

Dropout Prevention: Recommendations for School Counselors

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Abstract

School counselors are charged to identify potential dropouts and they work closely with students to help them stay in school or find alternative means of completing their education. Ninth grade students transitioning to high school experience insurmountable challenges as they shift from middle school to high school. Students who lack the academic preparedness for high school often repeat the ninth grade or drop out of high school. This literature review explored the reasons why students drop out of school, identified predictive risk factors, and highlighted social indicators associated with students who drop out of high school. The school counselor role is to provide intervention strategies and programs to strengthen students desire to remain in school. This article provides school counselors with recommended strategies to decrease students from dropping out of school.

Keywords: transition to ninth grade, dropout prevention, strategies for dropout prevention, risk factors associated with dropouts, dropout characteristics, dropout prevention strategies for school counselors

Dropout Prevention Recommendations for School Counselors

For most students entering high school is an exciting time. Oftentimes, students eagerly anticipate that high school will be the best time of their lives. Ninth grade students entering high school have the opportunity to make new friends, take courses with upperclassmen, and become independent by making choices/decisions without parental consent. This represents a huge shift in autonomy from the elementary and middle school times. Unfortunately, many students are unprepared for the host challenges associated with transitioning to high school. Research findings indicate that entering ninth grade can be one of the most emotionally difficult, most academically challenging times in children's lives (Reents, 2002). Students transitioning from middle school to high school encounter developmental, social, and academic challenges. Ascher (2006) reports that ninth grade is the most critical point to intervene and prevent students from retention and dropping out of school.

Developmentally, adolescence marks a significant shift in human development marked by greater pubertal changes, development of larger social networks, involvement with social cliques, and unfamiliar sexual and other social stressors (Cohen & Smerdon, 2009). Additionally, during the transition, students begin to make important academic and social decisions that eventually determine the likelihood of matriculating to college, going directly into the workforce, or dropping out of high school (Cohen & Smerdon). Ninth-grade students exhibit higher rates of failure in courses, decline in test scores, and experience behavioral problems more than students in all other grade levels (Smith, 2006).

Students who lack the academic preparedness for high school often either repeat the ninth grade or drop out of high school. The National Center for Education Statistics compiled data about high school dropout and completion rates in the United States. Dropouts accounted for 8% of the 38 million non-institutionalized, civilian 16-to-24-year-olds not enrolled in high school who have not earned a high school diploma or equivalency credential and were living in the United States (Chapman, Laird, & KewalRamani, 2010). Additionally, males are more likely than females to drop out of high school (Chapman et al., 2010). The national dropout rates for Hispanics, Blacks, Whites, and American Indian/Alaska and Natives are: 18.3%, 9.9%, 4.8%, and 14.6 % respectively. Consequently, the dropout rate for students of color is considerably higher than for white students.

Dropping out of high school presents students with various challenges. All students and their parents are challenged to consider the long-term consequences associated with dropping out; even though students might lack the motivation to persevere through the academic rigors of high school. Cohen and Smerdon (2009) reported several repercussions from dropping out, including unemployment, reliance upon public assistance, homelessness, imprisonment, and increased involvement in criminal activity. Hence, given these negative outcomes, it is important for educators, especially school counselors, to systematically address the issue of dropout prevention.

According to the American School Counselor Association National Model (ASCA, 2005), school counselors play an integral role in the overall development of student learning in the areas of academic, career, and personal/social development. Moreover, school counselors are encouraged to think in terms of the expected results of what

students should know and be able to do as a result of implementing a standards-based comprehensive school counseling program (Campbell & Dahir, 1997). The purpose of the present review of literature was to explore why students are dropping out of school and identify predictive risk factors. Social indicators associated with dropping out of school were addressed and effective intervention and prevention strategies school counselors can implement to prevent students dropping out of school were explored.

A review of literature was conducted by gathering the most relevant research, data, journal articles, webinars, and empirical studies encompassing schools' approaches to dropout prevention. Databases searched include ERIC, EBSCO host, Academic Search Premier, Google and Google Scholar all serving as helpful resources while compiling this data. Keywords used included: transition to ninth grade, dropout prevention, strategies for dropout prevention, risk factors associated with dropouts, dropout characteristics, dropout prevention strategies for school counselors.

