

School Counselors as CTE Stakeholders

Choosing a career is probably one of the biggest decisions a person makes. How does a student, of any age, make a sound decision? What are the knowledge and skills needed to achieve postsecondary and career success? How does one navigate through the sea of career information? **The answer:** A comprehensive guidance program coupled with a rigorous career technical education (CTE) program.

This brief highlights the integral role that school counselors, in conjunction with a CTE program, play in successfully guiding students through the maze of secondary and postsecondary options so that they are successful in their chosen career. While school counselors and CTE teachers/faculty work in the same building or campus, regrettably and oftentimes because of circumstances beyond their control, they are worlds apart. And sometimes misperceptions and stereotypes prevent these two communities from working collaboratively. However, we do know that when counselors and CTE teachers/faculty work together, the students benefit greatly. Below are ways that CTE and school counseling can benefit one another to accomplish their shared goal of student success.

Rigorous Programs of Study and Career Clusters: A Tool for School Counselors

CTE offers rigorous programs of study for broad career areas based on 16 national career clusters, or similar occupational groupings, that identify the knowledge and skills students need as they follow a pathway to their career and educational goals.ⁱ CTE programs of study include coherent and rigorous content aligned with challenging academic standards and relevant career technical content. This content must be delivered in a coordinated, non-duplicative progression of courses that align secondary education with postsecondary education and lead to an associate or baccalaureate degree, industry-recognized credential or certificate. Together CTE faculty, school counselors, and other education stakeholders can develop programs of study using curriculum available to their own students. State and local efforts are currently underway to develop the programs of study. The States' Career Clusters website provides sample programs of study that state or local school districts may consider.ⁱⁱ

Career clusters provide a framework for career development giving students the opportunity to take academic and technical classes relevant to their career goals. Within each of the 16 career clusters there are pathways that further define specific types of career opportunities they can pursue within that cluster. In turn, within each pathway there are set of specialized knowledge and skills that students must master in order to be competent in the career they are studying. CTE courses implemented through a career clusters' framework show students how the technical and academic classes they take can prepare them for future careers in the "real world". Counselors can use a tool such as the Career Clusters Interest Inventory Survey,ⁱⁱⁱ a pencil and paper survey, to gauge which cluster areas student might be interested in pursuing. Career Clusters Models^{iv} are helpful for parents and students to better understand the structure of career clusters and pathways, and they show how careers and occupations relate to coursework. Counselors can use the Models to guide students to the courses they should take if they wish to get a job in or major in a cluster area.

Comprehensive School Counseling Programs: A Tool for CTE

School counselors are partners in student achievement, and school counseling programs should be a fundamental part of students' daily educational lives. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) created , the ASCA National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs, which guides states, districts and individual schools in developing, implementing and evaluating a comprehensive, developmental and systematic school counseling program. The ASCA National Model supports the school's overall success by working with students on academic achievement, career planning and personal/social development.

A comprehensive counseling program based on the ASCA National Model is a way for school counselors to show students all of their academic and technical options, including CTE courses. Counselors can explain these options in the framework of career clusters and programs of study. Doing so will provide organization and structure to student planning. It may also make students more likely to enroll in rigorous and relevant courses because they will better understand the necessary next steps, whether they want to go onto college or work directly after high school. According to the Utah State Office of Education, CTE students who receive effective guidance services are more likely to complete a rigorous curriculum of English, science, and math and have higher test scores than those students who have not received such guidance.^v

State Examples: Models of Effective Collaboration between CTE and Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling

Missouri: The Missouri Center for Career Education (MCCE), established through a grant from the Guidance Counseling and Placement Section of the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, bridges the connection between CTE and counseling by offering curriculum and professional development for both CTE faculty and school counselors. MCCE offers resources to counselors such as the Guidance eLearning Center, which provides lesson plans for counselors to use at each grade level for career exploration and planning.^{vi} It also makes available Program of Study Implementation Modules that are useful for understanding career clusters and student transitions from secondary to postsecondary.^{vii}

Missouri also offers a variety of online resources for grades 7-16 that school counselors and CTE teachers can use to improve coordination between their programs. *Missouri Connections* is a website that allows students, teachers and counselors to access career explorations tools such as plans of study, assessments, college admission criteria, and a list of "hot" careers by region.^{viii} Counselors can also use the administrative database to track student progress and to improve curriculum and individual student counseling.

