

DEVELOPMENTAL GUIDANCE PROGRAM NEEDS AS PERCEIVED BY
STUDENTS AND STAFF AT FALLS HIGH SCHOOL IN INTERNATIONAL FALLS,
MINNESOTA

By

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ABSTRACT

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Perceived Needs of a Developmental Guidance Program by Students and Staff at Falls
(Title)

High School in International Falls, Minnesota

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The purpose of this study was to examine the perceived needs of the guidance department at Falls High School and to determine how the guidance services at the school can be improved. A 16-item survey was given to staff members and 11th and 12th grade students at the school.

The results of the study confirm that both students and staff believe that their guidance program should include post-secondary and career preparation, individual and group counseling on personal and academic issues, and assistance in scholarship searches, credit checks and class selection.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

A comprehensive school guidance program can be an immense asset to a school. A successful program can provide morale, confidence, and self-efficacy among students, faculty, and staff. It is important that guidance programs remain current and that the school community is being served in the most effective means possible. It is the school counselor's role to be proactive in the development of a program and to integrate all aspects of the learning environment. A counselor should recognize and implement guidance needs of students in their particular school environment in order to create a positive social and academic environment.

The role of a guidance counselor has vastly changed over the past few decades. Guidance counselors have gone from being involved only in the career aspect of a student's development to playing an integral part in the formation of the whole being of the student. As the lives of students change over time, so must the role of the guidance counselor. Coy and Sears (1993) explained the ever-changing role of the guidance counselor because, "The possibility of contracting sexually transmitted diseases, the availability of alcohol and other drugs...make young people's adolescence years both confusing and challenging"(p. 52). These factors are among the many that school counselors must work with each and every day to help students through their adolescent years.

Operating a guidance program can be a very detailed endeavor. Although the school counselor usually spearheads most activities taking place within the scope of the guidance program, there are other participants within the school who also carry part of

this responsibility. Each educator and staff member within the school should have a hand in the development of students according to the goals set forth by the administration. This includes leading guidance lessons, setting a positive example, and participating in events related to the development of students. If the entire school community is participating in the guidance program, students will have a view of how to live their life successfully and in a healthy manner.

Developing and maintaining a school counseling program takes time, motivation, and persistence. Deciding which programs to include and finding time to coordinate all involved can be exhaustive. The national model developed by the American School Counselor Association (2003) provides a framework for designing comprehensive school counseling programs. According to the executive summary, the ASCA model states that this framework fits in with many districts because it “supports the school’s overall mission by promoting academic achievement, career planning, and personal/social development” (p. 2). Campbell and Dahir (1997) stated that a comprehensive school counseling program “is developmental and systematic in nature, sequential, clearly defined, and accountable” (p. 9). Counseling programs should include aspects related to students’ self and wellbeing, their academic pursuit through school, and their future career focus. A comprehensive program would begin with students at the elementary level, then span through the middle and high school years.

With all guidance programs, evaluation is an important component of improvement. Gysbers and Hendrickson (1994) stated that the major intent of evaluation of a guidance program is to “improve the delivery to and impact of the program on the students it serves and to provide for communication among school counselors, guidance

program leaders, and school administrators.” A national survey concluded that guidance and counseling services in many major schools had improper funding; needed more resources, services, and staff; required more training; and lacked communication within the school and community context (DeRoche, 1987). With this knowledge, it is time to assess school guidance programs often and to take these results seriously and as a means for change within each school.

Recent and chronic cuts to school budgets are a growing concern. Due to cutbacks and budget freezes, school districts across the country are struggling to stay out of debt. Programs are cut and staff is often eliminated in many schools. One of the first positions eliminated by many schools in Minnesota, for example, is that of the guidance counselor. This is true of the guidance position at Falls High School in International Falls, Minnesota. The final licensed school counselor retired at the end of December, 2002. This position was not filled, leaving the many duties up to other administrators and staff at the high school. An inventory of the perceptions of the needs of this current program will be essential in determining the level of satisfaction and understanding within the school community.

The changes that will occur within Falls High School will be felt throughout the community. Individual and group counseling will not be available on a daily basis by a licensed school counselor. Guidance lessons will cease, and duties such as college preparation, career goal setting, and case management will be shifted to others in the school. Teachers will have one less trained resource for consultation on managing behavior problems or working with difficult students. Students who are in need of standardized testing registration assistance and interpretation may be directed to those

who are not properly trained on the current trends. College and scholarship applications will now be directed to an administrative assistant who will assist students with sending them out.

Statement of the Problem

Due to tight budget situations along with growing student needs and the emergence of the nationally accepted comprehensive guidance plan, new decisions may have to be made regarding the guidance program at Falls High School. The purpose of this study is to investigate the perceived needs for the guidance program at Falls High School in International Falls, Minnesota. The information collected from this study will be used to help improve Falls High School guidance services.

Research Questions

This study is intended to answer three main questions:

1. What are the perceived needs of students regarding the Falls High School guidance program?
2. What are the perceived needs of staff regarding the Falls High School guidance program?
3. How can the guidance program at Falls High School potentially be improved?

Definition of Terms

In order to better understand terms within this study, the following terms will be defined:

Guidance Program: A comprehensive program including those duties within the school counselors' job description, the goals of student development throughout the school, and a holistic approach of support throughout the school environment. These

include areas of personal counseling, career counseling, guidance curriculum, consultation, and other personal development issues of students. Domains of student development which are addressed by guidance programs include those of personal/social, academic, and career aspects.

School Counselor: Also stated as guidance counselor, a school counselor is a specifically trained and licensed professional in guidance and counseling. A school counselor works in schools to provide individual and group counseling along with other developmental guidance activities.

