

Educators and Counselors: Professional Allies in Addressing the National Teacher Shortage

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Secondary school counselors are key stakeholders in the Say Yes to FCS initiative and must be included in the efforts to recruit more family and consumer sciences (FCS) teachers. The initiative provides resources that would benefit school counselors in local districts that have FCS programs. To establish an effective partnership, FCS educators need to understand the current demands and expectations of school counselors as well as the often-limited training counselors may have received in career education and guidance in their counselor preparation program. This article explains the demands school counselors face and how FCS stakeholders can collaborate with school counselors in the local district. Commonalities between these two groups of professionals are also explored.

As the *Say Yes to FCS* initiative continues to expand, new stakeholders are identified. Secondary school counselors are key stakeholders and must be included in the efforts to recruit more family and consumer sciences (FCS) teachers. Through collaboration, the local teacher can inform counselors of the critical shortage of FCS teachers and inform them of the important college and career readiness content that is addressed in the secondary FCS classroom. To establish an effective partnership, the FCS educator needs to understand the current demands and expectations of school counselors, as well as the often-limited training counselors may have received in career education and guidance in their counselor preparation program. Therefore, the two purposes of this article are: (a) to educate FCS teachers on the demands school counselors face, and (b) to help FCS teachers understand their role in educating the school counselors in the local district, so that greater collaboration can occur between professionals who have a common goal—providing students with the necessary skills to be successful in college, career, and life.

State of School Counseling

School counselors are guided by the standards put forth by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) that suggest the role of school counselors is to “promote equity and success in rigorous educational experiences for all students” (2015, p.1). Counselors are also expected to “support a safe learning environment and work to safeguard human rights of all members of the school community and address the needs of all students through culturally relevant prevention and intervention programs that are a part of a comprehensive school counselor program” (ASCA, 2015, p. 1). Further, the ASCA national model suggests that school counseling programs be implemented as collaborative efforts benefitting students, parents, teachers, administrators and the overall community giving FCS teachers and counselors the opportunities to work together and not in isolation (ASCA, 2015).

ASCA provides a list of counseling (appropriate) and non-counseling (inappropriate) activities for school counselors on its website. School counselors are frequently assigned non-counseling activities (e.g. computing grade-point averages, maintaining student records, subbing

for absent teachers, keeping clerical records, hall duty, etc.) that are unrelated to preparing high school students for success after graduation (Hines, Lemons, & Crews, 2011). One of the most frequently assigned non-counseling duties of school counselors is the role of district or campus testing coordinator associated with the many state and federal mandates for standardized testing. Administrators justify this assignment with the reasoning that counselors are expected to provide academic support to students and testing is equated with academic support. Unfortunately, the role of testing coordinator has diverted much of the school counselors' time from other critical areas of a comprehensive counseling program (Schenck, Anctil, Smith, & Dahl, 2012). Because of these local expectations, school counselors are challenged with having enough time to effectively counsel students to take the courses, such as FCS, that not only meet high school graduation requirements but are also related to their career interests. Hines et al. (2011) determined that when students do not take the appropriate courses—academic and career-related—there can be negative consequences for students after graduation. Administrators, as well as teachers, need to recognize that “school counselors are responsible for each and every student in the building, and unlike others on campus, they are in a position to focus on the educational journey of the student” (Hines et al., 2011, p. 2).

Another pressing issue for most counselors is the large numbers of students they are assigned manage. ASCA (2015) recommends that counselors should have a ratio of 1 counselor to 250 students to implement a comprehensive developmental school counseling program designed to meet the needs of all students. However, the average U.S. counselor ratio is 1 counselor to 471 students. This disparity led the American Counseling Association to support a federal bill known as H.R. 320, the *Student Support Act*, which was re-enacted in January 2013 to provide additional funds to states to hire additional counselors that would lower the counselor-to-student ratio.

Finally, and surprising to many, most secondary school counselors were not required nor offered the opportunity to take a career counseling or career development course during their counseling preparation programs. This is especially a concern when counsellors participated in programs that were not accredited by the Counsel for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Education Program (CACREP). Standards were revised in 2009 by CACREP to include career development as one of the eight common core curricular areas required for students enrolled in a graduate-level counseling program (CACREP, 2009). Even with these increased standards for the more recently trained counselors, there is still a shortfall in career development content because it is often underemphasized in many counselor preparation programs. Miller (2015) found the CACREP-accredited university school counseling preparation programs in Texas require only one career counseling or career development course which tends to emphasize theory more than application.

This lack of preparation in career development may impact the counselors' self-efficacy in career counseling. For example, counselors may have limited skills and resources to connect students with labor market data. They may also be unaware of current high demand occupations, such as FCS education, because they have not been exposed to recent workforce data or know the resources to locate the data.

