DROPOUT PREVENTION SERVICES OFFERED TO AT-RISK, DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS BY VOCATIONAL AND SCHOOL COUNSELORS

by

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Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

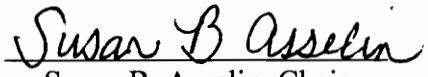
of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

Vocational-Technical Education

APPROVED:



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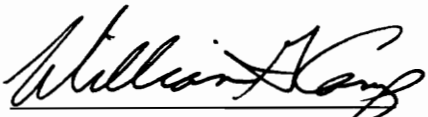

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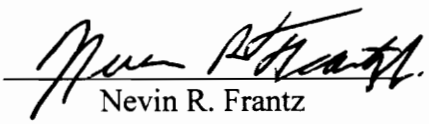

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April 1996

Blacksburg, Virginia

Keywords: Counseling, Disadvantaged, Dropouts, Students, Vocational

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(Abstract)

This study was designed to examine student support services and dropout prevention approaches utilized by guidance personnel to prevent at-risk youth from dropping out of school. The effectiveness of the counselor when dealing with the problems of at-risk, disadvantaged youth can be directly attributed to the counselor's knowledge of a students relationship with academics and the school environment.

Data were gathered by means of a questionnaire which was developed and mailed to randomly selected vocational and school guidance counselors within Virginia. The results of the study reveal that some differences in the use of dropout prevention approaches and community resources utilized exist between vocational and school guidance counselors.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Appreciation is extended to the friends and faculty members who assisted in the development of this study. Their advice and guidance is sincerely appreciated and contributed greatly to the successful completion of this study. Special thanks are extended to Dr. Susan B. Asselin who served as Chairperson and provided guidance and assistance throughout the development of this thesis. In addition Dr. Asselin seemed to always provide a solution for obstacles encountered during this study.

Appreciation is also extended to Dr. William G. Camp and Dr. Nevin R. Frantz who served as committee members for the thesis defense.

Appreciation is also extended to all who responded to the study and those who assisted in making this study successful.

Finally, and most importantly, a special thanks is extended to my wife, Leisl. Her support, understanding, and patience made this research possible.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The concern for a solution to the dropout problem in America's secondary schools is growing. Dropouts are no longer a issue for just large inner-city school districts. The dropout problem has found its way into small, rural schools, as well as their urban counterparts. Not only are unemployment, lower earnings, increased crime, reliance on welfare, and susceptibility to unwanted pregnancies problems that plague those students who fail to complete a high school education, the costs of dropouts to society are astronomical. United States Department of Labor statistics have shown that the lower the educational achievement, the more the likely a person will become unemployed (Farmer and Payne, 1992). Studies have estimated a loss of around $200,000.00 in lifetime earnings for a male high school student who fails to graduate or complete a GED (Farmer and Payne, 1992).

The lack of success of youth who drop out of school can be attributed to connections among the students themselves, lack of a sense of membership to the school, and lack of academic engagement (Wehlage, 1989). Many potential dropouts do not feel that they are a part of their school community and consequently exhibit negative behaviors. Academic engagement allows the students to take from the school environment a feeling of extrinsic worth. Learning within traditional public schools is not structured to be extrinsically

rewarding except for the few who compete for college entrance (Wehlage, 1989). Because of these two factors, youth who are at-risk need support from both the public school system and their families. Until the problem of school membership and the structure of the learning environment are addressed, academic engagement from at-risk youth cannot be expected (Wehlage, 1989).

Counseling students at the secondary level for drop-out prevention services is an extremely important task of guidance personnel. Such counseling may occur within comprehensive high schools or within vocational centers. Regardless of the facility where the counseling may occur, the counselor must realize that each student has special and individual needs. For counselors to be effective at retaining at-risk students in school, counseling educators and researchers are in agreement--auxiliary and administrative support functions must be eliminated from the counselors' day-to-day activities if they are to be effective in fulfilling their role (Tennyson, Miller, Skovholt, and Williams, 1989). The traditional role of the guidance program is viewed as an ancillary student service isolated from the instructional program, and designed primarily to encourage students to enter college (Cunanan and Maddy-Bernstein, 1994).

At-risk students are the segment of the secondary school population for whom this study determines how counseling differs between vocational and comprehensive high schools. Prior to understanding what counselors feel about at-risk students, a definition of at-risk students must be provided. The problem of

students at-risk refers to "students who, for whatever reason, are at risk of not achieving the goals of education, of not acquiring the knowledge, skill, and dispositions to become productive members of the American society" (McCann and Austin, 1988, p. 8). Voluntary or involuntary means may restrict students from achieving the educational successes of their peers. Such students can be labeled "at-risk".

The roles of the school counselor are performed within a secondary school setting. The primary responsibilities of the secondary school counselor are to assist all pupils, having as their major concern the developmental needs and problems of youth. Secondary school counselors also promote a positive, supportive, people-orientated school climate--a culture that values both students and teachers. School climate should be a concern of the secondary school counselor. The counselors may need to assist with the political processes that are required to convince others that a positive school climate is a necessary precondition to effective schools (Thomas, 1991).

The role of the secondary counselor is not dissimilar to the function of guidance counselors at the elementary and middle-junior high schools (Gibson and Mitchell, 1981). The main difference in the role of the counselor is that secondary school counselors shift from preventive to remedial counseling to help assist youth with their decisions. These decisions may include career or further education decisions. Decisions may include career of future educational goals, decisions relevant to relationships with the opposite sex, perhaps marriage, and

decisions involved in developing personal value systems (Gibson and Mitchell, 1981).

Another role of school counselors is dealing with at-risk students. Remedial strategies are one of the common services provided by counselors (Tolbert, 1978). Environmental factors contributing to a student's at-risk status need to be understood. Assessing pupils is not enough; once deficits and strengths are understood, steps should be taken to help develop an individual's coping skills (Tolbert, 1978).

