

Comprehensive Guidance Department

Issue – On the most recent Healthy Youth Survey Tacoma, roughly 4 of every 10 students reported experiencing depressive feeling of sad and hopeless. Over 70% of our young people reported intense anxiety and unable to stop worrying. Also, on the Health Youth Survey, 1 out of every 10 students reported considering, making a plan AND attempting suicide within the past year. Within the past 4 years, emergency room visits for children with a primary diagnosis of behavioral or mental health conditions have risen by 400% at our local children’s hospital, Mary Bridge. Suicide is leading cause of death in Washington State for ages 10-14. All of this data was gathered pre-pandemic and we know the impacts of COVID and racial injustice have only magnified these issues.

Statistically, two-thirds of students in a Washington State classroom report having at least one Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE), and more than one in five report three or more ACEs. Trauma is the norm. When research emerged showing that traumatic stress “hijacks the brain”, making it incapable of learning, trauma became an education problem. Nationally, 70% of youth receive counseling at school, or none at all. Schools have long served as a de facto mental health system for many children and adolescents. A comprehensive school counseling program is an integral component of the school’s academic mission and mental wellness for students. Comprehensive school counseling programs, driven by student data and based on standards in academic, career and social/emotional development, promote and enhance the learning process for all students.

Vision – Tacoma’s counseling program will ensure every student will acquire the academic, career and personal/social skills to reach their fullest educational potential and successfully manage their lives as healthy, responsible, competent and productive citizens. Tacoma will provide a comprehensive, developmentally age-appropriate school counseling program that is aligned with the ASCA national standards for school counseling programs. The ASCA Model is built to lift the three student outcome domains of academic, personal/social and career development.

Approach - School counselors play an important role in ensuring that students have excellent educational experiences. They are part of a school support team who provide essential social-emotional support in addition to academic support. A coordinated and orchestrated delivery model of assured services is necessary to equitably and strategically allocate resources in preparing each student for success academically, emotionally and in life after graduation. Aligning professional development, leadership opportunities, on-going coaching support and collaborative learning opportunities for the counseling staff is essential to the effectiveness of this unit. Students will be supported through a district-wide approach with small group curriculum, available

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instructional materials, and well-trained counselors.

School counseling provides support for academic, career, and socio-emotional development to K-12 students enrolled in Tacoma Public Schools. Counselors provide direct service through individual, small group and whole group counseling. Examples of the small groups include supports for grief, anxiety, depression and social skills. Counselors also ensure students rise to the next level with success and confidence. Middle school counseling includes the registrations of eligible students for the College Bound Scholars program and starting students on their career exploration pathway. High school counseling focuses on building course schedules, tracking and intervention for graduation, and preparation for college admissions and awards. Additionally, counselors comprise the Crisis Response Team that supports students and staff following a traumatic event.

- **Students:** Students are taught skills necessary to navigate hard times and allow their emotional intelligence to flourish. Secondary counselors guide students towards graduation and post-secondary success.
- **Staff:** The extremely talented TPS counselors and social workers are supported through professional development, coaching, resources and embedded practices. TPS continues to align systems and practices to the ASCA framework.
- **Community:** Partnerships local community-based mental health agencies, food banks and regional/national colleges improve student supports.

The multifaceted work of school counselors prepares students academically and emotionally for life beyond school. Often the heartbeat of a school's support system, school counselors bring a wealth of insight and resources to a variety of student-centered issues. As part of an advanced tier team, school counselors work with students individually and collectively to create a school climate that leads to healthy learning, living, and growth.

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Students whose academic and social needs are met are more likely to attend school, meet high academic standards, graduate, and thrive in and outside of school. This effort aligns with the district Whole Child initiatives learning across the District. The alignment of this work directly impacts the Academic Achievement benchmarks, but also crosses over to support all areas of Safety, Partnership and Early Learning.

Recent studies have demonstrated the connection between student achievement and student-to-school-counselor ratios (e.g., Gewertz, 2018). More counselors result in students with higher grades, students who felt as though their school was preparing them for their futures, students who were more likely to report that college and career information was more accessible to them, and also students who report belonging to a positive school climate (Lapan, Gysbers, and Sun, 1997). Also, in a project to examine the impact of school-counselor-led interventions on student academic achievement and school success behavior, it was found that group counseling from school counselors were associated with a positive impact on the students' achievements and behaviors (Brigman and Campbell, 2003).

One of the biggest benefits of school counselors is that they prepare students for academic, career and social challenges by relating educational agendas to their success in the future. They make students motivated learners and facilitate their exploration of careers. Counselors also encourage students to talk to their parents or guardians about the things that they are worried about. When students do not feel comfortable talking about emotional or social problems at home, school counselors may have individual counseling sessions with them. If there is a problem occurring with a group of students, a group counseling session might be warranted. Sometimes counselors include the parents in these sessions for larger issues to determine whether outside counseling or support is necessary.

