



EVIDENCE OF SUCCESS



Evidence-based school counseling is an ideal approach to develop school communities that support students' holistic life success.

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For the students you serve and for your own integrity, being intentional about and aware of the outcomes and impact of your school counseling work is absolutely critical. Evidence-based school counseling (EBSC) leads to this kind of intentional practice. But what exactly is EBSC?

The earliest ideas about EBSC were straightforward:

- » Use data to identify problems and student needs.
- » Find interventions with research evidence of their effectiveness where available.
- » Assess the student outcomes of the interventions used, while considering contextual factors, student variables, school counselor expertise and professional wisdom.

As EBSC evolved, it required a more ecological and systemic perspective, one that considered students' multiple intersectional identities and the complex interconnected contexts of school counseling work. The key question became how to develop an evidence-based school counseling system that truly takes into consideration the complexity and ever-changing nature of students, school counselors, the profession, schools and the multiple contexts and ecological systems in which we live.

Today, EBSC is an ongoing process, rather than a set of static steps. In the EBSC process, it's important to:

- » Explore the complex nature of the situation and context you hope to have an impact on
- » Investigate what is known about how to create change in that situation/context, intentionally engaging in collaborative efforts
- » Thoughtfully assess to determine if change has occurred

EBSC has also evolved to more intentionally consider how traditional methods of assessing, intervening and post-implementation assessment may unintentionally perpetuate institutionalized inequities and bias. Our efforts need to support all students and create school communities that are safe, with equitable learning environments.

Before even starting the EBSC process, there are several valuable questions to ask yourself to identify your own possible biases. These include:

- » How do my identity and biases affect my approach to school counseling work?
- » How do my lenses shape what I prioritize and what I notice?
- » What assumptions do I have about K–12 education, my students, mental health, success, achievement, etc., and how might those shape my decisions?

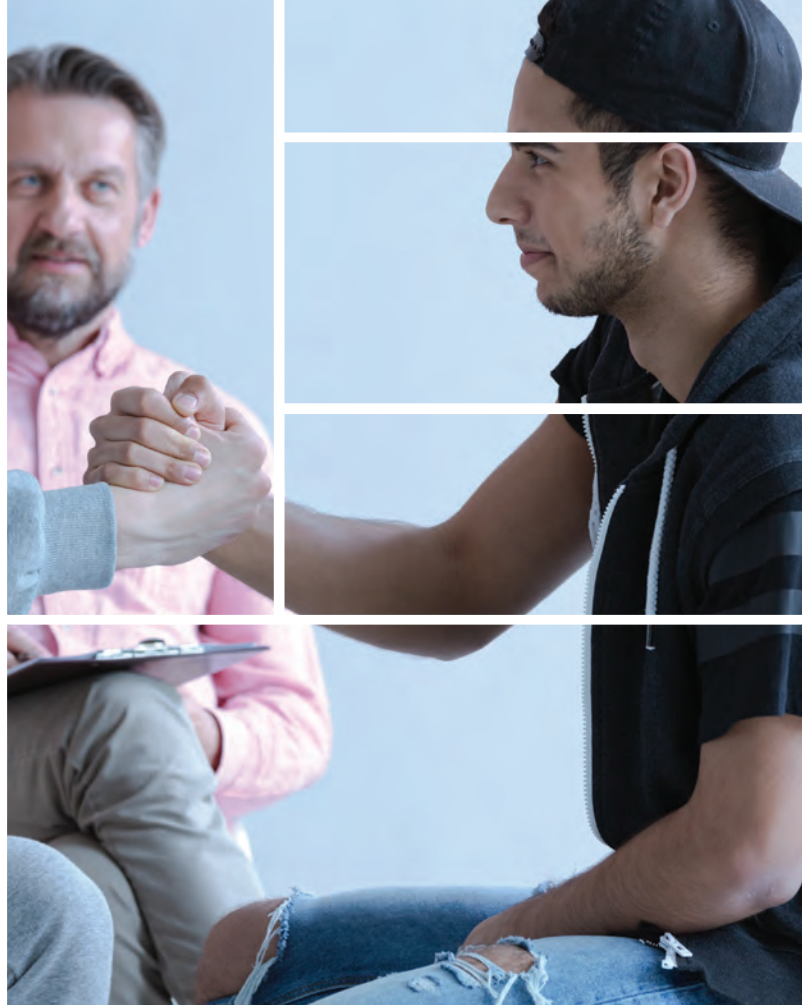
By answering these questions before

beginning our work, we allow ourselves the opportunity to become aware of our assumptions and approach school counseling practice from a holistic perspective.

Initial Exploration

Once we have self-awareness about our lenses, we explore the situation. What are some concerns we have? What outcomes would we like to see? This process falls under the Manage/Program Planning part of the ASCA Model. Involving student voices here ensures we empower them to give input and supports their increasing ability to advocate for themselves.

Families and teachers will also have valuable perspectives from their experiences, and including them in the conversations builds community and collaborative efforts. As part of this exploration, we examine data from multiple sources (e.g., student, school, MTSS, etc.) to provide valuable information for the larger picture. The ASCA school data summary or closing-the-gap action plan templates can be helpful; both are available at schoolcounselor.org/templates. As you explore school data, it's imperative to remember that implicit measurement bias may have an impact on what you see.