Dropouts are also the focus of the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education And Applied Technology Education Act of 1990. In addition to having equal access to recruitment, enrollment, and placement in vocational classes, students from special populations are granted access to "professionally trained" counselors (American Vocational Association, 1992). More specifically, the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Act states that each eligible recipient of Perkins funds "provide guidance, counseling, and career development activities conducted by professionally trained counselors and teachers who are associated with the provisions of such special services" (American Vocational Association, 1992, p. 77). Secondly, the Perkins Act states that eligible recipients be "provided with counseling and instructional services designed to facilitate the transition from school to post-school employment and career opportunities" (American Vocational Association, 1992, p. 77). In addition, the Secretary of Education has the authority to authorize grants that go directly to local

educational agencies, vocational schools and institutions of higher education offering vocational education programs that have proven to be successful in preventing students from dropping out of school (American Vocational Association, 1992).

Statement of the Problem

An appropriate education for at-risk students is a problem that has plagued society for many years. Whose responsibility are at-risk students? Today more than ever the roles of guidance personnel are undergoing revision in order to fit the changing secondary-level student population. Increased enrollments of students who are labeled at-risk and receive drop-out prevention services only add to the severity of the problem. This study is designed to investigate the roles of guidance personnel and the nature of drop-out prevention services offered to at-risk students. Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the job titles, level of responsibility, and number of counselors in vocational and technical and comprehensive high school settings?
2. What is the overall student enrollment and percentage of students at-risk of dropping out at vocational and technical centers and comprehensive high schools?

3. What school and community resources do guidance personnel seek for assistance in providing services to prevent dropouts?
4. What are the specific approaches guidance personnel use to prevent students from dropping out of school in vocational and technical centers and comprehensive high schools?

Significance of the Study

Even though the roles of guidance personnel in either comprehensive high schools or vocational centers are defined and examined, few high school teachers realize the effect of counseling for at-risk students who receive drop-out prevention services. At-risk students go to guidance personnel looking for answers in deciding their futures. In some cases the answers are given to students without the students having an opportunity to synthesize the information they have been given. The result is students who are directed to particular fields of employment or further education in which they have little or no interest. This scenario can lead to students who drop-out of high school, or if they graduate, students who don't fully benefit society to their potential.

Limitations

1. This study is based upon data gathered from counselors in randomly selected comprehensive high schools and the entire population of vocational centers in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The results of this study are not generalizable to counselors or at-risk students receiving drop-out prevention services in any other states.
2. Since only one counselor is surveyed in each school, it is possible that counselors in small schools will be over-represented in the study.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions were used.

At-Risk	- Students who, for whatever reason, are at risk nor achieving the goals of education, of not acquiring the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to become productive members of society (McCann and Austin, 1988).
Career Counseling	- Focuses on the career development of an individual concentrating on self-understanding, career planning, and career decision making in a dynamic relationship. Special attention is paid to values and attitudes in the context of a fluid social-psychological-economic environment (McDaniels, 1978).
Comprehensive High School	- A secondary school offering programs in a variety of different vocational subjects, although the majority of the students are not enrolled in vocational education programs (Meers, 1987).
Dropout	- Any person who is not enrolled in school or who is not a high school graduate or the equivalent (Weis, Farrer, Petrie, 1989).

School Guidance Counselor	- A specialist on the school staff who is uniquely qualified to help students work out increasingly complex problems of vocational choice, help plan and carry through meaningful and appropriate educational programs, and help identify more satisfactory solutions to personal/social problems which may be having an adverse effect upon their lives (Dunlop, 1967).
Vocational Center	- A shared-time facility that provides only vocational education instruction to students from throughout a school system or region; these students study academic courses in their regular high schools or in institutions (Meers, 1987).
Vocational Counselor	- A person who provides students with occupational information, counseling, and guidance (Clark and Kolstoe, 1995).

Summary

Although the problems of at-risk students have received increased attention by the public since the early 1960s, this student population has been in existence for years. The economic impact and loss of jobs to at-risk students have created new obstacles for educators and guidance personnel who work with this particular student population. A study of how school guidance personnel provide drop-out prevention services is needed to compare the roles and responsibilities of vocational and school guidance counselors to this student population.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature presently available about counseling at-risk students who receive drop-out prevention services. Specifically this chapter will address the following topics:

1. Early history of high school guidance
2. Vocational counselors
3. School guidance counselors
4. At-risk students
5. Drop-outs and prevention services

Early History of High School Guidance

The utilization of guidance services within high schools and vocational centers in the Commonwealth of Virginia is now required by law. Prior to today's guidance mandate, guidance found its way into the education of America's youth as early as the 19th century. During the 1890s Frank Parsons initiated counseling to underprivileged youth in the Boston area using three categories of techniques: (a) a clear understanding of yourself, your aptitudes, abilities, interests, ambitions, resources, limitations, and their causes; (b) a knowledge of the requirements and conditions of success in different lines of work, and the advantages and disadvantages, the compensation, opportunities and prospects in

different lines of work; and (c) true reasoning on the relations of these two groups of facts (Feingold, 1991). Although Frank Parsons became known throughout the United States for his efforts in early vocational education, many other educators such as Jesse Davis, Anna Reed, Eli Weaver, and David Hill also contributed much to the study of guidance services within America's public schools.

In the first quarter of the twentieth century two significant developments in psychology profoundly influenced the school guidance movement. These developments included the introduction of standardized and psychological tests, both individual and group-administered, and the mental health movement. The tests of psychologist Alfred Binet and his associate Theodore Simon were introduced in the United States in 1916 by Lewis Terman. When the United States entered World War I, the armed services sought a measure that would enable them to screen and classify employees. The first so-called group intelligence test, the Army Alpha Test, was administered to thousands of draftees. The possibilities of applying psychometric techniques to pupil assessment resulted in the rapid development and expansion of standardized testing in education (Gibson and Mitchell, 1981).

