of points earned RSD IIR- fall 2013 individual responsive services.

Responsive Services represents another area where Midwest School District professional school counselors rated their level of services as high. At all levels consistently, counseling departments were viewed as responding to families in need or experiencing a crisis in the range of (3) substantially or (4) fully. Although this element ranked the highest, opportunities for growth identified during the input team meetings were focused on continuing to support students and families after the crisis had passed with long-term care options or therapeutic school-based counseling services.

The last area of the IIR was System Support, which was necessary for management, and support of comprehensive guidance and counseling programs. System Support did not involve direct services to a student and can be often overlooked in determining the degree of implementation of a program. However, this area was crucial in maintaining and improving the comprehensive guidance program in a school or district. Tasks within this component included time-task analysis, establishing priorities, relevant professional development opportunities, service on building and district

committees and continual program improvement. System Support provided the opportunity for the comprehensive guidance program to be fully implemented within the building or district. It should involve a strong collaborative relationship between the professional school counselor and administrators. The following indicates the percentage of points earned in Midwest School District on the IIR in fall of 2013.

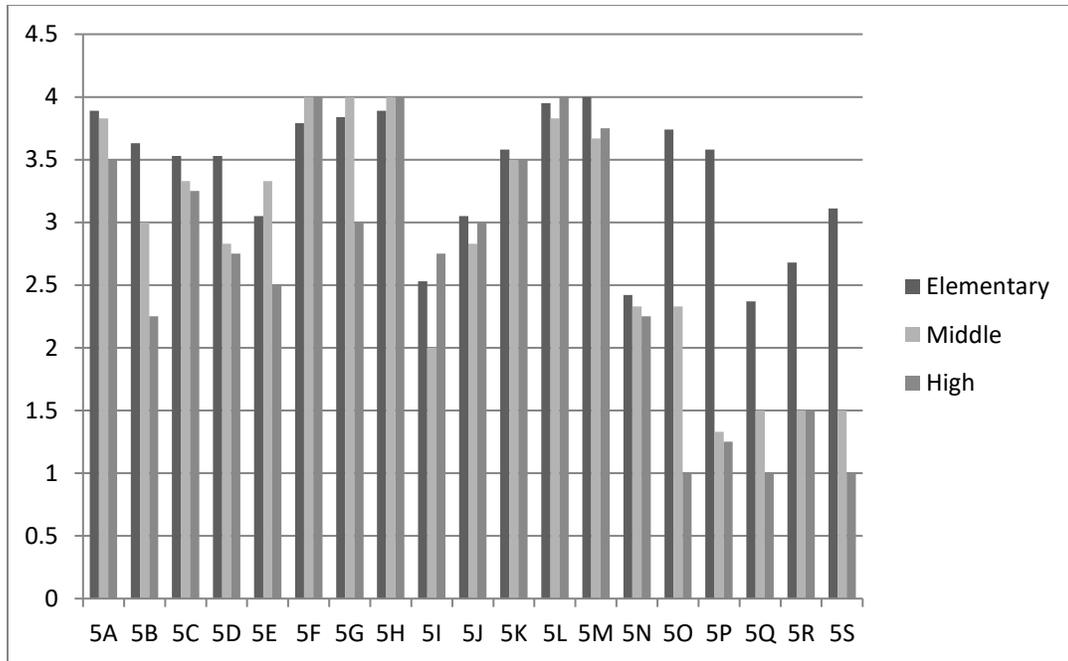


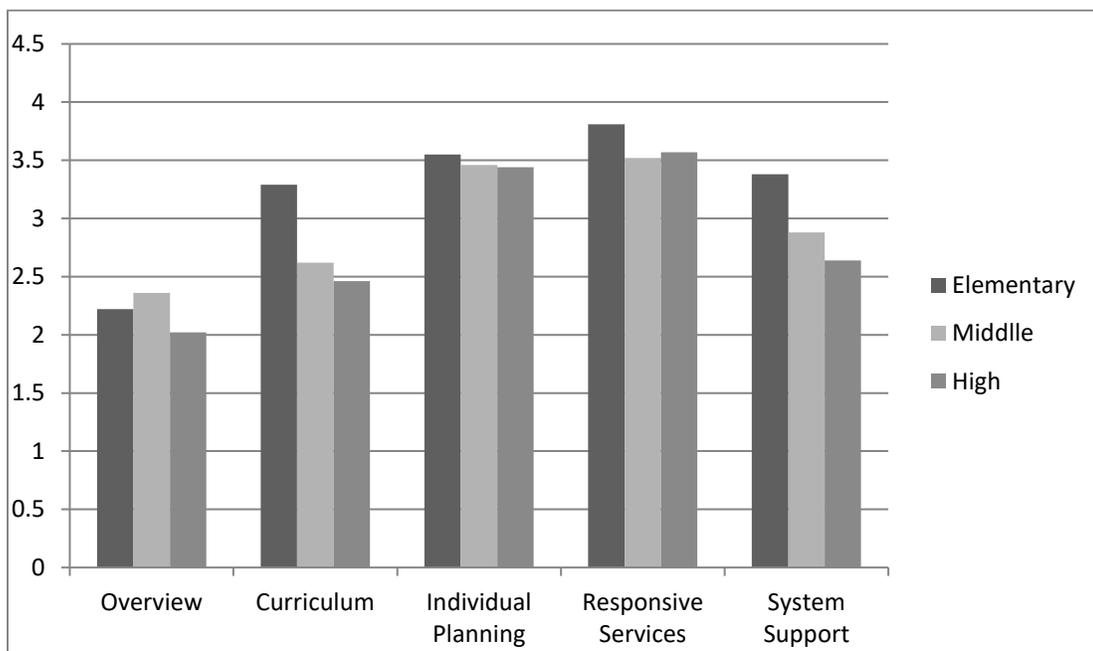
Figure 6. Percentage of points earned RSD IIR- fall 2013 system support.

System support concerns for the Midwest School District centered on program evaluation efforts not occurring on an ongoing basis or being reported to the identified stakeholders. Low scores were also received for not having action plans in place as a result of program evaluation efforts to guide the work of the professional school counselors. The final major concern was that the professional school counselor’s time was not being spent implementing the comprehensive guidance and counseling program, based upon the time task analysis results.

