

Preface

Evidence-based school counseling can be defined as the intentional use of the best available evidence in planning, implementing, and evaluating school counseling interventions and programs. The primary purpose of this book is to help school counselors develop the data skills that are needed for evidence-based practice in modern public schools.

Public education has gone through dramatic transformations in the past 15 years. Much of this transformation has been driven by a profound and fundamental change in the relationships of state governments to local school districts and by resultant changes in how districts and schools are led and managed. An equally profound shift in the relationship of the federal government to local public schools is evidenced in the No Child Left Behind legislation, which both reinforces a standards-based approach to public school management and accountability and introduces new requirements for public schools to adopt research-based approaches to education. Schools must be capable of demonstrating that their educational practices are supported by empirical evidence. These changes require that all educators become skilled in using data for planning, evaluation, and accountability and in evaluating outcome research.

Few school counselors were drawn to the profession because of the opportunities it affords to read research and work with data. Some school counselors resent the recent push to use data to document the outcomes of their work when every day they can see that they make a difference for students. Over the past quarter century, there have been recommendations to incorporate accountability practices into school counseling programs with little success (Aubrey, 1982; Fairchild, 1993; Fairchild & Seeley, 1995; Fairchild & Zins, 1986; Myrick, 1984; Wiggins, 1985). The predominant message of the accountability movement has been that producing evidence of effectiveness is a necessary condition for job security in public education. However, this message has been ineffective in persuading school counselors to add accountability practices to their already strained workload. This may be due in part to a lack of clarity about the relationship

between accountability and the improvement of services for students. Another roadblock is that most school counselors were not trained to use data or program evaluation in their graduate programs and may be intimidated by the prospect.

The Time Is Now

The new message in public education is that evidence-based practice skills and activities are necessary for continuous improvement in all aspects of education, including school counseling. The primary reason that school counselors need evidence-based skills is to increase their effectiveness in helping students. However, moving to an evidence-based approach is not simply a matter of adding accountability practices. It is a paradigm shift that incorporates the collection and use of evidence in all phases of the work of school counseling to support the counselor's professional decision making. In an evidence-based practice mode, the data that are needed to document accountability to stakeholders are generated naturally as a by-product of the school counselor's decision-making processes.

This book provides the information and skills in use of data that school counselors need in order to make the shift to evidence-based school counseling. These practices are linked to work that counselors and educators are doing in schools across the country and are rooted in the belief that evidence-based school counseling practice is the best way for us to determine that what we are doing is effective. The ultimate goal of school counseling is to help all students be successful (ASCA, 2003), and evidence-based practice provides the tools needed to support that objective. Implicit in this goal is a moral imperative to address equity issues by providing the best possible services for all students (Education Trust, 1999, 2001; House & Martin, 1998; Paisley & Hayes, 2003; Stone & Dahir, 2006). Data-based decision making, using existing evidence to identify possible interventions, and evaluating interventions and programs—the skills and processes delineated in this book—create success.

Ways to Use this Book

Throughout the book examples and scenarios are provided for readers as cutting edge ideas about what evidence-based school counseling practice could look like. We hope these will prompt discussion, new ways of thinking, and an expansion of possibility. Beginning with the end in mind is an effective way to approach change, so some readers may want to start with Chapter 9. There is a logical order to the chapters, but given that every reader will have unique experiences and knowledge, moving around in the book may also be valuable.