Organized guidance programs began to emerge with increasing frequency in secondary schools in the 1920s and more often than not modeled themselves after college student personnel programs. Secondary counselors were referred to as deans--separately for boys and girls, of course and with similar accompanying functions of discipline, school attendance, and related administrative

responsibilities. As a result, guidance programs of that period began to have a remedial emphasis. Pupils who experienced academic or personnel difficulties were sent to their deans. The deans then sought to help them modify their behaviors or correct their deficiencies. Nevertheless, school counselors of the mid 1920s could have conversed easily with their present-day counterparts concerning vocational or career guidance, the use of standardized testing instruments, assistance to pupils with their educational planning, the need for a more humanistic school environment, and their roles as disciplinarians and quasi-administrators (Herr, 1979).

During the 1930s the guidance movement became a topic of popular discussion among educators. Professional literature encompassed guidance activities and educational associations appointed committees to study the movement, and many issued reports with descriptions and definitions of guidance and guidance services (Gibson and Mitchell, 1981). Toward the latter 1930s psychotherapy gained popularity in counseling, rather than the study of psychometrics. This movement, and numerous research and theoretical contributions which have accompanied it, had its impact on vocational guidance. It made vocational counselors, whether psychologists or otherwise, more cognizant of the unity of personality, and encouraged the counseling of people rather than problems. Problems of adjustment in one aspect of living have effects on other aspects of life. The complexity of these processes of counseling

concerning any type of individual adjustment is evident, whether in the field of occupations, of group living, or of personnel values (Feingold, 1991).

During the 1940s, Brewer identified four conditions to which he related the rise of guidance and counseling in this country: a) the division of labor, b) the growth of technology, c) the extension of vocational education, and d) the spread of modern forms of democracy (Herr, 1979). As the country emerged from World War II, Carl Rogers was a significant contributor to a new direction in guidance and counseling. Carl Rogers published two books during the early 1940s and early 1950s, Counseling and Psychotherapy and Client-Centered Therapy. In his publication of Counseling and Psychotherapy, Rogers offered nondirective counseling as an alternative to the older, more traditional methods. Rogers also stressed the counselor's responsibility in repreceiving the individual's problem and enhancing the client's "self". Roger's follow-up publication of Client-Centered Therapy was the result of his continued research and application efforts. The book promoted semantic change from non-directive to client-centered counseling, but, more importantly, indicated increasing emphasis on the growth-producing possibilities of the client. Perhaps, more than any other individual, Rogers has influenced the way in which the American counselor interacts with the client (Gibson and Mitchell, 1981).

The 1960s brought new challenges to secondary guidance personnel. The late 1960s and early 1970s were a time of demonstrations, blatant racism, and political marches (Feingold, 1991). Many young people would have received

counseling from institutional programs only if the institutions could have reached them. These were times of drug experiences, new sexual styles, and increased rates of birth to young people who were not married. The counseling they received, including help for job placement, often came from their own peers. To contrast the problems of the 1960s and early 1970s, one view of counselors was to prepare children from the early years of schooling until graduation for advanced training in college. The 1970s until present resulted in a large number of students unable to attend college, even those unwilling to stay in school. Thus, many school dropouts are unprepared to enter the labor market or are screened out by business because of oversupply of candidates. Technology and urbanization resulted in new demands upon counseling and provided new challenges to help students attend post-secondary institutions or enter the workforce. Vocational counselors were an alternative for at-risk students who required assistance to stay in school or transitional skills for the workplace (Feingold, 1991).

Guidance counselors have a great impact on a student's choices of education and careers after graduation. In general, counselors may advise students to choose either conventional academic programs or vocational programs, each leading to dramatically different careers. Counselors often encourage conventional choices with modest emphasis on vocational choices (e.g., Chase, 1982; Lewis & Kaltreider, 1976; Moore & Strickler, 1980; Peer, 1985; Scholssber & Pietrofesa, 1973; Thomas & Stewart, 1971; Upton, 1982; White, 1985).

Vocational Counselors

Vocational guidance counselors became prevalent in public high school in the mid 1960s because of the anticipated changes in educational requirements needed for the majority of jobs in the workforce. It became common knowledge among educators, especially vocational educators, that only a small percentage of the jobs in the future would require a college degree while vast numbers of students were encouraged to prepare for a college education. Job opportunities and the need for skilled paraprofessionals and technicians was promising, whereas unskilled labor would decline in terms of job opportunities (Ressler, 1973).

Vocational guidance counselors perform their roles in vocational high schools or area vocational centers. Herr (1972) indicates that providing information about vocational education is the primary role of the vocational guidance counselor. Secondly, vocational counselors serve as a link between the student and the classroom teacher. The vocational counselor can inform teachers about students by referring to a students cumulative files. Vocational teachers should be made aware of past academic, personal, and vocational development of a student in order to effectively instruct the student. Vocational counselors provide career information to both students and teachers about career or further educational training needed for particular careers. Another role of the vocational counselor is in the area of developing human relations curricula. Vocational counselors assist teachers on identifying the academic and social problems of students. In many cases the classroom teacher may be able to modify a student's

ineffective behavior which causes dissatisfaction in work, laboratory, or school. However, the teacher typically lacks the counseling techniques to encourage student self-disclosure and the tools needed to modify the behavior. The vocational counselor can be of tremendous assistance to the vocational educator in such endeavors (Herr, 1972).

To summarize the roles of vocational counselors in vocational education:

> "The image and the significance of vocational education changed markedly in the 1970s. Once regarded as the "dumping ground" for the unwilling or unable student with facilities usually appropriate to this image, vocational education programs have made a dramatic turnaround in recent generations. Today these programs are attractive to all ability levels and are preparing graduates for high demand jobs in some of the finest educational facilities in the country. School counselors must become aware of both the nature of vocational education programs and the opportunities available to those who complete them. Additionally, counselors in preparation need to recognize differences in emphasis in the role and function of the counselor in the vocational school" (Gibson and Mitchell, 1981, p. 68).

