SECONDARY SCHOOL COUNSELORS USE OF A PLAN OF

STUDY AND THE SCHOOL-TO-WORK

OPPORTUNITIES ACT (1994)

By

LESTA A. BURGESS

Bachelor of Science
Northeastern State University
Tahlequah, Oklahoma
1993

Master of Science
Northeastern State University
Tahlequah, Oklahoma
1994

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Thesis Approved:

Annie A. Anderson
Thesis Adviser

Gary L. Brue

James A. Gregson

James P. Key

Wayne B. Powell
Dean of the Graduate College

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Students graduating from high school are entering a work world very different

from the one of their parents. The expectations of today's society places growing

demands on students and the educational system. However, society and other factors

create obstacles for our children to be academically proficient and to be internationally

competitive. According to the Oklahoma State Department of Education (1996) dropping

out of school, substance abuse, peer pressure, and school violence are not abstract issues.

The National Center for Education Statistics (1997) reported the drop out rate of

American high school students in 1996 was 11.1%. These issues are real and have a

substantial impact on students and their educational development.

According to Pautler (1996) graduates will exit school in one of the following

ways: some graduates will go on to further education; some will enter military service;

some will enter employment; and the remaining graduates will flow into the pool of the

unemployed or underemployed. These are rather traditional exit points for most high

school graduates.

There are 78.7% of our high school graduates who are not going on to college.

These students have been evaluated by business and industry as being marginally

employable upon graduation from high school while the economy has doubled its

technological base every eight years for the past century (Chew, 1995).

Research has shown that people start out in one career and end up 5-10 years later

in an entirely different career. According to Ettinger (1995) respondents were asked how

they began in their present job or career in a 1995 Gallup Poll. Only 36% of all adults said

they made a conscious choice and followed a definite plan. For college graduates, 54%

had made a conscious choice, but of those with a high school education only 38% had a

definite plan. They were just as likely to have gotten started in their career through a

series of chance circumstances. In that same survey, six out of ten respondents stated that

not enough attention was given to students not going on to college to help them develop

skills to get a job after graduation.

All students deserve up-to-date career and labor market information to make

informed decisions about their life and their careers. "Providing individuals with the ability

to more fully explain and understand the what, why, and how of their overall life career

development, the career goals they may have, or the career concerns they may face, is

important, particularly in today's complex society" (Gysbers, 1996, p.15). With the

demands of a technological society, students must prepare themselves for connecting their

educational experiences to the world of work. They will need many skills to help them

make initial and future career choices.

Career development and counseling are essential to the success of students. The

counselor can focus on assisting students with identifying career goals and provide career

planning for achieving those goals. Students should be given a variety of career

exploration experiences to help them understand the importance between school and

work. According to Ettinger (1995), in 1989 and 1994 Gallup Polls, individuals are

interested in career planning and they want help in accessing information and in using that information. That poll also indicated that there is a strong need for and interest in career information about job opportunities and career options on the part of both youths and adults. Additionally, the poll indicated that there is a need to target career development programs not only to the college bound, but also to those who do not pursue a baccalaureate degree.

Yet, people place barriers on educational change. Change will only take place when people change. Cross (1974) stated, ". . . people will change when there is a chance for personal reward. When the rewards of change are social and professional position, personal recognition, group acceptance, monetary gain, fulfillment of commitment, or one of a host of other rewards, people will respond" (p.86). Educational change is inevitable and must be supported by students, parents, teachers, counselors and administration.

Statement of the Problem

The problem is a lack of guidance in career counseling using plans of study before completion of high school. Additionally there is a lack of direction after completion of high school. Too many students are aimlessly wondering from job to job after high school. There is also the problem of high schools experiencing large drop out rates and a large majority of students who do finish high school but do not enroll in postsecondary education. This forgotten majority continues to be ignored. Students such as these are not adequately prepared for the workforce. They often lack the skills necessary for making sound career decisions.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of the study was to collect data in order to determine if secondary school counselors were using a plan of study with students. This study sought to determine the extent counselors were using a plan of study with students, the grade level of students, and how often the plan of study was revisited. Additionally, this study sought to identify the amount of parental/legal guardian involvement and recognize who assists the student in selection of their course work. This study further sought to identify the affect of the School-to-Work Opportunities Act (1994) on the use of a plan of study.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study to provide an analysis of the extent secondary school counselors were using a plan of study and the affect of the School-to-Work Opportunities Act (1994):

1. What plan of study does the counselor use?

2. To what extent is a plan of study being used by secondary school counselors?

3. What is the grade level of students filing a plan of study?

4. How often is the plan of study revisited?

5. What is the amount of parental/legal guardian involvement in developing and updating the plan of study?

6. Who aids the students in the selection of their course work?

7. Does the School-to-Work Opportunities Act (1994) affect the counselors use of plans of studies?

Assumptions and Limitations

The plan of study is a guide for secondary school students in their course selection. All students should have a purposeful course of study that goes beyond the formality of signing up for classes. The plan of study should reflect a student's abilities, interests, and future goals. It should be reviewed and adjusted regularly and be taken seriously.

The School-to-Work Opportunities Act (1994) requires all participating students to develop a program of study and curricula consisting of applied methodologies, interdisciplinary teaching and team teaching strategies. The integrated curricula prepares the student for employment in a broad occupational cluster. Additionally, the linkage between secondary and postsecondary institutions are established.

Recognizing the importance of a plan of study and the School-to-Work Act (1994), the following assumptions are made:

1. Secondary school counselors know the purpose and use of a plan of study.

2. Secondary school counselors have knowledge of the School-to-Work Opportunities Act (1994).

Recognizing the State of Oklahoma has atypical education systems the following limitations are:

1. The survey will be limited to the State of Oklahoma.

2. The state of Oklahoma is unique in that the Vocational Education system is under separate direction than the public school system.

3. The study will have time constraints and will be a one shot survey with no follow-up.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions of terms are furnished to provide, as nearly as possible,

clear and concise meanings of terms as used in this study and defined by The National

School-to-Work Office (1996) and the Oklahoma School-to-Work System (1996).

All Students: As defined in the Act, the term "all students" means "both male and

female students from a broad range of backgrounds and circumstances, including

disadvantaged students, students with diverse racial, ethnic, or cultural backgrounds,

American Indians, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, students with disabilities, students

with limited-English proficiency, migrant children, school dropouts, and academically

talented students" (National School-to-Work Office, 1996, p. 3).

