One District’s Adventures: Implementing a Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling Program

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Professional Responsibility: This project has been reviewed by collegial professional peers and has been submitted for on-line publication before being evaluated by faculty members from Portland State University. We are the authors and take full responsibility for the project’s contents and quality. This work serves as a baseline for our professional school counselor skills and demonstrates what we have done to develop and/or assess our actions directed toward serving students and schools.

One District’s Adventures: Implementing a Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling Program

A Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling Program (CGCP) is not a plan. It is not a notebook on a shelf. A CGCP is a dynamic process of planning, designing, implementing, and evaluating the work of schools to prepare each and every student with the skills, knowledge, and attitudes to be successful in the world. With publication of the Oregon Framework for CGCP in July 2003, Oregon joined many states across the nation in developing and adopting a Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling (CGC) Program. Benefits of such programs are well documented. “Current research strongly supports the effectiveness of a comprehensive, programmatic approach to guidance for all students and the impact more fully implemented guidance programs have on student achievement” (ACTE, 2003, p. 1).

The path to implementation of a CGCP, however, is new and unfamiliar territory. Moving a district of counselors and administrators who operate from a variety of counseling approaches to a common understanding of a comprehensive counseling program is a difficult task. Then, moving from understanding the new approach to implementing it is a complete shift of everything many counselors have been trained to do and are expected to do everyday in their buildings. How can a change of this magnitude be accomplished? What does it take for a District to shift its paradigm about counseling? This paper discusses one district’s adoption of a CGCP.

This report is authored by two school counselors who participated in a school district’s implementation of a CGCP in partnership with the State of Oregon’s Department of Education (ODE). One of the authors was the catalyst for the District agreeing to proceed with implementation in the first place. This report is framed as an action research project. We conduct a brief literature review to set the stage and then outline the Oregon process for rollout and program implementation. As participants, we report on the process our District undertook. We tell the story by recounting each meeting, paying particular attention to: (a) the focus of the meeting, (b) learning experiences, (c) team activities, and (d) group dynamics. We conclude by stepping back to review the overall results in comparison to goals and identify next District steps.
Action Research Approach

Action research is a problem solving process that takes the researcher through a series of creative activities along a journey of uncertainty. This action research project was conducted to report information about the way one school District changed and was changed by their adventures in implementing a new paradigm of counseling. The action research approach is one of concurrent action and program evaluation that undergoes a four-step process: (a) identify the area of focus, (b) implement the change process, (c) consolidate and record the changes; and (c) identify next steps in the process.

Problem Statement: Creating Transition from Site-Based Counseling to a CGCP

Research indicates that implementation of a CGCP is a challenging process (Gysbers, Lapan, & Jones, 2000; Macdonald & Sink, 1999). This has certainly been our experience here. Although many isolated elements of a comprehensive program exist, the District currently uses site-based decision making—there is no comprehensive District approach to counseling in policy or among schools. A small group of counselors initiated an effort to develop a CGCP in the District one year prior to joining the Oregon cohort process. While little substantive progress was initially made, the effort generated enough momentum to cause the District to appoint a liaison between counselors and administration. Through this connection, the group gained support of the Superintendent to join Cohort B in the statewide rollout of Oregon’s Framework.

Human Subjects Research Review Findings

The research proposal was submitted to the Portland State University Human Subjects Research Review Committee on March 23, 2006. The committee waived review of the application, finding the proposal (HSRRC Proposal # 06096) to be exempt from further review.

Plan for Analysis

Our action research tells the story of one school district’s adventures in implementing a CGCP. We focus on how implementing a CGCP through the Oregon Framework cohort process can help teachers, administrators, counselors, parents, and other stakeholders become aware of the significant contributions counselors can make to increasing student academic performance and life chances through a CGCP. This action research relies significantly on work products generated by the District’s participation in the cohort process. We report on the following aspects of the project: (a) the District’s participation in the cohort process through a narrative account, (b) results of an audit based on the elements of a CGCP using Oregon’s Framework, and (c)
evaluation of first year results of the cohort process. The narrative account of participation is comprised of first hand reports by the authors regarding events leading up to the District’s decision to join the cohort, our account of the District’s first year participation in the cohort, and a qualitative assessment of the level of support for such a program in the District.

