chapter 1

DEFINING *and* DESCRIBING *a* SCHOOL COUNSELING PROGRAM

As an elementary or middle school counselor, you are a member of a relatively young and honorable profession. You belong not only to the profession of school counseling but also to the counseling profession, which spans countless areas of professional helping and service in our society. Having historical roots in the industrial revolution at the turn of the twentieth century, the counseling profession of the twenty-first century has become an important member of mental health services (Schmidt, 2003).

Today's counselors work in settings that include mental health centers, family agencies, prisons, hospitals, funeral homes, crisis centers, employment agencies, colleges, and schools, to name a few. As an elementary or middle school counselor, you have joined one of the largest memberships within the counseling profession.

Throughout its history, the school counseling profession has searched for an identity and role among the helping professions. Today the questions—of why are counselors in schools and what are they supposed to do—are as prominent as they were years ago. As a member of this profession, you now face the same questions: Why are you here? What are you supposed to do?

In preparing to become a school counselor, you studied many areas of knowledge, including human development, psychology, career information and development, tests and measurement, and social and cultural foundations.

In addition, you have acquired skills in specific helping processes such as individual and group counseling, consultation, and facilitative teaching. This knowledge and skill provide a framework within which you are able to formulate and clarify your professional role to identify specific services for students, parents, and teachers.

Unlike counselors who practice in prisons, hospitals, mental health centers, and other settings, your services span a broad program of activities to assist several populations. This program includes preventive services, developmental activities, and remedial interventions for students, parents, and teachers. The challenge of offering such a wide range of services to different populations renders you unique in your practice of elementary or middle school counseling. Although you are similar in skills and knowledge to other professional counselors, you do not limit your role to a single service. Instead, you offer many services within the context of a comprehensive program. This notion of a *program* of services is a key element in school counseling, and your ability to define and describe your school's *counseling program* is a key to your survival and ultimate success.

DESCRIBING THE PROGRAM

The most important steps you take will be in describing and defining the school's counseling program. Although the range and diversity of the expectations placed on you illustrate the vital need for school counselors, they can also threaten your effectiveness by pulling you in too many directions and spreading services across too broad an area.

One element that will influence how well you describe the program is the language you choose. Because school counseling is a young profession, it continues to struggle to find accurate language with which to describe and define what it is and what it does. You want to explain your program with a language that is consistent with your profession and understood by students, parents, teachers, and others in the school community.

Choosing a Language

Terms such as pupil personnel services, guidance programs, and student services are a few of the labels that categorize and classify school counseling services. Since we frequently adopt the language and terminology of our location, you probably identify yourself according to labels and language you learned either in your graduate studies or in your school system.

My preference is to call myself a *school counselor* and the services I provide are part of a *school counseling program.* As such, I belong to a *student services team,* which consists of other helping professionals such as the school

nurse, school social worker, and school psychologist. For me, these terms accurately label the program of services I provide in schools. They are contemporary and more definitive than terms such as personnel services and guidance programs that are vague descriptors and often encompass conflicting roles and services for school counselors. For example, personnel services frequently imply and include record keeping, class scheduling, attendance monitoring, testing coordination, and other functions that detract from direct services to students, parents, and teachers. The terms *school counselor* and *counseling program* are also consistent with the language of our profession, as seen by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) and its journal, *Professional School Counseling*.

Guidance is a term with which I have struggled my entire career. This word has confused me because I have never understood what it means professionally in terms of skills and training unique to school counselors. Yet the word *guidance* has historical significance and remains prevalent in the school counseling profession.

My confusion is founded in the belief that guidance is not the professional domain of any single group. Everything we do in schools and, consequently, everyone who works in schools can relate in some way to the notion of "guiding students." Teachers guide students in daily instruction, as well as in their personal relationships with others. Yet we do not call them "guidance teachers." Administrators guide students regarding policy, curriculum, discipline, and school programs, but we do not refer to them as "guidance principals." Why then should we use the term "guidance counselor" as opposed to "school counselor?"

The entire educational program of the school, including the counseling program, is guidance-oriented (or should be). For this reason, it is inaccurate to confine guidance goals and objectives to a single program such as school counseling. Because guidance permeates every facet of the school, no one person or program has ownership.

The term *school counseling program* encompasses a broad area of services, which includes preventive services, developmental activities, and remedial assistance. The common ground for these three areas is that in each, counselors provide direct services to students, parents, and teachers.

