School Counseling Program Audit: Using the Café Model

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**Burris School Counseling Program Audit**

According to the American School Counseling Association (ASCA) (2012), the program audit is utilized to assess school counseling programs compared to the ASCA national model. Audits should be performed when the School Counseling program is designed and should be assessed yearly to check the progress and growth towards the national model. Program audits set the standard for the School Counseling program and allow the stakeholders to identify areas of strengths, weakness and create goals based on weak areas.

The current program audit was utilized to assess Burris Laboratory’s School Counseling Program. The audit was performed using the Café Model and the School Data Profile created by ASCA. The Café model is the Change Agent for Equity (Café) School Counselor Evaluation. The Café model pulls from the ASCA national model and incorporates principles from the National Center for Transforming School Counseling (Martin, 2002). The model focuses on the school counselor’s professional identity as the core of the School Counseling program. Thus the model can be utilized to appraise both the school counselor’s professional identity as an equitable agent of change and how the program is functioning as a result of this identity. To identify areas of need and to ensure that all students are receiving equitable services it is imperative to look at school data. The School Data Profile was used to identify areas of needs and to understand the schools demographics.

**School Data Profile**

The School Data Profile was used to identify and conceptualize the demographics of the students and to gain understanding about areas of needs. Burris Laboratory School is located in Muncie, Indiana and is very unique as it is a K-12 school. Burris is a public school that admits students based on a lottery system. This system allows for a more diverse student population to attend the school and attracts students from all over the Muncie area. The current enrollment for Burris Laboratory School is 622 students in grades K-12. Of those 622 students approximately 76% are White, 8% are multiracial, 8% are Black, 4% are Asian, 3% are Latino or Hispanic and 1% are American Indian students. Additionally, the rate of students on free and reduced lunch is at 27% (U.S. News), and approximately 26% of the school population has been identified as economically disadvantaged. According to the Department of Education, Burris has earned an overall school grade of A, meaning they have met the standards set by the DOE. Within the school there is some variety between general education students, special education students and high ability students. Currently, 226 (37%) of students have been identified as Gifted or High Ability, 12 (1.9%) are English as a Second Language, and 78 (12.6%) of students are receiving special education services. Additionally, the graduation rate for students without retention is at 94.1% and approximately 52.1% or 48 students are taking rigorous courses such as AP classes and Ball State classes. Standardized testing scores show needs in specific populations. Approximately 28.6% of students on Free/Reduced price meals did not pass ISTEP compared to 11.2% of students on paid meals who did not pass. Additionally, 52.9% of students in special education did not pass ISTEP compared to the 10.3% of students in general education that did not pass (Burris ISTEP Scores, 2013). Lastly, there is not much information as far as drop outs and discipline data, however, there were 43 in school suspensions and 20 out of school suspensions during the 2012-2013 school year according to Burris discipline data. Once the School Data Profile is complete it is crucial to the effectiveness of the School Counseling Program to evaluate the program based on the competencies created by ASCA.

**Café Model**

There are many facets to the Café model to assess the various aspects of a School Counseling program. As stated earlier the Café model integrates components of the ASCA national model with the National Center for Transforming School Counseling to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the school counselor and program. There are fifteen total domains that are covered in the model including: Leadership, Collaboration, Opportunity/Achievement gap and Cultural identity/Language to name a few. All of these domain areas are important to providing an equitable School Counseling program. Throughout this examination I will assess areas of strengths, weaknesses and improvements that can be made during my time at Burris.

**Overview of Evaluation**

Throughout the evaluation many aspects of the program stood out as strengths, while other areas need improvement. Overall, The Burris School Counseling Program is relatively balanced as many aspects are distinguished and some are unsatisfactory. An overall, theme of Burris that needs to be improved is data collection and analysis. The School Counseling Program is addressing many of the personal/social, career and academic domain areas; however, current interventions and programs are not utilizing Indiana or ASCA School Counseling standards. Therefore, on those sections it appears that the program is not executing those aspects, when in reality standards from ASCA or ISCA (Indiana School Counseling Association) are not being utilized.