Literature Review

In recent years there has been movement towards standards-based education. Standards-based education reform is touted as a means to (a) increase equity, (b) add clarity for all stakeholders regarding expectations for learning, (c) offer an internally integrated and consistent system of planning delivery and evaluation, and (d) provide for individual and organizational consequences of reaching or not reaching standards (Lieberman, 2004). There has been little research that connects counseling to student achievement or standards-based education. The lack of linkage of academic standards to counselor performance has left decisions about counselor roles and responsibilities up to individual school administrators. This creates a system where not only students and administrators are confused on appropriate and effective utilization of school counselors, but counselor’s themselves are confused. The result can be program fragmentation.

National Standards to Clarify a School Counselor’s Role

The American School Counselor Association (2003) developed a National Model for a CGCP which provides the basis for foundation development, delivery management, and accountability. Development of these standards arose from counselors’ needs to educate others about the purpose, scope, and practice of school counseling. The National Standards provide a means for counselors to (a) identify what students should know and do as a result of participating in school counseling program, (b) articulate strategies that support student success, and (c) focus on and clarify the relationship of school counseling to the educational system (Dahir, 2004). The new standards encourage counselors to shift their focus from delivery of a menu of student services to providing a structured and programmatic approach to address the needs of all students (Stone & Dahir, 2006). The common language of the standards enables school counselors, administrators, teachers, and parents to coordinate their work and multiply the power of their intellects (Henderson, Gysbers, & ERIC Counseling and Student Services Clearinghouse., 2005). It makes it easier for all involved to communicate about and improve student outcomes.

Benefits of a Comprehensive Guidance Program
The process of developing, adopting, and implementing a comprehensive guidance program is a demanding, ongoing, and rewarding experience. The rewards have been noted in initial research studies that found positive results from schools that have a CGCP. When comparing schools who have implemented a CGCP to schools who did not have a CGCP, it was found that students in more fully implemented programs reported earning higher grades, more positive relations with teachers, felt safer in school, had higher ACT scores, and took more advanced math and science courses. (Lapan, 2001; Lapan, Gysbers, & Yongmin, 1997; Nelson & Gardner, 1998). Additionally Sink and Stoh, (2003) found elementary students enrolled in a school with a CGCP in place produced higher achievement test scores.

Researchers have also found that school counseling programs positively influence factors related to educational development, including classroom behaviors, attitudes towards school, school attendance, and decision making (Borders & Drury, 1992). When schools or districts follow the process of implementing a CGCP, they are better prepared to meet the needs and wants of students and the school community (Henderson et al., 2005).

One study looked at how a CGCP impacted a single student. The study found that after 12 weeks of implementation, the student’s personal and social development improved, anxiety decreased, and her self-concept and behavior improved (Baggerly & Borkowski, 2004). Due to the student moving abruptly they were unable to document academic development improvement, but the teachers reported that she was less disruptive, more attentive and more cooperative.

Oregon’s Approach to Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling Programs

Oregon developed its own model for counselors – the Oregon Framework for Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling Programs. This framework was developed “to meet the needs of our ever-changing world and to support Oregon’s quality education goals and school improvement efforts” (ODE, 2003, p. i). Since it is a relatively new framework there has been limited research into its effectiveness, but because it is closely aligned with the ASCA National Model, it can inferred that the benefits pointed out in the literature regarding efficacy of CGC programs would also apply to the Oregon Framework.

Research results give proof to the effectiveness of CGCPs and identify the benefits that will accrue to all students when school districts implement such comprehensive programs.
During the first year of implementing a CGCP under the Oregon Framework, the focus is on considering standards and assessing the district’s current program (Stone & Dahir, 2006). Establishing a CGCP helps identify student needs and connect school counseling to the mission of the school. The benefit of the CGCP is that once the school counseling program has an organization and structure just like every other curriculum component; it no longer is ancillary but becomes an integral component directly linked to student achievement and school success.

**A Comprehensive Guidance Program Requires Systemic Change**

Any school improvement involves systemic change to make it a part of the school’s culture. The current speed, frequency complexity and scope of change require commitment vigilance, capacity to learn adaptability, and renewal (Wickwire, 2004). As one is going through change, it is important to validate the struggles one feels in the process by looking to others who have or are currently going through similar changes and are experiencing similar doubts and fears. All these doubts, questions and issues that others have relating to change must be dealt with as they occur, or the process may be sabotaged.

