

New School Quality Standards Approved

Final revisions to Rule 2000 were approved by the Vermont State Board of Education on October 18, 2005. It is anticipated that the approved rules will go before the Legislative Committee on Administrative Rules (LCAR) in January 2006. View the Board-approved School Quality Standards at the Vermont Department of Education web site. A PDF file of the new standards was added on December 12.

For school counselors, no improvements were made in working conditions. Although the student-counselor ratios

were maintained, they remain at an unrealistically high level. Even worse, the following sentence was removed: ~~“At all levels, the school should strive to meet the ideal ratios recommended by the American School Counselor Association.”~~ The ASCA national model outlines the need for counselors to spend more time in direct service to students. To accomplish this goal, the numbers of students with whom a counselor is expected to work must be reduced. The removal of this goal for school counseling programs in Vermont is a set back that will make it more difficult to expand the number of counselors. Unfortunately, the state’s *minimum* standard becomes the maximum when local school boards are thinking about budgets. The attitude becomes, “Well, the state says we only need one counselor for 300 high school students. Why should we add more?”

Oddly, the requirement for a *comprehensive* school counseling program was deleted, but the reference to ASCA’s national standards for academic, career, and personal/ social development was retained. Evidently, testimony by school counselors at the public hearings last spring had little impact on the final wording.

Here is the way the standard reads as it goes to the LCAR:

2120.8.4 School Counselors
(a) A school counseling program shall be available to all students in grades K-12. At the elementary level, there shall be no more than 400 students per school counselor. Schools with fewer than 400 students shall employ a school counselor at least proportionate to the ratio of the number of students to 400. At the secondary level, there shall be no more than 300 students per school counselor. For purposes of this rule, the term “school counselor” includes the term “guidance counselor.”

No improvements were made in the working conditions for school counselors.

(b) The school counseling program shall conduct programs that address students’ academic, career, personal and social development. Such programs shall be aligned with the work of other professionals in the school setting, as well as those in other educational and human service agencies.

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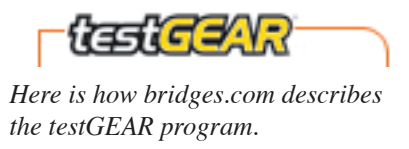
One of the best on-line sources of information available to high school counselors is the www.vtguidancecentral.com web site. It's also may be the most under used resource. VSAC pays the fees that allow every high school in the state to use the extensive career and college databases, and the test prep courses. VSAC also provides training to make sure counselors know how to use the various tools available on the site.

However, at a recent financial aid workshop in Brattleboro, only a handful of people stayed for the session on testGear. Knowing about this excellent test prep course can put your put all your students on equal footing when it comes to test readiness. Because it is available to every student, low

or moderate income students are no longer at a disadvantage. Even wealthy parents will breathe a sigh of relief that they don't have to shell out hundreds of dollars to pay for a test prep course. When parents call and ask what your school is doing to help students prepare for the SAT or ACT, give them the access code for testGear for your school.

Students begin with a 30 minute "Brain Scan" that tests English and math skills, and defines their learning style. When they have completed the scan, the program sets up a personalized curriculum to help them prepare for the tests. Using practorials, mini-courses, and labs students prepare to take the quizzes. The format is engaging—for example, the vocab lab is like a quiz show—and extensive help is available in the on-line resources.

If you skipped the workshops this year, contact the VSAC Resource Center, and they will be glad to help you.



testGEAR gives students the practice they need to reach their full potential on college entrance exams like the SAT, PSAT and ACT. This online learning system adapts to each student's needs by targeting their weaknesses and helping them to build necessary skills.

Raise student test scores on the SAT and ACT with testGEAR online test prep courses. testGEAR provides 24/7 access to highly correlated, standards-aligned content, including more than 60 interactive lessons that teach over 200 learning skills and test-taking strategies, as well as practice exams that help students walk into the exam confident and well prepared. Students start with a brief diagnostic test that measures their strengths and weaknesses and assigns a customized curriculum based on individual results.

testGEAR provides educators with ultimate reporting flexibility, providing the tools they need to measure and improve student performance. Nine detailed reports on student and group abilities indicate where students need to improve in relation to national standards, allowing for data-driven instruction at the classroom, school and district levels.

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Newsletter - Wayne Blanchard
 Send news items to Wayne at Springfield High School
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Writing Letters of Support

It's that season where high school counselors can spend a lot of time writing letters of support for students. Here is a way to put students to work in a way that will benefit them and help the counselor too. Ask them to fill out a personal profile of themselves. In the process of doing this task, they will pull together information about themselves that will help them to write the application essay, and they will make your job much easier. If you also ask

them to give the NASSP's "Student Description Form" to five of their teachers, you will have information and comments from the teachers to add to your letter. Combining this information in your letter makes the whole job much easier, and still gives the college the information it wants.