Some counselors believe that the term *school counseling program* is too restrictive because it confines services to remedial relationships. This is an unfortunate and narrow definition of professional counseling. Counseling relationships are for everyone, not only for people who have problems. For this reason, I see counseling as a way of helping healthy, functioning people capitalize on their strengths and reach higher levels of development. Although counseling also supports people who have concerns about the direction and purpose in their lives, school counseling does not need to be

restricted to remedial relationships. Individual and group counseling processes, for example, can benefit a wide audience. In this guide, you will find suggestions of how to use counseling processes in preventive services, for developmental learning, and to remedy existing concerns.

In developing a successful program, you want to select a language and vocabulary that describe accurately your role and function in the school. In choosing such a language, these guidelines may be helpful:

1. *Understand the language.* The terms you choose—counseling, guidance, personnel, or whatever—should have meaning to you. You should be clear about the words you use to describe yourself professionally and be able to defend the language you choose.
2. *Educate the populace.* Once you choose the language of your program, teach it to the people you serve. Let students, parents, and teachers know what you mean by *counseling, group guidance, consulting,* and other terms. A language is useful only if the people with whom you communicate understand it, accept it, and use it themselves.
3. *Use consistent language.* It is confusing to students and others when you use the language you adopt inconsistently. Consistency may be difficult at first, particularly if you have decided to change to new terms. Stick with it, and correct yourself when you confuse the language. Your students, parents, and teachers will be as consistent as you are.

Exhibit 1-1 presents a sample description for a school counseling program and the role of a counselor. You might use this description as part of a school brochure, a student handbook, a faculty manual, or other medium.

If you replaced another counselor who once served the school, the decision about language requires careful consideration. For example, if the previous counselor used terminology different from yours, you may need to adjust your thinking for a while. This is particularly true if your predecessor was at the school for many years and is well thought of by students and faculty. You may feel strongly about the terms you want to use to describe who you are and what you do, and these beliefs may be a healthy sign of your professionalism. Nevertheless, move slowly and as you introduce new terms, explain your rationale. By being considerate and winning teachers' trust and confidence, you will be more likely to have your ideas and suggestions accepted.

Regardless of the language that you choose or how long it takes your school to adopt it, an important aspect of describing a program of services is the leadership role you take in the process. Remember, you are not the program, but your leadership ability is paramount to helping the school build a successful program.

EXHIBIT 1-1

The School Counseling Program and the School Counselor

The counseling program in our school is available to help students, parents, and teachers develop positive learning experiences. The program consists of a variety of services and activities, including individual and group counseling, parent and teacher consultation, group guidance, information services, referral assistance to other programs and services in the community, and student assessment.

The school counselor is responsible for developing, scheduling, and evaluating services of the program and is assisted by the Counseling Advisory Committee and the school principal. Primary services of the school counselor provide direct assistance to students in the school. For this reason, a major portion of the counselor's day consists of services for students. Parent and teacher consultations are usually scheduled in the early morning before classes or during after-school hours.

The counselor is a licensed professional with preparation in human development, learning theory, counseling and consulting, tests and measurement, career development, research, and other areas appropriate to the practice of counseling in a school. The counselor's office is located in the school, and appointments can be scheduled by calling [counselor's phone], e-mailing [counselor's e-mail address], or writing to [school address].

Leading the Charge

To survive and flourish as a successful elementary or middle school counselor, it is essential to identify and embrace the leadership role you have in the program and the larger school community. School counseling in the twenty-first century is not simply providing individual and group services to students. Rather, it is the orchestration of many services, some provided by you, the counselor, and additional ones provided by other professionals. This orchestration, much like leading a major symphony, requires leadership characteristics and skills to develop working relationships, identify goals and objectives, and create appropriate action to demonstrate that everyone is playing the same tune and in the correct key.

A first step in developing your leadership role is to assess your strengths in taking on this responsibility. What skills and knowledge do you already possess that will enable you to persuade people to create a comprehensive program of services and commit their involvement in carrying out its objectives? Next is to determine what additional knowledge you need to be a successful leader in your school. How can you obtain this knowledge—through workshops, professional associations, or more graduate training? A third step

to consider is how to begin developing support for your ideas as a school leader. What will you need to do to win the confidence of your administration? Which teachers, support staff, and other school personnel are likely to support a comprehensive program, and how will you secure their support?