Assumptions and Limitations

It is assumed that all students and staff partaking in the study will answer the survey questions to the best of their knowledge. It is also assumed that students and staff participating in the study will have some degree of previous experience with the guidance program.

Limitations may include students or staff not filling out the survey to the best of their knowledge. Also, some students or staff may not have had any contact with the guidance program at Falls High school, and therefore will have little knowledge as to the effectiveness of the program.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Throughout this chapter there will be a discussion of the roles and responsibilities of a comprehensive developmental guidance program. The history of guidance in schools will be described, along with a detailed overview of components of recommended school guidance programs and a discussion of the importance of guidance counselors in schools.

The History of Guidance Counseling in Schools

Over the past 100 years, the role of the guidance counselor has evolved from a few basic services to a comprehensive program. The actual conception of the school counselor is a topic that is under scrutiny. Although many people have referred to Frank Parsons as the founder of guidance, Wittmer (1993) stated that guidance counseling actually originated years before by Jesse Davis, a principal in Detroit. Davis included an aspect of career and moral development with the English classes in his school.

In the early 1900's, the concept of guidance in schools became customary. According to Coy and Sears (1993), the term guidance then referred to helping students to make informed decisions. In these early times, guidance decisions mostly focused on vocational decisions for students. Adults, mostly teachers, were present in schools, helping students make choices as to what their future would entail.

When Frank Parsons developed the Vocation Bureau in Boston in 1908, the idea of vocational guidance blossomed to all communities. Not only had Parsons created a model that is still used today, he had become the founder of guidance programs that would eventually exist in every school district across the country. As Hartung and

Blustein (2002) stated, Parsons “planted the seeds for theory building, research, and practice aimed at understanding and assisting people to choose a vocation—a choice that he characterized as the ‘greatest decision’ of people's lives” (p. 42).

The evolution to a counseling initiative began in the 1930's. The National Occupational Conference was founded in 1933. According to Gysbers and Henderson (1994), this conference developed a national committee on education, which established new guidelines for guidance services. Personal and educational guidance services were added to the expectations, along with vocational guidance. Great interest in psychotherapy developed shortly after this period of time into the 1950's which, with the combination of guidance and counseling in schools, coined the new term *counseling psychology*. The influence brought specialists into the field of counseling and began a convergence of guidance and counseling.

The shift to a joint guidance and counseling focus continued during the passage of the National Defense Education Act of 1956 (NDEA). According to Campbell and Dahir (1997), this movement was created to help the United States win the edge it needed in the space program. NDEA helped to launch statewide testing opportunities through grants, along with increasing the presence of guidance counselors in schools. These counselors were expected to have great knowledge in the field of college admissions, student support, and academic enhancement. Counselors were also trained to a much lesser degree in psychology, social work, and health related issues.

Bourne (1988) stated that NDEA increased the popularity of the school counseling profession and increased the number of school counselors in training from less than 300 in 1957 to over 10,000 in 1967. During that time training also became

more intense. Courses for counselors increased from a few summer classes to a full year of master's level training in all aspects of guidance. This change brought forth a booming interest in not only the vocational guidance of students, but also led to an interest in assisting in other areas of students' social, academic, and personal lives.

The birth of the term *pupil personnel services* came soon after the NDEA movement. According to Gysbers (2001), pupil personnel services included a variety of services such as group and individual counseling, consultation, and evaluation, along with the traditional role of vocational assistance.

Today, a school counselor's role is one of several grouped under the umbrella term of pupil personnel services. School counselors are licensed and specially trained to provide counseling and guidance services to students, faculty, and staff. In all states, school counselors must have graduate level training and must be licensed in the state in which they are practicing. School counselors undergo training in mental health counseling, special education, aspects of student development, and other education courses.

The role of the guidance counselor has continued to progress, however slowly, into what it is today. It has grown from a somewhat ancillary position held by former teachers in the 1950's, to an emerging credentialed profession in the 1970's and 1980's, to a full-fledged facilitator of comprehensive guidance programs into the 21st century. One can only guess as to what the future has in store for the profession of guidance counseling. It will continue to grow to meet the needs of students throughout the years ahead.

Components of School Guidance Programs

As stated in the introduction, there are many different perceptions of a school guidance program. Campbell and Dahir (1997) defined a comprehensive school guidance program as “developmental and systematic in nature, sequential, clearly defined, and accountable. It is jointly founded upon developmental psychology, educational philosophy, and counseling methodology” (p. 9). Although school counseling programs vary somewhat according to the particular school and its administration, most programs have a certain body of common attributes.

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2003) has recently released its version of model comprehensive guidance programs. The ASCA framework for school counseling programs is designed to bring together the vital aspects of a school counseling program into one comprehensive model. Campbell and Dahir (1997) outlined the components of a comprehensive school counseling program. These include individual and group counseling, consultation with parents and teachers, coordination of programs, monitoring of individual cases, a developed guidance curriculum, evaluation of needs and services, and the balanced delivery of guidance services including working directly with students 70%-80% of the counselor’s time.

Individual counseling and group counseling are staples of a guidance counselor’s role (Campbell & Dahir, 1997). This type of counseling includes meeting with students on an individual or group basis to overcome challenges or offer support that is needed in their lives. Individual counseling can be beneficial to students coming to counselors for issues including personal, family, academic, or friendship problems. Group counseling can also be used for the same topics as individual counseling, only in a small group

setting. Groups can be helpful to students by providing a support basis of students and adults to help them cope and manage certain concerns.