Basic Skills: Basic skills are essential academic and personal abilities that are

necessary for success in school, and the workplace. Traditionally referred to as the three

R's---reading, writing, and arithmetic---in recent times, the term has been expanded by

both educators and employers to include a number of cognitive and interpersonal abilities,

including the capability to think and solve problems, to communicate information in oral,

written, and electronic forms, to work effectively alone and in teams, and to take

responsibility for one's own development (National School-to-Work Office, 1996, p. 4).

Career Awareness: Career awareness activities generally take place at the

elementary level. They are designed to make students aware of the broad range of careers

and/or occupations in the world of work, including options that may not be traditional for

their gender, race or ethnicity. Career awareness activities range from limited exposure to

the world of work, through occasional field trips and classroom speakers, to

comprehensive exposure. The latter may involve curriculum redesign, introduction of

students to a wide span of career options, and integration with activities at the middle school level (National School-to-Work Office, 1996, p. 9).

Career Development: Career development is the process through which an individual comes to understand his or her place in the world of work. Students develop and identify their careers through a continuum of career awareness, career exploration, and work exposure activities that help them to discern their own career path. Career development encompasses an individual's education and career related choices, and the outcome of those choices (National School-to-Work Office, 1996, p. 10).

Career Exploration: Career exploration generally takes place at the middle school level and is designed to provide some in-depth exposure to career options for students. Activities may include the study of career opportunities in particular fields to identify potential careers, writing individual learning plans that dovetail with career majors offered at the high school level, or review of local labor marker information (National School-to-Work Office, 1996, p. 11).

Career Exposure: Career exposure can be defined as activities at the high school level that provide actual work experience connecting classroom learning to work (National School-to-Work Office, 1996, p. 11).

Career Guidance & Counseling: As defined in the Act, the term "career guidance and counseling" means, "program---(A) that pertain to the body of subject matter and related techniques and methods organized for the development in individuals of career awareness, career planning, career decision-making, placement skills, and knowledge and understanding of local, State, and national occupational, educational, and ongoing market needs, trends and opportunities; (b) that assist individuals in making and implementing informed educational and occupational choices; and (C) that help students develop career

options with attention to surmounting gender, race, ethnic, disability, language or socioeconomic impediments to career options and encouraging careers in nontraditional employment" (National School-to-Work Office, 1996, p. 12).

General Track: The general track is characterized by a broadly defined curriculum that is less rigorous in nature than the academic and the vocational track. General programs of study prepare students for neither college nor the workforce (National School-to-Work Office, 1996, p. 25).

Integrated Curriculum: Integrated curriculum is when academic and occupational or career subject matter—normally offered in separate courses—are taught in a manner that emphasizes relationships among disciplines. Integrated curriculum may take many forms, ranging from simple introduction of academics into traditional occupational courses to comprehensive programs that organize all instruction around career major themes (National School-to-Work Office, 1996, p. 30).

Plan of Study: A planned, coherent sequence of courses leading to or supporting a career major (Oklahoma School-to-Work System, 1996, p 10).

Secondary School: A school comprising any span of grades beginning with the next grade following an elementary or middle-school (usually 7, 8, or 9) and ending with or below grade 12. Both junior high schools and senior high schools are included. (National School-to-Work Office, 1996, p. 53).

Summary

The school systems and curriculum are failing far too many students. There is still a large number of high school drop outs. There are also many who do complete high

school but do not know what they will do with their lives. They have no set goals or direction. Basically, they are not prepared for life.

Without guidance and direction, America will continue to see a large number of high school drop outs, substance abuse, peer pressure, and school violence. Additionally, the lack of guidance and direction for the students not going on to college will continue to be a problem. All students deserve assistance with career guidance and development, regardless of whether or not they continue on to postsecondary education.

Barriers in education must be eliminated. Change in the educational system is unavoidable and students, counselors, teachers, parents/legal guardians all need to support these changes. It is time for everyone to work together to ensure these changes take place and guarantee students a brighter and well guided future.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter reviews the literature in the following areas: (1) Historical Evolution

of Career Guidance and the School-to-Work Opportunities Act (1994); (2) Guidance and

Career Counseling; (3) Guidance and Career Counselors; (4) Plan of Study; (5) School-to-

Work Opportunities Act (1994); (6) Common School-to-Work Models; and (7) Education

and the School-to-Work Opportunities Act (1994).

Historical Evolution of Career Guidance and the

School-to-Work Opportunities Act (1994)

Career Education

Isolated career guidance programs were established in public schools near the turn

of the century. In San Francisco, George A. Merrill developed a plan for students to

explore industrial arts courses. Many of his innovations resemble the career-education

movement of the 1970s. In Central High School of Detroit, Jesse B. Davis served as

counselor for 11th-grade students from 1898 to 1907. His major duties involved

educational and vocational counseling. Later, as principal of this school, he required all

7th-grade students to write a weekly report on occupational interests for their English

class. Davis emphasized the moral value of hard work as well as the benefits of occupational information (Zunker, 1990, p. 5).

In the early 1900s Frank Parsons provided a systematic plan for career guidance that has endured, with some modifications, to the present time. According to his philosophical orientation to social reform, there was to be equality and opportunity for all. The procedures he outlined for helping individuals select an occupation were to be primarily based upon their interests and aptitudes and upon occupational information (Zunker, 1990, p. 5).

In the early 1970s, the concept of career education emerged in reaction to charge that current educational systems were not adequately preparing youth for work. In 1971, a plan was proposed by Commissioner of Education Sidney P. Marland. The plan would specifically address career development, attitudes, and values in addition to traditional learning. Career education as a new educational philosophy was considered integral to the education process, from kindergarten through adulthood. The career education programs centered on such topics as career awareness, career exploration, value clarification, decision making skills, career orientation, and career preparation (Zunker, 1990, p.14)

The relationships between traditional educational programs and the world of work was the major focus of career education. Career education had as its major purpose to prepare each individual for living and working in our society. The programs of career education were not to be simply additional courses added to traditional curricula but infused into existing curricula (Zunker, 1990, p.227). Hoyt, et al, (1973) stated, ". . . the objective of an ongoing career awareness approach is to use existing curriculum and

community in the development and maintenance of a positive self-concept as it relates to a

synthesis of future work roles" (p.30).