Goals are essential in accountability and effective delivery of services. At the beginning of the school year we did not have goals set for the counseling program. As interns we discussed the importance of this and as a team we collaborated with Julie and Elise to create goals for the center. Some of our goals include incorporating more culturally relevant information and perspectives into our guidance lessons. Additionally, we are going to create a cultural small group for students of all cultural backgrounds to come together, share their experiences and learn about each other. Sue (2008) found that ethnic identity was able to buffer the relationship between discrimination and life satisfaction. Sue (2008) found that a helpful approach is for School Counselors to design and implement programs that aim at enhancing cultural identities and pride, which can promote resilience in youths who face stress. I believe that this will help Burris to be a more friendly and accepting place where all students celebrate cultural differences.

Another goal we are focused on is the use of data collection in most of our programs. We would like to see an increase in data collection for individual sessions, small groups and classroom guidance to help strengthen the effectiveness of the comprehensive program.

Data is a component of the program that is not being used to its fullest extent. As students we have been taught to implement data collection and analysis whenever possible to strengthen our programs and advocate for our positions. Currently, data is being used to keep track of college and career readiness and other High School aspects. However, I believe that data can be used more effectively to track deficits, improvements and strengths of the current program. House and Hayes (2002) indicated that collecting and analyzing data could lead to increased student performance, closing the achievement gap and determining program effectiveness. Additionally, Young and Kaffenberger (2011) found that implementing a School Counseling program base don using data increases school Counselors’ beliefs and practices about the use of data. When we discussed the program audit both of the School Counselors noted that they would like to use more data collection, however with all of their duties it is difficult to do. As a current intern, I am hoping to implement more data collection practices. To begin I would like to use some sore of quick survey for students who are walking in to take to see how effective we are as counselors addressing walk-in needs. I believe that this will be a quick and easy way to see our effectiveness at the school and to advocate for more time in the office as we can serve more students and ensure that they can leave the center and be successful when they return to class. Additionally, we will be doing pre and post tests in our classroom guidance lessons and our small groups. Although this is a small thing to increase the results of this will increase our own understanding of our effectives and can help us identify areas that need to be improved.

The Café model has sixteen different domain areas. Below is an examination of the areas that needed the most attention and problem solving to improve. Each domain area consists of a description of the indicators, how Burris is doing in those areas and ways to improve those areas.

**Leadership**

The leadership section was strong in demonstrating School Counselor leadership; however new programs are not being created to specifically address the achievement, opportunity and attainment gaps at the school. This can be addressed by disaggregating the school data to see what students are not succeeding and finding equitable solutions to help those students succeed. Additionally, the use of goals and action plans can provide more attention towards making this a reality within the program. As addressed above, we are actively working on creating goals and plans to reach all students.

**Educator/School Counselor Collaboration**

Within the Educator/School Counselor collaboration the evaluation show both strengths and weaknesses within the program. Currently no program advisory council exists, however the counselors do a very good job with seeking out others in the profession, planning with other educational professions and collaborating with various school stakeholders. This collaboration with other stakeholders including teachers, parents and community members is essential to student success. According to Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) found positive associations between parental involvement and rates of participation, student grades, lower dropout rates, motivation towards schoolwork and valuing of education. According to Julie Maugherman and Elise Chupp, parents are very involved in the schools and have many opportunities throughout the day to communicate with various school personnel. Since Burris is a small school with a very close-knit community, the program advisory council is not as essential to the success of the School Counseling Program. Burris has a PTSO (Parent, Teacher, Student Organization) that facilitates discussions and advocacy for various programming. The guidance program is able to run ideas through this organization and collaborate with the PTSO to ensure that students are successful. Lastly, the School Counseling program does a good job of keeping up with the academic instruction initiatives but they do not share goals with staff regarding what the program is doing to address initiatives. To improve this it will be helpful to first identify goals of the program linking to academic initiatives. Additionally, sharing these goals either on the website or during staff meetings would help teachers know and through collaboration we can work to improve the overall effectiveness of the program.