School Guidance Counselors

The role of a school guidance counselor is more widely known than their vocational counterparts. A school guidance counselor's function is to provide

services to the students he or she serves. The roles of the secondary guidance counselor are constantly being revised. Although the emphasis and techniques will undoubtedly change, counseling, as a professional activity in schools, will never have the opportunity to "start from scratch" again (Gibson and Mitchell, 1981). It is anticipated that the role and function of the secondary school counselor will continue to be built around these traditional expectations as follows:

1. Assessment of the individual's potential and other characteristics.
2. Counseling the individual.
3. Group counseling and guidance activities.
4. Career guidance, including the providing of occupational and educational information.
5. Placement, follow-up, and accountability-evaluation.
6. Consultation with teachers and other school personnel, parents, pupils in groups, and appropriate community agencies.

Previously mentioned were a list of traditional roles of school guidance counselors that would seemingly never change. The American School Counselor Association adopted a role statement that applies to all school counselors, pre-K to postsecondary. It clearly describes that the school counseling program is an integral part of the school's total educational program. A school counseling program is developmental by design, focusing on needs, interests, and issues related to the various stages of student growth. There is a commitment to individual uniqueness and the maximum development of human potential. There

are objectives, activities, special services, and expected outcomes, with an emphasis on helping students to learn more effectively and efficiently. The role of the secondary school counselor is differentiated by attention to age-specific developmental stages of growth and related interests, tasks, and challenges of high school age students. One of the populations at the high school age level of great interest to guidance personnel is students labeled "at-risk" (Coy, 1991).

At-Risk Students

The term "at-risk" can imply numerous things to different observers. McCann and Austin (1988) observe that "the problem of 'students at risk' refers to students who, for whatever reason, are not acquiring the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to become productive members of American society" (p. 8). For some educators the definition of at-risk may be a student who never successfully graduates from high school (Beyer and Smey-Richman, 1988). At-risk is generally a term used to describe a condition that could exist at a later date. In other words, emphasis is usually focused towards characteristics that identify "potential" at-risk students. The idea that a condition of being at-risk results from a combination of individual and environmental characteristics is traceable to health literature (Grannis, 1989).

Studies have been completed on the types of students who are labeled at-risk of dropping out of school. Minority populations have traditionally not performed as well in school and have higher dropout rates than those of their

white counterparts and are an increasing proportion of the public school enrollments (Hodgkinson, 1985; Levin, 1985). High school dropout rates among blacks and hispanics are much greater than that of white students. In 1991, the total dropout rate for America's high schools was 14.3 percent. Of this percentage the dropout rates of the three largest groups were 10.7 percent for whites, 16.9 percent for blacks, and 35.9 percent for hispanics (NCES, 1991).

There are several means for assessing whether a student is at-risk. Being labeled by some school personnel may connote that the student is a potential dropout or trouble maker. Performance on standardized tests, record of psychiatric evaluations, school or arrest records, inappropriate school behavior, and community service records may be used to determine if a student is to be labeled at-risk. In addition, drug use, family-school relations, pregnancy, incarceration, and lack of parental involvement all contribute to a student who lacks success in his or her public school education (Farmer and Payne, 1992).

Presently, programs for at-risk students focus on the at-risk students' deficiencies and the schools' limitations on meeting their needs (Baizerman and Compton, 1991). The present focus of proponents for at-risk students must be changed to help students succeed. The ultimate problem for students may neither be the deficiencies of the student themselves nor the limitations of the school, but rather the everyday conditions of life experienced by the youth. Everyday living conditions for at-risk students may be so poor that they are unable to take full advantage of the school and social opportunities that exist for them. Social and

economic conditions ranging from basic lack of decent housing, nutrition, and health care to dysfunctional family structure, danger from violence and crime, failing neighborhoods and poor influence of friends and role models also plague at-risk students. Attacking these conditions requires a cooperative effort by education, social services, and the community as a whole (Baizerman and Compton, 1991).

Drop-outs and Prevention Services

The purpose of this section is to examine characteristics of drop-outs at the secondary level and prevention services to improve high school retention. Much attention has been focused on the subject of dropouts and the reasons why students leave school. Characteristics of this at-risk population include predominately males, lower socio-economic levels, previous failures, poor grades, monetary difficulties, behavior problems with school staff, poor attendance; and substance abuse (Klein, 1977; Peng and Takai, 1983; Presholdt and Fisher, 1983).

How students perceive themselves in conjunction with the school experience is particularly important to those at-risk. A student's motivation may be decreased by the school process itself and not by learning (Self, 1985). Dropouts subscribe to a self-concept as loners, sometimes rejecting both the school and self (Hedman, 1984). Many at-risk students feel little respect and interest from school administrators and teachers. Consequently, the potential

dropout may be more a victim of a lack of understanding than a student with a learning problem (Pittman, 1986). The key to keeping students within the school doors until graduation is for educators to make an effort towards understanding the student's individual problems and concerns. A way of understanding a student's problems and concerns is through positive counseling from school guidance counselors, vocational counselors, administrators, and teachers (Pittman, 1986).

Students who drop out of school once are apt to discontinue their education a second time. Students who have dropped out more than once may need help in overcoming problems associated with the traditional educational system (Gawda and Griggs, 1985). Counselors can establish re-entry groups for these students that focus on helping them identify strategies for coping with school-related concerns. In this way, counselors can assist students with immediate problems while working toward improving the educational climate.

Flexibility within a high school can help to deter possible dropouts from actually leaving school. Establishing and maintaining effective counseling groups for potential dropouts, re-entry students, or both, is not without obstacles. Administrators may believe that students should not be taken from class for counseling sessions. Dropout-prone students may be frequently absent. Frequent absences by group members may demoralize the group, weaken cohesiveness, and delay productive group work. Students may perceive sharing personal feelings in

a school setting as a threat to confidentiality and therefore be fearful of self-disclosure (Bearden, Spencer, and Moracco, 1989).