Here is a sample profile below. Other suggestions are welcome; send them to the newsletter editor: wblanchard@springfield.k12.vt.us

Personal Profile

This information will be the basis for the letters of support I will write for you for college admissions, scholarships, etc. Please be very fair to yourself and as specific as possible.

What college are you most interested in right now? What is it about this school that appeals to you?

What do you want to study when you go to college?

What are your career goals? What sparked your interest in this work?

What is your most meaningful school experience? Tell me what it is and then finish this sentence: Through this experience I discovered that I...

The most meaningful extra-curricular experience I have had is...

How did you spend your summer?

What do you do for fun and relaxation?

Do you have a part-time job? How many hours per week? Where do you work and what do you do? Finish this sentence: By working, I learned that I...

If you did not do well in some courses, are there any "extenuating circumstances" that should be included in a letter about you?

Use this space to tell me anything else that might help "promote" you in a recommendation. (Special summer school or travel experience? Anything unusual about your family or family life which may have had an impact on your academic work or your activities? Any unusual obstacles that you have overcome? Have you experienced any failure – election, athletic event, audition, etc. that may have strengthened or had a positive affect on you?) What are your best personal qualities, strengths, skills, etc.?

IN PRAISE OF CHILD LABOR: WHY CHORES ARE GOOD FOR YOU

If you're like Patrick Boyle, you had a lot of family responsibilities when you grew up: from setting the table and washing dishes to raking leaves, shoveling snow and cleaning bathrooms. Maybe you cared for younger siblings or painted the house. We all learned several important lessons from such experiences. First, befriend people who own chainsaws. Second, our ridiculous parents were right: Having chores is good for a young person. It builds good work habits. Builds discipline. Builds character. A common observation among professionals who work with youth is that they respond well to having real responsibilities that matter. That means duties they own that bring natural consequences if they slip. They don't have clean clothes, the dog doesn't eat or the house looks too embarrassing to invite anyone over. That's more powerful than getting scolded by dad, although let's not throw out scolding. In many communities, middle class kids have been liberated from meaningful family responsibilities. Adults frequently say that one benefit to being more affluent than their parents is that they can provide a better life for their children than they had themselves. If that better life renders a child incapable of cleaning his socks, then maybe we need pay cuts.

Russell A. Sabella, Ph.D.

Florida Gulf Coast University

ISN'T IT TIME FOR A STATEWIDE DUAL ENROLLMENT

By Gail Albert, CCV Coordinator of HS Programs

Who is a good candidate for “Dual Enrollment (DE),” the opportunity to take a college class concurrently with a high school class and to earn credit at both institutions? The spontaneous answer might be that student whose grades are excellent, who is active, engaged, bright and probably has already availed herself of the advanced classes her high school offers. We don’t need to find this student, she finds us, seeking the opportunity to learn, to get ahead and to expand her college-ready profile!

The “middle majority”

But what about those students in the “middle majority?” Counselors know them. They have good potential but don’t stand out; they don’t turn up at the office in trouble or for advice on college planning. Their grades are average, or they may have “checked out” academically. They don’t have commitment to their academic present—much less a vision of their future. They may be outsiders among their peers, or too wrapped up in their peer group, to care about school. Maybe they are deeply interested in a

“...a very successful strategy for engaging the disengaged, raising their aspirations and their academic appetite, and helping them reinvent themselves as students.”

topic not touched on in the HS curriculum. Some may face language barriers or economic, social, or cultural challenges that impair their belief that they can act on their high aspirations.

Dual Enrollment in Vermont

Here in Vermont, CCV has long partnered with high schools to provide DE opportunities to this middle majority with excellent results. Through reduced tuition packages made available to high schools, DE scholarships, and the development of a free college readiness class, “Introduction to College Studies,” CCV has reached out to this population. This academic year only, thanks to a generous Federal earmark grant, these opportunities have been extended to reach a far greater number of students through what has become known as “Rise to the Challenge.” The grant provides funding for eligible students who successfully complete the Intro class to receive a voucher covering the cost of an additional 3-credit college class at any of the Vermont State Colleges.

CCV’s experience suggests that DE is a very successful strategy for engaging the disengaged, raising their aspirations and their academic appetite, and helping them reinvent themselves as students.

How do schools make it work?

When schools consider implementing a dual enrollment option for students, questions arise immediately, such as “Who pays?”, “How can it be made equitably available to students regardless of economic status?” or “How should credit be granted?”.