Once the degree of implementation was determined and areas of strength identified along with those areas in need of improvement the results were shared with the program evaluation committee. All of the IIR results were sent to the Office of Testing and Assessment to aid in the process of formatting results districtwide, and the data analyzed into a comprehensive report based upon responses from all five sections. This information was shared with both the Input and Design Teams and the Board of Education including suggested plans for improvement. Reviewing this data through the lens of the essential questions provided by Dr. Stanley (What do you see? Why do you say that?) allowed several observations to be brought forward by the input team.

Suggestions or recommendations included feedback from all categories of the IIR. Under the program overview, the district must take a critical look at staffing ratios and if the current model best meets the needs of students. One of the major concerns expressed by staff before the program evaluation began was the reduction in force of professional school counselors at the secondary level so this was not surprising. In the area of curriculum, it was noted that the curriculum itself was outdated and inequities existed in the ability of elementary counselors to implement curriculum in classrooms while secondary counselors felt limited by their responsive service needs. While elementary professional school counselors were in classrooms on a weekly basis, secondary professional school counselors felt limited by other areas of the job usually individual planning or responsive services. The individual planning area identified strong transition and career planning activities in Midwest School District. Districtwide the implementation of this standard seemed to be the most consistent at all levels. Although, the PPOS was in place by the end of a student's eighth grade in Midwest School District,

the process was different at each middle school and yearly follow up did not transition to all four high schools. Under the area of responsive services, the increasing needs of students and families was identified and the priority of following up with immediate assistance was stressed. Buildings at each level reported doing a great job in this area, however, it was identified as being a high need that takes up a lot of the professional school counselor and district social worker's time. Buildings felt that a great job responding immediately to a crisis but the additional follow-up support long-term proved challenging. District totals per category are as follows:



*Figure 7.* District totals fall 2013 IIR.

The system support area highlighted the importance of advocating for and understanding the work of the guidance and counseling department and addressing discrepancies in fair share duties. Advocacy can take place through formalized groups like the Guidance Advisory Council and Board of education meetings or informal structures like administrators in their buildings, district leaders, teachers, parents and self-

advocacy. Professional School Counselors must do a better job of branding themselves and communicating to others just what it is they do.

The Office of Data Analysis and Continuous Improvement collected and analyzed the data and developed disaggregated reports summarizing the results shared with professional school counselors to inform their work and involve stakeholders. This report was presented during the Board of Education meeting along with communicating the recommendations identified through the program evaluation. Level discussions were held with both elementary and secondary professional school counselors to share observations and thoughts after completing building IIR analysis as a team and reviewing reports of the district combined totals.

Elementary summary discussions are as follows based upon the four program components. Under program review, the need for a current manual in place that includes all of the required documents (job descriptions, policies that relate to department, resources) was emphasized. The need for a defined process for documentation of interventions for results based counseling programs and a district policy that defines the school counseling program was noted. The Guidance Advisory Council (GAC) was identified as needing to be more visible to all stakeholders by posting guidelines, emailing minutes to all counselors and the goals and mission of GAC on the district website and manual. Under the curriculum, section it was determined that even though the individuals yearly reviewed the guidance and counseling curriculum informally the district had not updated the curriculum since 2005. The curriculum must be coordinated, integrated, and aligned Common Core, MSIP 5, ASCA and state standards. Individual planning was identified as a program strength in the areas of transitions and response to

intervention (RTI). Responsive Services was identified as the greatest strength at the elementary level. System Support component was highlighted as having a need to communicate with all stakeholders exactly what a comprehensive guidance and counseling program entails. More equality for elementary counselors with budgets for professional development and conferences and define roles and what fair share means including 504 and Testing Coordinators or administering makeup test, IEP and other duties was petitioned. Consistent feedback on time task analysis with building, district and state recommended statistics was requested as well as action plans to improve the comprehensive guidance and counseling program after the evaluation results are back.

Secondary counselors were allowed an opportunity to complete the same process as the elementary school counselors utilizing the method of open discussions and written responses on feedback sheets. The secondary group included both middle and high school counselor's responses together since both groups were impacted by reduction in force and job responsibilities are similar. The results were as follows based upon the five categories. Under the overview section, fair share duties and system support were identified as having increased because of counselor cuts some examples were longer lunch shift duties and serving on more committees requiring counselor representation. Counselors reported that they had no counseling manual in place and that they were unsure of the role of the Guidance Advisory Council or how productive it was. Under the curriculum section a need for an eighth grade survey that mirrors the senior survey was discussed and collaboration time to address the outdated curriculum and programs of studies was identified as a need. Under Individual planning the need to create a Personal Plan of Study (PPOS) document in an online format was highlighted. In the area of

Responsive Services responses indicated that it takes a team approach because counseling staff cannot do it all. In addition, the full time Social Worker was identified as a need and staff reported struggles with the management of the program based upon the current staffing model. In the area of Stem Supports, it was reported that not all stakeholders understand the comprehensive guidance and counseling program and feedback was needed on the time task analysis. Better relationships with building level and district administrators was desired as inclusion on district committees where counselors voices should be heard; yet often times too many committees.

The IIR results and the discussion points received from the professional school counselors and input team were heavily considered by the program evaluation committee when determining recommendations and identifying ways to grow the overall guidance and counseling programs.

### **Independent Expert with Dr. Bragg Stanley**

The Design Team as a part of the program evaluation process decided to consultant with an outside independent expert with the overall purpose and desired outcome in mind. The committee decided to research noted figures in the field of professional school counseling throughout the state of Missouri. The initial applicant pool was narrowed down both locally and regionally through the process of screening, and ultimately Dr. Bragg Stanley was selected as the independent expert. Dr. Stanley was the Director of Guidance and Counseling for the state of Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. He had served as a teacher, school counselor, director of special programs, high school guidance director, and a secondary coordinator for guidance. Dr. Stanley had served as an adjunct professor for counseling, given numerous

presentations at the local, regional, state, national and international level, authored several publications, and received numerous awards and recognitions. The Design Team sought the guidance of Dr. Stanley as the content knowledge expert and authority on state expectations to support the work of the program evaluation in Midwest School District. To guide this discussion the committee reviewed the analysis of the Internal Improvement Review (IIR) results for the district guided by two questions: What do you see? and What makes you say that? Some of the notable observations are included but are not limited to the following:

- High school curriculum scored 2.46 out of 4 possible points. This was the lowest of all three levels.
- There are high percentages of points earned on both Individual Planning and Responsive Services in comparison to System Support and Overview at all levels.
- Overview was the lowest of all percentages earned among the five tasks. All levels (elementary, middle, and high) range in 50% of points earned.
- In the curriculum category, elementary was higher in points earned at 82%. Points drop off at middle (65%) and high school (62%) level.
- Elementary schools completed 19 IIRs. Middle completed six IIRs. High school had only four IIRs.