Summary

This chapter presents a review and synthesis of the literature related to the roles and services of guidance personnel in regard to at-risk students who are potential school dropouts. Early high school guidance programs began because of a need for underprivileged youth to receive counseling. This idea soon grew into vocational guidance. Guidance programs became organized in the early 1920s and by the 1930s guidance programs were gaining acceptance from secondary educators. The 1940s and 1950s were a period in time when new directions in guidance such as client-centered therapy and non-directive counseling were discovered. The birth of vocational guidance and the vocational counselor arose from the 1960s. The 1970s until present have provided the opportunity for guidance programs to change to meet the needs of the at-risk students they serve.

The role of the vocational and school guidance counselor have changed just as the history of high school guidance has evolved. Vocational counselors assist students by providing them with information about careers and the training required of them. School guidance counselors provide services to those students who attend comprehensive secondary schools on vocational choice or postsecondary education.

At-risk students and the dropout prevention services provided to them have received attention in recent years. Students who receive drop-out

prevention services come from diverse backgrounds and each has personal characteristics that limit them in becoming successful in school.

The prevention services offered to such students are vast.

Chapter 3

Methodology and Procedures

This chapter will describe the research methodology and procedures to compare services offered to at-risk, secondary students by vocational counselors and school guidance counselors. The population, instrument, procedures for collecting data, and the method for analyzing the data are also presented.

Population and Sample

The population consisted of all secondary school guidance counselors in comprehensive secondary schools and vocational counselors in either regional, city, or county operated vocational and technical centers in the Commonwealth of Virginia. For the purposes of this study, two separate terms are used to identify guidance personnel. Guidance personnel may be assigned roles either as school counselors or vocational counselors. School counselors are not directly involved with or funded by vocational education programs. Vocational counselors are defined as those guidance personnel who are a part of a vocational high school or area vocational center. Comprehensive high schools are the site at which most school guidance counselors could be found.

For this study, 270 comprehensive high schools and 48 vocational and technical centers were identified in the Virginia Educational Directory. Using guidelines from a table for determining a randomly chosen sample, 159 of 270

comprehensive high schools were randomly chosen for this study (Krejcie and Morgan, 1970). All 159 of the randomly selected comprehensive schools were sent a sent a questionnaire addressed to the head guidance counselor. For the 48 vocational and technical centers in the state the table listed 44 as the suggested sample size listed (Krejcie and Morgan, 1970). Because of the closeness of the suggested sample size for the vocational and technical centers and the actual number of facilities in the state, all 48 of the centers were sent a questionnaire addressed to the head vocational counselor.

Development and Validation of the Questionnaire

A questionnaire was developed based upon current literature. The literature suggested roles and responsibilities of guidance personnel, and dropout prevention approaches used to deter students from becoming dropouts. The most frequently utilized dropout prevention services and approaches by guidance personnel were identified for use on the questionnaire. The use of services and approaches by counselors were validated by previous research and practicing school counselors.

More specifically, the questionnaire was divided into three sections: school and counselor information, student support services, and dropout prevention approaches. The questionnaire was composed using forced choice and close-ended questions. The first section of the questionnaire focused on school and counselor information. The participants were given a list of responses from which to select. For the second section on student support services the

respondent was asked to respond either yes or no to thirteen services that they may or may not provide to at-risk students. The third section of the questionnaire listed six dropout prevention approaches for which the respondent was asked to select either yes they utilize that approach or no they do not utilize that approach.

A panel of five school guidance counselors were asked to review the questionnaire for validity prior to mailing. As a result of the counselors comments concerning the organization, clarity, and ease of interpretation of the questionnaire, no alterations were made to the instrument prior to its mailing. All of the guidance counselors agreed that the instrument was valid and that all questions could be responded to easily. A copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix A.

Collection of the Data

The initial mailing included a cover letter explaining the purpose of the study, the questionnaire, directions for completion, and a self-addressed envelope for the return. One questionnaire was sent to each school requesting that the head counselor complete the survey regardless of the number of counselors at the school. A request was made for the questionnaires to be returned within 10 days (See Timeline in Appendix B).

Data Analysis

Frequencies and percentages were computed for comparison for each of the questions listed on the questionnaire. For ease of comparing the data, responses under "Student Support Services" on the questionnaire were arranged on a single table. In addition, responses under "Dropout Prevention Approaches" were also listed on a single table.

Summary

A sample of comprehensive high schools and the population of county or regional operated vocational and technical centers were surveyed for this study. The survey instrument, which was a questionnaire, was mailed to the head guidance counselor or head vocational counselor at each of the schools. Also a cover letter was included with the questionnaire that explained the purpose of the study.

Chapter 4

Results of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the roles of guidance personnel and the nature of services offered to students who receive drop-out prevention services. The specific questions that guided the development of this study are outlined in Chapters 1 and 3. This chapter presents the results from the collection of data under four research questions:

1. What are the job titles, level of responsibility, and number of counselors in vocational and technical and comprehensive high school settings?
2. What is the overall student enrollment and percentage of students at-risk of dropping out at vocational and technical centers and comprehensive high schools?
3. What student support services do guidance personnel seek for assistance in providing services to prevent dropouts?
4. What are the specific approaches guidance personnel use to prevent students from dropping out of school in vocational and technical centers and comprehensive high schools?

Respondents

A total of 207 counselors in comprehensive high schools and regional vocational technical centers comprised the population for this study. The initial mailing of the questionnaire resulted in a return of 113 of the 159 questionnaires (71.1%) sent to school guidance counselors in comprehensive high schools. For the second group, counselors in regional vocational technical centers, 35 of the 48 questionnaires were returned (72.9%). Data on counselor titles, school enrollment, and population are included for the 148 respondents. Since the study focused on the roles and responsibilities of guidance personnel, responses of twelve individuals in vocational and technical centers who indicated their primary responsibility as administrator were eliminated for the remaining survey questions related to job responsibilities.

Counselor Information

In comparing the job titles of counselors, respondents were asked to indicate whether their position was either a school or vocational guidance counselor. In vocational and technical centers and comprehensive high schools, slightly more than one-third of the respondents in vocational centers were vocational counselors, just more than one-quarter were school counselors, and about a third were either administrators or dropout prevention coordinators. Responses from comprehensive high schools showed the majority were school counselors and less than 5% were vocational counselors (See Table 1).