Schools have taken a variety of approaches to address these issues. One principal voiced the philosophy that the cost of one book of 10 CCV vouchers about equates to the cost to the district of one student dropping out of school—a worthwhile investment if even just one student remained in school as a result of DE. Some schools cover DE with grant funds, secured specifically for that purpose, or by leveraging funds from other sources designed to support student success. At least one employs a sliding economic scale based on a family-self-report to determine what share, if any, a student pays for a DE class. Other schools find the funds in current resources.

Schools use many different approaches to issuing credit for DE. Some schools allow students core credit for successfully completed college courses; others offer elective credit. Most encourage them to pre-plan with the school counselor how the credits will fit the student’s course of study.

High Schools also differ

DIALOGUE?

on how they treat DE classes on a student's transcript. Some name the class and college, without noting a grade. Others record a P or F so as not to have an impact on the student's GPA. While most colleges will not issue credit for a P/F class, the student always has the option to request an official college transcript be sent to another college. Interestingly, although most colleges allow AP scores to be used to meet prerequisites, AP classes may not always count toward the number of credits needed to meet Degree Requirements. However, DE classes transferred from one to another college may meet those requirements.

What Next?

It is clear from the above discussion that there is little consistency among Vermont High Schools in the treatment of DE, although there is widespread recognition of the practice. Given the importance accorded to DE practice in Vermont's "High Schools On the Move" initiative and the equity issues that arise from differing practices around the state, wouldn't it be helpful to initiate a statewide dialogue that aims at coming to terms with the value of this opportunity and the best and most equitable practices to guide and fund it?

For more information about dual enrollment, contact Gail Albert at 802-865-4422 or by e-mail: albertg@ccv.edu.

VTSCA Board Member Profile: Wayne Blanchard - Newsletter Editor

How and what in your academic and or professional career led up to you becoming a school counselor ?

I majored in sociology in college. Each year we had a month-long class to focus on one subject. I spent one "Jan Plan" working with medical social workers at a nearby hospital and was considering going into social work. However, I also had to deal with military service since I graduated in 1970. I went through Air Force ROTC and ended up with a job as a personnel officer. After a year as a regular personnel officer, I was assigned to a new unit and I worked as a career counselor. I met with new recruits in training and helped them to decide what they would do for work when they finished training. Of course, the needs of the Air Force took precedence but most recruits had a choice. We primarily used the AFQT, an early version of the ASVAB, as the main criteria for a recruit's eligibility for a job. While doing this job, I started taking graduate courses in Counseling & Guidance. I liked the courses and decided I could make a bigger difference in the lives of young people by working as a school counselor instead of as a military officer.

What is your daily, weekly and monthly routine as a counselor?

I work in a school with two other counselors. Together, we

create a calendar that enables us to publicize the activities that make up the Counseling and Guidance program. Think of the calendar as an outline for the year. We work to follow the national model of the American School Counselor Association. Our aim is to provide something for every student and to cover academic, career, and personal/social development. In the fall we focus on seniors and college planning. We also do a life skills program with all the freshman. It helps us to get to know them and for them to understand what we offer. We do a lot of testing in October: PSAT for juniors; PLAN for sophomores; and the ASVAB for juniors and seniors. In December, we do a career unit with all the sophomores. In January, we focus again on college applications and financial aid. In February and March, our focus is on juniors. We meet individually with them to review what they have accomplished and to help them figure out the direction that they are going to take after high school. We also register students for courses during February and March. In April we spend a week with Freshmen to help them develop a plan for high school. We spend May resolving schedule conflicts and we also focus on seniors who might be in danger of not graduating. Once we have the major events of the year sched-

Meet Board Member Wayne Blanchard - Newsletter Editor

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uled we can make weekly and daily activities. I see a number of students each day and for much of the year I usually have a classroom activity scheduled. Each week I have an Educational Support Team meeting and usually have a faculty meeting of some sort. Usually there will be parent meetings scheduled after school hours.

Do your duties consist of things not specifically in your job description ?

Sadly, in a school system counselors have to continually let people know what we do. Because counselors are not assigned to a class, teachers and administrators are not always sure what we do. Sometimes there is a tendency to assume we are available to do whatever needs to be done. If an emergency comes up, we do have to readjust our schedule. However, I am very careful not to just fill in for someone or cover some duty. We are fortunate in Springfield because we do get to work as school counselors most of the time. At other schools nearby, some counselors build master schedules, organize the standardized testing program, manage special education cases, do lunchroom duty and so on. All of these activities are important but they shouldn't be part of a counselor's job.

What have been some high points and low points

in your job ?

I love my job. I have worked with a lot of counselors who see becoming a principal the next step in an education career. I have always found my job fulfilling and I see administration as a step sideways, not up. The best part of my job is making a difference for each student who comes in to see me. I like being able to help students who are struggling with various issues in their lives and helping find solutions. The low points of my job include attending endless meetings that seem to make little difference: special education meetings, faculty meetings and so on. I also find helping students to sort out schedule problems to be a particularly tedious task.

