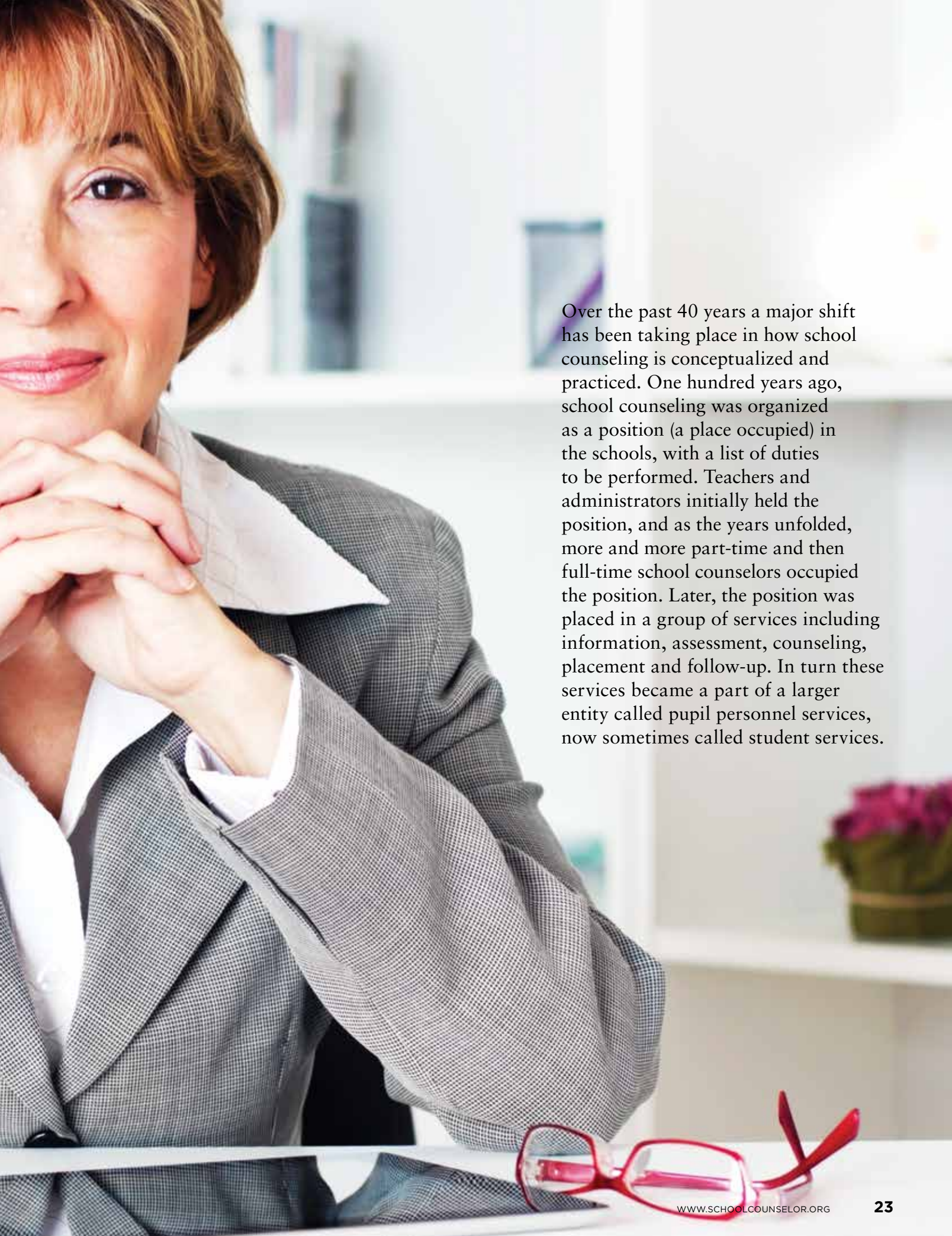


FROM POSITION TO PROGRAM

What once was a position in the schools, with wide-ranging duties, often clerical and administrative in nature, has moved to a comprehensive program approach, allowing school counselors to better meet students' academic, career and social/emotional needs.

