

Financial Implications of School Counseling Models and Best Practices in Indiana

Addendum to Part I: Recognizing Promising Models of School Counseling for Indiana

Introduction

As a follow-up to the Indiana Chamber of Commerce Foundation (ICC) study *The Indiana School Counseling Research Review* released in spring 2014, the ICC with financial support from Lilly Endowment, collaborated with the Center of Excellence in Leadership of Learning (CELL) and Fleck Education on a study in spring 2015 to identify and document exemplary models of school counseling programming and to develop a framework of practices that school may replicate.

During the study process, it seemed prudent to seek input about the financial implications of these models and practices from the perspective of school financial experts and school business official practitioners. The education consulting firm Educational Services Company was hired to give overview of the complexities of school funding formulas and multiple funding streams that might be considered by Indiana schools reviewing opportunities to implement new career counseling services or to augment school career counseling programming. What follows is the resulting analysis.

1. What funding streams support all school counseling roles?

- General Fund (State)
- Title Grants (Federal)
- Referendum proceeds for additional expenses for school counseling services
- Perkins Federal Funding Grants
- Various regional and state grants
- Charitable foundation grants
- Indiana Education License Plate funds through Indiana Department of Education

2. What are cost implications of contracting (or joint-contracting) some traditional and non-traditional school counseling duties?

The cost of contracting services is most often higher per day, given that benefits are not part of the contract and are added to overall agreement for services. Additional issues to consider would include confidentiality, continuity and fidelity. Districts are required by state law (Article 4.1) to employ a minimum of one certified school counselor per school district. However, districts could share additional counselors or a career counselor. One district would employ a counselor and the second district would pay for any time allocated to the second district.

Other considerations for jointly contracted services include technology support, software and hardware requirements, and insurance, to name a few. In cases where a counseling program is in a facility that is not a school building or is part of a joint contract, the local school board must approve the contract.

Assuming a certified individual is contracted, the cost per day would range from \$450 to \$600 per day. Total salary and benefits would probably average \$75,000 in smaller schools and amounts paid in suburban and urban schools would be greater. Amounts paid by charter schools will likely be less, in part due to part-time services.

Schools need to consider liability and insurance issues when employing contracted personnel.

3. What are cost and other implications of hiring non-counseling staff to complete traditional school counselor duties?

A certified social worker or other possible school personnel could assist the employed counselor with many duties at a reduced cost. District boards could create a non-certified position, similar to a school nurse, to complete duties as designated. A “certified social worker” must be a licensed “school social worker” according to Indiana rule. School psychologists are also allowed to provide “student assistance services”, in addition to school counselors and school social workers.

Schools could hire licensed social workers for approximately \$20 per hour. A full time non-certified individual would likely be eligible for benefits in addition to salary, bringing the cost to a range of approximately \$40,000 to \$60,000, depending on the district and internal pay schedules.

Schools need to consider liability and insurance issues when employing personnel who are called “counselors” or “school counselors” or who do “counseling” but are not licensed. Depending on the carrier, typical school liability plans would cover non-certified staff.

4. What are possible investment considerations and data collection considerations that will demonstrate success of new counseling models/practices?

Current state accountability guidelines and A-F school grading formulas recognize individual school academic improvements by graduation rate, post-secondary enrollment, early graduation, dual credit courses, and career and technical certification. Districts identified as “best practice” schools often utilize *Naviance* software.

Free Indiana tools such as *Learn More Indiana* (Indiana Commission for Higher Education) and *Indiana Career Connect* (Indiana Department of Education) offer information specific to individual student queries and provide good insight on career pathways, needed skills for certain careers and personality assessments. These sites are continuously improving to serve counselors, parents, students and teachers with information necessary for success. *Learn More* is partnering with the ICC with a plan to include a school counselor portal that provides a one-stop-shop for school counselor information, including best practices, related community support services, and associated funding sources to help superintendents plan for, adopt and fund those programs.

Programs such as 21st Century Scholars have transitioned into parallel counseling to ensure those students who are potentially at risk have a specific college plan that aligns with career opportunities. A program such as AVID (Advancement via Individual Determination) is a national tool which provides motivation, study skills and planning for in-school and post-secondary success. There are many other resources available at no cost and there are online resources for students and their families.