This could influence the results of the data.

The data indicated that curriculum was implemented more fully at the elementary level. Dr. Stanley noted that this was consistent with trends at the state level as well. Barriers to full implementation of the guidance curriculum increased at the middle and high school levels. Issues related to responsive services pulled counselors away from

curriculum implementation and these issues tended to be more prevalent at the secondary level. Dr. Stanley noted that a supplemental document titled *Beyond Barriers to Solutions: Actions That Promote Progress* (Gysbers et al., 2015) was referenced in the DESE manual will provide insight on tips to reduce barriers to curriculum implementation. Dr. Stanley also noted that System Support included professional school counselors “fair-share” duties. These duties include two questions: 1) What duties are needed in order to help support our program and 2) What are we doing to help the overall mission of the school? An example was service on committees as counselors were integral to the overall mission of the school. Dr. Stanley acknowledged that Midwest had done a great job of protecting counselors’ time in fair share duties and fulfilling the responsibility of getting counselors “into” the school and district mission. The big questions were: How are professional school counselors making a difference because of what they do? How are we effectively intervening with students to ensure they are impacting student attendance and test scores? How did the guidance and counseling program support student learning? These were all important questions to be raised and provided focus for where the Design Team should spend their time to assess the impact professional school counselors had on student outcomes. Essentially, it was necessary first to analyze and identify what school counselors did and then determine if students benefitted from of this work.

The next task was to review the Midwest School District professional school counselor’s time task analysis results with Dr. Stanley. Once again, as the design team dissected what the data was telling us we kept in mind the two essential questions: What do you see? What makes you say that? Some of the observations of the data included:

- Nine percent of middle school counselor time was spent on the implementation of curriculum.
- Individual planning time was much higher rate at the high school level compared to middle and elementary schools.
- Responsive services time on task was the highest at the middle school level at 51%.

It was noted that time task percentages did not equal 100%. Non-guidance activities also accounted for less than two percent of activities for professional school counselors. It was questioned during the Design Team that perhaps counselors were not informed what was included in fair share duties and therefore this was recognized as an area to review with school counselors in professional learning activities. The data was collected during two consecutive days in four months October, December, March, and May. During the March and May dates, both of these months were heavily weighted with individual planning task-driven activities at the secondary level with registration course selection and graduation activities. This may have skewed the data for the time task analysis with the heavy emphasis in the area of individual planning based upon programming activities that fell during this time in the guidance calendar. A year-long cycle on the time-task provided a more comprehensive measurement for analysis.

It was noted that the percentiles in the area of guidance curriculum on the time task analysis did not match up with the data received from the IIR. The inconsistent data may be attributed to the wide range of programming options available in Midwest School District. For example, high schools had a Freshman Seminar class, which was part of guidance curriculum, but counselors were not delivering the curriculum rather classroom

teachers. Since the actual manpower of the professional school counselor was not required to implement the curriculum, this may not be reflected on time-task reports. This approach viewed counseling as a program that can be implemented by various individuals and support systems rather than one individual. The Leader in Me program which was implemented at many of Midwest's elementary and middle schools was another example of guidance curriculum that was not delivered by the guidance counselor but by the teacher in the classroom but still was included in the overall guidance program.

In counseling delivery, Midwest had specialized roles of college and career counselors and social workers that supported the comprehensive guidance and counseling program in Midwest School District. Midwest was a large suburban district that had more supports in place to implement the guidance curriculum through the courses offered or the support of the Partners in Education (PIE) department, which organized lessons to be taught by vetted external speakers to cover a wide range of topics addressed in the guidance curriculum. This support allowed more time for professional school counselors to do other things. Dr. Stanley noted that the guidance curriculum was being delivered in the district, but the district was unable to determine the effectiveness of the program delivery. In other words, was the Midwest School District implementing the guidance curriculum with fidelity? How were the students different based upon what the district and counseling department was doing? Based upon the time task analysis results, high school counselors spend 54% of their time on individual planning activities. However, on the IIR, they noted 86% percent for points earned in individual planning. The district promoted a college-going culture and an emphasis was placed on students being college and career ready equipped with 21st century skills therefore this overrepresentation in the

area of individual planning was not surprising to the design team members. Dr. Bragg Stanley noted that Midwest was doing a great job implementing their program. He was impressed with the percentage of points earned across the board.

The Design Team asked Dr. Stanley several questions and the responses are available as follows:

**Question to Dr. Stanley:** When we look at IIR – do we have too much going on? Should we do a better job of creating priorities for our counselors rather than doing everything?

**Answer from Dr. Stanley:** That is how the IIR works. After a school completes the IIR, then we can see what the strengths are and what we need to improve. You look at the action plan and develop those next steps to improve your program. That includes defining what you need to keep doing, and what action you need to take to improve. It is recommended that schools complete the IIR every three years, and determine short-term and long-term action plans. This action plan can be part of the district's CSIP goals.

**Question to Dr. Stanley:** What advice can you give Midwest regarding standardizing the comprehensive guidance and counseling program and how should the district define the roles and responsibilities for the members within the program? We understand the needs of individual schools and this requires autonomy, but we also have heard from the Input Team the need for consistency. How do we bridge the gap?

**Answer from Dr. Stanley:** School districts around the state have felt the budget crunch. This makes us focus on Grade Level Expectations (GLEs) and making sure we are covering those important areas that impact students. First, we need to define what needs to happen and then we talk about how to deliver this type of program. For example,

individual planning is part of the State of Missouri's Top 10 by 20 efforts as is a personal plan of study (PPOS). But, having a "document" or system in place is different than "understanding" at the student level. So we need to look at how does individual planning support this process? How do our resources help us develop a meaningful plan of study that will lead to a post-secondary transition for the student? Those are the types of questions to ask. First, comes the program and then we must determine what resources we can dedicate to the program. Next, schools or districts can complete individual IIRs from which plans of action can be created to make things happen. Schools tend to spend their time "scheduling" versus involved in true individual planning activities. Individual planning is the process that we utilize to prepare our students for college and a career. It will allow our students to have the knowledge and skills to be good consumers of options for post-graduate study. This is what the "Pathways to Prosperity" initiative through Harvard graduate school of Education is all about in the state of Missouri.