Alignment of Family and Consumer Sciences and School Counseling

The mission of FCS education is to ensure students are prepared for independence, family, employment, and life by applying knowledge from a variety of educational disciplines (National Association of State Administrators of FCS, 2008). FCS meets this mission by

addressing national and state standards that help students successfully prepare for a future that includes in a rapidly changing workforce and global economy while concurrently preparing for careers. These standards provide students with the opportunity to develop their total well-being by empowering them to become healthy, well adjusted, self-confident, productive individuals, family members, and employees (National Association of State Administrators of FCS, 2008). The curriculum reflects the scope and diversity of FCS content in equipping all students with the life skills necessary to improve the quality of the physical, psychological, and social aspects of life for themselves and others.

The FCS curriculum aligns with the ASCA national model on college and career readiness standards for students. ASCA organizes these standards in three broad domains a) academic development, b) career development, and c) social/emotional development (ASCA, 2014). All domains promote mindsets and behaviors that enhance the learning process and create a college and career readiness culture for all students. The career development domain includes “standards guiding school counseling program to help students 1) understand the connection between school and world of work and 2) plan for and make a successful transition from school to postsecondary education and/or the world of work and from job to job across the life span” (ASCA, 2014, p. 1). The social/emotional development domain includes “standards guiding school counseling programs to help students manage emotions and learn and apply interpersonal skills” (ASCA, 2014, p. 1). Definitions for these domains harmonize with content within FCS curriculum. Most of ASCA’s 35 mindset and behavior standards (ASCA, 2014) include specific attitudes, knowledge and skills that students should be able to demonstrate as a result of their involvement in a school counseling program and are similar to FCS national and state standards. Consider, for example, the following ASCA standards (ASCA, 2014, p. 2):

- “BLS-7. Identify long- and short-term academic, career, and social/emotional goals.”
- “B-LS 9. Gather evidence and consider multiple perspectives to make informed decisions.”
- “B-LS 10. Participate in enrichment and extracurricular activities.”
- “B-SMS 7. Demonstrate effective coping skills when faced with a problem.”
- “B-SMS 8. Demonstrate the ability to balance school, home and community activities.”
- “B-SS 1. Use effective oral and written communication skills and listens skills.”
- “B-SS 7. Use leadership and teamwork skills to work effectively in diverse teams.”

Family and Consumer Sciences’ Role in Providing Career Guidance and Career Readiness

FCS teachers have historically been and continue to be in a unique position to complement secondary school counselors’ efforts to provide students with strong career guidance and prepare students to be career ready. In 1908, Frank Parsons established the first Bureau of Vocational Guidance. Since then, career guidance has been a vital component of workforce development and was foundational to the career education movement that developed in the 1980s. Career development has been a consistent component of the federal *Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act* (Hoyt & Stein, 2005).

FCS National Standards include a process framework for emphasizing a practical problems approach in FCS that can be used to address career decision-making. FCS teachers are well suited for helping others to resolve practical problems because of the underlying philosophy

that focuses on helping individuals and families' think about and take action in response to the problems or issues of everyday life (Brown & Paolucci, 1979; McGregor, 2004). Practical problems are considered "what should be done" problems and are frequently continuing concerns that focus on the larger fundamental questions, issues, and concerns of individuals and families. For example, "What should I do about exploring my career options in teaching FCS?" is a practical problem, and students need to have an understanding of the contextual factors related to a problem to investigate and respond to it.

FCS curriculum also prepares students for careers in occupations that are in-demand, require high levels of skill, and are frequently offer a high wage (O*NET Online, 2016). Career opportunities can be found in a range of occupational fields including, but not limited to, teaching, child care and development, early childhood education, housing and home furnishings, food service and hospitality, nutrition, health related occupations, social work, fashion construction and merchandising, and personal and family finance (O*NET Online, 2016). FCS courses are aligned with the following national career clusters: Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources; Architecture and Construction; Arts, A/V Technology and Communications; Education and Training, Finance, Health Science, Hospitality and Tourism, Human Services; Marketing; and Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (ACTE, 2015).

Advising tools known as programs/plans of study (POS) have been developed at the national and state levels for various career fields in these career clusters to help students and parents, as well as counselors, identify the courses, co-curricular and extracurricular opportunities (e.g. Family, Career and Community Leaders of America, hereinafter FCCLA), and extended learning opportunities (e.g. job shadowing, internships, work-based learning, and practicums) that are relevant to their career interest(s). Districts frequently customize POS to reflect local course offerings, thereby using the POS as a tool for program recruitment and an advising guide with students.

