

Counseling and achievement are tied

By **Carla Thomas McClure**

Results of a quasi-experimental study published in *Professional School Counseling* show that students who received structured, counselor-led group instruction in “essential skills for school success” scored higher on the reading and math sections of the state assessment than students who did not.

Is this the first research to link school counselors and student achievement?

No. Other studies have shown that school counselors can have a positive influence on social and academic outcomes for students. But earlier research was often marked by “weak designs that evaluate poorly documented and nonreplicable interventions,” according to John Carey, director of the Center for School Counseling Outcome Research.

What counseling intervention was studied?

Researchers examined the Student Success Skills program, which emphasizes skills identified in the research literature as essential for academic and social success.

These skills fall into three categories — cognitive/metacognitive, social, and self-management. Beginning in September, the counselor conducts eight weekly 45-minute classroom sessions. Beginning in January, the counselor delivers four monthly “booster sessions.”

Who participated in the study?

The study involved 25 school counselors and 418 5th- and 6th-grade students from 14 schools in Florida. About 45% of these students qualified for free or reduced-price meals; 85% were white, 4% black, and 9% Hispanic. All were categorized as mid- to low-performing.

How was the study conducted?

Researchers randomly assigned participating

students to either the treatment or comparison group. To measure outcomes, they compared students’ March 2002 and March 2003 reading and math scores on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). Teachers in the treatment group also completed a behavior rating scale (the School Social Behavior Scales) before and after the intervention.

What were the study results?

A comparison of pretest and posttest FCAT scores showed that students who received the intervention scored significantly higher in math than students in the comparison group. In reading, students who received the intervention also scored higher than students in the comparison group, although the difference was not statistically significant. Teacher ratings of treatment student behavior related to school success indicated an average improvement of 19 percentile points between September 2002 and April 2003.

These findings are consistent with those of three earlier studies of the Student Success Skills program. This study’s replication of earlier findings increases the likelihood that the improvements are due to the intervention, rather than to other factors. All four studies, combined, have involved 50 school counselors, 36 schools, two school districts, and more than 1,100 students in Grades 5, 6, 8, and 9.

Message for coaches. Consider enlisting school counselors to support learning goals by boosting students’ cognitive, social, and self-management skills. Including school counselors on the improvement team may require coaches to educate teachers and administrators about potential benefits, say researchers.

It’s also important to tie the counselors’ work to the school’s mission and goals and to write it into the school improvement plan. Make sure counselors use research-supported programs and practices that have been linked to positive student outcomes. ♦

References

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Carla Thomas McClure is a staff writer at Edvantia (www.edvantia.org), a nonprofit research and development organization that works with federal, state, and local education agencies to improve student achievement.