Consultation is another important duty of the guidance counselor (Campbell & Dahir, 1997). Counselors meet with parents, faculty, and staff regarding help needed to better work with the needs of the students. Working with teachers is the most widely used type of consultation. While it may be done on a formal basis with forms, follow-ups, and appointments, consultation with teachers is usually done informally by chatting with teachers during their prep time or talking through a situation as it arises.

Coordination of programs is another aspect of a comprehensive school counseling program (Campbell & Dahir, 1997). Coordination includes working together with the school community to incorporate a successful guidance program. School counselors should be constantly driving to provide the best means of services for students throughout their time at school.

Case management is an essential aspect to a school counselor's duties, although it may be overlooked at times (Campbell & Dahir, 1997). A school counselor should be constantly following up and monitoring the development of students throughout school in all areas of their lives. Keeping track of students can be a tedious effort, but it is an important component of a comprehensive guidance program.

Guidance curriculum is the next element in the guidance program. Guidance curriculum is important at all levels of school, but is mostly used during elementary school and middle school. This type of delivery is normally done with large groups such as homeroom or other classroom settings. Guidance lessons should be done on a variety of topics ranging from personal/social aspects to academic to career topics. According to

Campbell and Dahir (1997), the delivery of this method can be used with teachers and counselors individually or cooperatively and can be in classroom or advisory group settings.

Program evaluation is the final component to the ASCA model (Campbell & Dahir, 1997). A counselor should be constantly assessing the needs and evaluating programs to fit the school population. Evaluation should be done by the counselor, the counselors' supervisor, and any other stakeholders that exist within the school community. Finally, program delivery includes the balance among all of the components to create a program that benefits the school in the best method possible.

Along with ASCA's components of school counseling programs, the other important aspect of the American School Counselor Association's model is indeed the National Standards for School Counseling Programs. Campbell and Dahir (1997) explained that the National Standards are designed "to provide a model or guide to assist states, districts, and individual schools in planning, developing, implementing, and evaluating a school counseling program" (p. 4). The National Standards for School Counseling Programs incorporate aspects of student academic, career, and personal/social development into a comprehensive guidance program. Campbell and Dahir (1997) list these three broad areas along with three student standards in each area, for a total of nine student standards. These standards provide the framework for K-12 guidance programs in schools. The complete standards are included in Appendix A.

According to Mariani (1998), the national standards will help counselors to be more involved with students on a daily basis by incorporating different activities and strategies related to the future of the students. ASCA is involved with outside

organizations, as well as school counselors in the field, to provide assistance to those incorporating the national standards into their guidance curriculum. This type of cooperative effort will help all students to benefit from the services that a guidance counselor can offer in all aspects of life.

ASCA's National Standards for School Counseling Programs (Campbell & Dahir, 1997) will help schools throughout the nation bind together to create a more prepared future for students. These students should graduate from high school with the knowledge of their personal well-being along with aspects of how to develop and follow their career goals and how to succeed academically in wherever their future may lead.

The Importance of School Counselors

School counselors are most often the hub of the student services department in a school. They provide knowledge and insight on many issues and they are also qualified to be licensed in their field.

There are many reasons why it is important to have a school counselor on staff in a school. Beside the basic ASCA student standards that can be provided, a counselor acts as a student liaison. Counselors help staff to relate to students and students to relate to staff. Having the background and training needed in consultation, counseling theory, and other aspects of basic guidance counseling helps the school counselor to remain competent in many diverse situations.

As Coy and Sears (1993) state, "helping adolescents deal with personal and social challenges, as well as helping them make effective educational and career decisions, have long been the stated goals of secondary school counselors" (p. 52). School counselors are the neutral staff at a school available not only to help make decisions, but also to be a

safe haven from the rigors of daily school life. School counselors are not disciplinarians; instead they work with those students who have a difficult time in school. Coy and Sears (1993) also remark that as counselors chart new territory, they create new developmental programs which are determined by the needs of students and show student results for which the school counselor is accountable.

The American School Counselor Association (Campbell & Dahir, 1997) has also outlined benefits of school counseling programs. The authors state that there are benefits for all aspects of the school community including students, parents, teachers, administration, school counselors, postsecondary institutions, and the school district as a whole. Counselor roles that benefit students include preparing students for the future in all aspects of life, helping to expand knowledge of career opportunities, acting as a student advocate, and helping students to know themselves and others. For parents, a school counselor can increase the frequency of parent and school interaction; help parents to access community and school opportunities, and help to develop a plan for the students' future. Among school and staff, Campbell and Dahir (1997) note that counselors can provide consultation to teachers, work with the mission of the school to help administrators, and help to "provide rationale for implementing a comprehensive developmental counseling program in the school system" (p. 15).

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Throughout this chapter, a discussion will occur regarding the sample selection, a complete description of this sample, and the instrumentation. Data collection procedures will also be discussed along with the procedure used for data analysis. Finally, a description of the methodological limitations will conclude the chapter.

Subject Selection and Description

The principal, guidance department, and student registrar at Falls High School were contacted and approved the study before the project took place. Each 11th and 12th grade social studies class in Falls High School was approached to complete this study. These students were chosen to participate because of their level of exposure to the guidance services at the school. Most students had attended Falls High School since the seventh grade; therefore have had 5-6 years of contact, either directly or indirectly, with the guidance department. A copy of the parental notice and permission form is located in Appendix B. All students were asked to participate in the study. The gender ratio is approximately 1:1, and the cultural background is primarily European American. Presently, there are 239 students enrolled in grades 11 and 12 at Falls High School.

In addition to the students, the staff at Falls High School was asked to participate in the same survey. Staff members including teachers, secretaries, administrators, and aides were asked to take part in the study. Falls High School has a staff of approximate equal numbers of men and women, and the cultural background of the staff is mostly European-American.