Throughout this chapter and book, you will learn about aspects of comprehensive school counseling programs and how you, as a leader, can create a viable and valuable one for your school. Here are some starter tips as you put your plan into action:

- Know what you want to do and understand the literature and research to support your ideas.
- Identify school members—administration, teachers, parents, staff, and others—who will support you initially. Recruit optimistic colleagues and administrators and tell them your plans.
- Respect school traditions and culture. Even though you might want to work toward changing old ways of doing things, understand the emotional ties that some people may have to historical aspects of the school.
- Be inclusive. Although you might identify people who give early support to your ideas, be careful not to exclude other people in the process. People who might disagree with initial plans could have constructive ideas that when incorporated into the plan will help make it better.
- Listen, listen, listen! As a counselor, one of your greatest strengths is your ability to listen fully to others without being judgmental. Use that skill in building support for the counseling program and for your leadership.
- Maintain a consistent stance. In an earlier book, William Purkey and I presented a professional counseling stance that consists of optimism, trust, respect, and intentionality (Purkey & Schmidt, 1996). Consider these characteristics and others that you believe will help maintain a dependable leadership posture in your school.

By learning about yourself as a leader, gaining additional knowledge about the school counseling profession, and creating collaborative relationships in the school community, you are in a stronger position to maintain a wide vision of what the program should be. This means focusing on the development of a comprehensive school counseling program.

Focusing on a Comprehensive Program

All school counselors face the danger of being overwhelmed by the challenges brought by students, parents, teachers, and administrators. Sometimes, when we become overwhelmed, we lock ourselves into a single mode of operation.

In most cases, we choose what is comfortable. As a result, we sometimes spend a major portion of our time in a single activity such as classroom guidance, individual counseling, or program administration. Although these services are important, they do not, in and of themselves, establish a comprehensive school counseling program.

A school counseling program consists of a number of activities and services. These activities and services aim at specific goals and objectives chosen as a result of careful examination and analysis of the needs of the school populations. The services you use and the goals you select do not happen by chance; they are part of a planned program of services. Hence, you want to move beyond routine reactions to situations and crises that emerge and become guided by a well-designed plan of counseling, consulting, and coordinating services.

In this guide, all the suggestions and ideas relate to some aspect of a comprehensive counseling program. To summarize, we can categorize these ideas under one or more of the four components of a comprehensive program:

- Planning
- Organizing
- Implementing
- Evaluating

Planning is the process of assessing school and student needs, formulating a philosophy of school counseling that is consistent with the mission of the school, evaluating the current program (if there is one), and establishing and prioritizing future program goals.

Organizing entails the selection of specific objectives and program strategies. This selection process includes the decision of who will provide which services. In this sense, the selected goals and objectives assign specific responsibilities to counselors, teachers, and administrators, defining their roles in the school counseling program.

Implementing is the action phase of a comprehensive program. It involves the delivery of services such as counseling, consulting, coordinating, referring, testing, and others. Implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program also involves all the personnel who have responsibility for educating students in the school: teachers, counselors, media specialists, administrators, and others.

Evaluating is the phase of a program that determines success, examines weaknesses, and allows you to recommend changes for the future. In this edition of the *Survival Guide,* you will see that program evaluation is essential to a comprehensive school counseling program. Effective programs are not guided merely by the intuitions, preferences, and desires of counselors

and teachers. Rather, they are based on the assessed needs of students and measured outcomes of the services provided.

Some counselors believe they are valuable to their schools because they are always "busy." To survive as a school counselor, you want to move beyond the notion of "being busy" toward the realization that the services provided *make a difference* in the lives of students, parents, and teachers. Making a difference means measuring the effect of your services to the school.

These four phases of a comprehensive school counseling program illustrate that to be successful you must move beyond traditional approaches to guidance and counseling programs. The following comparison shows a few of the differences between traditional and comprehensive approaches (see Exhibit 1-2). As you will see, the traditional guidance approach is counselor-centered and informational in nature, whereas the comprehensive model focuses on broad populations being served and a wide spectrum of services.

You can use the Program Assessment Scale presented in Worksheet 1-1 to evaluate how comprehensive or traditional your program is. The scale emphasizes teacher input, group services, program planning, parent involvement, and other aspects of a comprehensive counseling program.

An example of the differences between these two approaches is in the area of career information and development. In a traditional guidance program, the counselor assumes responsibility for disseminating career information to students. At the elementary level, this could happen in the form of classroom guidance, whereby the counselor would present information about "The World of Work," for example. In a middle school, it might happen with individuals or groups of students receiving occupational information from the counselor.

