

Curriculum Leadership Institute E-Hint

The Role of the School Counselor in the Curriculum Process

Administrators and grade-level or subject-area teachers have clearly defined roles in the development and implementation of curriculum. But what about the other members of the professional staff? Every district has professional positions that provide critical support to the “regular” teaching staff. Counselors and psychologists, media specialists, Title and special education teachers, and technology specialists are an integral part of providing a quality education for the district’s students. So... what is their role in a district’s overall curriculum process? This *CLI Ehint* will focus on the role of the counselor. Future *Ehints* will discuss roles of other professional support staff members.

As many of you know, the core of the CLI Model is that a district must have a system of governance for curriculum and instruction. For years, school districts initiated projects to develop curriculum — without positive results. Curriculum documents ended up on a shelf somewhere, and nothing really changed. This happened because “developing curriculum” meant assigning tasks to a whole bunch of committees that worked in isolation. There was no central group to establish guidelines, assure consistency and follow-up, or make decisions about important issues that are critical to getting results.

Establishing a “central group” and giving it authority to make and carry out important decisions is key to successful efforts in curriculum and instruction. In the CLI Model, this group is called the Curriculum Coordinating Council (CCC). Board approved policy creates this council and gives it its authority. It is not the same as an administrative team, which would provide top-down management. Instead, it is a democratic governing body, with representatives from all district stakeholders. CLI provides a sample CCC make-up, shown here.

Primary teachers (K-2)	2
Intermediate teachers (3-5)	2
Middle level teachers (6-8)	2
High school teachers (9-12)	2
Professional support staff	2
Parent/community persons (by level)	3
Building administrators (by level)	3
Superintendent	1
Curriculum coordinator	1
Board member	1

TOTAL = 19

Notice that this sample includes two members of the professional support staff. Some school districts leave this open to any two members. Others feel that it is critical for the high school counselor to be on the CCC, so their document says "one high school counselor and one professional support staff person." The main point here is that it *is* important for these professionals to be a part of the CCC.

Counselors at all levels (elementary, middle, and high school) can provide much information and advice pertinent to the discussions of the CCC. In many school districts, it is the counselor who creates and maintains a database for student progress – information that is critical to decisions related to curriculum and instruction. Counselors can often provide additional information about student needs when discussions occur about extended learning opportunities. Counselors are also often alert to community perspectives, and services rendered by local agencies and groups.

When the CCC makes appointments to the various Subject Area Committees (SACs), counselors have a role here as well. In particular, a counselor should be considered for appointment to the Health SAC. In many school districts, the counselor actually teaches part of the health curriculum, especially outcomes dealing with physical development, human sexuality, and substance use and abuse. Counselors can also provide input for certain aspects of the social studies curriculum, such as social behavior, character education, or a course in psychology.

The high school counselor has even more responsibility that is directly connected to CCC issues, which is why some districts single out that position on the membership guidelines. High school counselors need to be very familiar with the district's Long-Range Plan, which outlines which subjects will be revised each year. Their input is often needed for decisions of both the CCC and SAC, since they know trends in enrollment, college requirements, scholarship rules, and so forth. However, they must understand that while their perspective is only from the high school point of view, CCC and SAC members are looking at the "whole picture" — kindergarten through grade twelve. So the *counselors should not be making decisions on their own about course offerings*. Instead, they should have ongoing dialogue with SAC members, who make recommendations to the CCC, who in turn makes recommendations to the Board.

High school counselors are instrumental in helping carry out *implementation plans* for new courses, new prerequisites or sequences, and new credit requirements. When possible, SAC recommendations should be approved in time to be included in the next year's handbooks, which are often printed as early as January or February. The counselors should also work very closely with the Middle School for incoming eighth graders. Finally, high school counselors can also provide information about graduate progress and any information gained from follow-up studies.

Many school districts are not fortunate enough to have educational psychologists on staff. However, those that do should consider the psychologist's role in the curriculum process in similar ways as described above for counselors. Psychologists are probably most helpful to the CCC as resources for assessment issues.