The Missouri Comprehensive Guidance Program has resulted in academic benefits for students and schools. High schools that provided students with educational and career planning services, such as individual planning, as part of comprehensive guidance programs had significantly higher AYP scores under No Child Left Behind.^{ix} Additionally, students attending Missouri high schools with more fully implemented guidance programs were more likely to: have higher 11th grade MAP Communication Arts test scores, graduate from high school, have better attendance, and have fewer discipline problems.^x

Nebraska: Nebraska Career Education utilizes school counseling in designing and implementing the Nebraska Career Education (NCE) Model. By using a common model in schools students, parents and educators better understand how both academic and CTE curriculum directly contribute to postsecondary and career readiness. Community colleges in the state are embracing the NCE model in admissions materials and other planning resources for seamless transitions between secondary and postsecondary.

NCE offers a variety of resources to create a career development program for counselors and students to utilize in career planning.^{xi} *Nebraska Career Connections* is a web-based career information tool that provides assessments, expansive career information and tools centered on career clusters. NCE programs of study are displayed in templates as sample Personal Learning Plans for each Cluster and Pathway that are used for individual student planning and curriculum development. Recently a middle school career exploration curriculum was released which introduces students to each of the 16 career clusters, and teaches them how to develop their Personal Learning Plans. A statewide evaluation of school counseling program using these resources is in progress.

Utah: Utah's Comprehensive Counseling and Guidance Program (CCGP) supports the Career and Technical Education Pathways initiative.^{xii} Pathways are used as models by school counselors when working with students on developing an individual Student Education Occupation Plan. During this process, counselors identify appropriate pathways that meet each student's interests, abilities, and goals.

A 1998 study commissioned by the Utah State Office of Education studying the implementation and outcome of comprehensive guidance in the state found that in highly implemented CCGP, students took more advanced math and science courses, took more CTE courses and scored higher in every area of the ACT.^{xiii} In a 2007 follow up study 93% of high school students surveyed reported that guidance services have had a positive impact on student planning, career exploration and course-taking, while 92% reported that they had been exposed to work-based learning opportunities.^{xiv}

Recommendations for School Counselors

Career Clusters: School counselors are invited to use the [career clusters' model](#) as a framework for academic and career planning for all students. The career cluster framework encourages and includes all levels of postsecondary education, including postsecondary degrees (Associate, Bachelor, Master and PhD), licenses, diplomas, certificates, and apprenticeships. Programs of study outline all of the academic and technical courses that students can take during each school year. School counselors, especially those who are responsible for scheduling, should make use of sample programs of study to ensure that students get both a strong academic core and relevant CTE coursework.

It is also important for teachers and counselors to develop and use a common language of education and career planning. Doing so will add efficiency and clarity to the process for students, and show how educational and career goals are aligned. Because the ASCA National Standards for Students^{xv} regarding academic, career and personal/social standards align very closely with the Career Clusters essential knowledge and skills,^{xvi} developing a common framework should not be problematic.

Community Involvement: CTE has a long history of business and community involvement within their programs of study. Local businesses can be mentors or offer internships to high school students which will provide practical applications and hands on experience for students to see the relevance of what they learn in the classroom to the “real world.” School counselors should leverage this connection to work collaboratively with community partners to educate students and parents on the careers located in and around their neighborhoods. School counselors can help students find and apply for internships with local businesses. Counselors should also encourage businesses to participate in “career nights” or offer scholarships to students pursuing postsecondary degrees or certificates in particular fields.

Recommendation for CTE

P-16 Comprehensive Career Development: Career development is a lifelong process. Career awareness begins in elementary school (K-5), career exploration occurs in junior high (6-8), career preparation and application takes place in high school (9-12), and life-long career management continues throughout one’s lifetime. It is important for CTE teachers and faculty to consider the advantages of engaging students of all ages in career development. Research has found that middle school students enrolled in career courses had improved math and science grades, and were more likely to engage in careful academic planning.^{xvii} Early planning will also give students more time to assess whether a 4 year or 2 year college, dual enrollment, or a certification program is appropriate to meet their goals.

Conclusion

There are advantages for CTE and comprehensive school counseling programs to coordinate their efforts to better serve all students in achieving postsecondary and career readiness. CTE offers rigorous programs of study, academic and career technical education curriculum, and existing relationships with the business community. Through these linkages, it serves as an effective and comprehensive model for counselors to use as they assist students in planning for their futures. Comprehensive counseling programs are a way for school counselors to show students all of their academic and technical options, including CTE courses, through organized and structured student planning.

Endnotes can be found in the online version of this brief at <http://www.careertech.org/show/publications>

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Endnotes

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- ^{vi} Missouri Center for Career Education, Guidance eLearning Center, Guidance Curriculum, at <http://missouricareereducation.org/curr/cmd/guidanceplacementG/lessons/index.php>
- ^{vii} Missouri Center for Career Education, Program of Study Implementation, <http://missouricareereducation.org/project/pos/>
- ^{viii} For more information, visit Missouri Connections, at <http://www.missouriconnections.org/>
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