BY NORMAN C. GYSBERS, PH.D., AND
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Over the past 40 years a major shift has been taking place in how school counseling is conceptualized and practiced. One hundred years ago, school counseling was organized as a position (a place occupied) in the schools, with a list of duties to be performed. Teachers and administrators initially held the position, and as the years unfolded, more and more part-time and then full-time school counselors occupied the position. Later, the position was placed in a group of services including information, assessment, counseling, placement and follow-up. In turn these services became a part of a larger entity called pupil personnel services, now sometimes called student services.

Today, while the position of school counselor with its list of duties is still being used as a way to structure school counseling, increasingly, under ASCA's leadership, school counseling is being conceptualized and practiced as a full K-12 program equal and complimentary with other educational programs and is being delivered by full-time school counselors working closely with teachers, administrators, parents and the community.

What are the implications of the transformation taking place in school counseling, this major shift from position to program? Why is the traditional position approach no longer adequate? What does the program approach offer school counselors that the traditional position approach does not? Let's take a look at why the traditional position approach is no longer adequate and what the program approach offers that the traditional position approach does not.

The Traditional Position

One of the reasons the traditional position approach is no longer an adequate way to structure the work of school counselors resides in the list of duties accompanying the position. Typically these lists are assembled over time and contain a mixture of school counseling, administrative and clerical duties. These lists often include such duties as coordinating the school testing program, testing for special education and gifted programs, being coordinator/manager of 504 files and maintaining permanent records. These administrative and clerical duties are a barrier to working directly with students because they substantially reduce the time school counselors have to help all students become college- and career-ready. Unfortunately, as school districts take on or are given new initiatives, these lists tend to grow longer, not shorter.

Another reason is that the duties in these lists are often unequal in size, and

the time requirements to complete them varies considerably. Some duties may be substantial and require a great deal of time. Other duties may be of less size and require little time to complete. This makes it difficult for school counselors to organize their work and calendar their time.

Still another reason is that the duties on these lists can vary substantially among elementary, middle and high school counselors and, what is worse, among school counselors in the same building. This can result in a lack of connectedness and cohesion. This often results in school counselor isolation, not in school counselor unity.

In addition, the traditional position of school counselor with its list of scattered and disconnected duties makes it difficult to be an advocate for the work that should be done – fully implementing a comprehensive school counseling program. How do school counselors explain who they are and what they do



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– their professional identity – by reciting a list of these scattered and disconnected duties? These lists often make school counselors appear as administrative assistants. As a result they are seen as office people, not program people.

The Program

Although the word program has appeared in school counseling literature since the 1920s, few efforts were made to conceptualize and operationalize the concept until the 1970s. By then it had become apparent that the traditional position with its scattered, disconnected and often lengthy lists of duties was no longer adequate to characterize and organize school counselors' work. In fact, it was causing role confusion and conflict among school counselors and causing many to view school counseling as an ancillary and marginalized service within education.

What was needed was a way to configure school counseling so it would be seen and understood as a mainstream program in education. The word program was chosen to identify and describe school counseling as having content, structure, organization and sequence. It was chosen to contain all of the content, activities, interventions and services designed and sequenced K-12 to meet all students' academic, career and personal/social development needs. ASCA adopted the program concept for school counseling with the publication of the ASCA National Model in 2003, which is now in its third edition.

The placement of the position of

school counselors within a comprehensive program framework represents a complete transformation of how school counseling is conceptualized and practiced. Instead of a single list of accumulated duties to identify and describe the work of school counselors, the program concept contains a complete array of developmental, preventive and responsive activities, interventions and services all designed to enable all students to become career- and college-ready. More specifically, it means school counseling programs provide direct and indirect services to all students.

