

Preface

Secondary school counselors across the United States confront a multitude of challenges in their journeys to prepare students to meet the demands of a global economy. The increase in the number of at-risk students, the increase in the level of educational attainment required for the modern work force, and the increase in college entrance requirements are a few of the issues that are prompting counselors to reevaluate their current school counseling programs. In the same manner, the age of high-stakes tests and teacher accountability has prompted school administrators to reevaluate their school's effectiveness, investigate various reform models, and develop appropriate restructuring plans that will assist school personnel to meet the needs of all students. Unfortunately, most of the federally recognized reform programs do not specifically address the issues or concerns of a school's counseling staff, but primarily focus on the school's climate, academic curriculum, instructional practices, and assessment approaches. A comprehensive counseling program is a critical component of a school's instructional program, and counselors play a vital role in school reform and school improvement. School counselors need assistance to develop effective practices and implement programs that are visionary by design and positively impact the school community if they are to continue to meet the ever-changing needs of diverse student populations and support the overall school improvement initiative.

According to the Indiana Department of Education (2002) a "best practice is a term that is used by many groups in society to describe 'what works' in a particular situation or environment. These practices can also be called research-based practice or scientifically-based practice if there is research to support its success in the field." In this book, we identify six Best Practices or strategies that profoundly affect and improve a school counselor's effectiveness in meeting the needs of stakeholders at the secondary school level. In addition, educational research pertaining to each practice is provided. The practices or strategies outlined focus on annual program evaluation, individual and schoolwide advisement, career education, transition, communication, and professional development for school counselors. They support the basic framework of the American School Counselor Association's National Model in theory and practice. We have designed specific programs and activities that reflect the various elements of the national model: foundation, delivery system, management systems, and accountability. Upon review of the literature, we found an

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increasing need for school counselors to create programs that are data driven and standards based. In this book, we guide counselors in designing and implementing visionary programs that assist students to develop realistic career and education plans, promote parent involvement and positive home relations, foster community and business partnerships, encourage students to complete challenging academic programs of study, and assist students with transitions to the next level of education or post-secondary experiences. The strategies for program evaluation, continuous improvement, and frameworks for specific programs will lay the foundation for a comprehensive school counseling system.

This book is a comprehensive resource designed to guide, assist, and support middle and high school counselors as they navigate through the program revitalization maze and move toward the integration of the American School Counseling Association's national model. Each chapter provides an overview of and research in support of a Best Practice, immediately preceded by a recommended program or programs that implement or apply the concept. Every program is described in detail to include goals, objectives, organizational steps, implementation procedures, and suggested materials. We provide numerous time-saving checklists, surveys, and forms that will assist the counselor to accomplish the multitude of tasks necessary to implement new programs. In addition, the book's chapters are written in an abbreviated format and can be reviewed in a matter of minutes.

Finally, this book is written from a practicing school counselor perspective and is designed for secondary school counselors who are striving to move their current programs from service-centered to program-centered. We have found that the academic programs of most schools are becoming standards-based and data-driven in order to ensure that students are meeting state and national standards. In the same light, the guidance and counseling program is an integral part of a school's academic programs and must mirror their efforts by establishing student competencies and implementing a process of continuous evaluation and improvement as an accountability measure. We provide the tools necessary to make this transformation. In addition, we contend that the academic, career, personal, and social development of students is not just the responsibility of the school counselor, but must be a joint effort that involves the entire school community. This philosophy is evidenced by the importance we have placed on involving all of the school's stakeholders in program development and implementation. The Best Practices can be tailored to fit the individual needs of most programs, and the simple strategies can easily be implemented by an individual school counselor or a school's counseling staff.