To find out the number of counselors employed in either vocational and technical or comprehensive school settings, counselors were asked to indicate the number of counselors employed where they work. Slightly more than 90% of vocational and technical centers and just less than one-half of comprehensive high schools employ one to two counselors. Just less than 10% of vocational and technical centers and slightly below 60% of comprehensive high schools employ more than three counselors (See Table 2).

The level of responsibility of counselors to at-risk students who are potential dropouts was determined by allowing counselors to select their level of responsibility from four choices: primary, secondary, shared, and never. If a counselor indicated they had no responsibility for at-risk students, they were asked to return the survey without answering remaining questions. The majority of both vocational and technical center and comprehensive high school counselors consider their responsibility to at-risk students as shared (See Table 3).

Table 1

Job Title of Respondents

	Vocational and Technical N = 35		Comprehensive N = 113	
Counselor Title	f	%	f	%
Vocational	13	37.1	5	4.4
School	10	28.6	108	95.6
Undesignated	12	34.3	--	--

Table 2

Number of Counselors In a School

	Vocational and Technical N = 23		Comprehensive N = 113	
Number of Counselors	f	%	f	%
1-2	21	91.3	50	44.2
3-4	2	8.7	31	27.4
5-6	--	--	22	19.5
<7	--	--	10	8.8

Table 3

Counselor Responsibility to At-Risk Students Who Are Potential Dropouts

	Vocational and Technical N = 22		Comprehensive N = 112	
Level of Responsibility	f	%	f	%
Primary	3	13.6	15	13.4
Secondary	3	13.6	21	18.8
Shared	16	72.7	76	67.8

Student Enrollment

In examining student enrollments in both settings most vocational and technical centers reported smaller enrollments than comprehensive high schools. Nearly 40% of comprehensive high schools had enrollments over 1,000 students compared to less than 6% of vocational and technical centers. Vocational and technical centers were more likely than comprehensive high schools to have enrollments of 500 students or less (See Table 4).

In two-thirds of the vocational and technical centers, at-risk student populations of less than 50% were present, as compared to over 95% of comprehensive high schools who share similar at-risk populations. Those vocational centers who have at-risk populations of more than 50% totaled just

over one-tenth while under 5% of comprehensive high schools have greater than one-half of the student enrollment labeled at-risk. One fifth of the surveys obtained from counselors in vocational and technical centers had no response given for this question. (See Table 5).

Table 4

School Enrollment

	Vocational and Technical N = 35		Comprehensive N = 113	
Students Enrolled	f	%	f	%
>250	5	14.3	6	5.3
251-500	11	31.4	20	17.7
501-1000	11	31.4	41	36.3
<1000	2	5.7	45	39.8
No response	6	17.1	1	0.9

Table 5

Percent of Student Population At-Risk of Dropping Out of School

	Vocational and Technical N = 35		Comprehensive N = 113	
Percent At-Risk	f	%	f	%
>25%	20	57.1	89	78.8
26-50%	4	11.4	19	16.8
51-75%	2	5.7	1	0.9
<76%	2	5.7	2	1.8
No Response	7	20.0	2	1.8

Student Support Services

Counselors in vocational and technical centers and comprehensive high school were asked to indicate whether support services were provided to students at-risk of becoming dropouts. More than 80% of counselors provided the following services: a) provide individual counseling, b) allow unscheduled counseling visits, c) place and recruit students in vocational education programs, and d) collaborate with community resources. Greater than 75% of comprehensive high school counselors provided: a) administered career interest surveys, b) established course sequence, c) provided individual counseling, d) group counseling, e) allow unscheduled counseling sessions, f) recruit and place students in vocational education programs, g) assist in locating adult services, and h) collaborate with community resources. More than 80% of vocational and technical center counselors provided: a) individual counseling, b) unscheduled counseling sessions, c) identify employment and educational skills needed by graduates, d) recruit students for vocational education and d) collaborate with community resources (See Table 6).

Table 6

Student Support Services

	Vocational and Technical N = 22		Comprehensive N = 112	
Responsibility	f	%	f	%
Administer Career Interest Surveys	11	50.0	93	83.0
Administer Career Assessments	10	45.5	75	67.0
Establish Course Sequence	16	72.7	109	97.3
Provide Individual Counseling	22	100.0	112	100.0
Provide Group Counseling	14	63.6	94	84.0
Place Students in Training/ Cooperative Education Stations	9	40.9	67	59.8
Follow-up Graduates	16	72.7	46	41.1
Allow Unscheduled Counseling Sessions	22	100.0	105	93.8
Identify Employment/Educational Skills Needed by Graduates	18	81.8	72	64.3
Assist Instructional Staff to Retain Students	14	63.6	80	71.4
Recruit/Place Students in Vocational Education Programs	20	90.9	98	87.5
Assist in Locating Adult Services	13	59.1	89	79.5
Collaborate with Community Resources	19	86.4	94	84.0

Dropout Prevention Approaches

In the third and final section of the questionnaire counselors were asked to indicate what approaches they utilized to prevent students from dropping out. Counselors in vocational and technical centers and comprehensive high schools were most apt to utilize: a) counseling and advising, b) work related, c) parental involvement, and d) student centered approaches. Counselors in comprehensive high schools were more likely to utilize tutorial approaches and alternative curriculum approaches (See Table 7).

Table 7

Dropout Prevention Strategies by Counselor

	Vocational and Technical N = 22		Comprehensive N = 112	
Strategy	f	%	f	%
Tutorial	6	27.3	71	63.4
Counseling/Advising	22	100.0	108	96.4
Work Related	15	68.2	71	63.4
Alternative Curriculum	13	59.1	97	86.6
Parental Involvement	19	86.4	105	93.8
Student Centered	22	100.0	100	89.3

Summary

This chapter addressed the presentation and analysis of data regarding the responsibilities and nature of services offered to at-risk students by counselors in vocational and technical centers and comprehensive high schools.