**Question to Dr. Stanley:** In Midwest, we have a high level of responsive services in high-risk schools. Where is the flexibility as it relates to the IIR? Is it more important to meet the responsive needs of students, versus implementing the curriculum? If we did more curriculum implementation, would responsive needs go down?

**Answer from Dr. Stanley:** Yes, there is data out there to indicate that if you enable a child up front, then that child will have less of a need for responsive services in the future. It's the same questions we receive at the state level - statewide consistency and local flexibility. It's going to look different from building to building. What's important is to learn the language of the program and build an understanding – so we are all going in the same direction.

As a final note, Dr. Stanley recommended to be cautious when we looked at school/district programs that delivered guidance curriculum. The supporting programs that expanded upon our comprehensive guidance and counseling program may not be in place next year. That is why it is important to conduct an IIR every three years to ensure programming is not lost. Dr. Stanley noted that he had been energized by the conversation with the Design Team and stated, “Midwest has one of the strongest guidance counseling programs in the state, a leader in Missouri.”

### **Character Education and School Climate Surveys**

Three Character Education and School Climate Surveys were conducted in the spring of 2013: a K-2 survey, 3-5 survey, and parent survey. All three of these surveys focused on three areas: Autonomy, Belonging, and Competence. For the purpose of the program evaluation, the input committee reviewed and discussed data from the 3-5 survey as it related to the professional school counselor. The survey question was as follows:

Table 25

#### *Q.5 Character/ School Climate Survey*

Q. 5 Please check all the people you can talk to about a problem.

	3rd	4th	5th	Response Totals
Teacher	96.6% (1,551)	95.3% (1,517)	90.3% (1,588)	94.0% (4,656)
Counselor	85.9% (1,378)	89.6% (1,426)	90.2% (1,586)	88.6% (4,390)
Principal	84.1% (1,350)	79.8% (1,270)	74.1% (1,303)	79.2% (3,923)

Most of the data presented during the program evaluation was generated from grades 6-12 or the secondary level. Because elementary school buildings are leaders in

character education, and the elementary counselor usually has a prominent role, it provided an opportunity to have a meaningful discussion around data from the elementary student perspective.

The data received from students indicated as students matriculated to higher grades, there was a downward trend in the teacher and principal being viewed as a trusting adult at school in contrast to the upward mobility present in the school counselor data. As students transitioned into upper elementary grades in Midwest School District they began to increasingly view the professional school counselor as someone they could talk to about problems or concerns. The role of the professional school counselor involved serving as an advocate for students that centered around establishing a relationship based upon trust and respect. District data supported that students' view their school counselors were allies they could contact when they needed to talk or problem solve.

### **Child Abuse and Neglect**

Missouri Children's Division Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline Unit required that school personnel act as mandated reporters when they suspect child abuse or neglect. The hotline provided an opportunity for individuals to confidentially report suspected abuse, neglect or exploitation of children. In Midwest School District, professional school counselors or social workers in most cases placed reports of child abuse or neglect. However, all members of certain occupational groups such as teachers, educators, social workers, physicians, and those having direct contact with students were mandated reporters. Not only were they required to report but in 2004, Missouri law required individuals to identify themselves when making a report. All reports were received

through a centralized toll-free number, which was answered seven days a week, 24 hours a day. During Input Team meetings, counselors and social workers noted the rising social-emotional needs and increase in reports of child abuse and neglect incidences. They indicated that much of their time was spent in responsive services areas responding to students in crisis leaving less time to implement their comprehensive school counseling programs. Data was compiled from the 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 school years and gathered from the end of first quarter of the 2013-2014 school year, which drew attention to the increase in mandated reporting. Child Abuse reports were not tracked or monitored prior to the 2011 school year. However, data reflected an increase in the number of reports in the 2012-2013 school when compared to the previous year. In addition, the data was analyzed halfway through first semester, yet it appeared to be on track for continuing upwards increasing the total number of cases reported.

Table 26

*Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting*

School Year	Elementary	Middle	High	Totals
11-12	38	11	9	58
12-13	57	30	5	92
13-14	21	10	3	34
Totals	116	51	17	184

*Note.* \* 13-14 school year data was collected from the end of first quarter.

**Missouri Student Survey (MSS)**

The Missouri Student Survey (MSS also known as the Safe and Drug-Free Schools survey) was conducted in even-numbered years since 2000. This survey tracked risk behaviors of students in grades 6-12 attending public schools in the state of Missouri. The survey included questions on alcohol, tobacco, and drug use and other behaviors that endangered physical health, emotional wellness, personal safety and security. The

Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, the Missouri Department of Mental Health and the Division of Behavioral Health conducted the survey jointly. The Missouri Institute of Mental Health analyzed the survey data and summarized the results in the MSS report for school districts at no charge. This survey provided Midwest School District an opportunity to learn more about students' tobacco, drug, and alcohol use as well as bullying and mental health concerns, which allowed buildings to plan prevention activities and programming in response to student needs. The results also provided information necessary for local grant applications in Midwest like the Drug Free Coalition federal grant.

The results of the Missouri Student Survey (MSS) were reported from the spring 2014 administration window with both Midwest School District and the state of Missouri data to provide more context. The survey consisted of 63 questions however for the purpose of the program evaluation on certain domains and results were examined. On average, it took 10 minutes to complete the survey, but the survey had no time restrictions. Approximately 66,609 students in the state of Missouri completed the MSS with roughly 4,415 completed in Midwest School District. The percentages of students in each grade level were as follows: sixth grade 11.1%, seventh grade 23.5%, eighth 12.3%, ninth 17.1%, 10th 14.2%, 11th 13.6%, and 12th 8.2%. Racially, the demographics were as follows: 83% were White, 4.7% Hispanic, 1.6% American Indian, 6.7% Asian, 9.3% Black, 0.9% Pacific Islander, and 4% identified as other. When broken down by gender, 49.8% of the respondents were male and 50.2% were female.

As it related to the data considered by the committee when conducting the program evaluation, several key domains were explored that fell under the umbrella of a

comprehensive guidance and counseling program. The topics included post-secondary transitions, personal safety and security, bullying and suicide, and self-harm.