EXHIBIT 1-2

Comparison of Traditional and Comprehensive Programs

Traditional Program	Comprehensive Program
· Predominantly one-on-one activities	· Balanced program of services
· Informational and administrative in nature	· Preventive, developmental, remedial in nature
· Reactive to situations	· Proactive in planning and goal-setting
· Clerical orientation	· Direct service orientation
· Counselor dominated	· High level of teacher involvement
· Minimum use of group work	· Extensive use of group services

WORKSHEET 1-1

Program Assessment Scale

DIRECTIONS: Underline your response to each question, and fill in the respective point values in the blank spaces. Total your points for the twelve questions to determine how traditional or comprehensive your school counseling program is.

1. Do you spend most of your time doing individual counseling and consulting with students? Yes (1 point); No (3 points) _____
2. Does your program emphasize a wide range of services, such as group counseling, teacher consultation, parent education, individual counseling, student assessment, and classroom guidance? Yes (3 points); Somewhat (1 point); No (0 points) _____
3. How many group counseling sessions do you lead in a typical week? 4 or more (3 points); Between 2 and 4 (2 points); Between 1 and 2 (1 point); None (0 points) _____
4. Are you involved with teachers in planning and presenting classroom guidance? Very much (3 points); Somewhat (2 points); Not at all (0 points) _____
5. Do you present all of the classroom guidance in your school? Yes (1 point); No, teachers also do guidance activities with their classes (3 points); No, there is no classroom guidance in the school (0 points) _____
6. Do you spend most of your time in crisis intervention and remedial services? Not most (3 points); No, but I want to do less (2 points); Yes, most of the time (1 point); No, I do no crisis intervention (0 points) _____
7. Do you have a written plan of goals and objectives that you revise annually? Yes, it guides program decisions (3 points); Yes, but only on paper (1 point); No (0 points) _____
8. Do you have an advisory committee to help guide your school counseling program? Yes, an active committee (3 points); Yes, but not active (1 point); No (0 points) _____
9. Are you overburdened with paperwork? Not really (3 points); Somewhat (1 point); Yes, most of the time (0 points) _____
10. Do you use assessment procedures with your students, parents, and teachers to establish program goals and objectives? Yes (3 points); Occasionally (1 point); Never (0 points) _____
11. Are your teaching colleagues an important part of the school counseling program? Yes, their input is sought and they participate (3 points); Somewhat, a few teachers are involved (1 point); No, it is my program to develop and implement (0 points) _____
12. Does your principal understand and support the services of the program? Yes, always (3 points); Usually (2 points); Rarely (1 point); Never (0 points) _____

SCORING: The closer to 36 points you score, the more comprehensive your program. The closer to 0 points you score, the less comprehensive your program of services.

In comprehensive programs, career information and development go hand in hand and are the shared responsibility of the entire school staff. In elementary and middle schools, teachers accept responsibility for integrating career information into their daily instruction. This infusion of career awareness helps students see how the subject matter can be applied in the outside world. It also enables students to learn which subjects relate to their interests and to particular careers in the world of work. You can assist with this integration by planning career guidance lessons and activities with teachers, locating appropriate resources, and presenting special topics in the classroom. Throughout the school year, you design and lead individual and group activities to focus on specific career development needs of all students. In addition, you work with teachers to plan schoolwide activities that focus on career information and development.

Using the ASCA National Model

Over the years, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) has worked diligently to develop a model for comprehensive school counseling programs. As I was completing this revision of the *Survival Guide,* ASCA was in the final stage of developing a national model. You can find out about the ASCA national model from the association's Web site at www.schoolcounselor.org.

The ASCA national model for comprehensive school counseling programs is intended to help practicing counselors create programs that are data-driven and results-based. The hope is that a national model will help school counselors design, implement, coordinate, manage, and evaluate services that help students achieve success in school. The national model should provide a structure or framework around which counselors design and develop their programs. Because we have a national model, however, it does not mean that all programs should look and function the same. Each elementary and middle school is different, and the comprehensive counseling program designed and implemented in each school should reflect those differences. In this way, you ensure services for all students.

Advocating for All Students

Today, elementary and middle schools reflect the populations they serve. Typical elementary and middle schools consist of students who bring a range of hopes, challenges, and needs to school each day. Counselors who design comprehensive programs of services understand their role in advocating for *all* students, not only those who show promise but also those who struggle to fit in the school.