Chapter 5

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This study was conducted to determine what roles, responsibilities, and strategies are part of vocational and school guidance counselors effort to prevent students from dropping out of school. Previous research completed by Gibson and Mitchell (1981) and Baizerman and Compton (1991) was used to base this study. Within this chapter a summary, implications, and conclusions will be presented. The sections in this chapter are based on data and analyses of it obtained from vocational and school guidance counselors.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the roles, responsibilities, and approaches of vocational and school guidance counselors to students who are at-risk of dropping out of school. Four questions were answered to determine information about school and vocational counselors, student enrollment, student support services, and dropout prevention approaches. Participants of this study were counselors randomly selected from 270 comprehensive high schools and the entire population of 48 county and regional operated vocational and technical centers in Virginia. A mail survey was sent to all participants. Response rates of the two groups were 71.1% for comprehensive high schools and 72.9% for vocational and technical schools. Since a follow-up of the non-respondents was

not completed, the results must be interpreted with caution. Counselors in small schools are over-represented due to sampling bias. In addition, comprehensive high schools were randomly selected and the entire population of county and regional operated vocational and technical were utilized for this study. Bias may also be seen because of an over-representation of vocational and technical centers. To analyze the data, responses were counted and frequencies and percentages computed.

Findings and Conclusions

Question One. What are the job titles, level of responsibility, and number of counselors in vocational and technical and comprehensive high schools? The job titles of counselors in vocational and technical centers were almost equally divided between school and vocational counselors and in comprehensive high schools school counselors were overwhelmingly more prominent. Counselor responsibility to at-risk students who are potential dropouts is a shared responsibility among counselors in both vocational and technical and comprehensive school settings . Few vocational and technical centers employ greater than two counselors, yet comprehensive high schools employ as many as seven or more counselors at one site.

In past years the vocational counselor was a prominent figure in both vocational and comprehensive high schools yet this study reveals that the number of vocational counselors is declining in comparison to school counselors. One

counselor made a comment on the questionnaire that the school in which they were employed believed that vocational counselors were unnecessary. In addition, two of the questionnaires used in this study revealed that "at-risk" counselors were present in comprehensive high schools.

The shared responsibility of at-risk students to counselors is due primarily because of the resources available to counselors at the secondary level. Regardless of the setting where the counselor is employed, adult and community services are available to assist the counselor in providing the student who is at-risk the most appropriate support plan to remain in school. The collaboration of services is beneficial to both the counselor and student because the student then may have several contacts to refer when decisions about their future in school arise.

Question Two. What is the overall student enrollment and percentage of students at-risk of dropping out at vocational and comprehensive high schools? Most vocational and technical centers enroll a smaller number of students than comprehensive high schools. The most prevalent number of students enrolled in vocational and comprehensive high schools varied; 251-500 and 501-1000 students are enrolled in over 60% of vocational centers and nearly 40% of comprehensive high schools have student enrollments of 1000 or larger. The majority of vocational and technical centers and comprehensive high schools have at-risk populations of less than 25%. At-risk student populations that exceed 50%

are found mostly in vocational and technical centers and are rarely found in comprehensive high school settings.

The smaller student enrollments in vocational and technical centers could be representative of the curriculum utilized at such a facility. Students who attend a vocational and technical center are focused on training for the workplace and acquiring an employable skill. Comprehensive high schools offer a diverse list of courses that do not specialize in particular vocational areas, but rather prepare a student for the workplace or postsecondary education. The lack of interest in some academic areas shown by at-risk students can result in students who lose interest in their education. At-risk students are sometimes given an opportunity to attend a vocational and technical center so that they may direct their efforts on obtaining a skill and obtaining employment soon after graduating. At-risk students who attend vocational and technical centers for this reason may reflect in the increased percent of at-risk students at these facilities when compared to comprehensive high schools.

Question Three. What student support services do guidance personnel seek for assistance in providing services to prevent dropouts?

The number of support services used by vocational and school guidance counselors is varied. The most relied upon student support services in both vocational and technical and comprehensive high schools are: a) individual counseling, b) unscheduled counseling sessions, and c) recruit and place students in vocational education programs. Previous research conducted by Pittman

(1986) supports that the key to retaining students in school is to understand their individual problems and concerns. Another student support service utilized by both vocational and school guidance counselors is a counselor's ability to collaborate with community resources. Baizerman and Compton (1991) believe that a cooperative effort among guidance counselors and community resources is needed to assist students with certain problems. Twenty percent more counselors in comprehensive high schools rely more on: a) career interest surveys, b) career assessments, c) establishing course sequence for students, d) group counseling, and e) locating adult services than counselors in vocational and technical center settings. Gibson and Mitchell (1981) concluded that the role and function of the comprehensive school counselor will be built around these support services. Thirty percent more counselors in vocational and technical settings rely more upon following-up graduates, and fifteen percent more identified employment and educational skills needed by graduates than comprehensive high school counselors. Previous research conducted by Gibson and Mitchell (1981) support the results found in this portion of the study.

The services utilized by counselors in either comprehensive or vocational and technical centers are similar. Exceptions are shown when examining career surveys and career assessments and the identification of skills needed by graduates. Career surveys and career assessments are more frequently used by counselors in comprehensive high school settings partly due to the structure of the comprehensive high school curriculum. As previously mentioned, comprehensive

high schools prepare students for a number of opportunities. Career surveys and assessments assist the student in forecasting career or future educational interests may be presented to the student. The career surveys and assessments in turn assist the counselor in helping the student to select courses that will provide some background in future interest. Identifying skills needed by graduates was a services more heavily relied upon by counselors in vocational and technical centers. Counselors in these facilities must know if the education that previous students received was adequate in preparing them for the workplace and if not what curricular alterations need to be considered.

Question Four. What are the specific approaches guidance personnel use to prevent students from dropping out of school in vocational and technical centers and comprehensive high schools?