Instrumentation

The survey contained 15 Likert scale items and also included a section available for comments. Common items related to ASCA's National Standards were addressed. A comparable number of items regarding personal/social, career, and academic development were included. There were no measures of validity or reliability, since the instrument was developed specifically for this study. The finalized survey is found in Appendix C.

Data Collection

Upon the granted permission of the principal, guidance department, and registrar of the school, the study took place. Parental notices and consent forms were handed out to juniors and seniors and they were asked to return them the following day. The survey was administered in April of 2003. Data were then compiled and analyzed.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed by using percentages in the first fifteen items. Comparison of student vs. staff group needs was conducted by using a *t*-test for significant differences between groups. For the sixteenth item, the written questions are recorded. A breakdown of student, staff, and total compilation of responses are given. All relevant descriptive statistics were utilized. The data were ordinal.

Limitations

Since the sample only includes current staff and 11th-12th grade students at Falls High School, the results should not be generalized to include the entire student and alumni population. Also, there were no validity or reliability measures, leading to generalized results.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Results of the study conducted in International Falls will be discussed within this section. Demographic sample information will be shown along with an item analysis of each individual question asked. This will be followed by a discussion of the research questions posed previously.

Demographic Information

There were 255 surveys given out to students and staff at Falls High School on April 3rd and 4th of 2003. There were 157 surveys returned, which were all complete and usable. This constitutes a 62% return rate.

Of the 157 participants in the study, 119 of them were students and 38 were staff and faculty members. There was no differentiation asked on the surveys regarding the classification of staff, however, teachers, secretaries, aides, and administrators all participated.

Of the 119 students who participated in the study, 76 were in the 12th grade, and 43 were in the 11th grade. All were students in a social studies class.

Item Analysis

An itemized statement for the study follows. Percentages will be used to show the results of each of the answered items for each group. When *t*-testing indicated a significant difference between student and staff responses, this result will be reported. The number of participants for each item will also be shown. The heading of the survey stated “Our Guidance and Counseling program should...” By indicating a number one on the Likert scale, participants acknowledged that they strongly agreed with the statement.

By indicating a number five on the scale, participants strongly disagreed with the statement. Numbers two, three, and four correlated on that scale.

Item number one on the survey stated “work with students to help with family issues.” A *t*-test conducted on group means indicated a statistically significant result ($p < .05$) between staff and students, with staff endorsing the statement more strongly than the students (see Table 1). Over half of participating staff members strongly agreed with this statement. Half of the students tended to either strongly agree or agree on this issue.

Table 1

Percentage Responses to Item #1: Work with students to help with family issues

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Staff (n=37)				
51.4%	21.6%	16.2%	8.1%	2.7%
Students (n=110)				
26.4%	23.6%	39.1%	8.2%	2.7%
Total (n=147)				
32.7%	23.1%	33.3%	8.2%	2.7%

Item number two on the survey stated “help students learn specific study skills.” Students and staff had similar responses to this item. Over 90% of respondents said that they strongly agreed, agreed, or were neutral (see Table 2). Combined, only 2.0% of participants strongly disagreed with the item, and 5.9% disagreed with it.

Table 2

Percentage Responses to Item #2: Help students learn specific study skills

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
		Staff (n=36)		
25.0%	27.8%	38.9%	5.6%	2.8%
		Students (n=117)		
29.9%	33.3%	29.1%	6.0%	1.7%
		Total (n=153)		
28.8%	32.0%	31.4%	5.9%	2.0%

Item number three on the survey stated “talk with students regarding personal issues.” The *t*-test results indicated a statistical significance at $p < .05$ level between students and staff, with the staff again showing stronger agreement with the statement. Almost 49% of staff strongly agreed with the statement where only 19% of students strongly agreed (see Table 3). However, 30.2% of students agreed with the statement where 18.9% of staff provided the same feedback. Overall, 34.6% of students and staff felt neutral about this item.

Table 3

Percentage Responses to Item #3: Talk with students regarding personal issues

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
		Staff	(n=37)		
48.6%	18.9%	24.3%	0.1%	8.1%	
		Students	(n=116)		
19.0%	30.2%	37.9%	8.6%	4.3%	
		Total	(n=153)		
26.1%	27.5%	34.6%	6.5%	5.2%	

Item number four on the survey stated “help students prepare for standardized tests (ACT, SAT).” As a whole, students and staff strongly agreed with this item with a

rate of 54.8% (see Table 4). Over 26% of respondents agreed, leading to an over 81.0% rate of agreeing.

Table 4

Percentage Responses to Item #4: Help Students prepare for standardized tests

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
		Staff	(n=37)		
56.8%	27.0%	8.1%	2.7%	5.4%	
		Students	(n=118)		
54.2%	26.3%	11.0%	5.1%	3.4%	
		Total	(n=155)		
54.8%	26.5%	10.3%	4.5%	3.9%	

Item number five on the survey stated “work with students on positive on-the-job skills.” Again, although mixed responses were seen from students and staff, a majority of both either strongly agreed or agreed on this item (see Table 5). Over 24% of staff

strongly agreed while 51.4% agreed. Also, 40.2% of students strongly agreed on this item and 30.8% agreed.

Table 5

Percentage Responses to Item #5: Work with students on positive on-the-job skills

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Staff (n=37)				
24.3%	51.4%	13.5%	8.1%	2.7%
Students (n=117)				
40.2%	30.8%	25.6%	1.7%	1.7%
Total (n=154)				
36.4%	35.7%	22.7%	3.2%	1.9%

Item number six on the survey stated “make groups on personal issues available to students.” The staff agreement rate on this item was higher than the student agreement rate, although the difference did not reach significance (see Table 6). Twenty-five point

seven percent and 37.1% of staff strongly agreed and agreed, respectively. Forty-four point six percent of students were neutral on this item.