One way that school counselors advocate for all students is by observing and listening to the culture of the school. At times, schools pass policies or develop programs that, though well intended, might discriminate against

certain groups or individual students. When you see this happening in your school, it is imperative that you take action. Point out to the principal and teachers what you have observed or what you have heard, and help them understand the implications for all students in the school. For example, one elementary school started a program for students to bring their fathers for a turkey lunch before Thanksgiving Holiday. The counselor pointed out that not all of the students in the school had fathers at home. Some students did not have fathers and others had fathers away in military service. After listening to the counselor, the principal and faculty decided to change the program to "Bring a Family Member to Lunch."

By advocating for all students, you demonstrate the democratic principles on which our educational and political systems are based. This professional stance is another way that you win support from your principal, teachers, and parents. Their support, in turn, allows you to describe and define the scope and limits of your role as a school counselor within a comprehensive program.

Elementary and middle school counselors who design and implement a comprehensive program of services rely on input and participation from the entire school staff. For this reason, the first step in establishing your program is to seek input and win cooperation from your teaching colleagues.

SEEKING INPUT

A comprehensive school counseling program does not belong to one person and is not the sole responsibility of the elementary or middle school counselor. Therefore, include as many people as possible in your program decisions. By seeking input from a wide audience, you are more likely to win support for the direction you take. When you make program decisions in isolation, out of reach of your teaching colleagues, services get out of touch with the needs of the school. As a result, you may find that the program lacks support from the faculty.

As a counselor in an elementary or middle school, you want the support of your colleagues. You may not win the total support of the faculty, but you do want the majority of teachers to believe that the services you provide and the part of the program for which they are responsible are important to the education of all students. This is what is meant by winning their support.

Winning Support

The first person to include in this decision-making process is the school principal. If you have replaced a counselor, you want to assess how the principal viewed the program in the past. When you are starting a new counseling program, determine what expectations the principal has for this new addition to the school. Or if you are a veteran counselor, you want to maintain a

strong working relationship with the principal. In all cases, you should schedule a time at the beginning of the year to meet with your principal and gather insights and expectations about your role in the school.

Before you schedule this meeting, do some preparation. Whether you are replacing a counselor, beginning a new program, or reviewing the existing program, make a list of questions to organize your interview with the principal. You may want to memorize these questions, so your interview is relaxed and spontaneous rather than stiff and structured. The following questions and explanations will help you prepare for an interview in a school where you are replacing a counselor. If you are a new counselor or a veteran counselor, you will need to adjust these questions to fit your situation. For a veteran counselor, an adaptation of these questions will help you and your principal examine where the program is and where it could be heading.

Questions for the Principal

1. *What was the most beneficial service offered in the school counseling program last year?* The principal's answer to this question will help you assess his or her priorities for the program. This information enables you to compare your philosophy with the principal's expectations and determine how close or far apart you are. By comparing your views with the principal's, you will know how much work you have to do to convince the principal of why a comprehensive school counseling program can benefit an elementary or middle school.

2. *Was there an annual plan for the school counseling program?* If there was a plan, you may have seen it during your interview for the position. If you did not see one, ask about it. An annual plan will give you a clear idea of what the past program looked like. If the principal indicates that there was no written plan, this is an excellent opportunity to mention that you would like to create one to give the program specific direction during the year and adequate evaluation at the end of the year.

3. *Are the teachers involved in providing guidance in the classroom?* The principal's answer to this question will indicate how the school views "guidance" and who has responsibility for it. You might ask whether there is a guidance curriculum—learning goals and objectives that are part of the overall school curriculum. Some states and school systems have developed guidance curriculums for every grade level. If this is true in your school, who has responsibility for it? On the one hand, if you find that teachers are integrating guidance activities into their daily instruction, you will know that you have a strong foundation for a comprehensive school counseling program. If, on the other hand, the counselor has had sole responsibility for classroom guidance, much work will need to be done to expand counseling services.

4. *Are teachers involved in an advisement program?* This question aims particularly at middle schools but also can pertain to elementary programs. If teachers are active in an advisement program, what is the school counselor's

role? A comprehensive school counseling program will include some type of advisement program that involves teachers for which the counselor might have coordinating responsibility. The counselor also provides in-service training for teachers. A strong advisement program is the heart of a school counselor's referral system.