Robert E. Taylor, Director of the Center for Vocational and Technical Education

at the Ohio State University, put it this way:

> Career education incorporates a view of the curriculum as a systematic, integrated, and cumulative series of experiences designed to help each student achieve (1) increasing power to make relevant decisions about his life, and (2) increasing skill in the performance of his life roles.

> Career education is designed to capacitate individuals for their life roles: economic, community, home, avocational, religious, and aesthetic. It recognizes the centrality of careers in shaping our lives. Careers determine or limit where we work, where we live, our associates, and other dimensions that are significant in defining our life-style. [Career education] should be viewed as lifelong. It is pervasive, permeating the entire school program and even extending beyond it. It is designed for all students.

> Career education is a systematic attempt to *increase* the career options available to individuals. . . .Through a wide range of school and community-based resources, young people's career horizons are to be broadened. Their self-awareness is to be enhanced. The broad framework for accomplishing this [consists of] the phases of career awareness, career exploration, career preparation.

> The program . . . is to be designed so youngsters will, in fact, have two options at several levels: continuing education or employment. (American Association of School Administrators, 1973, p. 4)

Most school systems are already using some elements of the career education concept

such as distributive education, industrial cooperative training, and cooperative office

education.

Some of the broad goals toward which career education was directed included the

following:

1. Integrating vocational and academic study;

2. Enhancing the value of work;

3. Merging school and community;

4. Strengthening bonds between the adult world and the world of youth;

5. Providing a structure for lifelong learning, and;

6. Increasing the confidence and competence of young and old to discover their

own potential and to choose and live productive and rewarding lives, including

both work and leisure pursuits (Green, 1978, p. 29).

Given the broad goals of career education, it is clear that the purpose was to better

prepare youth for life and for improving educational outcomes.

The American Association of School Administrators stated career education is not:

It is not just a new label for vocational education, although vocational education and its focus on preparation for specific occupations will be a very important component of any career education system.

Emphatically, it is not a euphemism for general education, as Sidney Marland's statements make clear; nor is it a new track to be offered alongside, or as an alternative to, strictly academic college prep programs.

It is not something confined to secondary schools but an integrated, developmental approach to the whole educational process that begins when children enter school and continues throughout their entire lives.

It is not education dictated by manpower and labor projections . . . but a new focus and structure of the entire educational system, building on the solid foundation you already have.

Finally, and most important, career education is not (as vocational education has so long been) "for somebody else's children." It is for all young people, including yours. (1973, p. 8)

Given this description of what career education is not, it is obvious career education had

something to offer everyone. A career education program was not just for an elite few or

the forgotten majority. According to Zunker (1990), "Career education collaboration is a

cooperative effort among educators, family, the total community work force, and government agencies" (p.260). Zunker (1990) further stated, "The career counselor has a very comprehensive role, consisting of teaching, monitoring, consulting, and acting as a liaison between school and community" (p.260).

Career counselors advocate career-education concepts by emphasizing that learning modules infused in formal instruction foster greater self-awareness, knowledge of occupational roles, and an understanding of the purpose of work in our society. Career-guidance strategies for the junior high school should include learning decision making and problem solving, relating self concept to educational and occupational goals, understanding strengths and abilities, exploring occupations, and understanding sex-role stereotyping. At the senior high school level career-guidance strategies should include decision making and problem solving, selecting and evaluating occupational choices, work habits improvement and working with others, personal-social skill development, lifestyle and leisure development, and seeking and securing employment (Zunker, 1990, p. 260).

Guidance and Career Counseling

The inadequacy of guidance and counseling programs is not an especially new problem. In 1984, a commission established by the College Entrance Examination Board concluded that the profession of school counseling is in trouble because of structural changes required in the profession. The Board also stated additional trouble could be found in administrative tasks that are irrelevant to counseling, the high student/counselor ratios, and cutbacks in funding for counseling programs. The study voiced great concern

that effective career counseling, which should encourage more students to complete a

program of studies adequately preparing them for college and career, remained rare. As

Coy observed in 1991, fully formed career guidance programs are a rarity in American K-

12 school systems. (McCharen, 1995)

Among a number of recommendations, the commission urged individual secondary

schools to take the following actions:

1. Establish a broad-based process for determining the guidance and
   counseling needs of students and how to meet them.

2. Develop school programs under the principal's leadership that emphasize
   the guidance counselor as a "monitor and promoter of student
   potential," as well as coordinator of the school's guidance plan.

3. Inform and involve parents in the choices, plans, decisions, and learning
   activities of students.

4. Strengthen collaboration of schools with community agencies and
   colleges, businesses, and other community resources to enhance
   available student services. (McCharen, 1995, p. 143)

Rogers (1996) endorsed the commissions recommendations with a more in depth

explanation of collaboration with the statement:

An effective career planning program must involve collaboration among schools,

families, businesses, industries and community members. Collaboration means that

all stakeholders work together to design a program that will help each student

establish and achieve goals through on-going career planning. Those involved in

the collaborative development of the program are more likely to feel a sense of

ownership and are more committed to continue their work to ensure the program's

success. This participation should be ongoing so that unique local needs are

included in the planning, implementation and evaluation cycle of the career

planning process. (p. 43)

Given this explanation of collaboration it is imperative that a career planning program

involve more than just career counselors.

Career counseling should help students to clarify and to articulate their aims and

aspirations and ensure that they are making informed decisions in relation to the needs of

the labor market (Watts, 1996). Kompelien (1996) stated:

A well-designed career planning process enables individuals to make the

connection from school to employment in a logical and well thought out manner

through the use of a coherent career plan. Unfortunately, for the majority of

Americans, the career planning process is somewhat less than well thought out and

planned. All too often, our nation's youth are left adrift to make their way in the

work force with little or no thought or preparation. (p. 51)

Students need to see the connection between school and work. "Guidance

counselors must insist teachers build learning activities into the curriculum to show

students the relationship between school studies and future career opportunities"

(Bottoms, 1992, p. 167). Studies have shown students have improved test scores when

they can make the connection between school and work.