Table 6

Responses to Item #6: Make groups on personal issues available to students

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
		Staff	(n=35)	
25.7%	37.1%	25.7%	2.9%	8.6%
		Students	(n=112)	
21.4%	21.4%	44.6%	8.9%	3.6%
		Total	(n=147)	
22.4%	25.2%	40.1%	7.5%	4.8%

Item number seven on the survey stated “provide appropriate and positive guidance facilities for students to be comfortable in.” Students and staff combined had a 49.4% strongly agree response and a 26.0% agree response (see Table 7). Six point five percent of the total respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement.

Table 7

Responses to Item #7: Provide appropriate and positive guidance facilities for students

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
		Staff (n=37)		
51.4%	24.3%	18.9%	2.7%	2.7%
		Students (n=117)		
48.7%	26.5%	17.9%	4.3%	2.6%
		Total (n=154)		
49.4%	26.0%	18.2%	3.9%	2.6%

Item number eight on the survey stated “meet with students and their parents about future plans.” Although a majority of each group either agreed or strongly agreed, the *t*-test showed statistical significance at $p < .001$ between groups, with staff again endorsing the statement more strongly. Eighty-one point one percent of staff members responded that they strongly agree with this statement where only 46.1% of students strongly agreed (see Table 8). Sixteen point two percent of staff and 23.4% of students agreed with the item. No staff members disagreed or strongly disagreed with the item.

Table 8

Responses to Item #8: Meet with students and their parents about future plans

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Staff (n=37)				
81.1%	16.2%	2.7%	0.0%	0.0%
Students (n=117)				
46.1%	23.4%	17.5%	9.7%	3.2%
Total (n=154)				
46.1%	23.4%	17.5%	9.7%	3.2%

Item number nine on the survey stated “help students find local and national scholarships.” Again, no staff members disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. Seventy-five point seven percent of staff strongly agreed and 10.8% agreed with the item (see Table 9). Of the students participating, 55.7% strongly agreed and 28.7% agreed with the statement.

Table 9

Responses to Item #9: Help students find local and national scholarships

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Staff (n=37)				
75.7%	10.8%	13.5%	0.0%	0.0%
Students (n=115)				
55.7%	28.7%	9.6%	4.3%	1.7%
Total (n=152)				
60.5%	24.3%	10.5%	3.3%	1.3%

Item number ten on the survey stated “work with students and staff to promote a positive attitude throughout the school.” Forty-one point seven percent of staff and 42.9% of students strongly agreed with this statement (see Table 10). Thirty-one point one percent of students agreed, where 30.6% of staff felt neutral.

Table 10

Responses to Item #10: Work with students and staff to promote a positive attitude

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Staff (n=36)				
41.7%	22.2%	30.6%	5.6%	0.0%
Students (n=119)				
42.9%	31.1%	19.3%	6.7%	0.0%
Total (n=155)				
42.6%	29.0%	21.9%	6.5%	0.0%

Item number 11 on the survey stated “work with students to decide on high school course selections.” The *t*-test showed statistical significance at $p < .001$ among staff and students; staff agreed with the statement significantly more strongly. Eighty-nine point two percent of staff strongly agreed with this statement and 5.4% agreed (see Table 11). A majority of students, 51.3%, strongly agreed with the item and 29.4% agreed.

Table 11

Responses to Item #11: Work with students to decide on high school course selections

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Staff (n=37)				
89.2%	5.4%	5.4%	0.0%	0.0%
Students (n=119)				
51.3%	29.4%	12.6%	5.9%	0.8%
Total (n=156)				
60.3%	23.7%	10.9%	4.5%	0.6%

Item number 12 on the survey stated “provide letters of recommendation upon request.” A combined total of 77.5% of staff and student respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this item (see Table 12). Seventeen point five percent of the total participants were neutral on the issue.

Table 12

Responses to Item #12: Provide letters of recommendation upon request

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Staff (n=36)				
63.9%	13.9%	16.7%	2.8%	2.8%
Students (n=119)				
53.4%	25.4%	17.8%	2.5%	0.8%
Total (n=154)				
55.8%	22.7%	17.5%	2.6%	1.3%

Item number 13 on the survey stated “work with teachers on student behavior management.” Thirty-two point four percent of staff strongly agreed with this item and 24.3% agreed (see Table 13). Within students, 26.5% strongly agree, 36.8% agree, and 33.3% remain neutral.

Table 13

Responses to Item #13: Work with teachers on student behavior management

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Staff (n=37)				
32.4%	24.3%	21.6%	16.2%	5.4%
Students (n=117)				
26.5%	36.8%	33.3%	2.6%	0.9%
Total (n=154)				
27.9%	33.8%	30.5%	5.8%	1.9%

Item number 14 on the survey stated “work with students on stress management.” On this statement, 35.1% of staff strongly agree and 27% agree (see Table 14). 27.9% of students strongly agree with this item while 35.1% agree.

Table 14

Responses to Item #14: Work with students on stress management

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Staff (n=37)				
35.1%	27.0%	24.3%	5.4%	8.1%
Students (n=117)				
27.9%	35.1%	26.0%	8.4%	2.6%
Total (n=154)				
30.7%	31.3%	25.0%	8.4%	4.6%

Item number 15 on the survey stated “help students with obtaining and filling out college applications.” The *t*-test indicated a statistical significance ($p < .05$) between staff and students; again, staff agreed more strongly with the statement. Seventy-five point seven percent of staff and 60.7% of students strongly agree with this statement (see Table 15) while 16.2% and 23.1% of staff and students, respectively, agree with this item. There were no staff members who disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.