Who Drops Out and Why

Research findings suggest that too many students are leaving high school early. Somers, Owens, and Piliawsky (2009) purport that dropping out is the most devastating consequence of youths' frustration with the demands of schooling and outside stressors. Subsequently, Tyler and Loftstrom (2009) reported that, although researchers know about the characteristics of students who leave school, they know less about the causal factors that lead to dropping out of school early.

Students of the twenty – first century have more demands and challenges to endure than ever before. Blue and Cook (2004) noted that teenagers' dropping out of high school before completion have been a challenge for educators, parents, and

employers for at least 30 years. Consequently, graduating from high school has remained problematic, even as the nation's general education level has increased (Dillow, 2003).

Students are dealing with circumstances that often place them at risk of dropping out of school. According to the National Dropout Prevention Center (2011), there are numerous factors impeding learning, including pregnancy, drug abuse, illness or disability, low self-esteem, and a dysfunctional home life. According to Hupfeld (2007), researchers have correlated types of student characteristics with students who drop out. For example, students who take on adult roles, such as parenting or working a substantial number of hours, are more likely to drop out. Moreover, demographic factors correlated with academic risk are also correlated with students who drop out. Hupfeld identified several demographic factors associated with dropping out, including being from a low-income family, being a minority, being a male, being from a single-parent family, having learning or emotional disabilities, and having limited English ability. It appears that students seem to drift toward dropping out as multiple challenges compound with each other, rather than making a single decision based on a single event (Hupfeld, 2007).

When one considers the multiple factors students have to encounter, these events can be quite overwhelming for a 14 or 15 year old to handle. In a study conducted for Civic Enterprises (2006), students gave the following personal reasons to dropping out: 32% said they had to get a job and make money, 26% had to become parents, and 22% had to care for a family member. These students are charged with

making decisions such as remaining in school or making other adult decisions at an early age.

Predictive Risk Factors

Unlike 30 years ago, school districts have a wealth of accessible student data information identifying students at risk of dropping out of school. Allensworth and Easton (2005) purport that some of the behaviors students' exhibit as predictive of dropping out include academic failure and disengagement. Another predictor is students who have repeated a grade in elementary or middle school (Viadero, 2006). Gleason and Dynarski (2002) analyzed risk factors for identifying students who will drop out of school. Risk factors were defined as student characteristics or measures of past school performance thought to be associated with dropping out. Within their study, Gleason and Dynarski suggested that dropping out was defined as not being enrolled in school and not having earned a high school degree. According to a report by Kennelly and Monrad (2007) for the National High School Center, early risk factors associated with students dropping out of high school include failure to be promoted to the next grade level, failure of core academic courses in secondary school, excessive absenteeism, and other signs of disengagement.

Failure to be Promoted to the Next Grade Level

Being held back in the ninth grade is considered the biggest risk factor for dropping out (Gleason & Dynarski, 2002). In a study conducted by Alexander, Entwistle, and Horsey (1997), students who repeated a grade in elementary and middle school left school without a diploma. Findings from a Philadelphia study showed students who failed to be promoted to the next grade level attended less than 70 % of school, earned

fewer than two credits, and if students had one of these characteristics they had at least a 75 % probability of dropping out of school (National High School Center, 2007). Finn (1989) indicated that performing poorly over school one year may lead to temporary disappointment causing students to continue to perform poorly over several years, leading to students becoming detached from school and internalizing the notion that they are failures and leading them to drop out of high school. Moreover, Gleason and Dynarski (2002) noted important indicators of poor academic performance have included low grades, test scores, and placement on a non-academic track.

Students who are retained during ninth grade suffer emotionally if they cannot move forward with their peers. Failure to be promoted to the next grade level fosters greater feelings of low self-worth. These students feel as though they do not have the ability to meet the academic challenges of school. Neild and Balfanz (2006) suggested one way schools can help students who have failed classes is through an effective system of credit recovery. Credit recovery will provide students with the opportunity to earn additional credits needed to be promoted to the next grade level. School counselors assist with the process of students gaining credit recovery by identifying students in need of credit recovery and serve as the general point of contact for students to sign up for credit recovery.