Table 27

*Q. 11 What are your plans after you graduate high school?*

	Frequency	Percent
Go to College	3947	89.38
Go to Technical School	52	1.18
Get a Job	49	1.11
Join the Military	128	2.90
Don't know	185	4.19
Other	55	1.25

Note: Frequency Missing = 14

The survey results supported the fact that students in Midwest School District overwhelmingly intended to transition to a four year university. The district promoted a college going culture and professional school counselors spent a great deal of time in individual planning to explore students skills and interest, making connections with their coursework and examining post-secondary options. The findings were also consistent with the MSIP 5 data that indicated that the four-year and two year combined college totals were around 88%.

Table 28

*Q. 14 During the past 30 days, on how many days did you not go to school because you felt you would be unsafe at school or on your way to or from school?*

	Frequency	Percent
0 days	4226	96.86
1 days	101	2.29
2 or 3 days	34	0.77
4 or 5 days	18	0.41
6 or more	30	0.68

Frequency Missing = 21

Overwhelmingly, based upon the MSS, students identify as feeling safe in Midwest School District buildings. Many of Midwest School District buildings were state

and national schools or character where the intent was purposeful to ensure that all students felt a sense of belongingness and safety. Professional school counselors delivered guidance lessons under respecting one's self and others, run groups and provided conflict mediation when necessary.

Table 29

*Q.15 I feel safe at school.*

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	178	4.02
Disagree	227	5.13
Agree	2331	52.70
Strongly Disagree	1687	38.14

Frequency Missing = 7

Responses were consistent with previous answers with the majority of students agreeing that they felt safe at school. More investigation is needed to determine the grade, location, and cause that 10% of the population did not feel safe at school. When comparing to the previous questions, more students identified themselves as feeling unsafe but yet still came to school.

Table 30

*Q.16 I feel safe going to and from school?*

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	181	4.10
Disagree	203	4.60
Agree	2134	48.32
Strongly Disagree	1898	42.98

Frequency Missing = 14

The majority of students indicated they feel safe going to and from school. However, 8.7% disagreed with this finding indicating a possible unsafe situation on the bus or along a route for walkers.

Table 31

*Q. 23 During the past 12 months, have you been bullied on school property?*

	Frequency	Percent
No	3208	73.29
Yes	1169	26.71

Frequency Missing = 53

The glaring statistic is that 27% of the students reported being bullied on school property indicating the district must continue to be aware of hot spots for this kind of activity and clearly set and enforce expectations for school wide behavior. In addition, the frequency of 53 missing was the highest number of students deciding to skip the question, which could represent higher numbers than reported.

Table 32

*Q. 35 During the past 12 months, did you ever seriously consider attempting suicide?*

	Frequency	Percent
No	3971	90.02
Yes	440	9.98

Frequency Missing = 19

Of particular concern during the program evaluation process were the number of students who had seriously considered harming themselves. Professional school counselors and school social workers identified students mental health concerns as being extremely important and a driving force of their work. The Missouri Student Survey captured the voice of Midwest School District's sixth through 12th grade students intent to harm themselves and overall mental health which provided data about the necessity to help students find hope, develop coping skills, and seek alternatives to suicide.

**Lethality Assessments**

Midwest School District believed that staff members were in a distinct position to assist students in dealing with threats of suicide. Any indicators of suicide must be taken seriously and professional school counselors and district social workers should provide intervention immediately which varied based upon the level of risk assessed. Guidelines have been established through district policies and regulations to ensure that clear and consistent communication exist on the district response to the threat of suicidal behavior. The overall goal of suicide intervention was to provide hope, ensure safety, seek alternatives, and identify resources.

Once staff members have been made aware of any indication of potential suicide, threats must be taken seriously and reported to a building administrator immediately. The student should not be left alone during this time to ensure their personal safety. While conferencing with the professional school counselor, district social worker, school nurse, or a building administrator, a Life Plan or lethality assessment will be completed. A Life Plan (Lethality Assessment, Intervention, Follow Up, Emotional Encouragement) consisted of a student's demographic information and notes from the incident. During the Lethality Assessment phase forms were completed by a professional school counselor, school social worker, school nurse, or building administrator/designee which were officially filed in the student's health record. The assessments started by gathering key details about the plan for the suicide attempt through probing questions like the desired timeframe and location, method to be used, and access or availability of means. Evaluators must then document the student's mood and history with depression followed by a list of behaviors and feelings as they relate to the individual. Any substance abuse

and misuse, previous suicide attempts, loss or trauma and psychiatric care were documented as well. Based upon the student's responses or previous history the evaluator circled the corresponding box, which is marked under categories in columns or high, medium, and low. Once the assessment is complete, the evaluator had a tool and visual representation to give an overall rating of low, medium or high. There are 26 rows of questions and scoring for each question yielded a variety of responses between low to high. Professional school counselors and district social workers will have used professional judgment when assessing the threat to harm. However, as a rule, if 10 or more areas yield high responses or if the responses are high in significant areas like previous history and having a clear plan with available means then higher ratings would be warranted.

The next step was to follow the Intervention Plan based on the level of risk determined in the Lethality Assessment. Parents and guardians and the principal or designee should be notified regardless of the outcome to plan for necessary interventions based upon the outcome. A Life Pact will be reviewed and signed with the student and copies sent home to the parents that included access to local resources. The Children's Division may need to be involved if high lethality assessments were obtained and students have attempted suicide in the past and parents were unable or unwilling to help. Police involvement may also be required in situations where the student was assessed to be in immediate danger to ensure their personal safety. Once a student has completed the assessment and sought, necessary interventions a follow up plan must be put in place for a student's re-entry into the school system following a suicide attempt. A mandatory conference must be held with the returning student, their parent/guardian and building

staff members supported by a written report prepared by the treating physician clarifying that the student is physically and mentally able to return to school. The report should include recommendations for follow-up care and the student will not be allowed to return without this documentation. The re-entering student will be assigned a staff member (usually a professional school counselor or school social worker) to provide support as long as deemed necessary.