Evans (1996) states that the key factor in change is the meaning of the change to those who must implement it. Changes, because of their associated primary meanings, often encourage resistance; provoke loss, challenge competence, create confusion, and cause conflict. Understanding these feelings is vital to successful implementation of change. He outlines several tasks necessary to successfully cause change in schools. These tasks include unfreezing, moving from loss to commitment, moving from old competence to new competence, moving from confusion to coherence and moving from conflict to consensus. The first year of the CGCP process involves the task of unfreezing staff and counselors. The goal in this stage is to increase the fear of *not trying* while reducing the fear of *trying*. This can only be achieved by preserving psychological safety. CGCP leaders need to reaffirm personal connections while making the change meaningful to individuals. It is also important to acknowledge that change represents loss and establishing meaning is how people best deal with loss. Finally Fullan (1993) concludes that

There is a pattern underlying . . . change and it concerns one’s ability to work with polar opposites: simultaneously pushing for change while allowing self-learning to unfold; being prepared for a journey of uncertainty; seeing problems as sources of creative resolution; having a vision, but not being blinded by it; valuing the individual and the group;
incorporating centralizing and decentralizing forces; being internally cohesive, but externally oriented; and valuing personal change agentry as the route to system change. (p. 40)

This change process must include staff from all levels in the district. As Lopez (2002) wrote after her district developed a CGCP “unless the momentum toward change is supported, it [a CGCP] will not be sustained” (p. 96).

Embracing the Oregon Cohort Process

Oregon Department of Education recognized the complexity and difficulty of the change that would be necessary as school districts adopted a CGC. A conscious decision was made to not test or pilot the framework. Instead ODE developed a statewide rollout of the Oregon Framework. It was executed through formation of cohorts. ODE provided leadership, direction, structure, and resources necessary for school districts to begin implementation of a CGCP.

The cohort process was designed to assist districts to move from a group of individuals each doing counseling in their own buildings to a focused team that understands the benefits of designing and implementing their work into a sequential, preventative, program that addresses the needs of all students. The framework guides the planning and design of that program. ODE chose to use a framework rather than a model since a framework allows for a wide range of outcomes and does not dictate the structure of the final product.

District Support

School districts were selected to join a cohort if they were able to demonstrate readiness and commitment. Requirements were: (1) commitment to create and maintain a PreK-12 CGCP using the Oregon Framework, (2) leadership support as evidenced by the superintendent’s signature of agreement, and (3) alignment of the CGC program with Oregon’s Framework.

Cohort Team Commitment

In return for ODE’s support, cohort districts were asked to form teams of twelve members. The teams were comprised of administrators, teachers, counselors, staff or other key stakeholders. Teams would meet with ODE two times per year for three years. ODE would guide the cohort districts on their path of change. The cohort provided opportunities for school districts to connect and share with other districts and other cohorts. There was also recognition that no two districts’ approaches need follow the same path in the process. The course charted by ODE included meetings of entire cohorts and meetings of district teams. The cohort meetings provided (a) activities and training on CGC, (b) training on the Oregon Framework, (c) opportunities to
learn from leaders in the field of counseling on the theory and practice of CGC, (d) opportunities to meet as district teams to discuss the current state of our counseling program, and (e) opportunities to plan a comprehensive program of counseling. The schools were selected and grouped into cohorts of six schools each. Cohort A began its work in the summer of 2004.

**District Cohort Team**

Our District met the criteria for selection and became part of Cohort B in the summer of 2005. The District team was selected by the District administrator in charge of counseling. The team ultimately included two administrators, two community stakeholders, three elementary counselors, two middle school counselors, and a counselor from each of the two high schools. The group was comprised of five men and seven women.

Team members chose to join the District cohort team for a variety of reasons. Some had little or no exposure to CGC and not everyone on the team understood or supported the work the team was assigned. Some of the counselors on the team had reservations about the idea of CGC because a previous attempt to make the change in the District had been unsuccessful two years prior. Some members joined the team to protect their own interests. Some joined to ensure that the movement would not force them to change the way they did counseling in their buildings or change their personal choice in curriculum. Some expressed concerns that nothing was being done to prevent counselors from losing their jobs. Others had fears that the group would write language in support of only licensed counselors, excluding Child Development Specialists. Some thought it was a waste of time to produce a document that would sit on a shelf and collected dust. Some remembered similar efforts to change things in the past and hoped this one would go away.