Failing Core Academic Courses

Students failing core academic courses have a greater chance of not graduating with their cohorts. Allensworth and Easton (2005) identified indicators of failure for ninth graders. Receiving more than one F per semester in core academic subjects together with failing to be promoted to the 10th grade is 85 % accurate in determining who will not

graduate on time. Students who fail core academic courses typically have low academic achievement.

Another factor affecting the likelihood of students graduating is the number of credits earned. Kennelly and Monrad (2007) noted that credit accumulation in the freshman year is highly predictive of four-and six-year graduation outcomes. Neild and Balfanz (2006) noted that students who drop out as ninth or 10th graders had the equivalent of fifth grade reading level scores. Furthermore, Hupfeld (2007) reported that students who struggle academically by receiving low or failing grades, scoring poorly on tests, repeating grades, and falling behind on credits required for graduation are more likely to drop out. Therefore, it seems important for school counselors to work together with school administrators to identify ways of assisting students with low reading levels.

Excessive Absenteeism

Attendance during the first year of high school is directly related to high school completion rates. According to Tyler and Loftstrom (2009), absenteeism and discipline are linked with a higher probability of students dropping out of school. In a longitudinal study conducted by Gleason and Dynarski (2002), the factors associated with the highest dropout rates were high absenteeism and students being over age by two or more years. Since absenteeism is considered one of the strongest predictors of course failure, which in turn is associated with dropping out. It is important for schools to monitor attendance rates so they can intervene quickly (Kennelly & Monrad, 2007). Moreover, students often describe not being able to catch up, or gradually increasing absences from school until they discover themselves no longer attending school

(Hupfeld, 2007). Therefore, school counselors should implement preventive measures to monitor students' attendance.

Social Indicators

Students have many social, environmental, and contextual factors to encounter on a daily basis. Sometimes, before students enter the building, they have faced environmental challenges no child, at the tender age of 14 or 15, should have to encounter. In relation to dropping out of high school, there are several red flags for schools to be aware of in order to prevent these students from dropping out of school.

Socioeconomic Status

In general, students in low socioeconomic neighborhoods are more likely to drop out of school than students in more affluent neighborhoods (Blue & Cook, 2004). High school students from families within the lowest 20% income range were six times as likely as those with families in the top 20% income distribution to drop out of high school (Kaufman, Alt, & Chapman, 2004). Students with parents who have limited resources must be encouraged to be resilient and fight through the challenges and potential likelihood of dropping out. Moreover, family background greatly affects educational outcomes and is commonly viewed as the most important predictor of school achievement. Researchers examining family background have found family income, socioeconomic status, and parents' educational attainments are related to dropping out (Blue & Cook, 2004). Additionally, students from lower socioeconomic families encounter numerous challenges. Social factors experienced by students often lead to personal and psychological issues related to dropping out. Therefore, school counselors should be mindful of the many social and psychological factors including family

characteristics students endure while trying to regularly attend school and achieve required skills and information.

High Mobility

Another factor increasing students' chances of dropping out of school is students with high mobility. According to a study conducted by Rumberger (2003), students who move twice during their high school years are twice as likely not to graduate as students with consistent enrollment. South, Hayne, and Bose (2005) reported mobility might have a contextual effect on adolescent educational behavior, raising dropout risks among mobile and non-mobile students. High levels of mobility in the local community detract from the cohesiveness of parental social networks and inhibit the sharing of human resources (Sun, 1999).

Disengagement

Hupfield (2007) reported students drop out at the end of a long process of disengagement, rather than as the result of a single event. Teachers and counselors should note the importance of student engagement in order to avoid disinterest. Typically, students who are not engaged in school tend not to show up or pay attention, and academic failure often ensues. Moreover, students are disengaged from school beginning in middle school. Early interventions before middle school and high school are commonly recommended as the most powerful strategies to prevent students from dropping out, which in turns prevents disengagement (Hupfeld, 2007). Another factor contributing to disengagement is discipline referrals. When students receive behavioral referrals, their attendance decreases, and they begin to disengage.