Naviance software has a startup cost of \$3.00 per student. Annual fees range from \$3.00-\$15.00 per student. AVID costs approximately \$3 per student per day the first year and fees decline in subsequent years. There are other similar programs being used by schools in Indiana and beyond that include a career planning component.

5. Will school districts share financial data about their counseling models/practices?

Generally speaking, most school districts are more than willing to share “best practices”. Counselors would likely ask permission from their building administrator prior to discussing various programs that they are using in their local district. Data shared that are in some way connected to individual students would necessarily be in aggregate form.

School budgets are posted on the Department of Local Government Finance (DLGF) website although they may not give enough specific detail for in-depth research regarding costs for counseling programs.

6. What information will be helpful to a superintendent/business manager if considerations are being made to change career counselor practices/models?

Any significant change to counseling practice would be addressed in the job description of the counselor and would need to be approved by the local school board. The building principal would make the recommendation to the superintendent who would share this new information, program or model with the school board and request its approval before implementation. The financial considerations would be explained to the board, and would be clarified through board minutes with additional information from the superintendent.

Any regulation changes and/or mandates from Indiana Department of Education or state legislature would be made available to the superintendent prior to implementation. The database discussed in the previous section would be a useful planning tool and might help identify effective funding strategies.

7. From the superintendent/business manager perspective, are there policies or laws that inhibit changes to school career counseling models/best practices?

State regulations would trump local policy. State Board of Accounts and local board policies would guide any financial adjustments.

Providing after-hour services at schools, 24/7 and wrap-around services, services at non-school or jointly contracted facilities, or those provided through inter-governmental agreements are sometimes difficult because of collective bargaining contracts. Costs associated with collective bargaining are not likely to affect charter schools.

8. From the superintendent/business manager perspective, are there non-funding changes in policies or laws that could incentivize changes to school career counseling models/best practices?

The high school or middle school principals would make the recommendation to the superintendent who would share the new program or building level plan to address counseling programs or models with the board and, again, request its approval before implementation. These changes could be shared with the board as communication items only if no additional funds are committed.

Several years ago a criterion of 65 percent was discussed as a way to estimate the balance of school district general fund expenditures for instruction and other expenses. The guideline is not part of current school expenditure reporting. The guideline did not include counseling services as part of instruction. Including those services in the criterion, if implemented, might create an incentive to incorporate new models and additional best practices.

9. From the superintendent/business manager perspective, if given grant support or personnel support to change a school counseling model, what is the ideal approach that will allow for a school district to sustain the program when the grant is complete?

Grants and donations must be accepted by the local school board. Those funds are then assigned a specific account and are managed from the district level utilizing State Board of Accounts guidelines. When the agenda item is discussed and reviewed by the board, the grant and/or donation is explained in detail – time frame, personnel responsible for implementation, and all expectations and the evaluative processes would be made clear at that time. Generally, the board would receive written documents for their review prior to the meeting. Additionally, the minutes of the public meeting and any discussion and/or questions about the intent of the program would allow for additional clarification. Sustainability options should be a part of any discussion at that time.

Providing funds for staff development for classroom teachers, administrators, support staff and funds to promote community engagement with and greater awareness of such programs could go beyond funding and lead to institutionalizing and sustaining those programs.

Planning for a referendum that includes additional counseling services as one of the expenditures from the proceeds of the referendum might be offered to promote institutionalizing such services following a grant period. Referendums are approved for a maximum of seven years and must be renewed.

10. Additional considerations:

Form should follow function. In the case of financial implications for adopting and sustaining promising school counseling programs a holistic program view will not only enlarge the services available through newly adopted promising programs, it will enlarge the funding base beyond state budgets and local funding increases to include corporations, foundations, endowing organizations, special interest groups, mental health organizations and other similar funding sources. This will not only promote innovation, excellence and fidelity, but it will also improve the chances of effectiveness, improved quality of life in communities served by such programs, and the sustainability of those programs.

School and community counseling services are affected by many complex human and organizational variables affecting both the provider and the client. Moving from a common business model to a needs-based model using a balanced score card will also improve the likelihood of innovative school counseling programs becoming effective and sustainable. Adding strategic non-financial performance measures to traditional financial metrics will give school and community leaders a much better measure of school counseling practices, the sustainability of those programs and the necessary adjustments in order for them to be strongly effective.