5. *Is there an advisory committee for the school counseling program?* A comprehensive program of services will reflect the needs of the school and community. To achieve this, seek input from others. If the counseling program had an advisory committee in the past, encourage the principal to continue with one. If there is currently no committee, ask the principal to suggest names of teachers and parents who might serve. In middle schools, you also could recommend that students have representation. If your school has numerous committees, you may want to recommend that an existing committee serve as the advisory group for the counseling program. The school does not need to add yet another committee, so you will win favor with the teachers by combining this initiative with other committee objectives.

Once established, the advisory committee will help you assess student needs, design a comprehensive program, inform the staff about program goals and its role in reaching these objectives, and evaluate services for the year. An advisory committee enables a counselor to win support from the faculty for program decisions and changes. It also encourages the staff to accept responsibility for various aspects of the program, thereby sharing ownership of the school counseling program.

6. *What parental involvement have you had in the school?* A comprehensive counseling program benefits from volunteers and parents who are involved in their children's education. A school that prides itself in strong parental involvement and volunteer programs is in good shape to establish a comprehensive counseling program.

How your principal answers this question may give you an indication of how welcomed parents are in the school. School climate is essential to school effectiveness and is, in turn, affected by parent attitudes. As the counselor, you can assist the principal in strengthening parent and school relationships, thereby improving student performance.

7. *Is the counseling center located in an ideal place, and is it adequately furnished?* If you have begun working as a school counselor, you have already assessed the facilities and made preliminary judgments. If your assessment is positive, you will not need to ask this question. If, however, there are some aspects of the counseling center that disturb you, you may want the principal's perceptions.

The principal will be able to educate you about funding limits, space restrictions, and other realities that have an impact on the placement and furnishings of the counseling center. If the principal is open to suggestions for changing the center, you may want to have a few ideas in mind. For example, suppose you are in an elementary building with three stories, and

the counseling center is in the basement at the far end of a dark hall. You may want to emphasize that student access to the counselor is paramount to a successful program and that kindergarten and first grade children would probably not be comfortable visiting the counselor under these conditions. Would any other alternatives be possible?

When focusing on facilities of the counseling center, it is wise to emphasize their impact on the program and on students, parents, and teachers. Avoid mentioning your own welfare, preferences, and tastes. The most important factor is how appropriate facilities contribute to a positive difference for clients the program intends to serve.

Is the furniture adequate? Are there adult-size chairs as well as student chairs? Is there a telephone for making referrals and following up cases? Is the center sufficiently private for confidential sessions? If some of the facilities are less than adequate, ask your principal how you can help improve the situation. Worksheet 1-2 provides an easy checklist to evaluate your facilities.

Because elementary and middle school counselors are frequently placed in buildings that were designed and constructed before counseling programs existed, adequate facilities are sometimes unavailable. Take heart. Remember, just because the broom closet or boiler room is the only available space does not mean it has to look and function like a broom closet or basement. Use your imagination, ask teachers for ideas, and renovate!

8. *What has been the most successful service offered in the counseling program?* If the principal has an answer, you may want to follow up by asking how the service was evaluated. The principal's response will give you insight into the kinds of accountability processes that have existed in the program. You will want to stress the importance of evaluating services so that the program can be altered each year to meet the needs of students, parents, and teachers.

9. *Was there any service or activity in the past that the principal prefers to discontinue?* Sometimes principals and counselors do not communicate. If your principal has allowed some services to continue despite his or her feelings about them, you should know this up front. If the principal dislikes a service that you believe is important, you can examine what aspects of the service have been discomforting and negotiate changes to make it more palatable.

As a follow-up to this question, you might also ask about activities that the principal wants you to handle but that have no relationship to counseling services. As a member of the school staff, you will want to participate and accept your fair share of responsibilities to help the school run smoothly. Although you want to be involved, extra duties or administrative functions can detract from your primary role of serving students and might even defeat your purpose in the school.

WORKSHEET 1-2

Facility Checklist for a School Counseling Center

Directions: Check *Yes* or *No* for each of the items on the list.

Yes	No	
☐	☐	Adequate space for small group sessions.
☐	☐	Counselor's office has audio and visual privacy.
☐	☐	A reception area for waiting and reviewing materials.
☐	☐	A display area for educational and career materials.
☐	☐	A telephone and desktop computer for the counselor.
☐	☐	Storage area for equipment, toys, games, and materials.
☐	☐	Appropriate sized furniture for students and adults.
☐	☐	Tables for group activities.
☐	☐	Access to a conference room.
☐	☐	A sink for washing hands and cleaning up paint, clay, and so forth.
☐	☐	A computer for student self-instruction and guidance programs.
☐	☐	A TV monitor for video, Internet, and closed circuit use.
☐	☐	A secure room elsewhere in the school where records are stored and teachers can have access without disrupting counseling services.