The support that school counselors provide for parents and guardians is just as important as the support that they give to students. They may facilitate individual, parent-teacher or parent-parent consultations and discussions to ensure that everyone is on the same page when it comes to issues regarding the students, whether it involves disciplinary decisions, specific educational material or social provocations. School counselors might even provide resources to parents who have questions about child-related problems. They also ensure that parents understand the services that other staff such as nurses, psychologists, resource teachers and social workers can provide for students who have special needs or abilities. When the parents need extra support, the counselors help them find it, whether it is within the school system or the community.

The ASCA National Model guides our school counselors in the development of programs focused on the mindsets and behaviors all students need for postsecondary readiness and success, actions that help close

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opportunity gaps and result in improved student achievement, attendance and discipline.

WHAT SPECIFIC BOARD-ADOPTED BENCHMARKS WILL BE INFLUENCED BY THIS WORK?

- Acceptance to Next Institution
- Graduation Rates
- Students Without Suspensions/Expulsions
- Graduation Grade Point
- Course Failures
- Academic Rigor

MEASURABLE GOALS

- We will increase Acceptance to Next Institution 75% by the end of 2023 as measured by VANI.
- We will decrease number suspension/expulsions of student group with the largest gap in each grade by 15% by the end of 2020 as measured by Power BI suspension/expulsion data.
- We will increase graduation rates from 89.9% to 91% by the end of 2023 as measured by Power BI graduation rates.

Inputs / Resources	Activities	Outputs / Outcomes
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Professional Development / Coordinated by Director Whole Child	Counselor-specific PD to improve learning in: small group instruction, suicide prevention, self-harm interventions, cognitive behavior theory, depression, anxiety, data use, Crisis Response Team, and substance abuse interventions.	Exceptional quality of support for all students and high retention rates of counselors through job satisfaction.
Counselor Leadership Opportunities/ Coordinated by Director Whole Child	Multitude of opportunities to grow leadership skills and depth of knowledge through captaining/joining a counseling leadership team	Distributive leadership for increased ownership; content area expertise for fellow counselors; availability and quality of guidance; increased district capacity in: technology, suicide prevention, self-harm interventions, cognitive behavior theory, depression, anxiety, data use, support for BIPOC and LGBT youth, and transitioning to new school
Learning Communities and On-going Coaching/ Coordinated by Director Whole Child	Bi-weekly counselor level meetings, weekly coaching for small groups, PLC meetings, lead counselor meetings, social worker meetings, crisis response team meetings	Practice, feedback, academic discussion of best practices based on the ASCA model

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EQUITY- Counseling

According to the U.S. Department of Education, in 2014, the number of students of color in U.S. public schools surpassed that of white students (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). However, white students continue to graduate from high school at higher rates than black and Hispanic students (Kena et al., 2015). In addition, an achievement gap exists along socioeconomic lines. Many students of color, first-generation and low-income students aspire to college; however, the college application process can present significant obstacles (Page & Scott, 2016). Some students in schools report there is no adult in the school with whom they feel they can discuss these issues, and many of these students come from underrepresented social or cultural groups. These students cannot always rely on their parents for college information and must instead turn to their high schools, where school counselors are in a position proven to increase access for students. School counselors can also play a role in assisting students in identity development contributing to their success (Maxwell & Henriksen, 2012).

Historically, underrepresented populations have faced barriers to participating in a rigorous curriculum and higher-level classes (Vazquez & Altshuler, 2017). School counselors, teachers, administrators and other school staff can be involuntary gatekeepers of access to these classrooms. Research finds that when students and school counselors are able to connect, school counselors have the potential to become empowering agents (Emde, 2015). When students feel like they are being treated in a biased or negative manner, they often exhibit self-destructive behaviors such as truancy, withdrawal, acting out and nonparticipation in class activities. Conversely, when students believe they are treated warmly, they are more likely to be engaged in school, talk about pressing issues and participate in class activities (ASCA, 2016).

School counselors develop and implement a school counseling program promoting equity and access for students. School counselors work to help close achievement, opportunity,

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attainment and funding gaps in their schools, districts and communities. School counselors are mindful of school and community perceptions of the treatment of underrepresented groups and understand the importance of collaborating with school and community groups to help all students succeed. (American School Counselor Association, 2016) School counselors promote equitable treatment of all students by:

- Using data to identify gaps in achievement, opportunity and attainment
- Advocating for rigorous course and higher education for underrepresented groups.
- Promoting the development of school policies leading to equitable treatment of all students and opposing school policies hindering equitable treatment of any student
- Promoting access to rigorous standards-based curriculum, academic courses and learning paths for college and career for all students
- Developing plans to address over- or underrepresentation of specific groups in programs such as special education, honors, Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate
- Creating an environment that encourages any student or group to feel comfortable to come forward with problems
- Collaborating with families in seeking assistance services for financial literacy, job skills and placement and free services (such as childcare assistance) as well as providing parents educational opportunities to assist them in supporting their students' education
- Acting as a liaison between home and school promoting an understanding and encouraging creative solutions for students handling multiple responsibilities beyond a typical load