Table 15

Responses to Item #15: Help students with obtaining and filling out college applications

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Staff (n=37)				
75.7%	16.2%	8.1%	0.0%	0.0%
Students (n=117)				
60.7%	23.1%	9.4%	5.1%	1.7%
Total (n=154)				
64.3%	21.4%	9.1%	3.9%	1.3%

Item number 16 on the survey stated “please add anything else that you feel would be beneficial to the Guidance and Counseling department at Falls High School.” Responses from students and staff varied, however, there were many responses repeated, and are therefore noted following the results.

Table 16

Responses to Item #16: Please add anything else that you feel would be beneficial to the guidance and counseling department at Falls High School

Responses

Students (n=22)

1. More aggressive approach regarding credit checks, college, and scholarships (8)
 2. Having a school counselor present would be helpful. (6)
 3. ACT/SAT preparation courses (2)
 4. Using the Peer Mediation program more often
 5. Remain current on trends in educational areas.
 6. Assist with summer employment.
 7. Do not pry into family issues.
 8. Help students stay caught up in classes.
 9. Help students with out of school issues.
-

Staff (n=16)

1. Have a counselor of each gender present. (3)
2. Guidance counselors should focus on post-secondary options and scholarships. (3)
3. Have a full-time, licensed counselor present. (3)
4. All of these issues are important but not practical due to budget constraints. (2)

5. Work with agencies such as Planned Parenthood.
 6. Participate in annual reviews for special education students.
 7. Prompt and accurate information to colleges at the students' request.
 8. Stress management for staff.
 9. Provide more information on vocational interests and schools other than traditional colleges.
-

Research Questions

Research question #1: What are the perceived needs of students regarding the Falls High School guidance program?

All survey items related to this question. Overall, students either strongly or somewhat agreed that the guidance program needs all of the items except for groups on personal and academic issues. All other items related to personal/social, academic, and career assistance were overwhelmingly endorsed.

According to responses on items related to personal and social issues, students felt that their guidance program should definitely work with students individually on family issues. Students mostly either agreed or were neutral on having a school counselor available to talk with them regarding other personal issues. These same students also showed neutrality on making groups on personal issues available, however there was a large percentage who agreed that this is necessary. Working with students regarding stress management was also important to this population.

In the domain of career and post-secondary preparedness, students responded that they needed many services. Working with students to promote positive working skills

was deemed necessary by over 70% of students. Students would also like to meet with counselors and their parents to discuss future plans. Scholarships, both local and national, were important to students and that they would like to have assistance in finding them. Over 75% of students agreed that the guidance counselor should help to provide students with letters of recommendation upon request. Students also felt it important that their guidance department help students to obtain and complete college applications.

When it comes to academics, students felt it is important that the counseling department help them to learn helpful study skills. Students would also like assistance on preparing for standardized testing and deciding on high school course selections. Working with teachers regarding student behavior management was important to over 60% of the students.

Research question #2: What are the perceived needs of staff regarding the Falls High School guidance program?

All survey items related to this question also. A majority of staff either strongly or somewhat agreed to each of the questions posed. All related to aspects of personal/social, academic, and career development. Staff perceived some needs more significantly than students, such as guidance staff working with students to help with family issues, talking with students regarding personal issues, meeting with parents and students regarding future plans, working with students to decide on high school course selections, and helping students with obtaining and filling out college applications.

Post-secondary preparation was extremely important to staff. Over 75% of staff strongly agreed that the counseling department at Falls High School should help to obtain and fill out college applications, meet with parents and students to decide the post-

secondary track that the student will take, and provide letters of recommendation when requested.

Personal and social aspects of counseling were also important to a majority of the staff at the school. Working with students on family issues and working with students on personal issues rated very high with staff members. Also, a majority of staff either strongly agreed or agreed with the statements regarding making groups available on personal issues.

Academic concerns also ranked high with staff members. Staff thought it was important for the counseling department to help students prepare for standardized tests such as the SAT and ACT, and also to help students to gain specific study skills. Staff members also found it somewhat necessary for the guidance department to provide consultation on student classroom behavior.

Research question #3: How can the guidance program at Falls High School potentially be improved?

Survey item # 16 related to this question. According to the responses from students and staff regarding this issue, there are many ways that students and staff recommend improving the guidance program. Overall approaches such as having a counselor present to work on these issues and remaining current on educational trends were mentioned, along with suggestions in each of the domains.

In the personal/social domain, students and staff recommended using the peer mediation program more often, helping students with out of school issues, work with community agencies, and providing stress management for staff members were deemed important. In the domain of academic counseling, students and staff recommended

helping students stay caught up in classes, participating in annual reviews for special education, and having a more aggressive approach regarding credit checks.

In the area of career and post-secondary development, the Falls High School community recommended assisting with summer employment, providing prompt and accurate information to colleges, providing information on vocational interests instead of just colleges, and focusing on only post-secondary issues.

Items #1-#15 also suggest improvements by stating what is important to students and staff at Falls High School. Each item in the survey was agreed to by a majority of total respondents as being important in each of the domains – personal/social, career, and academic.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

In this chapter, a discussion regarding the findings of the survey will ensue along with final conclusions of the study. Recommendations will be made for future use of the study and also for the International Falls School District including recommendations for staff, student services, and administrators.

Discussion

The findings of this study determined that the students and staff at Falls High School believe that there are many needs in the guidance department of the school. The greatest need that both students and staff felt is the need for services in the career aspect of counseling. Services such as helping students prepare for college, selecting high school classes, and meeting with parents and students to determine future plans rated high on the scale.