These sample questions are intended as a starter list that you will want to tailor to suit your situation and needs. Having an open, honest discussion with your principal sets the stage for you to win support for a comprehensive school counseling program. The questions may also help you survey your teaching colleagues to assess what teachers think will make a good program. Without knowing what they think, you are less able to win their support, which along with that of the principal is essential for success of a school counseling program. Teachers' support is also important in helping you convince them of their role in assisting with student development.

Sharing Ownership

Winning support from your principal is the first step toward including your colleagues in planning and implementing a school counseling program. An advisory committee is an excellent vehicle through which to gain their cooperation. After discussing the idea of a committee with your principal, you will want to select members. This selection might come from recommendations

of the principal or from volunteers. The persons selected for this committee should advocate a strong counseling program, believe that the program is the responsibility of all staff members, and be willing to attend committee meetings during the year.

If you and your principal decide to seek volunteers, an announcement about the committee could be made to the staff at a faculty meeting or by a memo to the teachers. You might consider sending out an announcement and following it up with discussion at a faculty meeting. Exhibit 1-3 presents an example of an announcement.

During the year, your advisory committee will help you and the teachers plan events and activities to focus on schoolwide guidance, parent involvement, student development, and school climate. As these activities are implemented, the involvement of your students, parents, and teachers will be essential. This is another illustration of how the school counseling program belongs to everyone.

Letting everyone share ownership in the counseling program gives you support that is vital to function as a school counselor in a comprehensive program of services. Such support enables you to define clearly the expanded services of the program.

DEFINING WHAT YOU DO: A GLOSSARY OF SERVICES

Many functions of school counselors are defined and described in counseling literature and research. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, school counseling is a broad professional practice that includes preventive services, developmental activities, and remedial interventions. As such, counseling in schools encompasses a wide variety of activities and services. An important characteristic of a comprehensive school counseling program is the awareness people have about your role as a counselor. To be successful, you need to educate students, parents, and teachers about program services.

One way to help others learn about your role as a school counselor is to list your functions, with a brief description of each, in a faculty manual, student handbook, PTA or PTO newsletter, or other resource. But the first step is to identify for yourself what it is you do.

Identifying Services

The following list will help identify and describe the services of a comprehensive school counseling program. Depending on your audience—students, parents, or teachers—you may need to adjust the language and edit the list accordingly.

Individual Counseling

School counselors provide individual sessions for students to assist with a variety of educational and personal concerns. The primary purpose of these

EXHIBIT 1-3

Advisory Committee Volunteers

Dear Teachers:

The principal, Mrs. Jones, has asked that we form an Advisory Committee for the School Counseling Program. This Committee will consist of teachers, students, and parents, and will guide the counseling program during the year. The committee will

- Design a needs assessment procedure and make program decisions based on the results of this assessment
- Determine how classroom teachers will use the guidance curriculum during the year
- Assist the counselor with the design of a schedule of services
- Help the counselor determine topics for group counseling and group guidance
- Focus on school climate and recommend activities to improve the learning atmosphere
- Help the counselor design procedures to evaluate the program during the school year

The committee is to meet before the end of September, and then will meet three times during the year. The school counselor will chair the committee.

Mrs. Jones will select committee members next week. If you are interested or can recommend students and parents for the committee, please complete the form below and return it to the counselor's mailbox. Mrs. Jones will announce the committee members at our next faculty meeting.

Thank you for your assistance!

Advisory Committee Form

Name _____

_____ I would like to serve on the School Counseling Advisory Committee

_____ I nominate the following student for the committee: _____

_____

_____ I nominate the following parent for the committee: _____

_____

Home Phone: _____

Please return this form to the counselor's mailbox.

sessions is to help students explore their concerns, make appropriate plans of action, and be successful in following through with their plans.

Group Counseling

In some instances, students help each other by working in groups with leadership from a counselor. Group counseling allows students to share ideas about specific issues such as problem solving, career choices, educational planning, and peer relationships, as well as helping them use these ideas to resolve their concerns. Group sessions usually involve small groups of students, who are led by a counselor and meet once or twice a week for a specific number of sessions.