Recommended Strategies for School Counselors

There are numerous factors that cause students to drop out of school. Additionally, students fail to realize the alarming consequences associated with dropping out of school. For example, Martin and Halperin (2006) noted that dropouts cost the nation more than 260 billion dollars in lost wages, lost taxes, and lost productivity. Economic, societal, and equity considerations indicate a need for interventions that could cause one million students who leave school each year to make a different decision (Tyler & Loftstrom, 2002). Therefore, school counselors are challenged to develop interventions and strategies to assist students to avoid dropping out. Somers, Owens, and Piliawsky (2008) noted that dropout prevention is an important area of study because society's cost for individuals who drop out of high school can be estimated into billions of dollars.

As part of American School Counselor Association National Model (ASCA) school counselors are encouraged to design, coordinate, implement, manage, and evaluate their programs for students' success. School counselors are encouraged to carefully design and deliver strategic interventions aimed at increasing academic achievement with all students (Brown & Trusty, 2005). The school counselor's goal when working with at-risk students is to identify and intervene before students move through a continuum of self-destructive behavior (ASCA, 1999). Several recommendations for school counselor interventions were suggested in the previous review.

Early Identification of Poor Attendance

Heppen and Therriault (2009) noted that attendance during the first year of high school is directly related to high school completion rates. The biggest risk factor for failing ninth grade is the number of absences during the first 30 days of high school and failing the ninth grade is one of the most important predictors of dropping out (Neild & Balfanz, 2006). School counselors can assist with decreasing school dropout rates by early identification of students with poor attendance (White & Kelly, 2010).

Early identification can begin through the use of collaborating with middle school counselors from the high school feeder middle school. High school counselors should inquire from feeder schools, students with poor attendance, failing grades, behavioral concerns, and students at-risk of retention. Jett and Pulling (1995) suggest that ninth-grade teachers who attend eighth-grade team meetings would become aware of academic, social, and emotional needs of their soon-to-be students.

Information about attendance is the most practical indicator for identifying students in need of early interventions (Allensworth & Easton, 2007). School counselors can monitor students' attendance by gathering attendance benchmarks by flagging students who've missed roughly two weeks (10 days) of school per semester (Heppen & Therriault, 2009). Students who miss more than 10% of instructional time should be flagged for possible early intervention (Heppen & Therriault, 2009).

School counselors can address the dropout challenge by identifying students at risk of dropping out through the use of an early warning system (Heppen & Therriault, 2009). The National High School Center (2010) developed an early warning system tool that will calculate students' indicators for attendance, course failures, grade point

average, and on-track status that determines whether a student is below the defined benchmark on each indicator. Moreover, the template provides tiered intervention strategies school counselors can implement for students with varying degrees of intensity.

In addition to identifying students through the early warning system, school counselors can monitor student's progress the entire year by updating the early warning system tool. It is important that school counselors consistently monitor students' level of progress in order to provide effective drop-out prevention strategies.

After school counselors have identified students at risk of dropping out due to excessive absences, course performance as assessed through report cards, grade point averages, and previous retention history, school counselors can utilize group counseling strategies to assist students with overcoming excessive absences.

Group Interventions

The ninth grade serves as a pivotal grade for determining whether a student will graduate (Roderick, 2003). Sewell, Palmo, and Manni (1981) noted that students who have encountered repeated failures within the classroom tend to have a loss of confidence and self-worth which in turn prohibits them from becoming contributing members of society. Fortunately, group interventions have been shown to be effective in working with at-risk students (Bemak, Chung, & Siroskey-Sabdo, 2005)

Kayler and Sherman (2009) conducted a psycho-educational group to increase study skills and grade point averages for at-risk ninth-grade students, the results from the study indicated that the use of study skills improved dramatically after students' participated in the group. With this notion, school counselors can implement psycho-

educational groups targeting important dropout prevention variables such as study skills in order to assist students at-risk of dropping out. School counselors should address issues in the groups that meet the needs of the students. Possible group goals could include learning to set goals, developing effective study skills, improving attendance, and coping with family issues/concerns.

According to the findings of a literature review by McClanahan, McLaughlin, Loos, Holcomb, Gibbins, and Smith (1998), group interventions in schools were more effective than individual interventions, fostering better developed social competencies within groups, bringing about new insights that were unavailable through individual work, and enhancing social skill development. School counselors have a wide range of responsibilities that consume their time; research findings indicate that group interventions may be more effective than individual interventions as a dropout prevention strategy (Bemak et al., 2005).