The Lethality Assessment totals were reported from the 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 school years. The number represents the instances where a professional school counselor or district social worker reported a lethality assessment and a student's intent to harm him or herself. The assessments were tabulated district wide then broken down based upon buildings, levels, and quadrants to determine patterns or trends. For the purpose of this program evaluation, data was reported by the level of elementary, middle, and high. Although principals received training to perform lethality assessments, they were primarily completed by professional school counselors and school social workers. After completing a lethality assessment, staff members were required to email the district office, communicating an assessment was administered, the building location, the risk level, and the action was recorded to track the number performed districtwide. Tracking this data helped to determine student needs, programming, and staffing options. As a practice to ensure confidentiality, it was not required that a physical hard copy of the actual assessment be sent in interoffice mail or an electronic copy scanned to the district office as evidence of the assessment. It was also not a practice to reveal the student's name in email correspondence when the assessment was reported. However, this information was accessible in the student's health file and shared in transition meetings

with professional school counselors at the feeder schools when students changed between levels or locations.

It was determined as an outcome of the program evaluation and by reviewing the data, that the level of the assessment would also be helpful when analyzing results. Initially, professional school counselors and social workers only communicated the occurrence of the lethality assessments but subsequently they listed the perceived level such as low, medium, or high. This allowed the district office to filter the data in another fashion based upon the intensity and offer support when a high lethality assessment was rendered. They also identified whether another assessment was administered in close proximity to the one they were currently reporting to identify whether the same child represented multiple assessments.

Table 33

*District Lethality Assessments*

Level	2011/2012	2012/2013
Elementary	21	37
Middle	54	73
High	26	54
Total	101	145

*Note.* \* 30% increase from 11-12 to 12-13 school year

The number of lethality assessments has risen in Midwest School District with more occurrences happening at the secondary level. In one school year, the data reflects an increase of 30% more assessments completed. Additional suggestions have been raised on categorizing assessments by month to determine peak periods or trends, indicating whether it was a repeat assessment or duplication in students and indicating the level of the assessment when reporting.

**Student Needs**

During the Input Team meeting committee members responded to questionnaires on the perception of student needs in Midwest School District. The committee was asked to keep in mind what does each individual student need and how can we meet those needs? The responses were broken down into three major themes: educational needs, emotional needs and social needs. The major emphasis under educational needs focused on creating a district wide response to intervention (RTI) process that supports at-risk learners. Another educational need was addressing the current high school hybrid schedule, which was not deemed user friendly and failed to meet the majority of student's needs. The emotional needs category identified common themes relating to mental health counseling and ensuring adequate staffing was in place to respond, more counselors and social workers for individualized attention and developing a sense of self-efficacy and coping mechanisms for students dealing with anxiety concerns. The social needs category common themes focused on developing soft skills, life skills, infusing character education, and preparing students to be good citizens.

## **Chapter Five: Discussion and Reflection**

### **Summary of Findings and Implications**

During the program evaluation process, it was important to understand the difference between the Midwest School District having a written program in place and a fully implemented program. Structurally, program components may be written and articulated; however, it was important to determine what was really getting done. Both direct and indirect services must be carried out in order to reach full implementation of a comprehensive guidance and counseling program. Essentially, the program evaluation answered whether the Midwest School District comprehensive guidance and counseling program was being implemented in the buildings of the district consistently serving the needs of students, parents and staff. One of the challenges yet strengths in this process was sifting through the enormous amount of data to determine what was pertinent to the work. It was necessary to continue to revisit the overall purpose and desired outcome during the program evaluation process to be reminded of the focus and research questions.

1. Does the Midwest School District Guidance and Counseling Program meet the program standards?
2. How does Midwest School District comprehensive guidance program address the issue of impact and overall effectiveness on student outcomes as a result of the work of the guidance and counseling program?
3. Do the K-12 services and programs currently in place in Midwest School District adequately address students' social/emotional needs and academically ensure that they are college and career ready?

4. What is the role and responsibilities of the professional school counselors, college and career specialists and school social workers in Midwest School District and how well are they performing these duties?

The Midwest School District comprehensive guidance and counseling program was based on the Missouri Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling Program (MCGCP), which mirrors ASCA national standards. The program has identified content standards based upon grade level expectations in the three areas of academic development, career development, and personal/social development. Midwest School District also operates within an organizational framework based upon the six structural components of: program definition and philosophy, program facilities, advisory council, resources, staffing, and budget. The four program components of guidance curriculum, individual planning, responsive services, and system support are currently in place in varying degrees of implementation with identified processes and activities.

District MSIP data, the senior exit, character education, and Missouri student surveys all measure impact and the overall effectiveness of the comprehensive guidance and counseling program. However, the program evaluation process has provided some indication for growth opportunities and next steps for the Midwest School District counseling program to further impact student success. It has also created an opportunity to review and revise when necessary job descriptions and define roles and responsibilities of the professional school counselor, college and career specialist and school social worker. The recommendations for practice and policy will outline the proposals and rationales put forth because of this work, which are ultimately decided by the board of education.

Conducting a time task analysis allowed Midwest's professional school counselors an opportunity to collect meaningful data that can be used to determine where time was currently being spent and identify those areas that needed improvement. Data from the time task analysis was useful to Midwest School District professional school counselors to plan and improve their program within their buildings and to assist in advocating for program improvements with administrators. When school counselors were not directly spending quality time with students and fully implementing their programs it was challenging trying to gauge the impact of their work on student outcomes. Time task analysis also provided information assessing whether or not time was being spent where it needed to be spent working with students to promote their academic, career, and personal-social development within the comprehensive guidance and counseling program areas of guidance curriculum, individual planning, and responsive services. The data showed that the professional school counselor's time was being spent on non-guidance duties and overrepresented heavily in specific areas. This information can help support discussions and action steps on how to better use counselor's time or provide additional supports in high need areas to be able to fully implement the comprehensive guidance program. Midwest School District continued to seek ways to free up the professional school counselor's time from completing tasks that any staff member could do so there was time to implement the work that only they as certified and trained counselors could do. Without this data, it would be difficult to understand and identify gaps that exist in programming and problem-solve strategies to address the areas of concern.

The results can have an impact on staffing, programming and implementation of the guidance programs in the Midwest School District and other buildings and/or districts

within and outside of the state of Missouri. There are relatively few studies on how implementing a comprehensive guidance program affects student outcomes or even school district evaluating their guidance and counseling programs for overall effectiveness. It is my intent that this study add to the growing body of work and encourage buildings and school districts to truly examine their programs and determine whether the actions they are taking best meet the needs of the students they serve.

### **Counseling Strengths and Challenges**

The Input Team Committee identified several areas as strengths of the professional school counseling department in the Midwest School District left on comment cards during a group meeting. The district was viewed as having a comprehensive school counseling program in place that focused on academic, career, and social emotional concerns. Professional School Counselors were identified as being qualified, responsive, collaborative, and dedicated to their profession. The district support and leadership team at central office were also listed as assets. The committee found there were great programs in place, a strong curriculum, and numerous opportunities for professional development.