Has the job changed any since you started?

In my job at Springfield High, the changes have been for the better. We have been able to focus on working as school counselors and have had relatively few additional duties assigned to us. Our case load is currently about 200 to one, which means we can get to know our students and make an impact in the school. I know that in other states this ratio is much worse. Nationally, I think the school counseling program outlined by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) has been very useful. Also, I have been impressed with the work that Norman Gyspers at the University of Missouri has done to

promote comprehensive school guidance programs.

Would you recommend anyone enter a career in school counseling?

A person who wants to go into school counseling has got to like working with kids. The job also requires a lot of flexibility. Some days, I don't get to do anything that I planned to do. I think a counselor has to be able to tolerate a lot of ambiguity. There are often no immediate rewards. Helping a student work through a problem or make plans for the future is rewarding but often I do not see the results right away. Sometimes I envy teachers with their daily contact with students. Teachers can also measure what progress they are making with the class. Counseling at the high school level does allow me to see changes over the four years and that helps.

Do you get support from faculty and staff ?

Support from teachers makes a school counselor's job much easier. In fact, I would say that the job is almost impossible to do without the support of the teachers. Many of the issues that students bring into my office have to do with how they are getting along in class, either with the teacher or with other students. In both cases, the teacher can make a big difference in resolving the problem. One of the constraints of the job is the way we are viewed

by others. I often compare a counselor to a chameleon. Just as a chameleon blends in with its background, the counselor's job is often seen only against one backdrop. For example, if I work with students on financial aid, that is how those people view my job. If I help someone do career planning, they think that that is my job. If I attend a Individual Education Plan meeting, people think that that is how I spend my time. I find it difficult to get others to understand the many dimensions of my work.

What do you see as the future in the field of counseling ?

I think the ASCA national model is the best hope for school counseling. It gives counselors the tools to make the political changes necessary for school counselors to work. Creating a program and getting it endorsed by administrators and school boards is a lot of work but counselors need to be visible and this is one way to do it. Some states are adopting these school counseling guidelines. I don't think counselors will be able to do only individual counseling and still survive. The biggest change I would make about school counseling would be to reduce the number of students that a counselor is expected to work with. The smaller the case load the more effective the counseling program will be.

Send comments to Wayne at wblanchard@springfield.k12.vt.us

Benefits in Membership in the VTSCA

- * Networking with hundreds of other school counselors throughout the state
- * Legislative updates and lobbying at a state and national level -- leaders at local, state and national levels champion and lead change initiatives
- * Continuing education credits and/or contact hours through annual conferences
- * Professional development opportunities in areas of critical need are made available to all professional school counselors
- * Relevant information exists to enhance professional school counselors' level of skill and professionalism (VTSCA newsletter & web site)
- * We hope to provide access to new "VTSCA" website for feedback, board list, contacts, networking, by-laws, mission, upcoming conferences and links to our profession. Also hope to have a list-serve for future networking opportunities.
- * VTSCA supports relevant research and evaluation in school counseling
- * VTSCA maintains an organizational structure and administrative functions that facilitate the accomplishment of the goals and objectives
- * Strategic partnerships with stakeholders exist to benefit professional school counselors and their students
- * Recognition of Vermont School counselors through the "James F. Cawley and New Counselors" awards for outstanding work and contributions made to the counseling profession
- * Support to counselors who have regional and area meetings
- * Resource for ethical concerns, professional development and skill building
- * Co-sponsored a spring conference with Vermont Student Assistance Corporation on K-12 career development for students
- * Professional organization maintaining and monitoring legislative action related to school counselors and counseling
- * Regularly sends VTSCA representatives to American School Counselor National Conference and Leadership Development Institutes to exercise our voting privileges at National Delegate Assembly.
- * Promote and improve public relation for the counseling profession

Renew your membership today — only \$45 a year.

Membership Expired?

Check your mailing label. If the label says "VSCA 2006/10" they you renewed your membership—thank you! If your label says "VSCA 2005/10" in the upper right corner, then your membership has expired. Remember we are a non-profit, volunteer organization that is supported by counselors for counselors. There is no paid staff to send you reminders. Everybody's membership needs to be renewed each October. Many people do this at the fall conference, and if they don't go to the conference, they often forget to renew the membership. The association needs your support.

Please renew my membership.

Name _____

Mailing Address _____

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The membership fee is \$45. Please make out checks to Vermont School Counselor Association, and mail to:

P.O. Box 665
Burlington, VT 05410

VSCA 2005/10

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A 2005 on your mailing label means it's time to renew your membership. Please send in your \$45 today.

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**Vermont School Counselor Association
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