Clinton High School (grades 9-12): Clinton, Iowa 563-243-7540 ext 1200

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- Liza De Stefano, School Counselor (ldestefano@po-2.clinton.k12.ia.us)
  -1st year as a School Counselor

School size- 1250 students
SES-
Ethnic-
Ratio- 1/350

Year 1

We began the Counselor Academy in the Summer of 2005. Sue had received an email from Cindy talking about the Elementary School Counseling Academy. It sounded like it incorporated a lot of the same material that Sue had learned in her Master's program. Sue also felt that it was very important that we become part of the academic team in our school. Cindy was kind enough to let us join the academy even though we are high school counselors. Our first week of the academy was very eye opening. Sue recalls feeling very validated in what we do, because we were already reaching students through classroom guidance, but the concern was that we didn't have anything on paper stating if we were effective. Tracy recalls feeling very concerned about the job security of School Counselors. So much of what we do as counselors makes our students 'feel good,' but how do you measure feelings? It was eye opening to see that, at that time, we didn't have any data (or proof) showing that we were effective. Dr. Hatch's words hit home when she said that we need to be measuring and evaluating what we do to show that we are making a difference to our students and in our school. We felt confident that we were heading in the right direction, but we realized that we had a lot of work to still do!

During year 1, we felt our principal was unaware of what services our department provided to students on a regular basis. We were seen as a 'go to' office for many different tasks. We feel we were viewed as professionals by our principal, but often felt placed in a role that we were next in line after Associate Principals dealt with an issue. From the teacher's perspective, we felt confident that they did not know what we did. From the student's perspective, we were seen as people to go to talk and make changes on their schedules. We don't feel the students connected us with the importance of four year planning, career planning, and goal setting. During year 1 of the academy, it is safe to say our role in our building was 'reactive' versus 'proactive.' Parents viewed us as a sound board for teacher complaints and school policy concerns.

As a result of our first year of Counselor Academy, we began our binder production. This included a program audit, mission statement, belief statement, identified ASCA standards that were being addressed, and an action plan for all grade levels (including specific lesson plans and 9th grade pre/post). We also identified what we needed to measure for 9th grade, as well as a specific intentional guidance plan for 11th graders in danger of not graduating on time. We left year 1 feeling confident and hopeful with the plans we had in place for the upcoming school year.

Year 2

We were excited to return for year 2 because we knew we would receive work time and time to process and follow through what we had accomplished over the summer. It felt as though every other opportunity we had through staff development, etc, things fell through once the school year began. It was exciting to think that we could continue this work! We were appreciative of Trish's guidance that lead us to creating our binder of work (our program) and gave us a plan of how to implement it once we got back to school.

One of the hardest things to learn was the development of pre/post tests. We had never done this before, so it was completely new. We realized year 2 that we didn't include attitude questions in our pre/post, so it was nice to have the opportunity and guidance to revise our tests. Another struggle from year 2 was analyzing our data from 9th grade classroom guidance and realizing that we were not effective. We learned that we had given the students too much information, which lead to the inability to process the important information. When we came back to counselor academy we were able to sit down, narrow our goals, re-write our pre/post, and shortened our 9th grade lesson plan. By the time we came back to the second session, we had data to be proud of. Our students made significant gains in understanding what was most important (attendance, grades, and graduation requirements).

We feel our role shifted slightly during year 2 due to our increased presence in the classroom and with increased discussions with our building principal (thanks to our management agreement, which was also developed during year 2). We felt the shift in being seen as more 'proactive' versus 'reactive.' The presentation to our building was a huge turning point in how we were perceived by the staff. (We still need to test this theory- staff survey to follow).

Our principal came to our 'Sharing Results Event' which was a big surprise. It validated our perception that Ms. Tharaldson was beginning to better understand our role as School Counselors and how we can be an asset to our administrations and our building as a whole. A response did not come until Ms. Tharaldson joined Tracy and Sue at a presentation in Eldridge. That was the first time we heard such a positive comment regarding what we did and how we benefit our school. It was nice to hear her say she had complete trust in us as professionals in what we do. This comment immediately boosted our confidence in going to our principal to ask for what we need. We were now asked to be a part of more committees, which lead to us feeling as though our opinions mattered.

Year 3

This year we find ourselves more confident, but still feeling behind and unsure of what lies ahead. Our struggles right now center around getting our middle and elementary schools on the same page that we are and truly have a Comprehensive K-12 School Counseling Program. We are also always striving to reach more students in a positive and preventative manner. This year we are not only maintaining what we have created over the past year, but adding our first support/educational group, using broader data to implement our program (Iowa Youth Survey), and have created a new after school tutoring program. We just completed a parent survey and plan to do a staff and student survey to ensure we are meeting the needs of our students and see if the perception of the school counseling office has truly changed. We plan to continue presenting to the staff our results of this year's classroom guidance and intentional guidance. With our new position on the curriculum development team, we are going to strive to meet the goal of getting all grade levels on board.

We feel most proud of that we are viewed as a program that is leading the way in the changing roles of school counselors. We would recommend to new counselors not to give up, stay focused, and don't go at it alone. The job can feel very overwhelming, but it can be done! We

suggest taking an active role in your school- be a part of teams, get involved. Networking is the key to success. We would tell those that resist that change doesn't have to be a bad thing. It can be invigorating and breathe new life into your career.

We still struggle with determining what to let go of. With the addition of new tasks every year, we are beginning to feel overwhelmed and don't want to miss the most important tasks of our job (meeting with the students). We need HELP in this area!!!

Final Thought

One big step we forgot to mention is the importance of presenting to our school board. Our presentation not only validated for us that we do good work, but it opened the eyes of our board members how important K-12 school counselors truly are to the academic success of students in the Clinton Community School District.