The challenges of the guidance and counseling program highlighted on comment cards completed by the input Team committee centered on several areas. Structural components mentioned included: student-counselor staffing ratios being currently at DESE minimum standards of 1:500 as opposed to the desirable 1:375 or the recommended 1:250; there was no current guidance policy in place; lack of grade level counseling at the middle school levels; the difficulty assigning courses to students at the high school level with the current hybrid schedule in place and the inconsistency of 504

responsibilities and lack of extra planning days at the elementary level. The social emotional area uncovered a concern for the high needs in responsive services, which was difficult to meet because of the large caseloads. Some counselors noted feeling ill equipped to respond to growing demands and expectations of intensive therapeutic casework, the personal stress associated with crisis support provided to students and staff members, and the necessity to maximize outside mental health resources during the school day was also highlighted. Under time management it was identified that the professional school counselors were often pulled in several directions with inconsistent priorities, involvement on all building and some district committees was challenging, too much time spent on course selection at the secondary level, and difficulties facilitating small groups with students and leading classroom lessons.

### **Social Workers Strengths and Challenges**

The same process was utilized to gain anecdotal comments about social workers strength and weaknesses from comment cards collected during the Input Team meeting. The Input Team identified the Social Work Department strengths as being a liaison between parents, staff, and the community. Members viewed the district social workers as a caring, professional, knowledgeable staff with strong relationships with counselors and administrators. Social workers were also regarded as being familiar with community resources and outside supports with the ability to make home visits to support students and families. They typically could deal with attendance, child abuse and neglect, basic needs, and students in crisis.

The challenges as it related to the district social workers focused on several common concerns many of which were tied to staffing or role definition. Staffing

concerns identified the need for more social workers in the district indicating that six traveling social workers in a district of 22,000 with increasing social-emotional needs was not nearly enough to meet the demands of student needs. Role clarification and consistency in expectations among locations was also identified as a challenge as well as effectively tracking and evaluating outcomes.

### **College and Career Specialist Strengths and Challenges**

Lastly, the Input Team meeting also identified strengths and challenges about the College and Career Specialist position based upon anecdotal feedback. The strengths identified included the College and Career Specialists were staffed at the four high schools in the Midwest School District and worked primarily with juniors and seniors but supported all grade levels. The Input Team committee recognized and applauded the district decision for having a designated position in place that focused on ensuring all students were college and career ready, which was not a DESE program requirement. The College and Career Specialists were identified as experts in the college going process with the ability to help students select post-secondary options, navigate the college application process, discuss financial aid, interpret standardized test scores, identify scholarships, write letters of recommendations, assist with NCAA and NAIA recruitment for student athletes, plan the district College Fair, and maintain close relationships with college admission officers.

The Input Team identified the challenges of the College and Career Specialists as being a lack of competitive compensation which resulted in higher turnover, similar positions were not available at the elementary and middle school levels, need for a more proactive approach assisting ninth and 10th graders, communication and awareness of the

role to all stakeholders, responsibilities, and staffing of position was inconsistent district wide, more emphasis placed on college as opposed to careers and implementing a system to track student outcomes particularly minorities, low socio-economic status, and students with disabilities after graduation.

The program evaluation process provided an opportunity for the Midwest School District to discuss the counseling program and the roles within. Great systems, including school districts, must continually monitor the processes they have in place for accountability and overall improvement. The stakes are high given the fact that the results measured are not merely data points but actual real student lives and outcomes. Evaluating counseling programs on a voluntary basis speaks to the commitment and respect for the program as an integral part of the total school community. It is from analyzing data, holding input and design team focus groups, administering surveys, and completing the Internal Improvement Review that the Midwest School District was able to take a critical look at the comprehensive guidance and counseling program and identify strengths and develop the following recommendations for improvement.

### **Recommendations for the Program Evaluation Process**

Recommendations for further study include completing a needs assessment to gather information about the types of interventions and programs needed and evaluating the guidance and counseling program utilizing surveys from stakeholders (counselors, students, parents, and teachers). Curriculum was discussed during the process of the program evaluation process as being in need of revisions and updating through the curriculum cycle. Midwest School District could administer the student needs survey, for

guidance curriculum planning to gather data on what grade level expectations students perceive to be important to them.

The data on the senior exit surveys and other academic indicators could be disaggregated further looking specifically at the super subgroups performance with a particular focus on the Midwest School District voluntary transfer students participating in the VICC program. In addition, college and career specialists could track their programs and services to determine whether they are assisting underserved students with opportunities to achieve a college education thus producing more highly trained individuals, which increases our competitiveness in a global economy. With the reduction in staff, professional school counselors found it difficult to continue results based counseling or evaluation interventions with students' districtwide, in buildings or common themes at each level.

For comparison, Midwest School District could conduct the ASCA National Model school counseling program assessment (ASCA, 2012, pp. 59-62) which provides a national framework as opposed to Midwest's prior use of Missouri's DESE IIR model. This activity could be completed through the Guidance Advisory Council (GAC) or in a full-scale evaluation process in the recommended three-year period.

### **Recommendations for Practice and Policy**

Recommendations for undergoing a program evaluation stemmed around ensuring appropriate time to dedicate towards the work and including the voice of as many stakeholders as possible. In order to improve upon this practice the researcher suggested more opportunities to directly engage student voice in the evaluation of the counseling program either through focus groups or intentional surveys aimed at the effectiveness of

services offered through district programs. Another key aspect of the evaluation process missing from the Midwest School District guidance and counseling program evaluation was the engagement of parents and their voice as it relates to the services, personnel, and policies that make up the comprehensive guidance and counseling program.

The design team created a proposed list of recommendations for the evaluation of the Midwest's Professional School Counselors, Social Work, and College and Career Specialist Program. Within the seven recommendation areas, there were 14 proposals under review for considerations as a part of the ongoing development of a Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling Program. During the input team meeting, the drafted proposals were presented and each table was given the opportunity to discuss the areas and provide input, which was gathered for consideration. The design team listened to the table discussions and gathered information to take back to the next team meeting for revision to determine the final recommendations to take to the board. The final recommendations are categorized below under one of the seven respective recommendation areas.