Group Guidance

School counselors often meet with groups to help students learn specific information about themselves and their development. These instructional groups are commonly referred to as group guidance. Ideally, teachers also lead these types of activities in their classrooms. Guidance groups can be small or large, and usually the guidance topic is related to one or more goals and objectives in a guidance curriculum.

Group guidance also can be used in a student/teacher advisement program. Whether a counselor or a teacher leads them, guidance groups are instructional in nature and focus on topics such as self-concept development, study skills, friendship, health habits, career information, and good citizenship.

Guidance Curriculum

Some schools design learning goals and instructional strategies to assist students with personal, social, career, and educational development and write these goals and strategies into the school curriculum. The intent is to have these goals and objectives incorporated into daily instruction by classroom teachers. School counselors assist with this curriculum by planning its integration with teachers, providing resources and materials, and presenting some activities with teachers in the classroom. You will learn more about this service in Chapter Five.

Student Appraisal

Counselors help students, parents, and teachers by gathering information about student abilities, behaviors, and achievement so they can help make appropriate decisions about educational placement and instruction. In helping with these decisions, counselors use tests, inventories, observations, interviews, and other procedures to gather information.

Referral

School counselors serve as referral agents to help students and their families receive assistance from other programs and services in the school system and

from agencies outside the school. Counselors work closely with teachers and administrators in these referral processes.

Consultation

Helping children develop to their fullest potential is best accomplished when people work together. For this reason, counselors consult with teachers and parents to plan appropriate services for every child. These consultations typically focus on the needs of the individual child, but sometimes counselors lead group consultations for teachers and parents to focus on specific issues and topics. For example, a counselor might present an in-service workshop for teachers to learn about indicators of child depression, or they may lead an education group for parents to discuss childrearing techniques.

Coordination

The school counseling program includes a wide range of services and activities that require coordination for smooth administration and for which the counselor assumes primary responsibility. In some instances, student helpers, parent volunteers, and teachers can be of assistance.

The preceding list is a sample of typical counselor services. Use it as a guide to develop a list that suits you and your school's counseling program. As you can see, responsibility for many activities is shared. Your next step in program development is to determine areas of shared responsibility: Who does what?

Communicating Your Role

As noted earlier in this section, having a lexicon or description of your services is just the first step in defining what you do in the elementary or middle school. More important are the processes you use and actions you take to communicate your role with students, parents, teachers, administrators, and the community.

This *Survival Guide* devotes considerable attention to ideas and strategies that counselors use to help people understand their role in schools, so I will not devote much space to the topic here. However, there are a couple of essential points that might help you create and communicate a role that is professionally satisfying and rewarding. Here are three starter ideas:

1. *Use existing avenues of communication.* For example, if you have regular faculty meetings, PTA (or PTO) meetings, assemblies, or other gatherings in the school, place yourself on the agenda each time and tell something about what the counseling program is accomplishing. If your school puts out a newsletter periodically, write a "Counselor's Column" that shares useful information for students, parents, and teachers.
2. *Commandeer a bulletin board.* Sometimes counselors shy away from being responsible for bulletin boards in the school, and this reluctance

is understandable. Sometimes managing bulletin boards becomes a full-time job and takes counselors away from their primary responsibility. Nevertheless, having control of at least one bulletin board can be an excellent way to communicate what you and the counseling program are doing in school. Be sure to include samples of student's drawings and other productions if appropriate because they will attract attention to your announcements.

3. *Launch your program into cyberspace.* In this rapidly changing world of advanced technology, it is essential that the counseling program be visible on all school communications, including the Internet. Make sure you ask for space on the school's Web site to have a link to the school counseling program.

These three ideas only scratch the surface of ways to communicate your role in a comprehensive school counseling program. What is most important, and stressed throughout this book, is the effort you make to communicate the role as you understand it so that you take professional command of who you are and what you do in the school.

In this chapter, you have learned about ways to describe and define a comprehensive school counseling program. This guide takes the position that planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating a program of services are key to your survival as a school counselor. To be successful in this endeavor, seek input from others and share ownership of the program. The next step is to determine the responsibilities that various players—administrators, teachers, and counselors—have in making a comprehensive program of services a reality. Chapter Two offers suggestions for determining these responsibilities, identifying your role in the program, and learning to balance your time across the many services of a comprehensive school counseling program.