**Outline of the Cohort Process and Scope of Study**

The cohort process was designed to follow a three year sequence. The focus of the first year is on planning a CGCP; the focus of the second year is on designing the program; and the third year is for implementing the program. Planning during the first year includes (a) forming the team, building teamwork, and building team capacity; (b) learning the Oregon Framework; (c) conducting an audit of counseling program activities; (d) beginning work to create some pieces of the foundation; and (e) learning about managing change process. The focus of the second year, the designing phase, is to build the foundation, which includes (a) creating District policy on counseling, developing a counseling philosophy, and articulating a mission statement with regard to CGCP, (b) designing the program itself, and (c) creating a shared vision with
Each Meeting Plays a Vital Role in Planning for a CGCP

The District’s charge in the first year is to conduct a planning effort where it assesses its existing counseling programs and uses the resultant information and understandings to guide planning of a new program. The first year’s tasks were to form the cohort team, learn details about a CGC approach, conduct an audit of the District’s existing counseling programs, practice applying some of the newly learned skills and concepts, and begin to figure out how to extend the learning into the broader context of our work. What follows is the account of each meeting.

First Meeting: Learning and Organizing, August 11 & 12, 2005

The purpose of the first meeting was to organize the team that would represent the District in Cohort B. During this meeting we discussed and agreed to a set of process rules under which we would operate. We planned a series of meetings throughout the year. We discussed the importance of participation and acquired the commitment of each member to the work of the team. We recognized the importance of involving people beyond the small group of the team and identified the names of individuals to include as members of a broader advisory team.

*Learning about comprehensive guidance and counseling programs.* The team attended a two-day training for all five of the Oregon Cohort B teams organized and sponsored by ODE. At the training, cohort teams met each other for the first time. Each team was invited to share information about the makeup of their team to emphasize the importance that individual members would play in the process. Teams were encouraged to support and draw upon other cohort teams throughout the process of implementation. Team members received a notebook of training materials including the Oregon Framework. During the training, teams had an opportunity to build understanding of comprehensive counseling through a series of presentations by highly respected leaders in the field of counseling. Norm Gysbers spoke on comprehensive guidance and counseling. June Tremain presented the Oregon Framework. Cal Crow spoke on student centered learning and a panel from ODE discussed School Improvement.

The first presenter, Norm Gysbers, spoke on the framework. Gysbers originated the concept of a Comprehensive Guidance Program. He started our journey by taking us through the evolution of the field of counseling. He described the process that led to counseling becoming a
position with a list of duties. As the focus and demands of school counseling changed, counselors found themselves engaged in a wide variety of activities in search of an organizing concept. The CGCP is an organizational structure that provides a way to organize delivery of counseling services. The five structural elements of the counseling delivery system are (a) guidance curriculum, (b) individual planning, (c) responsive services, (d) system support and integration, and (e) student advocacy. He explained that the framework is the tool that allows us to organize work we are already doing and conceptualize how pieces fit together into a program. We completed an exercise to organize current District activities into the five areas of the delivery system and estimate percentages of time counselors spend on these activities.

June Tremain from ODE provided an opportunity to learn the Oregon Framework in detail. The cohort studied the four domains (Academic, Career, Personal/Social, and Community Involvement) and the 15 components of the Framework. Note that the five structural elements of the counseling delivery system are captured in the Content portion of the Framework. We completed an activity that helped members of the district teams sort out which program components are firmly in place, are somewhat in place, and are not yet being done.

Table 1

Components of the Oregon Framework for CGCP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Framework</th>
<th>Component</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foundation</td>
<td>1. Mission Statement</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. Program Philosophy</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. District Policy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>4. Guidance Curriculum</td>
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<td></td>
<td>5. Individual Planning</td>
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<td></td>
<td>6. Responsive Services</td>
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<td></td>
<td>7. System Support and Integration</td>
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<td></td>
<td>8. Student Advocacy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>9. Professional Staff</td>
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<td></td>
<td>10. Collaborative Structures</td>
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<td>11. Materials and Facilities</td>
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<td></td>
<td>12. Management Systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuous Improvement</td>
<td>13. Student Progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14. Staff Development</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cal Crow spoke on student centered learning. Cal is co-founder and Program Director of the Center for Learning Connections, one of the first organizations to link education reform with the changing economy and workplace. He motivated us to get the change process started by putting students at the core of our work. He asked “How can we use a CGCP to create a positive environment with students and parents?” Cal made a case that learning is not entirely a cognitive process. He encouraged counselors to put heart and soul into our programs. He challenged us to join him in his vision that counseling and guidance are part of the whole curriculum. The panel members from ODE built a case for the critical role school counselors play in School Improvement. The journey to school improvement is a slow and deliberate process of change. This change process is directly linked to the changes counselors are making by implementing CGC programs.