The purpose of a guidance program is to serve all students, college-bound, career-

bound, or vocational-bound. Rogers (1996) stated, "An important goal of any career

planning program should be to ensure that students have the information and work

learning experiences to help them make sound career and education decisions" (p. 44).

In the early years of school, the processes and activities that are part of the career development program focus on awareness of the world of work and an understanding of oneself. In the middle school years, the focus is on exploration. In high school the career development program should focus on preparing the student to make tentative career plans, pursue additional education or training, or completing the tasks which will prepare them to enter the work force. Stages in career development are somewhat uniform and related to age, but development is also influenced by factors such as parental status, economic factors, or a disability. To meet these varying needs, career development programs must be individualized and designed to meet specific needs of all individuals over the life span (Ettinger, 1995).

The career guidance program's goal is to provide students with the knowledge and skills needed to develop realistic career plans and make the appropriate decisions to carry out those plans. The guidance program can assist students with the exploration stage of career development by helping them achieve the following goals:

1. Identify their unique interests, skills, and personality characteristics.

2. Distinguish between several broad occupational areas in terms of potential satisfaction, the nature of work tasks, and the future demand/need for those occupational areas.

3. Learn about different educational options as they relate to career choices (such as the choice of the vocational curriculum in high school as preparation for a skilled trade versus the college track as preparation for a profession).

4. Identify future decisions that they will need to make in order to implement different career and educational choices (such as the need for postsecondary training and/or the need for financial aid).

5. Make short-term and long-term educational plans based on tentative choices of occupational areas they want to explore (such as choosing advanced math

courses in high school if they want to explore math-related careers) (Sears, 1995, p. 40).

Career guidance programs help students become lifelong learners who can access and understand information about self and the work world. Because of the guidance program students are able to make informed and wise decisions about their lives.

Guidance and Career Counselors

The guidance counselor is the single most important person to the student, the staff, and parents. Yet, the case load of a single school counselor can be very high. It is not uncommon for counselors to have 200 plus students under their guidance. However, a counselor's top priority is to serve as an advocate for the student (Chew, 1995).

The role of the guidance counselor has changed and guidance and counseling programs must change to adapt to the demands of changing schools and changing workplaces (Chew, 1995). Many counselors today are inviting academic and vocational teachers to become partners with them in the counseling process. This relationship helps reduce the student-counselor ratio and provides effective one-on-one counseling.

Teachers and school staff should be involved so the students can explore a variety of occupational options and it is the responsibility of the counselor to encourage this involvement. Sears (1995) stated the goals of assisting students ". . . can be met by integrating comprehensive career units focusing on self-awareness, career information, and decision making into social studies or English classes (p.40). Further, "counselors can facilitate these career guidance units with classroom teachers. Teachers can assign

vocabulary, reading and writing assignments that focus on career and educational planning activities, thus meeting subject area goals as well as career goals" (Sears, 1995, p. 41).

Guidance and career counselors need to come out of the office and into the classroom and the community. Guidance and career counselors need to be up-to-date on trends in business and industry, including new and evolving occupations and current job placement opportunities. Counselors must develop and update programs and materials to orient students, parents, and teachers to the changing nature of the workplace and the increasing demands of higher education (Bottoms, 1992).

A successful career development program has parents as key partners. Trusty and Watts (1996) stated, "When high school students were asked to choose between the opinions of parents and peers, parents' opinions were overwhelmingly chosen in the area of career development" (p.242). Trusty and Watts (1996) further stated, "Children's openness to parents' help, combined with parents' desire to help their children, and positive perceptions of counselors and educational institutions all point toward fertile ground for counseling" (p.248).

The commitment of parents to the process adds significant influence to efforts both at home and in the community. They *must* be kept informed of plans and progress at all times. Specifically, counselors should:

a. plan and conduct on site activities (i.e., open house, career fair, etc.)

b. host parent meetings

c. prepare and distribute correspondence, offering motivation and elaboration on the need for their involvement

d. send materials home that can be used for career planning in a more private setting

e. provide information about labor market trends which can be obtained from State Occupational Information Coordinating Committees or state or national labor relations council/board/department

f. tap the PTA to access reluctant parents (Lehman, 1996, p. 28).

Counselors and teachers should participate in business and industry tours to see firsthand what the student will need in the future. Students today will change occupations ten times and careers three times. And because of technology, they will encounter careers not yet invented. Education and training for the jobs of the future will be a lifelong process with many options and pathways. The counselor will play an integral and active role in assisting students with information and planning. The result will be the acquisition of a variety of skills, credentials and degrees (Oklahoma Department of Vocational and Technical Education, 1994).

Few decisions that are made in life are as influential on lives as the selection of an occupation. This decision influences income and standard of living, personal and social identity, and affects self-esteem and educational attainment. Unfortunately, the choice of one's career is often left to chance or made with inadequate information. Better career advising and planning will assist all students with the career development process (Chew, 1995, p. 36).

Plan of Study

All students should have individual career and education plans. Research suggests that students who have a plan that focuses and guides their course taking in high school

are more likely to take classes necessary to succeed in college and in careers. Decisions about students' future educational and career plans should rest unequivocally in the hands of young people and their parents. But all students should have a purposeful course of study that goes beyond formality of signing up for classes. It should reflect a student's abilities, interests, and future goals. It should be reviewed and adjusted regularly. It should be taken seriously, not simply be a pro forma activity (Olson, 1997).

An important part of career exploration and decision making is choosing high school courses. Students need to know the full range of options and opportunities available to them. The plan of study provides the student a process to help them know where they are headed (Oklahoma Department of Vocational and Technical Education, 1996).

The purpose of an individual career and education plan ". . . is not to track students, but rather to give parents and students more information so that they can make sound decisions about the future" (Olson, 1997, p. 248). Students generally are not informed enough to choose the courses they will need to take in high school. "A typical eighth-grade student lacks the knowledge and information-gathering skills to determine the best educational route to follow" (Bottoms, 1992, p. 163). Counseling and filing a plan of study will aid in informing the student of the courses needed for the variety of career options.

When 8th grade students begin scheduling their high school courses they should know their career choices and have a plan for their high school program. Counselors or advisors should assist them in developing a tentative plan of study based on their career interests, and make them aware of the standards and requirements of the occupations that

are within their career major. The original, completed, and signed plan of study should be placed in the student's career folder or portfolio (Oklahoma Department of Vocational and Technical Education, 1996).

