

Counselor Connection Program, 2005

REIS05-180-4

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. The second grant year and the 2nd cohort of new counselors comprised the 2004-05 academic year. The same four mentor counselors continued as mentors for the second Counselor Connection Program (CCP) cohort of 38 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 for this year was for mentor counselors to implement the 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 36 DISD elementary schools during the 2004-2005 academic year. Participating schools are shown in Tables 1. Mentor counselors were experienced counselors with past counseling experience ranging from five to 30+ years direct counseling experience within DISD. Each of the four mentor counselors was responsible for mentoring 9 to 10 (2nd cohort) counselors through on-site visitation. In addition, the mentor counselors made at least two visits to the first cohort counselors in the grant program. Visits usually consisted of one-half day on school 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 demonstrated relationship building with teachers, administrators, and other school personnel.

Table 1
Participating Elementary Schools

School Name	Number of Positions	School Enrollment
Bethune	2	992
Bowie	2	860
Budd	2	626
Burnet	2	1,252
Casa View	2	892
Cowart	2	977
Cuellar	2	788
DeGolyer	1	413
Donald	1	679
Ervin	1	528
Fannin	1	279
Gooch	1	330
Hall	2	694
Hawthorne	2	624
Hooe	2	748
Hotchkiss	2	873
Ireland	2	775
Johnston	1	669
Kiest	2	798
King	1	242
Knight	2	743
Maple Lawn	2	672
Medrano	2	613
Mills	1	559
Mount Auburn	1	585
Rice	1	513
Rosemont	2	856
Rowe	2	880
Runyon*	2	916
Russell	1	389
San Jacinto	2	696
Seagoville Alternative	1	N/A
Titche*	2	1,063
Tolbert	2	650
Urban Park	2	901
Winnetka	2	793

Note. * Both positions were 2nd cohort counselors; N/A = not available; enrollment data as of 8/1/2005.

First Year Structured Interviews

Structured interviews were used to determine the extent to which mentor counselors believed the program was effectively implemented for the first grant year (1st cohort). Answers to structured interview questions revealed possible reasons new counselors tend to leave the District. Those reasons were: a) stress, b) feeling overwhelmed with job duties and responsibilities, c) strained relationships or school climate, or d) inconvenience of school to residence. Structured interviews were not conducted in the second grant year (2nd cohort) with mentor counselors or with new counselors.

Second 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 36 schools where new counselors were employed. With an overall response rate of 62.2%, 336 surveys were returned for analysis. Survey results indicated that new counselor performance effectiveness was rated relatively high overall, very near 80% on a scale of 0-100%.

Second 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 second grant year, three of the 38 new counselors (2nd Cohort) left the district, an attrition rate of 7.9%. This rate was substantially lower than the rate reported for the 1st Cohort (2003-2004 school year) of 11.4%.

New Counselor Impact Survey, 2nd Cohort

Follow-up was conducted among the group of new counselors comprising the second grant program cohort. Of the 38 new counselors in the second cohort, 3 left the district, 1 changed to teaching, 7 returned to counseling but at different schools, and 27 remained as a counselor in the same school. To determine if these counselors viewed the program similarly, a brief survey was distributed to

each new counselor with slightly different question wording based on the group in which each of them fell. Of the three new counselors who left the district, two surveys were returned for a 67% percent return rate. One counselor rated the experience as "very good" and the other rated it as "good". Of the remaining counselors, the grant program had the following impact.

Among the eight counselors who changed position or school assignment, four of the five responders rated the mentor experience as "very good"; one of the five responders rated the experience as "good".

Among the 27 counselors who remained in the same school and position, 17 of the 19 responders rated the mentor experience as "very good"; 1 of the 19 rated the experience as "good"; and 1 of the 19 rated the experience as "average". When asked whether having a mentor counselor helped to influence the decision to remain in the previous assignment, 12 of 19 (63%) of the respondents reported "yes" and (37%) reported "no". Table 2 shows some of the demographic characteristics of the two cohorts.

Table 2
Demographic Characteristics
Comparison of First to Second Cohort

Demographic Characteristic	First Cohort			Second Cohort		
	n	N	%	n	N	%
Counseling Experience (less than 1 year)	24	41	58.5	22	38	57.9
One counselor in school	15	41	36.6	12	38	31.6
Permanent Certification	24	41	58.5	19	38	50.0
Ratio of Counselor to Students	1:748			1:679		

Note. "n" is number of responders; "N" is total cohort

Fewer of the 2nd Cohort new counselors had less than one year of K-12 counseling experience; fewer were placed in schools as the only counselor; and fewer 2nd cohort counselors had permanent certification in counseling when compared to the 1st Cohort of new counselors. The 2nd cohort new counselor-to-student enrollment ratio (largest) was also less (1:679 compared to 1:748). The value of the mentoring experience for most new counselors continues to be rated very good.