Most school districts have after-school hours available for enrichment and or remediation. Athletic events and extra-curricular programs continue generally through the evening. A school counseling center could also be provided during these after-school hours to encourage families to be more engaged with their children for appropriate scheduling and post-secondary counseling. Some parents find an early morning appointment more convenient. Utilizing the Zero Hour prior to the opening bell is another option to consider. One thought is that an additional stipend paid to the counselor or master teacher would likely be a reasonable expense. The estimated cost for this option would range from \$40 to \$60 per hour depending on the salary of the individual providing the service – approximately \$8,000 per academic year. Care would need to be taken when considering this option; however, because in reality school counselors are “on the job” as soon as they arrive at the building and many already arrive before the first bell rings in the mornings.

Department chairs or lead teachers could be given additional responsibilities as an expectation dictated by the building principal. These individuals could share and reiterate the importance of clear and appropriate career explorations generally within their particular grade level. This option would be no cost to the public schools.

The recent trend toward early college programs in high schools adds a dimension of school counseling without significantly increasing expenditures by the local school corporation or charter school. In this case, a university or community college could provide counseling services using its staff on-site at schools. This would be no cost to the public schools.

Post-secondary employees from community colleges or universities are an option to explore with secondary partners and vary from school district to school district. Oversight and involvement from the guidance is necessary in this type of arrangement. This is a less inexpensive opportunity if the right individual is found and a solid commitment is made by both the school and the college. This option would benefit both entities and would be no cost to the public school district.

Area career and technical centers are a valuable resource for consideration. The time commitment is significant from both partners, but the expense would be minimal and could be very beneficial for both. There are career centers located throughout the state and each of those centers offer counseling support to the students attending classes there. Many career centers employ school counselors and career counselors using federal and state Perkins dollars.

Public school corporations work collaboratively to provide financial support to the staffing of each center. Counselors currently work with participating districts to provide limited conversations with students and their families, generally at the end of one school year to prepare for scheduling the following year. An additional counselor assigned through the career center could be a valuable resource and would limit the financial commitment across the state. Professional development for these counselors could be manageable, and the service provided would have oversight from each governing board.

Works Councils, county economic development boards and local chambers of commerce are excellent resources for arranging contacts with local businesses and industries. These opportunities are valuable educational experiences that allow students to consider the many different fields under general career umbrellas. Advisory boards composed of local business and school leaders are also an excellent place to focus on promising school counseling practices and can provide in-kind services such as internships and other work based learning that lead to career exploration and counseling, job seeking skills, helpful student class schedule adjustments and other services related to school counseling.

Partnering with a not-for-profit organization to provide school counseling services is also an important consideration. Many counties across the state have community foundations that offer competitive grants for educational opportunities. Writing the grant is time-consuming and may not be sustainable given the nature of the foundation and the variation of the dollar amounts available.

Shared services are an option for those districts operating within a reasonable driving distance. In small and rural areas, travel time makes this a less attractive plan. The individual providing the service will expect to be paid for the entire contracted period plus mileage. The specific details of the contract arrangement would be negotiable. Fidelity of services is a concern. If the individual contracted is not dedicated to doing a professional job, the entire program might suffer. Clear expectations and attention to time on task would require administrative monitoring. One individual could be assigned to different locations on a rotational basis within contracted days per week.

The diversity of 293 public school districts in Indiana makes this a challenge. Throughout the state there are 402 high schools, 476 traditional middle schools and an even greater variation in the 6-12 grade configurations. Some are 7-12 buildings, 5-8 middle schools are fairly common, and the separate student populations vary dramatically from urban to suburban to small/rural. When approximately 40 public charter schools are also considered, the variety is compounded further. The financial implications for charter schools are similar to publicly funded traditional schools. The search for additional resources, connecting in-school services to the 24/7 needs of students and parents, accounting requirements and related accountability, and analyzing balanced metrics for success are equally demanding for charter schools.

Conclusion

For this project, we consider the four domains noted in the project overview: 1) delivery of services, 2) financing services over time, 3) evaluating counselors, 4) professional development and pre-service training programs for counselors. Item 1) is noted in several of the above paragraphs. There are numerous options to consider, however, “best practice” would be to have a well-prepared career counselor employed by the district with specific duties designated that would highlight and emphasize *Promising Models of School Counseling*. Item 2) is also addressed in the above paragraphs. Average costs will vary greatly depending on the type of district, the grade levels addressed, the proximity of buildings, professional development required, etc. Item 3) is addressed by the current state and local evaluation tool, while item 4) might be served by the nine Educational Service Centers throughout Indiana. These regional service centers provide professional development opportunities on demand. They service schools within their regions effectively and might be a cost efficient and consistent training option with an appropriate training model.