The career portfolio can help students, ". . . explore the developmental aspects of their learning and growth in a systematic way with the goal of formulating tentative career and education plans" (Ettinger, 1995, p. 51). Clearly written career goals and a plan of achieving them should be part of the career development process. The plan should include information on occupational interests and educational options. It should be accessible to the student and the student should know that it can be changed and updated at any time.

A career portfolio can be assembled to help students plan, set goals, and move more successfully from school to the workplace or postsecondary education. The purpose of the portfolio is to provide a tangible means whereby students may collect and use pertinent information to assist with personal, educational, and career decision-making. In essence the career portfolio is a visual resume that portrays the student's strengths, achievements, and capabilities (Chew, 1995).

The implementation of a written, planned, and comprehensive guidance program may benefit the various populations involved in the program in the following ways:

Benefits for Students

1. Improves academic performance and success in school.

2. Increases opportunities for career awareness, exploration and preparation.

3. Develops decision-making and problem-solving skills.

4. Assists in acquiring knowledge to effectively relate to others.

5. Increases opportunities for student assistance and support.

Benefits for Parents

1. Provides support for parents regarding their child's educational development.

2. Provides increased opportunities to participate in their child's career development.

3. Increases opportunities for parent/school interaction.

4. Increases opportunities to participate in academic and postsecondary planning.

Benefits for Teachers

1. Encourages positive relationships among students, parents, teachers and school counselors.

2. Provides an interdisciplinary team effort to address educational goals.

3. Provides direct support to the classroom to improve student academic performance.

Benefits for Administrators

1. Provides program structure with specific guidance content.

2. Provides a means of evaluating program efforts.

3. Increases the opportunities to monitor student success and provide support.

Benefits for Local Boards of Education

1. Ensures that a quality guidance program is available to all students.

2. Provides program information to the community.

3. Provides a basis for determining funding allocations.

4. Provides ongoing data relative to student achievement.

Benefits for School Counselors

1. Provides a clearly defined role and function.

2. Increases effectiveness and efficiency in performing guidance functions.

3. Provides an organized plan to reach all students in the school.

4. Promotes participation on interdisciplinary curriculum teams.

5. Provides a tool for program management.

6. Outlines a plan for helping students achieve their potential. (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 1996, p. 7)

The plan of study should be reviewed annually with the student, the guidance counselor and the parent or legal guardian. Many schools plan for this review during annual parent conference or parent night at the school. A few high schools in Oklahoma make this annual review a requirement for the student to complete the enrollment process for the next grade. It is critical that the plan of study be a working document which is revised to reflect the students' changing interests and goals (Oklahoma Department of Vocational and Technical Education, 1996).

By the time a student enters the 9th and 10th grade levels, he or she should have had adequate awareness and exploration activities so that ideas are being formulated regarding possible careers. To ensure that the students can reach their career goals, a counselor or mentor should have guided the students in formulating a plan of study (Oklahoma Department of Vocational and Technical Education, 1996). "Providing individuals with the ability to more fully explain and understand the what, why, and how of their overall life career development, the career goals they may have, or the career concerns they may face, is important, particularly in today's complex society" (Gysbers, 1996, p. 15).

School-to-Work Opportunities Act (1994)

The School-to-Work Opportunities Act was passed on May 4, 1994. The legislation was passed, "To establish a national framework for the development of School-to-Work Opportunities systems in all States, and for other purposes" (Public Law 103-239, 108 Stat 568, May 4, 1994, p. 5). Before the passage of the act, Choy (1994) stated,

These systems will help our youth acquire the knowledge, skills, and labor market information they need to make a smooth and effective transition from high school to career-oriented employment or to further education as well as to respond to changes in local labor markets and economies. Specifically, the proposed legislation calls for programs that combine school-based and work-based learning, with employers participating as full partners. (p. 57)

The goal of the act (Hudelson, 1994, p. 22) is to give ". . . every student the opportunity to sign up for a program that provides a clear pathway to a career." The act had three basic program components: (1) school-based learning component, (2) work-based learning component, and (3) connecting activities component.

School-based Learning Component

The school-based learning component would provide students career awareness, exploration, and counseling. This would help students identify, select and consider interests, goals and career majors. Students would be allowed to explore and choose a career that may have traditionally not been for their gender, race or ethnicity. Students would receive this information not later than the seventh grade. At the beginning of the

students eleventh grade, they would choose a career major (Public Law 103-239, 108 Stat 568, May 4, 1994, p. 9).

There are six major elements in the school-based learning component. The first major element requires that students begin participation in a career awareness or career exploration and counseling program no later than the seventh grade. This does not mean students would be tracked. Rather, it would expose students to a variety of occupational choices. This in turn would encourage students to identify their interests and consider a variety of goals and career majors, including options that may not be traditional for their gender, race or ethnicity (Brustein & Mahler, 1994, p. 25).

The second major element is for students to select a career major by at least the eleventh grade. The Departments of Labor and Education have defined "career major" as a coherent sequence of courses or field of study that prepares a student for a first job and that:

- Integrates academic and occupational preparation through the coordination of school-based and work-based learning and the establishment of linkages between secondary and postsecondary institutions;

- Prepares the student for employment in a broad occupational cluster or industrial sector;

- Typically includes at least two years of secondary education and at least one or two years of postsecondary education or registered apprenticeship training;

- Results in the award of a high school diploma or GED (or an alternative diploma or equivalent certificate for students with disabilities), a certificate or diploma identifying completion of one or two years of postsecondary education, and a skill certificate;

- May lead to further training, such as entry into a registered apprenticeship program or admission to a degree-granting college or university (Brustein & Mahler, 1994, p. 25).

The third major element of school-based learning is the development of a program of study that meets the academic content standards that the state has established for all students. For example, a math or science program must be made relevant to the student's chosen career, including providing the student with information about how that knowledge would be applied in a real work setting. However, the content of the program is to remain as vigorous as it has always been (Brustein & Mahler, 1994, p. 27).

The fourth major element is to develop a program of instruction and curricula that integrates academic and vocational learning into a program consisting of applied methodologies, interdisciplinary teaching and team teaching strategies. This integrated curricula should also provide instruction in all aspects of an industry as it relates to the career majors of participating students. This means that the instruction that students receive in their chosen career major should include not just the technical skills related to that industry, but an understanding of the broader issues involved (Brustein & Mahler, 1994, p. 27).