Beginning to plan a District CGCP. With this shared experience and foundation of information, cohort teams returned to their districts to begin planning a comprehensive program for the District. At the start of the new school year, we communicated the enthusiasm and information with staff in our individual buildings. One counselor created and shared a PowerPoint presentation from the information Cal Crow had offered at the training. The progress of the team was shared with other counselors in the District at the first counselor meeting. We acknowledged the importance of keeping others informed during the process.

Our first order of business was to designate a team leader—a project director. The director would need to be someone who could guide the team and chart out a timeline, but also someone who was well-connected in the District, a strong leader, experienced in dynamics of group change. Several potential candidates were identified and approached by team members. The candidate who ultimately agreed to lead the team is an experienced administrator who is responsible for Federal Programs in the District office. Most importantly, he is supportive of counselors and has the ear of the Superintendent. The fact that his responsibilities include the Positive Behavior Support program in the District was viewed as an advantage since overlap exists between this program and development of a CGCP. We planned dates and purposes for a series of meetings throughout the year as shown in Table 2.

Growing awareness of the importance of a CGCP. Prior to this two-day training there had been no shared identity and little cohesion in the group of District counselors. Counselors in the District had previously only met together in level teams or as a crisis response team. As a
group, counselors had lacked the ability to stay focused and move quickly through an agenda. Individuals benefited from the safety of the structured meetings and the opportunity to learn new information so they could proceed in spite of the persistent uncertainty.

Table 2

*First Year Meeting Schedule and Purposes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>August 11 &amp; 12</td>
<td></td>
<td>Learn &amp; organize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 7</td>
<td>10-2</td>
<td>Read &amp; study framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 21 &amp; 22</td>
<td>8-4</td>
<td>Conduct a program audit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 20</td>
<td>10-2</td>
<td>Review audit with ODE rep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 10</td>
<td>10-2</td>
<td>Systems Change Game</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 21</td>
<td>10-2</td>
<td>Build the foundation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cohort team cohesion began to appear as members gained awareness of their role in the work to be done. The team gained enough information to feel that they were part of something important. People who had various motivations for wanting to be on the committee moved to understanding the need for the development of a District program and supporting the implementation. We experienced something in common as a group and had a bonding experience. We came to recognize that we are a part of a significant and important change because of (a) the significance of the guest speakers, (b) sharing the experience with other school districts in the cohort, and (c) because we shifted our thinking about counseling in our own buildings as we came to understand the picture of what a CGCP could look like.

We did not get team representation from teachers because we found it was more difficult to communicate an understanding of the CGCP and cohort process to individuals who did not have a counseling background. In retrospect, it was an oversight not to include teachers on our Cohort team. It would have built inclusion of teachers from the outset and would have been very helpful in disseminating information throughout the District.

*Second Meeting: Planning for Success, October 7, 2005*

The second meeting was focused on the planning necessary to set the stage for the work that was to follow in the first year. We had three main objectives: (a) gaining the commitment of key people, (b) learning the Oregon Counseling and Guidance Framework, and (c) assess the
current program in the District according to the Framework. There was a lot of enthusiasm and energy going into the second meeting as a result of having attended the summer trainings. As a team we recognized the growth we had made both individually and as a group.

*Concentrating on the Oregon Framework.* One of the most important steps in the first year is learning the Oregon Counseling and Guidance Framework. We chose to do this by having each group read about one part of the framework and then report it back to the group for discussion. This was an important step in helping us learn the framework and helping us envision how it might look at different levels. We had ongoing discussions regarding the need to have others within the District involved in the process (teachers, administrators, board members) and possible ways to make this happen. To get people invested they would need to be informed on the development of the framework, the goals of the project, and the benefits of involvement.

*Building the foundation.* Smaller committees were established to work on creating the foundation for our District Comprehensive and Counseling and Guidance Program. A committee was assigned to write and research each of the following: (a) mission statement, (b) District policy, and (c) District philosophy. We identified several courses of action to build understanding and support including: (a) writing letters to the superintendent, (b) using site councils to inform school board liaisons, (c) meeting with our building principals, and (d) presenting at staff meetings in our buildings and at the District-wide counselor’s meetings.

