

The School Counselor and Test Preparation Programs

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American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Position

School counselors assist students in preparing for standardized tests by promoting opportunities designed to increase knowledge and improve test-taking skills. School counselors help students and their families become knowledgeable about test preparation programs and assist them as they decide which programs best meet their needs.

The Rationale

Students are often apprehensive about standardized tests and sometimes view tests as intimidating or threatening. Compounding these feelings is the fact that since 2001, average college acceptance rates have dropped 8 percent while number of students applying to college has increased by the same amount (National Association for College Admission Counseling, 2011). Because of these issues, school counselors are often asked for advice on test preparation programs to increase scores and opportunities. Research has demonstrated that the best predictor of college success is the “quality and intensity of a student’s high school courses” (Adelman, 1999). Research on test-taking and test-wise strategies such as time-use and guessing strategies revealed that such preparation can improve scores. These gains are even larger when a student participates in a longer test preparation program that allows the student to practice and develop more broad cognitive skills (Crocker, 2005).

Many students benefit from becoming familiar with the test format and test-taking strategies before taking a standardized test. Content area review and repeated test-based practice have shown to be beneficial for students as they prepare for exams.

The School Counselor’s Role

School counselors provide test-taking strategies as a part of a comprehensive school counseling program as a way of “leveling the playing field with respect to access” (Crocker, 2006, p. 118) to test preparation, promoting academic, career and personal/social development for all students. Test-taking skills and strategies include:

- Time-use and stress management
- Error-avoidance and guessing
- Memory and recall techniques
- Deductive reasoning
- Test-wiseness (including scoring rubrics, test format and item formats)

School counselors collaborate with school staff to coordinate and provide information on integrating test-taking strategies, content and practice tests into regular classroom instruction. School counselors provide students and families with research and information on a variety of test preparation options to enable them to make informed decisions about commercial test preparation programs, free programs as well as those that have a fee. The school counselor collaborates with staff to encourage integration of test-taking strategies and content into the curriculum.

Summary

Research shows test preparation can help students improve test scores. School counselors collaborate with school staff to assist students as they prepare for tests by providing instruction on test-taking skills and providing research and information about test preparation programs to students and their families.

References

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National Association for College Admission Counseling. (2011). *2011 State of College Admission*. Washington, D.C.