Additionally, group interventions provide a framework that more efficiently manages time constraints and provides the greatest service delivery to the maximum number of students in the most efficient manner. Consequently, group interventions can be very effective in bringing about these desired changes (Larsen & Shertzer, 1987).

Academic Support via Peer Tutoring

When school counselors carefully design and deliver strategic interventions aimed at increasing academic achievement, the likelihood that they will produce the outcome is substantial (Brown & Trusty, 2005). School counselors can assist with students' level of academic achievement by collaborating and partnering with local colleges, universities, and extracurricular enrichment partnership programs to engage

students in academic support via peer tutoring (Bryan, 2005). Partnership programs that enhance academic achievement incorporate high expectations regarding student performance and these programs also enhance students' sense of self-efficacy and self-esteem (Bernard, 1995).

School counselors are challenged to be aware of community organizations that can serve as resources to provide academic support services for students (Atkinson & Juntunen, 1994). This awareness will enable them to identify and partner with reputable mentoring, tutoring, faith-based, and other community programs to provide academic enrichment experiences for students (Bryan, 2005). Tutoring, whether conducted by peers or others, appears to be an effective method for increasing academic achievement (Brown & Trusty, 2005).

Peer tutoring assists students with developing effective study skills. Fulk (2003) described how one school addressed concerns about academic performance of incoming ninth grade students. Tutors provided study skills classes and workshops to assist students with learning note taking strategies and study for exams, and tutors provided support during lunch periods and study halls.

Peer tutoring has proven to be an effective strategy with students at risk of academic failure. Turkel and Abramson (1986) noted there is substantial evidenced that a peer tutoring program can provide a number of positive cognitive and affective gains. In a study of 65 school peer tutoring programs, Cohen, Kulik, and Kulik (1982), found that both the tutees and the tutors made definite and positive gains on both the cognitive and affective levels.

It is important to note that school counselors cannot do it all (Erford, 2003). Rather, it is suggested that school counselors be actively involved in activities to engage their schools' stakeholders (Bryan, 2005). Peer tutoring is an effective way to help prevent students from dropping out of high school and engage stakeholders.

Parental Involvement

Students who stay in school and perform successfully tend to have parents who are informed, concerned, and involved with their child's education (White & Kelly, 2010). Moreover, White and Kelly noted that parents have an amazing impact upon their child's academic success or failure. Negative parental attitudes about school, low expectations, and poor parenting style contribute to poor student performance and ultimately to school dropout. School counselors play a pivotal role in bridging home and school. School counselors are challenged to recognize that as a bridge and enhance parent involvement across the constituencies they serve (Walker, Shenker, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2010).

Parents who are actively involved and engaged in their child's education contribute to student's academic success in all areas. Because school counselors are trained in both individual and group counseling approaches, they have learned strategies for working with parents, guardians, families, and communities to address problems affecting student success (Council for Accreditation of Counseling & Related Educational Programs, 2009). School counselors can increase parental involvement by scheduling parent teacher conferences, hosting parent nights, providing parents with teachers' email addresses, and encouraging communication between parents and teachers (White & Kelly, 2010). Walker, Shenker, and Hoover-Dempsey (2010) noted

several strategies school counselors can take to increase families' capacities for involvement.

School counselors should communicate the importance of parental involvement by conducting an assessment of the attitudes of families and students regarding parent involvement. They can train parent liaisons to explain to families the benefits participation can have for their children (Walker, Shenker, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2010). Additionally, school counselors can encourage parents to provide positive reinforcement and express to their children the value they place on education (Walker, Shenker, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2010)

Another strategy to increase parental involvement is for school counselors to organize parent groups and psycho-education programs for subjects identified in a needs assessment such as the following: parenting skills, communication, boundaries, anger management, time management, and child and adolescent development (Bemak & Cornely, 2002).

School counselors can address the barriers associated with parent attendance by developing flexible schedules for parents unable to attend meetings during the traditional school day. Walker, Shenker, & Hoover-Dempsey (2010), noted that by making child care and elder care available, providing transportation, making home visits, and by holding meetings at centers at community centers within the community can assist parents in participating in their children's schooling.