*Building a common sense of purpose.* The benefits of having a District-wide program became clear at this meeting which helped us become a cohesive group with a unified purpose. There was an increase in honesty and sharing and a better ability to see where we needed improvement as a group—areas such as leadership and presentation skills. We strove to become comfortable with change and acknowledged the different ability levels group members have for accepting change. Some members were satisfied with a slow change process whereas others wanted to jump ahead to the end product. We came to recognize that individuals would need to put their own agendas aside and just be present in the process of establishing the Framework. As a group, we gained significant cohesion and a sense of common purpose. We also developed an appreciation for each other’s strengths. We accomplished specific tasks as a group and made specific assignments for follow up items. And finally we had developed an appreciation for the contributions that implementing a CGCP might bring to the District and its students.

*Third Meeting: Conducting a Program Audit, November 21 & 22, 2005*
We started a program audit at the third meeting to assess the current status of the counseling program in the District. We generated an action plan that identified what needed to be done, who would be responsible for the action, and the timeline for completion. Although we did not complete the audit in the time we allotted, we recognized great value in the discussions that were generated as the result of conducting the audit. These discussions were at the very heart of developing understanding of what it takes to develop a CGCP and its implications.

*Getting to the essence of a program audit.* The audit, see Table 3 for a summary, was instrumental in facilitating conversations among counselors about District-wide program

Table 3

District Counseling and Guidance Program Audit Summary, February 10, 2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CGC Program Component</th>
<th>Completed</th>
<th>In Progress</th>
<th>Not Initiated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Mission Statement</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Program Philosophy</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. District Policy</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Guidance Curriculum</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Individual Planning</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Responsive Services</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7. System Support and Integration</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Student Advocacy</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Professional Staff</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Collaborative Structures</td>
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<td>11. Materials and Facilities</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Management Systems</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. Student Progress</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. Staff Development</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>15. Program Planning &amp; Evaluation</td>
<td>X</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
components as well as what we do in individual buildings. It made it easy for people to develop an understanding of where our current District counseling and guidance program stands in comparison to the Framework. The audit helped focus our conversations on what we have and where we need to concentrate energy in the future. It also helped counselors recognize the connections to begin to collaborate with other programs in the District such as Title Programs, English Language Learners, and Special Education by examining the framework of Response to Intervention and how programs and resources relate to each other. In addition, we had great discussions about our philosophies and the directions we would like to move toward.

Results of the audit. As the result of the third meeting and associated audit we were able to make deeper connections and understandings and recognize interconnectedness between team members and their respective roles. It also gave us a sense of focus through specific enumeration of counselor roles and responsibilities. The audit results showed us that we had already completed work in two areas, had work in progress in most areas, and also had several areas where work had not yet begun.

Unprecedented communication between District functional areas and levels. The cohort team dynamics and process were becoming more refined by the third meeting. Subgroups worked well together to accomplish goals. The team was focused and purposeful. Everyone contributed and open discussion led to thorough discussion and evaluation. Prior to the cohort team meetings, the only reason counselors met was as members of the District Crisis Response Team. Discussion on the subject of counseling in the District had never occurred before. The team now displays a high level of commitment and understanding of the task at hand and strong group cohesion. In addition, the audit process itself helped the group focus on planning instead of jumping ahead to solutions. There was recognition that as cohort members we were going to need to involve and coordinate with groups of grade level counselors in the District. Counselors discussed opportunities to integrate some elements of CGC with other program initiatives such as Response to Intervention (RTI) and Positive Behavior Support (PBS).

It became very obvious that counseling had existed in isolation and that implementation of a comprehensive program will involve connecting and communicating with many others inside and outside the District. There was conversation about needing to communicate with the school board, with level teams, with administrators, with the entire group of counselors, with counselors in other school districts, with parents, and with community stakeholders. The
opportunity to have conversation with other counselors about counseling in the District was recognized as being very important. Very little discussion between grade levels had ever occurred before within the District. We learned so much about each other and our work during discussion generated by the audit process.

*Fourth Meeting: Audit Review and Planning for Change, January 20, 2006*

By our fourth meeting we were getting comfortable with one another and with candid discussions about needs in the District. This meeting presented an opportunity to reflect on the progress of the Cohort Team so far. We took advantage of the opportunity to have June Tremain from ODE at the meeting. She was a valuable addition to this discussion adding insights and feedback about our progress.

