Burris Laboratory School Counseling Program Assessment

Samantha Fitzjarrald

Ball State University

**School Counseling Program Assessment**

 I recently completed a school counseling program assessment and school data profile for Burris Laboratory School. This assessment helps me determine how closely my school is following the standards set by the ASCA National Model. It also helps me determine areas of need for the school counseling program and areas of need for the students. Overall, the school has a clear plan of what they need to do now and in the future to improve their program. The school was even given an A on the Indiana State Report Card. However, the program does not follow ASCA’s standards very well and needs to improve in that area.

 The school data profile makes it clear that Burris is lacking in diversity. However, that is actually an area of improvement over the last few years. Burris also works very hard to create closing-the-gap activities. The school has a large number of gifted students, totaling almost 36% of their student body last year. More programs could incorporate gifted students and their needs. Almost 15% of the student body receives special education services, which means that programs geared towards these students could also be beneficial.

**Foundation**

Foundation was one of the areas of concern while discussing the program assessment with my supervisors. For instance, the school has a vision statement, but the counseling program does not. Therefore, the counselors need to develop this statement so that students and families can look at these and see the overall vision of the program. The vision statement could entice families into attending this school over others if they see that the school and the counseling program have strong visions and overall goals that align with the state and ASCA standards. The program does have a mission statement that aligns with the school’s mission statement. However, the mission statement is vague and does not include specific academic, career, and/or personal/social development goals. It also does not discuss school-wide data, which is something the school as a whole is trying to improve upon. The mission statement is not rooted in ASCA standards at all.

 Overall, the biggest area of concern in the foundation section is the fact that the school does not follow any of the ASCA student standards. The school does however follow the ISCA standards and standards set by the school administration. These standards are used when making their mission statement, student standards, and overall program goals.

 To improve the area of foundation, I would like to implement a new vision statement and also use their current standards to combine them and make them work with ASCA standards. The ISCA standards and ASCA standards are similar and could easily align if someone worked to see the similarities and differences. The new vision statement needs to include the overall goals for the students, a message about diversity and equity, and use previous research to show why specific strategies are being used. For instance, the Burris vision statement might be that children leave school with a set of moral values, basic social skills, strong self-esteem and confidence, tolerance and respect for others, and the ability to achieve. This vision could be expanded to match one that the overall school creates and could include specific strategies in the future when research has been analyzed.

**Program Management**

According to the ASCA National Model and the ASCA standards, Burris is not doing well in the area of program management. Once again, the program is not a RAMP program because its program is not based on the ASCA National Model. The assessments for the program are done yearly by the interns, but are often not of primary focus when the school is trying to improve the program. There is not an advisory council at all for this school. The counselors keep track of their hours and do their own use-of-time assessment, but they are not following ASCA’s 80/20 suggestion. For instance, the counselors are expected to do testing for the school, which takes away from their ability to work on direct and indirect services for the students. However, the counselors do spend a lot of their time doing direct service activities with the students in the school. The annual agreement that the counselors use is just their contract and their RISE requirements. However, these requirements follow most of the guidelines that are in the ASCA National Model for what a school counselor should do and be. Their agreement also reflects the mission statement and overall goals of the program.

 Burris does not use action plans at this time, but are in the progress of developing some for their new curriculum, which is based on research findings. These action plans will be used in small group plans and most likely with the Skillstreaming lessons (guidance lessons) given in the elementary and middle school classrooms. The counselors are also starting to use lesson plan templates for classroom activities.

 There is a lot of work that needs to be done in the area of program management. First of all, the counselors need to start implementing lesson plans and action plans for all of their guidance activities, small groups, and closing the gap activities. Utilizing these resources would cut down on their time spent in management or non-program activities, help them align the ASCA standards with the ISCA standards they are currently using, and develop programs based on research to use in the future. I plan on implementing these practices in the Skillstreaming curriculum that I am starting later this month, in both my guidance activities and small group activities. The school also needs to stop making the counselors do activities that are not involved in the school counseling program, like testing. Finally, I would develop weekly (or monthly) calendars for each counselor and each counseling intern to have at all times. This way, each person knows what needs to be done and how to help the program thrive in the strongest way possible.

**Delivery**

Delivery is Burris’ strongest area according to the ASCA National Model. Burris provides all types of direct service, guidance lessons, counseling, and indirect services that the students may need. The counseling program has a variety of services available to students in all grades, K-12. The one area of concern in this category is that direct and indirect provision does not amount to 80 percent or more of the school counselor’s time. As I have previously discussed, the counselors still have duties to fulfill for the school as a whole that are not necessarily beneficial to the counseling program. For instance, I am already involved in a monthly guidance program for the elementary and middle school students called Skillstreaming, working on creating a small group based on the results of a needs assessment, working with individual students, and working with high school students on high school scheduling and applying to college. At any given moment, all four of the counselors at Burris are doing some kind of direct service for the students. All of these services are based around the students’ academic, career, and personal/social needs which aligns with the ASCA standards even if it is not clearly stated in the mission statement.

 To improve on the delivery section of the ASCA National Model I need to help the counselors develop ways to prioritize their time so that 80% of their time is spent in direct and indirect service. I think the best way to increase the likelihood of this is to start with program management. If I can help the counselors develop a solid foundation to their program through the mission statement and management of the curriculum, the counselors can spend more time working with students in more direct ways. This could include developing lesson plans and curriculums for the future so that everything does not start from scratch. All of this would be based on the research past interns have collected and that I have collected thus far. The overall goal would be to make sure all four counselors have an 80/20 split for their use of time.

 I also would focus more on closing the gap activities. The one area of concern when looking at the school data profile was the lack of diversity. There should be more small groups and guidance curriculum directed towards closing the gap. This would also incorporate the action plans and lesson plan templates that I have previously discussed.

**Accountability**

 Accountability is something that Burris has been trying to improve upon over the last few years by adding a research aspect to their program. Their data tracking has improved immensely by the collection of data for the Skillstreaming guidance program and the use of data for small group programs. They are also using data to figure out their closing-the-gap programs now. However, not all programs and the overall curriculum is using data at this time. They are not currently analyzing their use-of-time reports or sharing their program results with any stakeholders.

 The school counselors take evaluation and their own improvement very seriously at Burris. The counselors evaluate the program and themselves to use for the future plans of the overall counseling program. This includes evaluating the goals of the program and the results of those goals. I think this is really important because a lot of people have the same goals each year and the same results and never try to improve them. There is always going to be improvement when working with students because the atmosphere in schools is always changing.

 The first thing I would do to improve the accountability aspect of the ASCA National Model would be to make data a requirement for each program. I do not see any point in doing a program where the effectiveness is not implicated and used in the future. The next thing I would do is to analyze each type of data (process, perception, and outcome) separately to see what is most effective and what could be used in the future. Then, I would make an overall results sheet and take it to the counselors and administration to show them areas where the school could use counseling and guidance services more effectively. I would especially use this on new programs for closing-the-gap that all of the counselors have been working on. Finally, I would continue to evaluate the overall guidance program and each counselor to see ways to improve the program in the future even after I am gone.

 I think the most important step, as a leader in this counseling program, is to develop programs based on the ASCA standards that help diversify the school and continue to close-the-gap amongst the students.