The fifth major element is the provision of regularly scheduled evaluations. The purpose of these evaluations is to assess student progress in the following areas:

- Academic strengths and weaknesses;

- Academic progress;

- Workplace knowledge;

- Career goals;

- Additional learning opportunities needed to master core academic and vocational skills (Brustein & Mahler, 1994, p. 27).

The sixth major element under the school-based learning component is for partnerships to design mechanisms to enable students participating in school-to-work programs to move easily from secondary to postsecondary programs. These mechanisms are already in place in tech prep programs around the country and can serve as a model for partnerships created to develop and implement school-to-work systems (Brustein & Mahler, 1994, p. 28).

Work-based Learning Component

The work-based learning component consists of mandatory activities and permissible activities. The mandatory activities would be: (1) work experience, (2) a planned program of job training and work experiences leading to the award of a skill certificate, (3) workplace mentoring, (4) instruction in general workplace competencies, and (5) broad instruction. Permissible activities would be: (1) paid work experience, (2) job shadowing, (3) school-sponsored enterprises, or (4) on-the-job training (Public Law 103-239, 108 Stat 568, May 4, 1994, p. 10).

The work-based learning component of the School-to-Work Opportunities Act (1994) consists of five key elements. The first key element concerns work experience. Actual on-the-job experience in the workplace is a vital part of work-based learning. The work experience could be either paid or non-paid but priority is given to systems and partnerships that provide high-quality paid work experiences (Brustein & Mahler, 1994, p. 30).

The second key element is the provision of a planned program of job training and work experiences, including training related to pre-employment and employment skills.

The program should be planned to provide a series of experiences to be mastered at progressively higher levels. These activities must be:

- Coordinated with the school-based learning component;

- Relevant to the career majors of students;

- Designed to lead to the award of skill certificates (Brustein & Mahler, 1994, p. 30).

The third key element under the work-based learning component is workplace mentoring. This will play a crucial role in coordinating and integrating the school-based and work-based learning components for participating students. The workplace mentor will be responsible for:

- Critiquing the student's performance;

- Challenging the student to perform well;

- Working in consultation with classroom teachers and the employer (Brustein & Mahler, 1994, p. 30).

The fourth key element requires each program to provide instruction in general workplace competencies, including the development of positive work attitudes and employability and participative skills. Adequate academic and technical knowledge is only one prerequisite of a well-rounded employee. Today's high-performance workplace requires a diversity of general skills, such as teamwork, problem solving and critical thinking (Brustein & Mahler, 1994, p. 31).

The fifth key element under the work-based learning component is broad instruction, to the extent practicable, in all aspects of the industry in which participating students are interested. The education and training that school-to-work students receive

must be broad enough to give them a solid career foundation and the skills for adapting to changing environments (Brustein & Mahler, 1994, p. 31).

Connecting Activities' Component

The connecting activities' component would provide each participating student with a mentor and each student would be matched to an employer. Employers, mentors, teachers, and counselors would receive necessary training to implement this component. Also, under this component, assistance would be provided to schools and employers to integrate academic and occupational learning. Additionally, participants who completed the program would receive assistance in finding an appropriate job, continuing their education, or entering into an additional training program (Public Law 103-239, 108 Stat 568, May 4, 1994, p. 10).

There are eight mandatory activities in the connecting activities component. The first mandatory activity is matching students with employers. This would involve identifying and securing sites that can provide the resources and support needed to give participating students meaningful and productive work experiences in their chosen careers. Partnerships must provide counseling services for students prior to placement in a paid or non-paid work experience. It is critical that the career major the student selects is planned to provide him or her with related school-based and work-based learning opportunities (Brustein & Mahler, 1994, p. 33).

The second mandatory activity in the connecting activities component is establishing liaisons between education and work. Each school-to-work program will provide students with a school-site mentor to act as an intermediary among the various

individuals involved --- including the students, the employer, the workplace mentor, teachers, school administrators, parents and others within the community. Close supervision is required to ensure that students meet the objectives of the work-based learning component and that the work-based learning experience dovetails with the school-based learning component (Brustein & Mahler, 1994, p. 33).

The third mandatory activity is providing comprehensive technical assistance for everyone involved. Partnerships are required to provide technical assistance and services to participating employers as well as schools and students. Partnerships will also need to provide staff development for teachers and counselors to ensure the seamless integrating of the school-based and work-based learning components. It must be noted that school-to-work funds can be used to train workplace mentors but not to pay their salaries. However, it is permissible to both educate and pay the salary for a school-site mentor with school-to-work funds (Brustein & Mahler, 1994, p. 34).

The fourth mandatory activity in the connecting activities component is to provide assistance to schools and employers in designing procedures for integrating the school-based and work-based learning components. These two components must be so intimately integrated that it may be difficult to see the boundaries between the two. To achieve this kind of integration, secondary faculty, postsecondary faculty and employers will have to spend a considerable amount of time together jointly planning the school-based and work-based components. Partnerships are required to assist participating schools and employers in developing or modifying curricula to integrate academic and occupational learning into

both the school-based and work-based learning components. This will ensure students are being adequately prepared for the workforce of the future (Brustein & Mahler, 1994, p. 35).

The fifth mandatory activity is to encourage participation of employers. Local partnerships will be required to develop a series of employer incentive strategies aimed at seeking and retaining the services of employers as teachers and trainers at the workplace. Only through collaborative partnerships with employers can workplace environments be designed that represent the real life situations students will require to both motivate them and prepare them for the ever-changing workplace (Brustein & Mahler, 1994, p. 35).

The sixth mandatory activity in the connecting activities component is the assistance of job placement, continuing education or further training. This might entail directing students toward other community services --- such as public and private employment agencies and career counselors --- to help them make a successful school-to-work transition. Local partnerships are to develop a system that makes sure students are not left wondering what the next step is (Brustein & Mahler, 1994, p. 35).

The seventh mandatory activity is the collection and analysis of post-program outcomes of participants. To the extent practicable, programs will be required to collect data on participants based on the following:

- Socioeconomic status

- Race

- Gender

- Ethnicity

- Culture

- Disabilities

- Limited-English proficiency

- School dropouts

- Disadvantaged students

- Academically talented students

The analysis of this information will allow partnerships to longitudinally follow

program participants and completers. This will provide information that will indicate

whether or not the program has been effective. Additionally, it will highlight areas that

need to be improved and determine methods that have been more effective than others.