More importantly, school counselors can prepare parents to perceive and respond appropriately to teacher invitations to involvement. School counselors can provide parents with fact sheets to prepare for parent-teacher conferences describing

specific steps to take before, during, and after the meeting. Prior to the conference, school counselors can provide parents with learning goals for their child in this grade or course (Walker, Shenker, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2010). Similarly, since most parents have several forms of communication, school counselors can provide parents with contact number, e-mail addresses, and telephone numbers to increase parental communication with teachers (Walker, Shenker, Hoover-Dempsey, 2010).

Programmatic Service Delivery: Transition Programs

The ASCA National Model (2005) recommends that school counselors engage in leadership roles to support students' academic achievement and holistic development through service delivery. Moreover, ASCA's (2007) School Counselor Competencies state that an effective school counselor serves as a leader in the school and community to promote and support student success. School counselors can assist with reducing the dropout rate by working closely with principals to develop transition programs for ninth grade. Counselors play a vital role not just in developing, but also implementing ninth-grade transition programs, especially ninth grade academies. According to the Texas Comprehensive Center (2008), through implementation of a transition plan, school counselors play a major role in program delivery of eighth grade and ninth grade transition by involving parents and families in the transition process through the use of communication and encouraged involvement.

School counselors can send notices/newsletters/and also promote two-way communication such as phone calls and e-mails. Moreover, school counselors can coordinate and assist parents and students with conversations among teachers by

helping students and parents set personal and academic goals for high school (Texas Comprehensive Center, 2008).

School counselors can increase comfort and reduce anxiety through orientation activities including discussions of curriculum, scheduling, discipline, and co-curricular activities. Another strategy involves allowing student ambassadors to act as mentors to younger students, and school counselors can help to establish student ambassadors to act as mentors to younger students (Texas Comprehensive Center, 2008).

In addition, it is important for school counselors to provide ongoing classroom guidance lessons for students and staff dealing with communication skills, peer pressure, how to meet people, problem solving skills, study skills, as well as preparation for life after high school (Texas Comprehensive Center, 2008).

Lastly, school counselors can develop special programs and peer support initiatives for ninth graders struggling academically and/or socially by addressing the instructional needs of students entering high school unprepared for rigorous, college preparatory work. Moreover, school counselors can collaborate with community colleges to provide students with the additional support for tutoring.

Since transitioning to ninth grade can be a difficult adjustment for students, Ellerbrock and Kiefer (2010) note, there is a need to develop and maintain supportive relationships within schools and create a caring school community for all students, especially incoming ninth-grade students. Researchers (Smith, 1997; Morgan & Hertzog, 1998) have reported a dramatic reduction of the drop-out rate and ninth-grade retention rate in schools implementing a multiple transition strategies program.

Additionally, Dedmond (2006) and Mizelle (2005) have indicated successful transition programs are varied and multi-dimensional and bring about greater results for schools.

Moreover, it can be noted that the freshman transition programs provide students with the academic and life skills necessary to be successful during their first year of high school and thereafter (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2010). Shillingford & Lambie (2010) noted that school counselors' leadership practices serves as a major influence of the comprehensive, programmatic service delivery they provide to their students and stakeholders.

Service Learning

According to the National Dropout Prevention Center (2011), implementation of service learning opportunities for students is another strategy to reduce the dropout rate. Service learning is a teaching and learning method connecting meaningful community service experiences with academic learning, personal growth, and civic responsibility (National Dropout Prevention Center). Service learning allows students to learn by doing, learn from each other, and promotes engagement in community-based projects.

School counselors can collaborate with communities in order to best serve students. Hobbs and Collison (1995) suggested counselors must be open to the contributions of those who work outside the school, and also realize collaboration will mean joint, rather than unilateral decision making. School counselors can increase service learning opportunities for the students they serve by enlisting the support of other community resources to assist students (Hobbs & Collison). Service-learning provides students with the opportunity to work as a team, build their self-esteem and

self-efficacy, and collaborate with positive adult role models (National Dropout Prevention Center).

