

DOES YOUR SCHOOL NEED A CONSUELOR?

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It is a cliché that the future of your country is in the minds, hearts and actions of young people. The social, economic and political development of the country depend on the decisions which young people make today. A democracy cannot long continue to exist without citizens who are prepared through education to participate in the political, economic and social life of that democracy. The future of the country is in the schools of today. How well our teachers are able to prepare students for tomorrow will determine that future.

Teachers work hard at the task of educating youth for life in an increasingly complex, ever-changing society. The day when a teacher sat on one end of a bench and a student sat on the other end is no more. With one or even a few students a teacher could know each student as a person and adjust lessons and advise the student about life. Today a teacher has many students and many responsibilities. Teachers are professionals. They want to know about each student's life outside of the classroom, because they know that thoughts, emotions and values from outside the classroom impinge on achievement in the classroom. The better a teacher knows a student as a person the better a teacher is able to teach that student. A teacher needs help in this process.

Not only do teachers need help in understanding the pressures on today's youth, but today's youth need help in understanding and dealing with those pressures. To understand what is happening in their physical and social development along with the demands of family, school and the rest of society

on their energies may make the transition from adolescence to adulthood smoother than it might otherwise be. Adolescents need someone who is emphatic with their concerns, but who has the ability to trust whatever decisions are made. Youth need to have a close relationship with someone who is not a teacher, a preacher or a parent with a particular set of behaviours or values to impose. Such a person is a professional school counselor.

A counselor is a professionally educated adult who can listen empathically to youth. One who, through training, knows when to provide information, and how to help adolescents evaluate that information as it applies to them. Counselors help youth make educational, vocational, personal decisions and plans which affect their lives. Since counselors are also knowledgeable about the school they may help students and teachers understand each other.

In one school, teachers complained that a boy they considered very intelligent was doing only average work in their classes. The counselor learned that the young man was considered by musical experts to be a prodigy on the violin and was taking lessons from a famous teacher in the area. The boy practiced the violin for a total of six hours a day seven days a week. His goal was to become a concert violinist. When a counselor informed teachers to this, each became less demanding that the young man spend more time studying their subject, and the relationship between the student and the teachers became a much happier one.

All schools have some record about their students. It is a necessary administrative task. It is necessary to know who is in a school, where they live, who their parents are such information.

All schools have teachers who take a special interest in helping a particular student. All schools have some personnel who are aware of the home situation of some students. All schools have teachers who learn what some of their students do after they go on the next grade or graduate from the school. Some schools have programs to learn these things about their students and make changes in school practices as a result of this knowledge. Others rely on chance information.

A counselor's task is to organize a program of assistance to all students which help a school reach its goal better than if there were no plan. Counselors organize the gathering in record folders which can be used to help students make sound educational, vocational and personal decisions regarding their schoolwork and the other areas of their lives. Records of students behavior and achievement in different classes, psychological test scores, information about interest, personality and out-of-school activities, physical problems and information about the home situation will all be useful in helping students understand themselves and make plans for their best development. Students can help in developing and in keeping such records. When this is done students take more interest in school and in their future plans. With student permission, counselors can share this information with teachers and administrators as a means of helping students grow into adulthood more smoothly. Such records should reflect the student as a developing whole person.

Certainly adolescents will become adults without counselors. Babies have been born and have lived to adulthood without the aid of modern medicine. People learned many things before their school organized. However, we lead longer healthier lives and learn many things better because of modern medicine and modern school. So, too, some adolescents will enter occupations of attend college and be happy and efficient. Some will see no reason to

remain in school and drop out. That's life. It goes on regardless of the presence or absence of counselors.

Counselors believe that it is better to plan and to have knowledge about how to make a plan work than to depend on chance as though education and life were a lottery.

Counselors can gather information about the requirements for particular occupations and what people do on the job. They can help students and teachers understand how particular academic disciplines relate to particular occupations. A bright young man wished to become an astronomer and "study the stars". He was not doing well in mathematics. When he learned through a counselor that a great deal of an astronomer's work involves mathematics, his motivation to study it and his achievement improved. The mathematics teacher was able to use the interest in astronomy in planning more interesting class work for him. How much better to discover the need for mathematics early than to be unprepared when one tries to enter the profession. When a connection is made between vocations and classwork interest and achievement improve.

Students may decide to attend colleges or universities without consideration of whether they or the university "fit" well together. This may result in wasted time and money.

One student was persuaded by an athletic coach to attend his school because of the student's ability. Part way through the sport season, the student discovered that he could not reach his vocational goal of engineer at that school. He needed to transfer to a college where such training was offered. A talk with a counselor in high school would have provided him not only proper considerations of his vocational goal, but also have given him the correct information about where to secure the background necessary for engineering. It would have saved him the time and money he spent attending a college that did not further his career goal. Professional counselors cannot totally eliminate trial and error decisions by students, but they can reduce the number of such decisions. The fewer the number of ill-considered decisions that are made, the better our society will be. People will be more

efficient in their work and more contented with their lives.

Parents will also benefit from the work of a counselor. Adolescence is often a period of conflict between children and parents and, sometimes, between school personnel and parents. Professional counselors are knowledgeable about school rules and policies, the growth and development of adolescents and have been trained in the use of individual and group counseling techniques. A counselor can help parents understand the interest, abilities and personal-social development of their child as a student. A counselor can provide information about school policies and help parents understand them. Counselors are able to organize groups of parents and help them learn better ways of relating to their children. Such activities will help students benefit more from school activities.

Counselors have the knowledge and skill to use a variety of assessment devices including some psychological test. Such instruments sample students thoughts and skills by paper and pencil techniques and thus provide insight to characteristics knowledge of which might not be available to the student, his parents or his teachers. The results of such instruments may be interpreted by a counselor with a student on a personal level. When this is done well a student has more knowledge about self and is able to make better decisions both in and out of school.