This information will be required at the end of each fiscal year (Brustein & Mahler,

1994, p. 35).

The eighth mandatory activity in the connecting activities component requires the

youth development programs under the act be linked with employer and industry strategies

for upgrading the skills of their workers. The local partnership would work with various

members from its school-to-work network to address the issues of employee training,

retraining and future workforce development (Brustein & Mahler, 1994, p. 36).

School-to-Work Models

There are four models of School-to-Work. They are (1) Career Academies, (2)

Occupational/Academic Clusters, (3) Tech Prep, and (4) Youth Apprenticeship. In

choosing the most appropriate model, Williamson (1995) stated:

Each model has advantages, and no single approach is right for every situation.

Many factors --- your student population, the economic picture in your area,

the kinds of programs you already have in place, the business located in your area and other considerations --- will affect which model will best serve your students. (p. 27)

One model could be combined with another. For example, the combination of work-based instruction (youth apprenticeship) with school-based (tech prep) instruction. There is an advantage of combining models. Cahill (1994) stated, "Students who successfully complete a youth apprenticeship phase with tech prep may readily find themselves employed by the company participating in the program" (p. 14). Cahill (1994) further stated, "Combining them can give students the best of school and work and smooth the way for their all-important move into productive citizenship" (p. 14).

Career Academies

Career Academies can best be described as a school within a school. The academies were originally designed for the at-risk student. This has since changed to include all students from all ability levels. The structure of the model, ". . . allows a small group of students to interact with one another and the same staff throughout their years in the academy" (Williamson, 1995, p. 28). The staff might consist of four teachers. One teacher would be selected from math, one from English, one from science, and one from the vocational area. The advantage of the same staff working together (Grubb, 1995) would be how relatively easy and natural it is to integrate vocationally relevant material into academic courses. Additionally, with the same staff, projects could be developed that would cover all four areas. This would show how academic education and vocational education are utilized together.

Career academies are not without problems, particularly between academy staff and other school staff. The non-academy personal may believe the academy receives more money than the non-academy. Similarly academy teachers have additional responsibilities they may not want that include establishing and maintaining business relationships (Williamson, 1995, p. 30).

Another problem often encountered is one of resentment. Teachers outside the academies often know little about the programs. They also complained about the teaching load differences. They believe academy teachers get out of meetings, get the best students and do not work as hard as non-academy teachers. However, when they do learn the dynamics of the academy, they find their beliefs were very much mistaken (Olson, 1994, p. 30). When problems are worked out, the Career academy model can serve as a successful model in the School-to-Work movement.

Occupational/Academic Clusters

A student would choose a career cluster or major in the Occupational/Academic clusters model. This usually would be at the beginning or end of tenth grade. A student would take classes that would be linked to the chosen career cluster or major. Grubb provided this example:

Students in a health cluster are likely to take courses related to health occupations, as well as biology and chemistry courses that emphasize medical applications, while a pre-engineering major is more likely to emphasize math, physics, and certain computer applications. (1995, p. 97)

Given this example, Grubb further stated, ". . . the adoption of clusters or majors provides a theme, issue, or broad occupational area that can focus both the academic and the vocational content of the high school years" (1995, p. 98).

In occupational/academic cluster models academic teachers work closely with vocational teachers to, ". . . plan together the appropriate sequences of academic and vocational courses within each career path, creating more collaboration among teachers and greater opportunities for curriculum integration of various kinds" (Grubb, 1995, p. 248).

Many vocational educators view the occupational/academic cluster model as the best way to integrate academic and vocational instruction. Education reformers believe the model can be used effectively to provide School-to-Work learning experiences for a large proportion of the country's high school students (Williamson, 1995, p. 31).

Tech Prep

Dale Parnell introduced the concept of tech prep in 1985. Tech prep is, ". . . a two-year high-school program coordinated with two years of study leading to an associate degree from a community or technical college" (Williamson, 1995, p. 31). The program was originally designed for the "forgotten majority" students. However, tech prep is for all students.

Scott (1991) stated tech prep is, ". . . a relatively new educational concept that prepares people for technical careers by linking high school studies with community

college coursework" (p. 22). To further describe the tech prep concept, Scott (1991) wrote:

> Most tech prep/associate programs operate on a "2+2" basis: two years of high
> school and two years of college. Tech prep is designed to work similarly to
> traditional college prep programs. Secondary students with an aptitude or interest
> in pursuing advanced technical training are placed in programs that prepare them
> for more advanced training at a community college after they graduate from high
> school. (p. 63)

Given this description one should agree that tech prep can add structure and direction to educational programs. However, no program is without barriers. Bragg and Layton (1995) identified two barriers of failure of 4-year colleges. They were: (1) to award credit for applied academics or tech prep courses, and (2) difficulty of dealing with bureaucracies (p. 308).

Yet, barriers can be eliminated. One way is for secondary and postsecondary institutions to work more aggressively to reform curricula, creating opportunities for students to access further higher education and future-oriented, technological employment (Bragg & Layton, 1995, p. 310).

Results of successful tech prep programs have been impressive. School officials of the Pee Dee Tech Prep Program in Richmond County reported (Scott, 1991), SAT scores rose, dropout rates fell, and school algebra courses increased 60%. Scott (1991) concluded in the article, "Tech prep isn't the only way to prepare people for productive work in today's economy, but it is a proven way" (p. 63).

<u>Youth Apprenticeship</u>

The Youth Apprenticeship model, ". . . is the school-to-work model that most consistently provides structured work-based learning, paid work experience and occupational certification for students" (Williamson, 1995, p. 35). The new youth apprenticeship initiatives are trying to create a clearer path to post-secondary education, in addition to providing occupation certification (Stern, et al, 1990).

This model has been criticized as having ties to organized labor. However, Bremer and Madzar (1995) defined youth apprenticeship as ". . . a program that integrates school and workplace learning by emphasizing learning by doing under the tutelage of experts, and which addresses the personal and occupational development of young people" (p. 15). Students would earn an income while gaining valuable work experience and an occupational certificate.