A benefit of the program concept is that the program's delivery system of direct and indirect services provides authoritative descriptions for all of the school counselor's duties. Duties that have accumulated over time around the position of school counselor, including administrative and clerical tasks, are replaced with duties derived directly from the program's content and structure. As a result, scattered and disconnected lists of duties are replaced with duties that are systematically and sequentially arranged K-12 within the structure of the program's direct and indirect services.

Another benefit of the program concept is its ability to unify school counselors K-12. Although each grade and grade-level grouping has its own unique challenges requiring differing activities and interventions, the overall K-12 structure of the program remains the same and brings elementary, middle and high school counselors together with the same mission and vision. The program structure of direct and indirect services provides common language connecting school counselors K-12. At the same time it allows considerable flexibility in the selection of activities, interventions and time allocations depending on the needs of elementary, middle and high school students.

Still another benefit of the K-12 program is that it provides a way for all school counselors in a district to schedule their work and time across the direct and indirect services of the delivery system. By allocating 100 percent of their time across these services they can

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display and manage their work and keep track of their time. Developing a calendar for the program allows school counselors to move from the traditional position with its scattered and disconnected duties to a unified, intentional K-12 district comprehensive school counseling program. Calendars can also show administrators, teachers and parents that the program is developmental and proactive and is designed to reach all students K-12 and help them achieve their academic, career and personal/social development potential. It can also show administrators that full program implementation requires 100 percent of a school counselor's time.

Finally, a benefit of using the program concept for school counseling is that the program's structure provides a direct way for school counselors to collect and analyze data to evaluate the degree to which the program is in place and functioning as it should.

Developing a calendar for the program allows school counselors to move from the traditional position with its scattered and disconnected duties to a unified, intentional K-12 district comprehensive school counseling program.

Also, since school counselor duties are derived directly from the program's content and structure, they can be used to develop the necessary forms and procedures to evaluate school counselors' work. In addition, the structure of the program provides

ways to evaluate the overall results of the program as well as the impact of the program's activities, interventions and services on student behavior.

There is Work to Do

Fully implemented and accountable school counseling programs do not happen overnight, and school counselors cannot do this work alone. It takes a commitment from counselor educators, state school counselor organizations and state department of education personnel to adopt the common vision that all schools will have fully implemented and accountable school counseling programs. It also takes the support of school administrators. Unfortunately, recent studies conducted by ASCA and the National Association of Secondary School Principals suggest school administrators do not yet fully understand the value of the programmatic concept of school counseling and its benefits to students, the school and the community.

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In addition, fully implemented and accountable school counseling programs require counselor education programs to prepare school counselors in training to know school counseling program language (its content and structure) so they are able to clearly articulate the program concept. Once employed, school counselors must be able and willing to use this knowledge to become advocates for full program implementation and evaluation by using data to give regular presentations to their administration and local boards of education demonstrating the impact of their program on critical markers of student success.

State departments of education can also contribute to achieving the goal of fully implemented and accountable school counseling programs. They can make sure fully implemented and accountable school counseling programs are part of the state's school accreditation program standards in general and, more specifically, contribute to achieving

student performance expectations as defined by those standards. They can make sure the state's school counselor certification standards address the knowledge and skills school counselors need to implement and evaluate school counseling programs. They can work with state counselor education programs to improve the pre-service education of administrators by ensuring administrators-in-training learn about the value and contributions of school counseling programs and school counselors' proper role. Finally, state departments of education can work with the state school counselor organization to provide the necessary ongoing professional development to school counselors by establishing state-wide mentoring programs.

A common vision shared among counselor educators, school counseling organizations and state departments of education does not guarantee that every school will have fully implemented and accountable school counseling programs.

However, by working together they can create a climate of expectation, an expectation that every school district will have fully implemented and accountable school counseling programs that are an integral and central part of the instructional process to ensure all students are college- and career-ready when they graduate. 

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