The most common dropout prevention approaches practiced by both vocational and school guidance personnel were counseling and advising and work related approaches. Counselors in comprehensive high schools tend to utilize: a) tutorial, b) alternative curriculum, and c) parental involvement approaches more than counselors in vocational and technical centers. Counselors in vocational and technical centers rely on student centered approaches more so than counselors in comprehensive high schools. The results from this study complemented previous research by Gibson and Mitchell (1981) and Baizerman and Compton (1991) concerning approaches utilized by guidance personnel to prevent dropouts.

The fact that counseling and work-related approaches were the most common approaches to prevent dropouts may not be surprising. Counseling is the first alternative for students who are at-risk. This approach to dropout prevention is a means to access the student's individual problem and from that point either further counseling is completed or other dropout prevention approaches may be utilized. Work-related approaches give the at-risk student an opportunity to interact with society at the workplace, as well as to continue a revised education at the school.

Recommendations

1. It is recommended that counselors in both comprehensive and vocational and technical center settings increase collaboration with teachers, adult, and community resources to provide the at-risk student more opportunity for success in their education.
2. It is recommended that counselors investigate reasons why some at-risk students lose interest in their education and what services and approaches can best assist students who exhibit this characteristic.
3. It is recommended that counselors in either comprehensive high school or vocational and technical center settings examine their use of student-centered approaches to prevent students from dropping out of school.

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APPENDIX A

Questionnaire and Cover Letter

Virginia Tech
VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE
AND STATE UNIVERSITY

Division of Vocational and Technical Education

College of Education
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061-0254
Fax: (703) 231-3292

Dear Vocational or School Guidance Counselor:

My name is Bryan Ashby and I am a graduate student in the Division of Vocational and Technical Education at Virginia Tech. As part of my masters thesis, I am conducting a study to obtain information about the roles of school guidance and vocational guidance counselors in providing dropout prevention services to at-risk students in Virginia secondary schools. Please assist me in this study by spending a few moments of your time, to complete and return the attached survey.

Enclosed you will find a questionnaire along with a self-addressed, stamped envelope. I would really appreciate receiving the completed survey by November 6, 1995. All responses are confidential and total, not individual data will be reported. Your assistance in providing this information is greatly appreciated. Thank-you for your time and interest.

Sincerely,

Bryan D. Ashby

Susan B. Asselin, Ph.D.
Associate Professor

GUIDANCE SERVICES OFFERED TO STUDENTS AT RISK OF DROPPING OUT

The purpose of this survey is to obtain information about dropout prevention services offered by school guidance and vocational counselors in Virginia.

I. SCHOOL/COUNSELOR INFORMATION

1. Select the title that best fits your role:

____ Vocational Counselor - Position funded by vocational funds and assist students in vocational course selection

____ School Guidance Counselor - Position not funded by vocational education funds

2. How many students are enrolled in the school where you work? (select one)

____ Less than 250
____ 251 - 500
____ 501- 1000
____ Over 1,000

3. What percent of the student population in the school where you counsel are considered at-risk of dropping out of school? (select one)

____ Less than 25%
____ 26% - 50%
____ 51% - 75%
____ Over 76%

4. How many counselors are in the school where you counsel? (select one)

____ 1 - 2
____ 3 - 4
____ 5 - 6
____ 7 or more

5. What is your level of responsibility to at-risk students who are potential dropouts? (select one)

____ Primary
____ Secondary
____ Shared
____ Never * (IF ANSWERING "NEVER" TO THIS QUESTION PLEASE STOP AT THIS POINT AND RETURN SURVEY)

II. STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

*Indicate those services you provide by circling **YES or NO***

1. Administer career interest surveys	YES	NO
2. Administer career assessments	YES	NO
3. Establish course sequence for students	YES	NO
4. Provide individual counseling	YES	NO

5. Counsel students in groups	YES	NO
6. Place students in training stations or cooperative education programs	YES	NO
7. Follow-up graduates to verify skills needed for the workplace	YES	NO
8. Allow students unscheduled counseling sessions	YES	NO
9. Identify employment or educational skills needed by students who graduated high school	YES	NO
10. Assist instructional staff on effective ways to retain students	YES	NO
11. Recruit and place students in vocational education programs	YES	NO
12. Assist student and their families in locating adult services for at-risk persons	YES	NO
13. Collaborate with community resources to prevent students from becoming dropouts	YES	NO

III. DROPOUT PREVENTION APPROACHES

*Please indicate the services you provide by circling **YES or NO***

1. Tutorial	YES	NO
2. Counseling/advising	YES	NO
3. Work related	YES	NO
4. Alternative curriculum	YES	NO
5. Parental involvement	YES	NO
6. Student centered	YES	NO

THANK YOU SO MUCH, I GREATLY APPRECIATE YOUR TIME AND EFFORT

Please return survey to Bryan Ashby, 900 Brightwood Manor Dr. #8, Blacksburg, VA 24060 by **November 6, 1995**

APPENDIX B

Timeline of Data Collection

Timeline of Data Collection

Dates	Events
September - October, 1995	Development of Questionnaire
October 18, 1995	Finalized Questionnaire
October 20, 1995	Mailing of questionnaire to 48 vocational and technical centers and 159 comprehensive high schools.
November 6, 1995	FINAL CUTOFF DATE

VITA

Bryan Dixon Ashby was born on February 15, 1971 in Nassawadox, Virginia. He attended Northampton County Public Schools from 1976 until he graduated from Northampton High School in 1989. In 1989 Mr. Ashby was accepted by Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in Agricultural Education. He graduated in 1993 with a degree in Agricultural Education. In March of 1993 he accepted a teaching position with Northampton County Public Schools. After one year teaching at his alma mater, he applied to Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University to enter graduate school and pursue study in Vocational Special Needs Education. In the summer of 1994, Mr. Ashby began studies for his master's degree in Vocational Special Needs Education. In September 1994 Mr. Ashby accepted a position with Montgomery County Public Schools as a Special Education Assistant. In the summer of 1995, Mr. Ashby accepted a position with Giles County Public Schools to teach agricultural education. Mr. Ashby completed the degree requirements for the Master of Science degree in Vocational-Technical Education at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia in April, 1996.