*Results of the audit pointed to the work ahead.* The meeting focused on reviewing the results of our audit with June Tremain and the cohort team. She had been involved with several other districts as they had undergone this process and was able to give us ideas and options others had tried and as well as a validate where we were in the process. We reminded ourselves that developing a CGCP is a three-year process and that in the first year of the process our main task was one of assessing and evaluating the current system. In order to know where we need to go, we had to first learn where we are right now. The second year aims at designing a new CGCP, and we will not need to take up implementation until the third year. Throughout the first year, reminding team members of the length of the process helped reduce discouragement of the team—we didn’t have to fix it all right now.

*Recognizing resistance to change.* During the course of our review, we began discussing the resistance to change that we anticipated as we move towards implementing a CGCP. We identified several steps we could take to address the resistance including: (a) involving other counselors in the process, (b) identifying key people to involve in each step of the process, (c) integrating our work with other system approaches in the District (such as PBS and RTI), and (d) showing how CGCP is not just another thing they are being asked to do but a way of prioritizing and coordinating for stronger programs District-wide. As a team, this meeting really took us from looking at our individual needs and feelings to looking at the District as a whole and what would be beneficial for them. The group as a whole began to extend to others outside the group, moving from being internally cohesive to being externally oriented.
Deploying internal cohesion to an external focus. Reflecting on where we were in the process, we recognized that dealing with resistance to change needed to be an essential part of our strategy. We recognized that the most effective way of achieving and maintaining the buy-in of others is to involve them in each step as a part of the process. We recognized the importance of selling the CGCP as “the” thing and not just “another” thing. When we started with an audit, it helps create buy-in because participants are able to recognize that many of the pieces already exist and that much of the work they are doing fits right into a CGCP. We recognized that many of the things counselors do are not written down anywhere.

Fifth meeting: Systems Thinking/Systems Changing Game, February 10, 2006

Teams from all five of the school districts in Cohort B met together for the fifth meeting. We played a systems change game that provided us experience in the process of organizational change. It was aimed at building understanding of the complexity of orchestrating change and the importance of constant communication throughout the process by all stakeholders.

Learning dynamics of change. While playing the game, team members learned strategies for creating the process of change. We learned to view problems as opportunities for creative solutions. We recognized the importance of communication and the necessity of communicating with others to ensure success. We recognized the importance of identifying formal and informal leadership structures and how to develop and use existing connections. In addition, we learned not talking to people and making assumptions about what people know does not work.

Learning how to orchestrate change. The lessons of the day included what it takes to create schools that are learning organizations. The group developed a shared vision of our process of change. Even though cohort members did not work together as a team (district cohorts were purposefully mixed up into working groups made up of members from other district teams), our knowledge of process improved. We were able to think about and learn from our team dynamics because we were one step removed from each other during the learning. The exercise helped the group members look for larger perspective that lies beyond individual perspectives. We learned to value the individual and the group. We were able to begin to look ahead to the challenges of creating change in our District. It reinforced the efforts we were making as we saw other districts having similar challenges and moving through the process in a similar pace.

Differentiating individual needs. The game helped us see the importance of each step no matter how small we might feel the step is. It helped us look at our team members differently—
even though we have the same goals, different members have different needs, i.e.; some needed a lot of information before they could move, others wanted to hurry up and make a move and learn from any possible mistakes. Some members were open to risk-taking and others wanted to maintain the safe environment; some liked change and others were uncomfortable with change unless they were provided with sufficient information first.

*Sixth Meeting: Preparing for the Future and Reflection, April 21, 2006*

Our final meeting was one of reflection and planning for next year. We reviewed the progress we had made on implementing the foundation (Mission Statement, Philosophy Statement, and District Policy). The foundation had been written by this time and was thus ready to be presented to the School Board and to the District Leadership Team. These presentations would be essential in gaining the commitment of key people in our district, an important step in the planning stage. At the last district-wide counselor meeting we were able to have all District counselors participate in an activity that helped them learn the Framework. This was a positive step in communicating with all counselors and bringing them along with us in the process.

*Preparing for the future.* When planning for future steps, we agreed to work with all counselors in the District to complete time and task analysis. The results will be tabulated and used as a vehicle to help shape the framework structure as we move into the design stage. Another identified next step was to look at student outcomes and how best to use them to further our program.