In a research article by Stott and Jackson (2005), students who participated in service-learning activities demonstrated measureable increases in personal/social development, civic responsibility, academic learning, and career developmental. School counselors can discuss service learning projects and activities by conducting classroom guidance lessons about service learning. During the classroom guidance lesson, school counselors can explore students' personal awareness by allowing students to learn about their career interests, learning skills needed in order to conduct service learning projects, and the importance of developing character education skills such as respect, humility, empathy, and gratitude (Stott & Jackson, 2005). Service learning serves as a great opportunity to teach students at-risk of dropping the importance of bridging the connection between school and work.

Discussion

School counselors have been charged with addressing program planning needs for all students, including at-risk students. With this notion, dropout prevention serves as a major concern for school counselors. Students transitioning to high school are often unprepared to face the many developmental, social, and academic challenges. The findings of the present literature review suggests there are several predictive risk factors for students dropping out of high school, including failure to be promoted to the next grade level, failing core academic courses, and excessive absenteeism. Additionally, the research suggests several red flags school counselors should be aware of to prevent students from dropping out of school, including socioeconomic status, high mobility, and disengagement from school.

It would be beneficial for school counselors to develop dropout intervention and prevention strategies for students. Hupfield (2007) noted dropout prevention practices within schools have strong holding power when they focus on alterable aspects of the learning environment.

Practical Implications

Based on the literature presented, school counselors can implement various dropout prevention strategies as follows: the early identification of students with poor attendance, providing programmatic service delivery of transition programs, and providing academic support via peer tutoring, parental involvement, and group interventions. White and Kelly (2010) contend school counselors play an integral role in identifying, monitoring, intervening, and following-up with at risk, potential dropout students. Group interventions seem to be more effective than individual interventions.

School counselors are challenged to consider multiple risk factors associated with students dropping out of school. Once school counselors examine the many factors associated with dropping out, school counselors should employ effective evidence-based dropout prevention strategies to decrease dropout rates.

The National Dropout Prevention Center (2011), offers several recommendations for educators and school counselors planning to implement dropout prevention/intervention programs. Students drop out for particular reasons. Programs should address multiple risk factors across several domains and use multiple strategies in addressing risk factors.

As school counselors, no one is completely responsible for implementation and follow-up with dropout prevention programs. Therefore, school districts are challenged

to develop dropout intervention and prevention strategies with the support of school counselors. School counselors are at the forefront of identifying students at-risk for dropping out. Additionally, school counselors can become innovative and creative by serving on school leadership teams addressing and developing dropout prevention strategies and interventions. Gysbers (2004) suggested school counselors must take action and accept the challenge of contributing to school improvement. Within the accountability component of the ASCA (2005) National Model, school counselors are challenged to help narrow the information and opportunity gaps for students. The accountability function charges school counselors to serve as leaders, advocates, collaborators, and data-driven decision makers in their respective schools (Dahir & Stone, 2009).

White and Kelly (2010) contend school counselors should implement empirically supported interventions, increase the probability of support from fellow teachers and school administrators, and increase the probability of attaining more positive and enduring educational outcomes.

School counselors are held accountable for the academic, personal, social, and career development of students. Given the challenging statistical data regarding the number of students who drop out, there are several indicators school counselors can have a positive impact according to the ASCA (2005) National Model. Specifically, the school counseling profession has called school counselors to be leaders in their schools with relation to dropout prevention. The findings suggest school counselors should focus on several promising strategies to reduce the number of students dropping out of high school.

An underlying theme regarding these recommendations is for school counselors to work collaboratively with other educational professionals and those providing strategic community resources in order to identify early and use appropriate interventions for potential school dropouts.

School counselors have been charged with the notion to address program planning needs that address the needs for all students including at-risk students. With this notion, dropout prevention serves as a major concern for school counselors. Students transitioning to high school are often unprepared to face the many developmental, social, and academic challenges. The findings of the present literature review suggest that there are several predictive risk factors for students dropping out of high school, including failure to be promoted to the next grade level, failing core academic courses, and excessive absenteeism. Additionally, the research suggests several red flags school counselors should be aware of in order to prevent students from dropping out of school, including socioeconomic status, high mobility, and disengagement from school.

It would be beneficial for school counselors to develop dropout intervention and prevention strategies to prevent students from dropping out. Hupfield (2007) noted that dropout prevention practices within schools have strong holding power when they focus on alterable aspects of the learning environment.

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