The first category was policy and definition. Recommendations included refining the program mission, vision, and goal statements based on current research to guide program decisions. A full implementation of the comprehensive guidance and counseling program should be integrated with the educational program(s) in order to support the success of the overall vision and mission of the district. The district was encouraged to develop a clear and transparent district policy that defines the Midwest Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling Program. A fully implemented comprehensive guidance and counseling program should be supported by a relevant school board policy including a

written definition, philosophy, practice and procedural safeguards related to the guidance program.

Under the area of administration, several recommendations were brought forth for consideration. The first included redefining the roles and responsibilities of the Guidance Advisory Council (GAC). This can be achieved by reviewing the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MODESE) guidelines for GAC membership, reviewing the overall purpose and responsibilities to ensure an effective guiding team. Next was the need to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the College and Career Specialists, Social Workers, and Professional School Guidance Counselors. Clarifying the roles and responsibilities will provide consistencies among the individual Midwest school buildings and clear expectations for utilizing all supports. It was further recommended to develop a Midwest Pyramid of Support to respond to the increased social and emotional needs of students. The identification of support services in a timely manner will help support students and families in need. The final recommendation under administration was to develop a current comprehensive guidance and counseling program manual. A manual was essential in order to provide a comprehensive document to include all components of the Midwest's comprehensive guidance and counseling programs. In addition, the manual will include resources and forms for all departments to use as needed.

The next category for recommendations was curriculum. It was suggested to begin the comprehensive guidance and counseling program curriculum review before the current timeline of the 2017-2018 school year. Since the curriculum has not been formally revised since 2005 and the last revision cycle was pushed back due to funding, it

was recommended to address the outdated curriculum as soon as possible. A curriculum component was a necessary part of the comprehensive guidance and counseling program that will address a majority of the guidance and counseling grade-level expectations contained in the content element of the IIR (Internal Improvement Review). Next was to update expectations for personal plans of study to align with MSIP5 Learning Standards. The Missouri School Improvement Program requires that all students have a personal plan of study built around a career path or cluster beginning no later than seventh grade. This plan follows a student throughout their secondary career in the Midwest School District to provide direction and is reviewed and revised with the participation of parents during high school. The last curriculum recommendation was to outline and update the Career and Educational Program Companion Guide. The guide provides for successful student transitions between secondary and post-secondary education.

Under the recommendation area of communication, one goal was identified. The recommendation was to create and implement an effective system to provide clear, consistent and two-way communication within the Midwest school community regarding the Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling Program. The development of a strong communication plan was important to ensure an ongoing, strategic network of communication among the Midwest staff members and school community.

Under the area of evaluation a recommendation was brought forth to develop a long-term plan to collect, analyze and disseminate data to guide decision-making, and improve the overall effectiveness of the comprehensive guidance and counseling program. This will provide a systematic measurement of the comprehensive guidance and counseling program goals and methods for communication of progress toward those

goals. The evaluation process should include the following components: 1) completion of the IIR every three years and 2) conducting an annual review of data through Guidance Advisory Committee.

The next category was professional development and two recommendations fell under this category. First, was to create a professional learning program to build Midwest staff members' knowledge and skills regarding the comprehensive guidance and counseling program. It was imperative for professional school counselors to regularly update their professional knowledge and skills to meet the ever-changing needs of our students and their families. The next recommendation was to expand our continuous improvement model for professional learning based upon the needs assessment, current policies, state and federal mandates, and research in the field. This process will identify themes and priority areas within guidance and counseling to be addressed through the program to best meet the needs of students and families.

The last recommendation area was staffing and one proposal was brought forth for decision by the Board of Education to hire 4.5 social workers to assist with responsive services for students. Responsive services at the secondary level increased significantly during the past few years and must be addressed so that all students meet academic success. This change in staffing would add a Social Worker to each High School and Middle School. Each secondary building would have a social worker, aligned to feeder schools, to assist with responsive services for students. A future consideration to be reviewed during the next fiscal year and only after evaluating the impact of the addition of social workers at the secondary buildings was adding two additional counselors (1 at the high school with ratios over 500 to 1 and one traveling between the two middle

school close to 1000 with 2 counselors in place). Staffing ratios were also recommended to be lowered to a 1:475 minimum. Finally, consideration should be given to the College and Career Specialists by reviewing the salary scale and offering a competitive wage to reduce turnover and the addition of one college specialist for equitable services based upon enrollment to one high school.

The researcher presented the recommendation to the board of education for review and consideration. Recommendations were devised from a lens of fiscal responsibility coupled with what was deemed to be in the best interest of students and families. Many of the recommendations take time and human capital and can be easily implemented to make small gains in improving the comprehensive guidance and counseling program. Other recommendations require a commitment of financial resources of allocated budgets and materials and the political resources of the school boards, stakeholders and community resources.

### **Final Thoughts**

I started this journey by listening to the professional school counselors and honoring their voices of the increasing demands due to the reduction in staff at the secondary level. As an administrator who formally worked as a high school counselor and college and career specialist, I was intimately aware of the tremendous workload and varied responsibilities that the position requires. I also understood far too well the lack of understanding that exist on what exactly a school counselor does making them an easy target for non-guidance duties. Professional school counselors, college and career specialist, and school social workers are in the helping profession and in my opinion truly do whatever it takes to help students succeed. It genuinely bothered counselors in

Midwest School District when they believed they were being spread too thin or not effectively serving all students because of their current staffing model. It was extremely difficult for counselors who just one year prior before the cuts grew their programs, provided highly responsive services, conducted results based counseling projects, and ran small groups to have to cut back on some of these valuable activities to prioritize their time. Many believed they were not giving their best to the students by eliminating needed programs while others began to feel burned out trying to still do it all.

Midwest School District was on the forefront of guidance and counseling demonstrated in its ability to evaluate its programs in a formalized process. Many districts do not have a system in place to analyze the work of a professional school counselor, let alone to do so in a detailed and public light in the name of continuous improvement. Midwest reviewed the decision making from previous years and took an in-depth look at its impact on student outcomes and more importantly made changes where supported. This process was no longer just about counselor cuts but led to work that was more meaningful through the full-scale evaluation. Gaps in the program were identified and addressed through short-term and long-term action plans making the comprehensive guidance and counseling program one-step closer to full implementation. Personally, I grew tremendously through this dissertation journey and my understanding of the evaluation process, comprehensive school guidance programs, student needs, concerns of staff, and the areas of needed improvement in the district.

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