Personal and social aspects of the counseling department were also deemed important to students and staff at the school, right behind career needs. Items such as working with students on family issues, promoting a positive attitude throughout the school, and talking with students regarding personal issues were highly rated.

Academic items also were overall rated as important to staff and students. Students and staff believe that assistance should be given to students regarding study skills and behavior management in the classroom.

These needs follow the American School Counselor Association's recommendations for school counselors. Students and staff agreed that all competencies

from ASCA should be included in the guidance program in their school. Components such as individual and small group counseling, consultation, and classroom guidance are all important to students and staff, which coincide with the ASCA components.

Conclusions

Overall, students and staff of Falls High School express a great need for guidance services. Although there are services currently being offered at the school, the presence of a school counselor would be of greater benefit to the school. Deducing from both the Likert scale items and the open-ended question on the survey, students and staff feel a need to have even more services offered in their surroundings.

Having a school counselor present for relevant matters of personal/social, academic, and career/post-secondary concerns is of utmost importance. A licensed counselor who has been trained in these topics will help to keep the school community current.

The most important topic for students and staff as far as guidance needs are concerned is career and post-secondary preparedness. Although there is staff available to facilitate clerical tasks associated with post-secondary planning, a licensed school counselor should be available to answer students' questions regarding college placement, major choices, and scholarship information. School counselors go beyond merely sending completed applications to schools and schedule college recruiter visits. A school counselor at Falls High School should be in constant contact with perspective colleges and post-secondary opportunities as a liaison advocating for the students' best interest.

Academic topics should also be an issue for the guidance department. Both students and staff have indicated that it is important for counselors to meet with students

regarding future plans, credit checks, and preparation for standardized testing. The registrar is currently overseeing duties of credit checks, however planning, course selection, and test preparation and interpretation are beyond the scope of the individual's duties. Counselors should be in contact with students at least twice per year to plan for classes, give advice, and be sure that academic choices in high school prepare students for the track they will be taking beyond their graduation.

Personal and social issues are also of importance to students and staff at Falls High School. Students should feel comfortable to go into a comfortable guidance office and speak with licensed personnel on issues that are personal to them. Counselors should know the backgrounds of students and be ready to advocate for any home, family, or friendship situation that may arise, abiding to the utmost confidentiality and being familiar with informed consent issues. A school counselor should know resources available to students in the community relating to this topic and be ready to discuss issues with students.

Recommendations for Falls High School Staff

With no licensed counselor on staff, the current staff at Falls High School may be obliged to take on extra duties. Providing services in social studies classes related to career and job placement once a month would help students gain proficiency in their future career choices. Interest inventories and guest speakers from a variety of career backgrounds would be beneficial.

The library and computer labs might offer programs related to college and career searches. Websites such as Fastweb.com and college databases would help students to search for the path that most interests them along with giving an array of choices for their

postsecondary course. Not only should these services be offered, but students should be taught how to use them, and should be encouraged to use them often. Follow-ups could be done by the computer staff, library staff, or social studies instructors through worksheets or evaluations on these programs.

Other high school staff must increasingly serve as a support system to the students. When students have questions regarding classes, personal issues, or career choices, teachers and staff often take the time to work with these students through the issues. In addition to their full time teaching duties, faculty and staff are being called to take the time to find answers for students, write letters of recommendation, and be an accessible resource for all guidance topics.

Taking on these duties will no doubt be an overwhelming task. Teachers and other staff at the school already have a large workload and classrooms due to budget cuts taking place throughout the district. Putting in extra time may be temporarily necessary for the betterment of services relating to guidance at Falls High School, and compensation for these services should be considered in the absence of a licensed counselor.

Recommendations for Student Services Staff

The current student services staff (i.e. registrar, guidance office assistant, school social worker, etc.) should first and foremost familiarize themselves with the ASCA competencies and standards. Through the absence of a guidance counselor, ASCA standards are not recognized. ASCA standards touch every aspect of a students' personal, career, and academic life. Student services staff should research the connection

that spans the competencies and standards and how they can be used in various methods to enhance the lives of students.

Student services staff must also be aware of the gap that the absence of a guidance counselor creates and should consider stepping up to meet the needs of students. These needs include regularly checking in with students on academic progress, keeping an updated list of scholarships and college visits including being of assistance when students are going through the application process, and being aware of the personal lives of students and meeting with them when issues arise. Connecting with community organizations and post-secondary representatives is also an important aspect in diverse areas of working with students. Staff should be alert to all aspects of students' lives and remember that sometimes students need to be approached to meet with student services staff; they do not always take time out of their day to talk to the staff when they have a question or issue. Again, as staff members assume additional duties, additional compensation should be considered

Student support staff should realize, however, where their limits might be. Without a school counselor license, many school staff members do not have the proper training or experience in handling issues pertinent and relevant to a guidance counselor's position. Staff should be aware of referral agencies and who the proper authority is at the school trained to handle student issues such as these.

Suggestions for Administrators

This survey illustrates the value of the guidance counselor and the services that they provide. Administrators must decide how best to meet the guidance and counseling needs of each student in the school if no school counselor is hired. While following

ASCA standards, a school counselor would develop the college and career placement program along with bringing in more scholarship opportunities to the school, which is very important to Falls High School students. Academic and individual counseling services would be offered, which is also deemed a need by students and staff. A licensed counselor is trained in many areas that other staff are not schooled in, therefore it would be beneficial to the school community to have one on staff.

