

# Measuring Quality of Year 3 CFS Implementation

## Elements of High Quality Counseling Strategies

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School counseling programs are an integral part of schools' academic plans, articulated (and embraced) as a core component of schools' fundamental educational practices. Schools recognize the ways in which counselors promote and enhance students' learning experiences, providing an added layer of support to foster students' social/emotional growth, their academic performance, and their long-term planning for college and career. Many Connecting for Success (CFS) schools are using the school counselor role to provide intensive counseling support to students in the CFS cohort, all of whom are at risk of dropping out before high school completion. Research (including experimental studies) indicates that school counselors can help to reduce the risk of student dropout by addressing issues before a student is in crisis, and by providing prevention-based support that keeps them on track to graduate.<sup>1</sup> These studies also provide evidence of *specific* effective practices. School counseling programs that have demonstrated the most impact are those that incorporate the following elements:<sup>2</sup>

- **Dedicated Support:** Highly personalized services from a trained counselor who can provide full-time dedicated support to the high-risk cohort, and who maintains regular contact and close relationships with each student.
- **Systematic Monitoring:** Systematic strategies to monitor student progress and address areas for growth.
- **Collaborative Partnerships:** Connections among schools, families, and community services to provide a strong support system for students.
- **Family Engagement:** Substantial communication with and support for parents.

High quality counseling strategies serving at-risk youth should **include all four elements**. The following summary provides more detail on each of these elements, including definitions of the specific practices that make up each one.

### Dedicated Support

- **Staff capacity:** The availability of the counselor is critical to providing individualized support and guidance to students needing daily monitoring to stay on track. To most effectively provide this level of support, the counselor position should be full-time, staffed by a state-credentialed counselor who brings experience working with at-risk youth. Additionally, the counselor should maintain a small- to medium-sized caseload, and be fully dedicated to the CFS cohort. According to the American School Health Association, the maximum recommended student/counselor ratio is 250:1 for general counseling services.<sup>3</sup> Higher ratios make it hard for counselors to provide regular, individualized support to each student – and, in particular, to high-risk students who need greater attention and ongoing support than the general student population.
- **Regular contact:** Counselors should meet at least monthly with each student. This regular contact is critical for establishing a relationship with each student and engaging them in the process of setting and pursuing educational goals.

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<sup>1</sup> American Counseling Association (2007). Effectiveness of school counseling. Office of Public Policy and Legislation.

<sup>2</sup> Anderson et al. (2004), Lehr et al. (2004b), & Dynarski (2004).

<sup>3</sup> National Center for Education Statistics (2005). State Nonfiscal Public Elementary/Secondary Education Survey 2003-2004, U.S. Department of Education.

- **Range of supports:** Counseling programs for high-risk students should offer a range of supports responsive to each student’s needs. These should include academic support, along with social-emotional support, targeted problem-solving, goal setting, service learning opportunities, and career counseling. Counselors should also offer both individual and small-group counseling. Individualized attention is critical to ensuring a student stays on track to meet their academic and personal goals, while small-group interventions provide an opportunity for students to work on shared tasks, problem-solve, develop supportive relationships, and inform one another’s growth.<sup>4</sup>

## Systematic Monitoring

- **Data-driven approach:** School counseling programs should take a data-driven approach, in which the counselor regularly reviews data to drive decision-making and improve student learning. Counselors should use data to create customized support services for students, monitor student progress and the effectiveness of supports, collaborate with teachers and parents, and advocate for student success. A data-driven approach means systematically monitoring data (at least monthly) on students’ academic performance, attendance, and behavior in order to regularly assess their progress, and to support their growth and learning. The frequency with which counselors review student data should ideally align with the frequency with which they meet with students and teachers to reflect on progress and next steps.
- **Data access:** For a data-driven approach to be highly effective, counselors need access to all of the data that will allow them to make informed decisions about how best to support a student. iResult offers a valuable platform that enables users to access data centralized in one place, to sort across systems and points in time, and to view student data holistically. Unlimited data access allows counselors to reference students’ data whenever they need to, and to use data to inform ongoing learning conversations.

## Collaborative Partnerships

- **Team-based structure:** Effective school counseling programs that promote student success are a collaborative effort among the school counselor, teachers, administrators, and families. School counselors should be open to collaboration with internal and external partners (e.g. community-based organizations to which they can refer students for additional services). Enlisting the support of these partners allows school counselors to act as a hub that connects students to a network of additional resources, and thus and offer more comprehensive support to their students.<sup>5</sup>
- **Administrative support/buy-in:** When school principals believes that the counseling program is critical for monitoring and promoting student success, they are more likely to set up the counselor with the time, resources, and support they need to maximize their impact with students. Administrative support ensures that counselors can focus on student learning-based work rather than on the administrative-based tasks that may be taking the counselor away from their primary function.
- **Alignment of counseling and academic instruction:** Strengthening alignment between counseling services and academic instruction ensures that students are benefiting from a coordinated network of support. Strengthened alignment is a core component of building collaborative partnerships to better support student success. In the most effective school counseling programs, counselors and teaching staff have formed close alliances, and there are clear linkages between counseling and classroom-based work. Counselors and teachers should have structured time to meet (at least quarterly), where

<sup>4</sup> American School Counselor Association. ASCA National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs (third edition).

<sup>5</sup> Cowan, K. C., Vaillancourt, K., Rossen, E., & Pollitt, K. (2013). A framework for safe and successful schools [Brief]. Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.

they can exchange information about individual students, with each party informing the other’s work with that student. By creating such forums for information exchange, schools can create a bridge between what is learned in counseling and what is learned in the classroom.

## Family Engagement

- **Bridge between school and home:** School counselors play a critical role in building a bridge between schools and homes to ensure families are connected to the educational process. Research shows that family engagement leads to greater student achievement and increased graduation rates.<sup>6</sup> In a high-quality counseling program, the counselor builds relationships with families and ensures there is information flowing between the school and the home. This work may include the counselor facilitating and encouraging communication between parents and teachers, scheduling parent-teacher conferences, preparing parents to engage with teachers, or conducting home visits to keep parents informed about their child and the school.
- **Support family involvement:** Counselors should support families in their efforts to engage with their child’s education, inviting parents to be “co-educators” along with their child’s teachers.<sup>7</sup> Parent involvement is not solely about parents participating in school functions – involvement also includes setting high expectations and creating positive attitudes about education. Counselors can help encourage parents to provide positive reinforcement at home, and to express value for their child’s school success.<sup>8</sup> One way counselors can invite this collaborative approach is by conducting home visits for the purpose of building collaborative and trusting relationships with parents, rather than conducting a home visit only for punitive or disciplinary purposes. In doing so, counselors support a culture of family-school partnership, further strengthening the network of support for students who are struggling the most to succeed in school.

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The elements outlined above form the basis of the *Connecting for Success Student Counseling Quality Measurement Tool*. The quality measurement tool assesses the extent to which a school’s implementation of counseling, specifically to support CFS students, incorporates these critical dimensions and elements of quality. This tool can help schools and the Hawai’i Community Foundation monitor implementation of best practices, and identify areas to strengthen quality and further maximize impact for students.

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<sup>6</sup> Harvard Family Research Project (2014). *Redefining Family Engagement for Student Success*.

<sup>7</sup> Flannery, M.E. (2014). All in the family: how teacher home visits can lead to school transformation. neaToday. National Education Association.

<sup>8</sup> Henderson, A. T. & Mapp, K. L. (2002). *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement*. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.