A high school student was planning to be become a nurse or perhaps a secretary. In talking with her about her plans, the counselor discovered that she would really like be a medical doctor, but believed that she did not have the ability to succeed in medical school. Besides, she believed that only men could become medical doctors. Women could become only nurses. She had a low opinion of herself and of her abilities. The counselor was able to help her examine her excellent grades in school, especially in the sciences. She began to see that she had earned the high grades; that achievement test she has taken placed her as better than 90% of students her age. She began to feel better about herself. The counselor also informed her about the increasing numbers of women who attending medical field on the same level as men.

When the student and counselor considered this evidence together, the student's goal changed and she began to plan to enter a pre.med course in college. The counselor was also able to help her select a proper college, and to help her apply for scholarships.

A counselor cannot make decisions for people. A counselor can take the time to listen to ideas, thoughts and feelings of a person. By so doing, the person examines the self, the effect of the self on other and others on the self. Plans can be made to change those aspects of self that need changing and to accept those characteristics self that cannot be changed.

One of the most important changes that all adolescents face is the development of those physical attributes which characterize them as adults. Not all adolescents are prepared for those changes in voice and body structures which occur along with the intensity of emotions which accompany them. Maturity comes early to some at late to others. Each rate of change is unique to that person. Some are proud of the way they are changing. Others dissatisfied. Still others are fearful. Adolescents value the way they appear to their peers. They wish to be liked and popular with their peers. They often value peers and their ideas more than those of parents or teachers. Adolescence is often an unhappy time of life.

Counselors are able to use processes and individual counseling to help students understand and accept the changes going on within them. Counselors can provide an educational program about personality development which will mitigate the effects of such changes on school performance. Counselors can mediate the conflicts between individuals and groups in the school which arise because of the changes which occur. When counselors help students understand themselves better and to make realistic plans, they help teachers also benefit directly. Students who know they want to be and have a plan to become that are better students. But teachers also benefit directly from a counselor's presence in school. The counseling process is longitudinal in nature. It is not oriented to handling only crisis situations. It is oriented toward the development of students over time and, thus, involves

the cooperative effort of many persons. Counselors may organize and lead, but they have no magic potion administered in the privacy of counseling. Counselors help teachers become involved in the lives of their students.

Counselors help teachers and administrators directly by organizing a program which orients new students to the school. Booklets or pamphlets about the school with description of course offerings, requirements, rules and policies, a list of faculty along with a floor plan of the school facilities could be prepared with the help of current teachers and students and designed to lessen the confusion (and fears) felt by all new students. Counselors help by organizing the committee of teachers and students who decide on the content and program in which the "Survivors Manual" is to be used.

Counselors help teachers and administrators directly by calling attention to problems of students which could be dealt with by a change in school policy or practice. One high school had a large percentage of students who drove to school. It was school policy that students were not permitted to drive from school until the end of the day which was the same for all students. The counselor pointed out that some students needed financial help to stay in school. If the school policy were more flexible, students could drive their cars to part time jobs. Thus, some students could continue their educations instead of dropping out of school completely. In this instance, teachers and administrators were concerned enough for the welfare of students that a more flexible policy of course selection and driving were worked out.

Teachers are the direct recipients of counselor service in a variety of teacher ways. Counselors can organize student groups and teach them about organizing study areas at home, how to use them to become better students. Counselors can study specific students, write up their findings and use them in a conference with the student's teachers. Plans can be made for the best way to help the student learn. Teachers are human beings with all of the problems of human beings. Sometimes, they need to talk to someone to whom they can release a fear or tension

without fear of a judgment or reprisal. Counselors often provide that outlet on an informal confidential basis. Counselors are trained to be warm, sensitive listeners without a need to run to superiors with every little bit of gossip.

In their work counselors gather information about community agencies and their work. Counselors can provide information about and referral to an appropriate community agency whether it be public or private. A service like this can be used by teachers as well as students.

Counselors can also be a liaison person with the rest of the community. Teachers are in the school all day every day and many teachers have not worked at any other occupation. They are not usually available to be visiting and learning about community businesses. Counselors, with the cooperation of the administration, teachers and community leaders can organize a day when teachers visit businesses and industries in the area. Teachers learn about businesses and businessmen learn about education. Students benefit from the exchange.

In one school where this way was done a teacher visited a factory for the first time although he had been in the community a long time. The factory was managed by one of his former students. The teacher had been sending students who lacked academic skills to apply for work in the factory. He believed factory work did not require much education. To his surprise he learned that none of the people he had sent had been hired. His former student managed a factory which was nearly all automated and required highly skilled, experienced engineers to run it. It was an eye-opener for the teacher.

Another way in which counselors serve teachers and administrators is by speaking at public gatherings. Service organizations such as Kiwanis and Rotary Clubs, seek programs which help their members learn. Some churches have groups such as those of lawyers, doctors and chambers of commerce and students and the school program thoroughly are excellent representatives to interpret the school and its programs to the public.

When a professional counselor works cooperatively with students, teachers and administrators a school is more likely to meet its objectives than school without a counselor. Research studies in Massachusetts, Maryland, Wisconsin and other states, suggest that counseled students achieve better grades than non-counseled students; that the drop-out rate lowers when counselors are added to a school staff; that counseled student seek higher

education more often than non-counseled students; and that counseled students are more knowledgeable about and choose a greater variety of occupations than non-counseled students. Counseled students have reported a higher degree of satisfaction with their lives and work than non-counseled students. Can we afford not to educate and to employ counselors dedicated to these ends? Can we really afford to treat the welfare of young citizens as a lottery?