EBSC has also evolved to more intentionally consider how traditional methods of assessing, intervening and post-intervention assessment may unintentionally perpetuate institutionalized inequities and bias.

While in the initial exploration process, it helps to list out resources and barriers. Schools are complex institutions, and many factors contribute to any given circumstance. It's also important to ensure we're not holding students accountable for a situation they didn't create and that they don't have the power to shift.

Some questions to consider:

- » Are there other ways to look at the data/information that might tell a different story?
- » What additional data/information could create a more accurate, integrated picture of students and their lives?
- » Is there data or information available

that provides a picture of the root causes of students' struggles and inherent strengths in their school/family/community contexts?

This exploration part of the EBSC process should be ongoing. We do our best with the time and resources available to understand what is happening and what is needed, and we make our best decisions based on what we know. New information discovered along the way may require an intentional shift in what we are doing.

As you gather information about a situation, begin investigating what is known about how to effectively create change in that situation.

Further Investigation

As you gather information about a situation, begin investigating what is known about how to effectively create change in that situation. We believe in using evidence-based interventions or research-supported activities or approaches because we know they work, provided they're validated with a similar population, and they save us time. Your job, then, is to choose interventions (if available) that research studies have shown are effective with student populations or system change efforts similar to your own.

Possible methods for change may involve:

Evidence-based interventions: These are interventions, such as Second Step or Student Success Skills, that have research rigor at the level required for inclusion in the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC.org) or the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (casel.org).

Research-informed practices: These are strategies and activities from research about effective practices. They have research support for the general approach, such as career counseling and restorative justice but lack specific evidence-based interventions.

Other options are to use research-supported systemic practices, such as creating a college-going culture or inclusive schooling focusing on the larger school



contexts. Or, you can use self-created materials or materials created by school counseling peers. However, often there's little evidence of their impact on students, and they can be time-consuming to develop. There is a plethora of self-created materials available from sites such as Teachers Pay Teachers, but these may not be research-informed, and little is known about their success.

Some questions to ask yourself as you're considering interventions and programs:

- » What student outcomes am I hoping for? What would success look like in this situation? How can I assess this?
- » Does the research about a chosen intervention demonstrate an impact on student populations that match my contexts?
- » Are the interventions culturally responsive and inclusive?
- » What barriers (e.g., scheduling, transportation, language) might prevent students from accessing these services, and how can I address them?

The dynamic process of implementing an intervention or program is also a key aspect of EBSC, as working from a collaborative, student-focused, caring and connected stance is a key part of effective school counseling. This part of the process relates to the Deliver component of the ASCA National Model. Once you identify an effective intervention, you may need to modify it to be responsive to your student population. However, that modification can change the intervention's impact, and it would no longer be evidence-based if it's not implemented as intended. This is an ongoing choice process; you want both relevance/fit and evidence of effectiveness.

Assessment and Communication

Ideally, the intervention and assessment process are interconnected. Start by



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considering the desired student and system outcomes (e.g., student belonging or reduced use of exclusionary discipline). Next, identify data sources (e.g., student information systems) or surveys to assess these outcomes, and then gather diagnostic or pre-test data before the intervention. After the intervention, gather the same data to measure outcomes. You may also engage in formative assessments to ensure fidelity, consistency and ongoing impact during the intervention process. This integration of assessment and intervention improves both parts of the process. ASCA's closing-the-gap action plan template can be helpful here as well.

Sometimes, assessments can seem like an add-on and are occasionally the part of the EBSC process school counselors

are most likely to skip. Although they may seem less relevant than the intervention, assessments provide critical information about whether you should expand what you're doing (more students, more classes, more schools), modify what you're doing to make it more impactful or not use a particular intervention again.

Using your valuable time to do things that don't support student well-being and success doesn't serve anyone. Preparing for assessment is an important step in the planning process, and through careful consideration, you can streamline the assessment process. Focusing on what you hope to change prioritizes the data you want to collect to demonstrate your intervention's impact.

Last but not least, colleagues, families

and communities won't know about your excellent work unless you share the work – and the results – with them. Newsletters, social media, school board presentations, letters to families, website materials and staff meeting reports are a few ways you can let key partners and decision-makers know about the school counseling program's impact and efficacy. Emphasizing EBSC practices' impact on achievement can help speak to areas of concern while also addressing your students' unique needs.

The EBSC approach can be used to develop school communities that support students' holistic life success. When you implement the EBSC approach in a multilayered and intentional manner, it

can identify barriers and potential ways to address systemic issues, while also investing in students personally and tracking the results of those efforts. Examples of this type of work include supporting students' resilience in addressing ongoing racism and multiple types of prejudice they may experience, ensuring our schools promote mental health for all and moving to culturally informed assessments to measure success.

School counselors are ideally situated to implement preventive and developmental interventions that increase wellness and social justice outcomes for all students. We are actively engaged in the ongoing process of identifying our best practices and the related research that

demonstrates the impact of interventions and all our programs. We have good strategies for implementing accountability approaches that show how we improve students' lives and create more equitable schools. This is why we became school counselors – to make a meaningful difference for our students and our communities.**A**

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