The cost of school counseling services in school corporations or charter schools varies depending on the extent of programs and the size of school appropriation budgets. Smaller rural and small city school corporations and charter schools may spend a greater percentage of the budget on school counseling services even though the level of services is no greater than in a larger school corporation. Typical expenditures in an urban school corporation may account for a range of 1.5 to 3.0 percent of the General Fund budget. Suburban schools with growing student enrollments may spend somewhat higher percentages, perhaps 3.5 to 4 percent. By comparison, smaller school corporations and charter schools may spend percentages similar to larger suburban counterparts, but not because they are providing more services. In that case, the General Fund budget is much smaller resulting in a greater proportion of the budget.

Overview of Key Financial Considerations to School Career Counseling Programs

Funding streams

- General Fund (State)
- Title Grants (Federal)
- Referendum proceeds for additional expenses for school counseling services
- Perkins Federal Funding Grants
- Various regional and state grants
- Charitable foundation grants
- Indiana Education License Plate funds through Indiana Department of Education

Joint contracting for traditional and non-traditional services

- Costs for shared facilities, including community agencies
- Shared contracts among school corporations: \$75,000 and higher
- Daily rate for contracting: \$450 to \$600

Non-traditional staff (licensed social workers and para-professionals)

- Based on local salary and wage schedules
- Costs in the range of \$40,000 to \$60,000 for licensed staff
- Potential hourly rate of \$20 and higher

Investments and data collection considerations

- Guidance software ranging from no cost to \$3 to \$15 per pupil
- Other student life software and on-line programs for study skills, school motivation, etc.
- “Para-counseling” programs with startup costs of \$3 per student per day

Sharing financial data

- Share “best practices”
- Financial information for student aggregated data
- Variation in accounting by function among school corporations may muddle data
- Statewide database managed by an independently funded agency

Tools helpful to superintendents /business managers

- Clarifications and guidelines from the Indiana Department of Education
- State rules and laws that specify accounting practices
- Shared services contracts

Policies that inhibit school counseling best practices

- State regulations trump school policies
- Policy that limits after-hours flexibility in services agreements for public schools

Non-funding changes to incentivize school counseling innovations

- Shared results among schools with successful school counseling practices
- Board approval of non-traditional programs

Sustaining changes in school counseling practices

- Provide staff development funds for implementing/institutionalizing innovative practices
- Board review and approval as successful innovative programs are implemented

Additional considerations

- Approach innovation for school counseling programs from a holistic point of view (whole child and his/her family needs)
- Use “needs-based” funding to consider school counseling programs
- Evaluate successful programs using a balanced score card with strategic non-financial performance measures in addition to financial metrics
- Develop greater flexible and innovative programs, including after-hour services and off-site centers
- Consider counseling services using post-secondary institutions and early college and/or dual credit university/secondary school agreements
- Provide mutually beneficial services by both Area Career/Technical Centers and related high schools. The estimated state-wide cost of those services would range from \$500,000 to \$800,000
- Use County Economic Development Boards and other business organizations to provide ancillary school counseling services and related internships
- Use advisory boards to create public-private community discussions and support for innovative counseling practices
- Rely more on discretionary funds at charter schools and on direct instruction funds in public schools to provide additional/innovative school counseling services
- Recognize that meeting accounting requirements and accountability expectations, and analyzing balanced success metrics are equally demanding for charter schools and public schools
- Use the regional Education Service Centers throughout Indiana as an option to provide staff development services useful for implementing and sustaining promising school career counseling services

Funding Implications for Promising Public School Counseling Services

OPTION	Add Counselor	Career Center	Post-Sec. Institution	Contracted Services (one day per week)	Professional Development	Add other licensed staff
SOURCE	General Fund	General Fund	No cost	General Fund	General Fund	General Fund
Urban	\$60-80,000	Estimated state-wide cost \$500-800,000	Regional	\$8-12,000	Varies	Daily rate
Suburban	\$60-80,000		Regional	\$8-12,000	Varies	Daily rate
Small-Rural	\$45-65,000		Regional	\$8-12,000	Varies	Daily rate

402 public traditional high schools, 476 public traditional middle schools, approximately 40 public charter schools