Suggestions for Further Research

This study was intended to get a base assessment of perceived guidance needs from the staff and students at Falls High School. Further research could include a study of the actual services that take place, their frequency, and the knowledge of students regarding the guidance program. A comparison study of the current guidance program with ASCA standards or the standards set out by the Minnesota School Counselor Association would also help to show the proficiency of the current program.

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APPENDIX A

American School Counselor Association

National Standards

Academic Development:

Standard A: Students will acquire the attitudes, knowledge, and skills that contribute to effective learning in school and across the lifespan.

Standard B: Students will complete school with the academic preparation essential to choose from a wide range of substantial postsecondary options, including college.

Standard C: Students will understand the relationship of academics to the world of work, and to life at home and in the community.

Career Development:

Standard A: Students will acquire the skills to investigate the world of work in relation to knowledge of self and to make informed career decisions.

Standard B: Students will employ strategies to achieve future career success and satisfaction.

Standard C: Students will understand the relationship between personal qualities, education and training, and the world of work.

Personal/Social Development

Standard A: Students will acquire the attitudes, knowledge, and interpersonal skills to help them understand and respect self and others.

Standard B: Students will make decisions, set goals, and take necessary action to achieve goals.

Standard C: Students will understand safety and survival skills.

APPENDIX B

Student and Staff Consent Forms

Dear Parent or Guardian:

Your student has been given the opportunity to take part in a study regarding the guidance and counseling services at Falls High School. This study is being conducted by Kim Sundin, a former student at the school, as part of a graduate school research project. The project has been approved by the administration of the school. Completion of the survey by students is completely voluntary. There is no penalty if students choose not to participate. I am asking your permission for your student to be included in this study.

The study will be constructed of a short survey on which your student will rate his or her perceived needs of an ideal guidance and counseling program at Falls High School. All answers will remain confidential.

If you have any questions regarding this study, please feel free to contact the researcher, Kim Sundin, at 612-508-8804, or the research advisor, Barbara Flom, at 715-232-1343. Please sign the form below indicating whether or not you have agreed to have your student participate and have your student return it to their social studies class by March 17, 2003.

Results of this survey will be shared with staff, students, and the community upon completion of data processing and will be available for your review.

Questions about the rights of research subjects can be addressed to Sue Foxwell, Human Protections Administrator, UW-Stout Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research, 11 Harvey Hall, Menomonie, WI, 54751, phone 715-232-1126.

Thank you so much for your time and support!

Sincerely,

Kim Sundin
Researcher

Barbara Flom
Research Advisor

~~~~~

I do/do not (circle one) agree to allow my student, \_\_\_\_\_, to participate in this study regarding the guidance and counseling program at Falls High School.

Signature of Student \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Parent/Guardian \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Consent for Participation

This survey examines the needs of the guidance and counseling program at Falls High School as perceived by staff members and students. The goal of this study is to find out what students and staff believe would be the most important guidance and counseling services at Falls High School. Before completing this questionnaire, I would like you to read and sign this consent form, indicating that you understand the potential risks and benefits of participation, and that you understand your rights as a participant. If you have any questions, please contact Kim Sundin, the primary researcher at 612-508-8804.

### RISKS

There are no perceived risks to participating in this study. Your answers are completely confidential.

### BENEFITS

Although the results of this study may help to benefit the school community in the future, there are no direct benefits to you strictly by participating in this study.

### CONFIDENTIALITY OF RESPONSES

Your answers are strictly confidential. Only the primary researcher, Kim Sundin, and her advisor, Barbara Flom, will have access to the raw data.

### RIGHT TO WITHDRAW OR DECLINE TO PARTICIPATE

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may choose not to participate without any adverse consequences to you. Should you choose to participate and later wish to withdraw from the study, you may discontinue your participation at this time without incurring adverse consequences.

NOTE: Questions or concerns about the research study should be addressed to Kim Sundin, the researcher, at 612-508-8804, or Barbara Flom, the research advisor, at 715-232-1343. Questions about the rights of research subjects can be addressed to Sue Foxwell, Human Protections Administrator, UW-Stout Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research, 11 Harvey Hall, Menomonie, WI, 54751, phone 715-232-1126.

~~~~~

I attest that I have read and understood the above description, including potential risks, benefits, and my rights as a participant, and that all of my questions about the study have been answered to my satisfaction. I hereby give my informed consent to participate in this research study.

Signature_____ Date_____

APPENDIX C

Survey Instrument

Your opinion is needed to help gain an awareness of student needs in the Guidance and Counseling department at Falls High School. Please take a few minutes to complete the following survey.
Your feedback is completely confidential.

Our Guidance and Counseling program should...

	Strongly Agree			Strongly Disagree	
	1	2	3	4	5
1. Work with students to help with family issues	1	2	3	4	5
2. Help students learn specific study skills	1	2	3	4	5
3. Be trained to talk with students regarding personal issues.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Help students prepare for standardized tests (ACT, SAT)	1	2	3	4	5
5. Work with students on positive on-the-job skills	1	2	3	4	5
6. Make groups on personal issues available to students	1	2	3	4	5
7. Provide an appropriate and positive physical facilities for students to be comfortable in.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Meet with students & their parents about future plans	1	2	3	4	5
9. Help students find local and national scholarships	1	2	3	4	5
10. Work with students to promote a positive attitude throughout the school	1	2	3	4	5
11. Work with students to decide on high school course selections	1	2	3	4	5
12. Provide letters of recommendation upon request	1	2	3	4	5
13. Work with teachers on student behavior management	1	2	3	4	5
14. Work with students on stress management	1	2	3	4	5
15. Help students with obtaining and filling out college applications.	1	2	3	4	5
16. Please add anything else that you feel would be beneficial to the Guidance and Counseling department at Falls High School					