*Reflection.* Sometimes, it is difficult to gauge how much information to share. Providing too much sometimes overwhelms the listener and creates anxiety. Providing too little (or not clearly enough) results in an uncomfortable vagueness. When we shared information with the District counselors, for example, some panicked because they were not quite ready to begin to take on their leadership role in the District. As we discussed implementation there was also an increasing amount of anxiety and resistance within the cohort team itself. It was important for us to experience this anxiety. It will help us grow and learn how best to assist the District through the process. We also became aware cohort members were not spending much time on developing the program between meetings. This important work will need to continue even when we are not meeting in order for it to be established as a part of the District culture. At the conclusion of this meeting we agreed to work harder at building stronger relationships with key stakeholders, gathering data, and communicating with others on a more regular and frequent basis.

First Year Results and Prospects for the Future
We have made a great deal of progress toward implementing a CGCP in the district this first year of planning. The team has formed an identity, benefited from training, set goals, worked together to accomplish goals, stepped forward to learn additional unfamiliar material, and begun preparations for the changes ahead. Once the team understood their mission clearly, it accomplished a thorough assessment of the counseling program in the district and generated conversation about counseling that was productive and unprecedented. This, in itself, was a significant change. The cohort team became the change it wants to create in the District.

Having learned the importance of communication to the process, the team made some effort to get the word out and include others in the change in the district so they would know what was going on and be more likely to support the changes. Our outreach efforts broadened the basis of understanding about the importance of a CGCP and the benefits that accrue to students, teachers, administrators, and counselors alike from implementing such a program. The CGCP was discussed frequently at meetings of District counselors and the cohort team provided an opportunity to for the counselors to learn the Framework. It was important to gage how much information to share at one time. If too much information was provided, it overwhelmed the listener and created anxiety and when too little information was provided, the subject seemed too vague and people did not consider it to be significant enough to remember. Counselors in the district were able to make the shift away from meeting only as a Crisis Response Team to meeting every other month to focus on the topic of Counseling. Counselors have continued to meet in level teams in the district and some have had numerous discussions about CGCP.

The Cohort team identified opportunities and avenues for educating District Administrators and Board members on the Cohort process but at the end of the year little progress had been made. The Administrators on the team did not share information about the counseling cohort with the Superintendent or the School Board. This will be essential if the effort is to be successful. The most significant lesson learned by playing the Systems Thinking/Systems Changing Game was the importance of communicating with others often. Cohort team members only began to realize they were going to need to plan and orchestrate the change in the District along a path similar to the change process ODE used with the Cohort teams. Counselors on the team were just beginning to accept the need to step into this leadership role in the district and form an advisory in their buildings and begin the process all over again.

*Placing Results into Context*
First year gains were gratifying, but change does not happen quickly in a complex system. In order for change to be effective in the district, each cohort team will have to do double duty. That is, each team has to learn the framework, develop a program, and implement the program. At the same time, each team must reach out to everyone in the district and communicate to keep them informed and generate support for implementation. Even the best plans in the world will go nowhere if the information is not extended out into the district in ways that give staff opportunities to buy in to the need for the change. This means that counselors will have to reflect on the process of change as they experience it and then design ways to present new information with others in a way that is respectful of the change process they must undergo, while at the same time, continuing to move ahead into the next phase of change.

Prospects for the Future

A great deal of work remains to be done. One of the challenges facing the team is the need to locate, train, and include team members who will be brought into the team to replace vacancies. It is important that the team continue to share the sense of purpose we have worked to develop. Many questions remain, but one of the benefits of the Cohort process is that we learn from the experience of other teams. We recognize it will be helpful to talk with Cohort A teams next year to learn (a) how they sequenced guidance curriculum; (b) what tools they used to gather data; and (c) how programs in buildings were designed, communicated, and implemented.

There are many programs competing for time and attention in the District. The team has built both understanding and appreciation of the benefits of a CGCP, but that may not be enough to change the system. For implementation to be successful, we have to find ways to integrate counseling into an even larger comprehensive program-approach so we can achieve the broad support base we will need to sustain a change. There is concern that if we do not create a larger comprehensive program in which counseling is an integral part, we will fragment the audience in our districts and overwhelm them with another thing. We possess the potential to do this integration because several team members are associated with these other initiatives. If counseling is to be “the thing” and not “just another thing” we need to work together with other comprehensive program efforts to produce one comprehensive approach for all programs in the district. To be successful, we must continue to strive to build strong relationships with key stakeholders, use data, and communicate with others on a more regular and frequent basis.
References