**Program Assessment/Accountability**

As previously mentioned, the use of data collection and disaggregating data would improve the program by demonstrating needs within different areas. The program assessment and accountability section can be significantly improved by employing small changes that will make a big difference. Most of the indicators of this section received a basic score such as uses disaggregated school report card data to find gaps and address non-dominant cultural groups. These areas are in need of improvement, to improve these areas the School Counseling team can meet at the beginning of the school year to look at the data and to plan the goals and interventions around meeting those goals. Although there are many areas that need improvement, the program is doing a proficient job in sharing intervention results digitally with stakeholders. In the past few years the program has been keeping and collecting data on Skill Streaming, a social skills classroom guidance program. They have shown the effectiveness of the program within the classrooms and use data to inform decisions about continuing the program. This year, we will continue this by expanding the Skill Streaming program to the middle school, as there have been many social issues already this year that can be addressed by this program. In addition, to foster cultural identity we can include culturally diverse perspectives and discussions while implementing classroom guidance and other programs to encourage students to think about other cultures and learn the importance of multiple perspectives.

**Achievement Gap**

As stated earlier the achievement gap section of the evaluation is weak, to improve this data collection needs to occur as soon as possible. Although this seems like a daunting task, we can find solutions to ease this process. As interns, we can look at interventions and connect them with ISCA and ASCA standards to show that our interventions are meeting the standards for our professional organizations. This will help us to show that we are doing what is proposed and that it is helpful. Additionally, it would be helpful to share those competencies with other school stakeholders to inform them that we follow standards and focus on applying them to the Indiana teaching standards. This may also help us to get into more classrooms at various levels if we are demonstrating that teachers can meet their standards through our programs. To address needs of underserved populations we can use disaggregated data to understand what students need support and we can begin to implement interventions to address these areas. Currently, there is a population of black students at Burris that are not passing ISTEP; it would be a good idea to implement a small group or some interventions to help this group, as they are historically underserved. As the School Counselor’s we can implement various strategies such as meeting with students, teachers and parents to identify needs and create a plan to address them.

**College and Career Readiness and Annual College/Career Readiness Planning**

The College and Career Readiness and Annual College/Career Readiness Planning sections have been combined, as they are relevant to each other. Both of these areas are some of the School Counseling Programs greatest strengths. Currently, Julie does a very good job of meeting student’s CCR needs with meetings and providing a plethora of college and career information for students. One of the greatest strengths from this section is the collaboration with parents and guardians regarding college prep. Burris hosts a college info night where parents are invited to come to school and learn about the financial aid, scholarship and admissions process. This helps parents and students learn about options that are available to them. Overall, the Counseling Center does a very good job of communicating with parents and guardians in all domains of personal/social, academic and career ensuring that students and parents have necessary information needed to be successful.

**Anti-Violence/Bullying/Safety and Ability, Disability, and Gifted/Talented**

The Anti-Violence and Ability sections are two of Burris’s greatest strengths. The school does a very great job of addressing bullying through multiple manners and through many different school personnel. The Counseling center provides classroom guidance on respecting self and other people’s differences. Additionally, other school personnel from the coaches, athletic director, assistant principals and aides all help with encouraging acceptance of others and work actively to decrease the amount of bulling incidents. Additionally, Burris has a large population (about 30%) that are high ability. Student in high ability at other schools often do not receive the support they need, especially at the Elementary and Middle School levels. However, the School Counseling program does a tremendous job supporting this. Additionally, students in special education receive the support they need as well. Students are pushed to excel in many different areas, with many students pursuing internships and independent studies. Burris also does a good job of ensuring that students are in the least restrictive environment pushing students to spend as much time in the general education classroom as possible.

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