FCCLA is a national career and technical student organization for middle and secondary school students and should be an integral part of any FCS program. FCCLA is designed to be co-curricular, which means it should be embedded in the FCS curriculum. FCCLA provides leadership and scholarship opportunities, competitive and STAR events, and community involvement, all which prepare students to become productive citizens and leaders in their communities and careers. FCS curriculum is aligned with state and national FCCLA programs and projects to give students the full benefit of all available opportunities.

Providing work-based learning opportunities is an important consideration in preparing all students to be career ready. With work-based learning, students can complete occupationally specific FCS training delivered through school-based laboratories or work-based learning arrangements such as internships, mentoring, and job shadowing. A work-based learning experience allows students to apply knowledge and technical skills to real-world projects and problems alongside FCS-related career professionals. For example, a student interested in teaching FCS could be assigned as a classroom/lab aide for a FCS teacher, earning credit for this learning experience. Work-based experiences provide students with firsthand opportunities to determine the skills and knowledge needed to be successful in any chosen industry.

Students may also improve their career readiness through achievement of industry-recognized certifications. FCS programs in Hospitality and Tourism and Education and Training, for example, offer industry-recognized certifications that can be completed during high school. These certifications may also provide an opportunity for students to earn dual college or articulated credit, as well as qualify them for a job opportunity. School counselors should be

made aware of the college and career readiness experiences that occur regularly in the FCS classroom, which is the first step in creating a collaborative relationship between teachers and counselors that will, ultimately, result in more opportunities to explore in-demand occupations such as FCS educator.

Recommendations

The following recommendations should be considered in the future by FCS teachers and school counselors to achieve a collaborative relationship:

- FCS teachers should make it a priority to work collaboratively with secondary school counselors to ensure that counselors are aware of an important resource in their building. Encourage the counselors to consider FCS teachers, and other teachers, as members of the counseling team. Teachers see their students daily and may recognize issues and concerns with students that are important to local counseling initiatives. Additionally, FCS teachers know the appropriate coherent sequence of courses are used in all FCS-related career pathways, especially the teaching pathway, and can identify those sequences for their counselors. Additionally, FCS teachers need to keep school counselors informed of any new standards or changes made at the state or national levels related to FCS, such as industry recommendations.
- FCS teachers should provide counselors with current employment outlook data on teaching FCS and promotional materials from the *Say Yes to FCS* campaign, such as posters, flyers, fact sheets, etc., that are designed to recruit potential students. Resources are available at the campaign website.
- Because counselors advise a broader range of students, they may be able to identify potential students not currently enrolled in an FCS course. For an example, there may be a student enrolled in Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources or the Fine Arts who have focused on those career-related electives, yet they might be a good fit a career in teaching FCS.
- Initiate a meeting with school counselors to discuss with them where there is shared background and how the FCS program can support school counseling expectations.
- Invite school counselors to the FCS classroom to observe the career development activities addressed in FCS courses and the career development resources and employability skills embedded in learning experiences. Having first-hand knowledge of the FCS curriculum and classroom experiences will better equip counselors to promote FCS courses for students and to accurately answer questions from parents and students.
- Invite school counselors to attend FCCLA events to see the rigorous and relevant instruction and competitions firsthand for increasing students' success in college and career readiness. Counselors might even be willing to judge FCCLA STAR Events.
- Attend professional development that focuses on career development and guidance to stay current with issues, resources, and data impacting the workforce.
- Seek professional development opportunities that promote collaboration between FCS teachers and counselors. These experiences will increase opportunities for both teachers and counselors to understand each other's roles in the high school program development and implementation process, as well as see the importance of working together in helping students achieve their postsecondary and career goals beyond high school.
- Work with local counselor(s) to establish partnerships with local and/or regional postsecondary programs to provide FCS dual college credit courses for students

interested in majoring in education. Courses could be either online or provided on the school campus. If secondary the FCS teachers meet the postsecondary requirements to teach a dual college credit course, they should be encouraged to offer the dual credit equivalent courses.

- Provide opportunities for current secondary school counselors and FCS teachers to discuss the alignments in their curriculums for providing the physical, intellectual, emotional, and social development needed for students to see their potential for success in school.

Summary

As the FCS profession continues to address the national teacher shortage, it is imperative that we embrace opportunities for new collaborations. The *Say Yes to FCS* initiative provides resources that would benefit the school counselors in local districts that have FCS programs. School counselors perform many counseling and non-counseling roles on a school campus, and often have extremely high advising loads. FCS teachers are valuable partners for school counselors because both groups share the common goal of meeting their students' physical, intellectual, social, and emotional developmental needs. Collaboration will provide a better learning environment for all students, as well as potentially increase enrollments in FCS programs because counselors will better understand the learning experience provided through FCS courses. A further outcome of increased enrollments is more students becoming aware of a rewarding career that is in high demand—teaching FCS.

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