

Counselor Connection Program, 2004

REIS04-180-2

At a Glance

The DISD Division of Counseling Services received a three-year grant award (2003-2006) from the U.S. Department of Education to fund program activities and services designed to assist and support new elementary counselors and to increase the quality of direct services provided to DISD students and families. Four mentor counselors were employed to work with the first Counselor Connection Program (CCP) cohort of 44 new counselors. The major focus of the grant program was for mentor counselors to make scheduled and unscheduled visits within the school setting to work with the new counselors on a one-to-one basis. An additional program component was for mentor counselors to be trained using a train the trainer approach on the We Help Ourselves (WHO®) anti-victimization program in partnership with the Mental Health Association of Greater Dallas.

Participating Elementary Schools

Mentor counselors provided assistance and support to new counselors at 40 DISD elementary schools during the 2003-2004 school year. Participating schools are shown in Tables 1. The four Mentor Counselors were all experienced counselors with past counseling experience ranging from 4 to 30+ years direct counseling experience within DISD. Each of the four mentor counselors was responsible for mentoring 10-11 new counselors through on-site visitation. Visits usually consisted of one-half day on site. During these interactions, mentor counselors demonstrated classroom guidance presentations, helped organize and coordinate school-wide programs, provided technical assistance in developing, planning, and implementing other job tasks both directly and indirectly, and demonstrating relationship building with teachers, administrators, and other school personnel.

Table 1
Participating Elementary Schools
Enrollment as of March 1, 2004

School Name New Counselor Schools	Number of Counselors	School Enrollment
Adams, Nathan	1	573
Anderson, Wm	2	846
Blair, W.A.	2	745
Bowie, James	2	989
Budd, Harrell*	2	740
Casa View	2	1045
Bannerman	1	371
Donald, L.O.	1	748
Ervin, J.N.	1	561
Gooch, Tom C.	1	396
Hall, L. K.	2	797
Henderson	2	933
Hooe, Lida	2	1012
Hotchkiss, L. L.*	2	933
James, Daniel	1	266
Johnston, A.S.	1	470
Jones, Anson	2	1102
Kahn, Louis	2	855
Keist, Edwin J.*	2	889
Maple Lawn	2	827
Mata, Eduardo	1	584
Medrano, E.H.	2	803
Peabody, George	2	770
Peeler, John	1	685
Pershing, John J.	1	647
Runyon, John W.	2	1105
San Jacinto	2	787
Seagoville AEP	1	86
Sequoyah	1	282
Silberstein, A.	2	1000
Stemmons, L.A.	2	891
Stevens Park	2	725
Titche, Edward*	2	1300
Tolbert, Thomas	2	777
Urban Park	2	1018
Vickery Meadows	1	437
Walker, E.D.	2	736
Webster, Daniel	2	749
Winnetka	2	889
Zaragoza, I.	2	741

* both counselors were new

First Year Outcomes-Mentor Counselors

To determine the extent to which mentor counselors believed the program was

effectively implemented each mentor counselor was interviewed. Answers to structured interview questions revealed the following insights.

- Possible reasons new counselors leave include stress, feeling overwhelmed with job duties and responsibilities, strained relationships or school climate, and inconvenience of school to residence.
- Sharing of ideas, encouragement, listening, modeling and demonstrating, ongoing communication, accessibility, as well as helping new counselors to meet performance standards were all important functions of mentor counselors.
- WHO® classroom guidance was difficult with regard to staying within the timeframe allotted, the extent of involvement in classroom discipline when making presentations, and with regard to cross cultural aspects of sensitive topics for the upper elementary grade levels. Obtaining administrative buy-in to develop guidance schedule was described as a barrier.
- Important unanticipated benefits of the program were the bonding that occurred among the mentors, between the mentor counselors and the new counselors, and the exchange of ideas from campus to campus.

First Year Outcomes-New Counselor Performance

To determine the extent to which counselor performance met expectations, a New Counselor Effectiveness Survey was developed and distributed to teachers and principals at the 40 schools where new counselors were employed. With an overall response rate of 68.1%, 293 surveys were returned for analysis. Survey results indicated that new counselor performance effectiveness was rated relatively high overall between 70-80% on a scale of 0-100%.

First Cohort Attrition Rates

An important outcome expected from the program was lowering the attrition rates of new counselors in the district. Attrition was defined for the program as the number of new counselors that leave the district. At the end of the first grant year, five new counselors left the district for an attrition rate of 11.4%. This rate is substantially lower than the rates reported by the Division of Counseling Services for previous years.

New Counselor Impact Survey

At the start of the second grant year, follow-up was conducted among the group of new counselors comprising the first grant program cohort. Of the 44 new counselors in the first cohort, 5 left the district, 2 retired, 2 changed to teaching, 1 changed to administration, 8 returned to counseling but at different schools, and 26 remained as a counselor in same school. To determine if these counselors considered the impact of the program similarly, a brief survey was distributed to each new counselor with slightly different questions based on the group in which each of them fell. Of the 5 new counselors who left the district, none of the surveys were returned for a zero percent return rate. Surveys were not sent to retirees. Of the remaining counselors, the grant program had the following impact.

Among the 11 counselors who changed position or school assignment, 4 of 6 responders rated the mentor experience as "very good"; 2 of the 6 responders rated the experience as "good". When asked whether having a mentor counselor helped to influence the decision to remain in the previous assignment, 50% of the respondents reported "yes" and 50% reported "no".

Among the 26 counselors who remained in the same school and position, 15 of 22 responders rated the mentor experience as "very good"; 3 rated the experience as "good"; 2 rated the experience as "average"; and 2 left the question unanswered.

In summary, the value of the mentoring experience for most new counselors was rated very good.