There are many benefits of the youth apprenticeship model for students, employers, and communities. Apprentices would generally be trained in a broad range of skills. The Youth Apprenticeship Demonstration Project in Broome County, New York was described in an article written by Hamilton and Hamilton (1992). They stated, "Specialized preparation for particular jobs is postponed as long as possible. In all occupations we emphasize broad and widely applicable knowledge and skills, usable in multiple jobs and in multiple workplaces" (p. 45).

Other benefits for apprentices include: (1) integration of academic and vocational learning, (2) integration of school and work-based learning, and (3) integration of secondary and postsecondary learning (J. A. Gregson, personal communication, June 20,

1996). Apprentices would understand how academic subjects such as English, math and science, are used in the workplace. Apprentices would connect what is learned at school with what is applied on the job. Finally, they could continue to a postsecondary institution for further education.

Beyond benefits for apprentices, there are many benefits for employers. According to the National Alliance of Business (as cited in Bremer & Madzar, 1995) employers who provide youth apprenticeship opportunities can expect to experience the following benefits:

- Obtain an expanded pool of qualified applicants

- Gain a direct chance to recruit and to screen potential employees

- Evaluate potential employees in work settings, prior to hiring

- Develop a quick, reliable source of skilled labor

- Meet contractual and legal obligations for affirmative action and equal employment

- Improve the quality of life and skills in the community

- Reduce turnover of entry-level employees

- Influence curriculum development to meet industry requirements (p. 13)

Given this list of benefits, employers could reduce turnover while obtaining quality workers. However, not all employers may get involved. "Many businesses in this country see obstacles in labor contracts, liability issues and competitive pressure" (Hong Vo, 1996, p. 22). Training costs is another barrier for employer participation. Hong Vo (1996) wrote, "Training cost is a common obstacle, especially among small companies that lack the manpower or financial resources to invest in students" (p. 23).

Yet, when employers do participate in the youth apprenticeship model, ". . . an apprenticeship program can be a very attractive investment for a company. And that may be the most effective way to ensure professional training for today's youth nationwide" (Hong Vo, 1996, p. 25).

Communities could benefit from the youth apprenticeship model just as employers and students described previously. Gregson stated:

> While participating in youth apprenticeships, high school students often have
>
> the opportunity to become engaged in projects that are of real value to their
>
> communities. Community-based projects, such as the construction of low-income
>
> housing, provide socially meaningful as well as rewarding work. Further,
>
> community members develop a greater appreciation of schools because they
>
> witness students becoming contributors rather than burdens to their communities.

With this scenario, one can see how communities could benefit from the youth apprenticeship model (1995, p. 23).

There are two principles that undergird the School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994. The first suggests that a better system of transition can address the nation's economic challenges. The second principle suggests that the workplace offers a more relevant, highly motivating place for teaching and learning (Bragg & Hamm, 1995, p. 40). The School-to-Work movement is an answer to parents, educators, employers, and communities who want students who are more skilled and better educated.

The first state implementation grants were awarded shortly after the passage of the Act. But interesting and innovative classroom/workplace connections have been enriching the learning experience for youth in many parts of the country for several years. They

have grown out of local ingenuity or local economic development needs. They have

received financial support from state legislatures, foundations and the federal government.

The challenge is moving from the innovative initiative to systemic change. The

new legislation officially recognized that preparing all students for productive roles in

society, including the ability to earn a living, is a legitimate and necessary mission for

American educational institutions (Packer et al., 1996).

Education and the School-to-Work

Opportunities Act (1994)

Young people have been encouraged by the School-to-Work Opportunities Act

(1994) to pursue further education and training. Olson (1997, p. 238) stated, "In sites

ranging from ProTech in Boston to the Education for Employment Consortium in

Kalamazoo, Michigan, high percentages of young people are choosing to pursue

postsecondary education because they understand the connection between learning and a

good job." Chew (1995) stated, "Counselors should help students understand that a

school-to-work focus can help them earn their way through college at wages above

minimum wage" (p. 44).

According to Olson (1997), School-to-Work can engage young people in career

planning and make them more optimistic about the future. In New York City, students in

career magnet high schools engage in what the education researcher Robert L. Crain and

his colleagues at Columbia University's Teachers College call "parallel career planning."

They prepare simultaneously for both higher education and employment. Their research

has found that graduates of career magnet high schools were more likely to have declared

a college major and earned more college credits when they went to college than their peers from traditional high schools with no career focus. On average, they also were employed more months after graduation.

A good School-to-Work program can give students a chance to assess their own capabilities and match them to careers that interest them. "School-to-Work transition initiatives need to be designed so that they can play a key role both in helping counselors create effective career development programs that move students into jobs that will exist in the future, and prepare students for a meaningful role in the world of work" (Ettinger, 1995, p. 20).

Finally, it is useful to recall again that School-to-Work transition seldom means an abrupt transition from full-time schooling to full-time employment. The initial transition from school to work usually occurs over a period of several years, during which work is combined with school. A successful School-to-Work transition system will use this initial transition period to help young people find and keep the kind of full-time job they want, with a minimum of wasted time. But it will also do more than that. A successful system will enable young people to master the process of learning while they work. In a fast-changing economy, this is fundamental (Stern et al., 1995, p. 129).

Summary

The review of the literature and research focused on the historical evolution of career guidance which was known as career education, guidance and career counseling, guidance and careers counselors, plans of study, and the School-to-Work Opportunities Act (1994). The research revealed the problems of guidance and counseling are not new.

There are the problems of funding, student-counselor ratios, administrative tasks and much more. Guidance counselors are continuously scrutinized for not providing adequate counseling and guidance. Granted there will never be enough time for counselors to be all things to all students.

Career education has been advocated for over twenty years and yet there are still many problems in today's school systems. Career guidance and counseling appears to take a back seat in the educational system. This is not necessary with the many options available to career guidance counselors.

The review of literature offered many suggestions for aiding the counselor such as involving teachers and staff as advisors. The advisor or staff member would then help the student plan a program of study, monitor their progress and advise students and parents on the progress.

Research has also shown that School-to-Work can motivate young people to learn. Many young people report that they are more interested in and more challenged by these programs than by traditional academic course work. School-to-work can encourage young people to pursue further education and training. The system can help students make a more optimistic career plan and likewise succeed in their chosen career.

The selection of a career is one of life's most important decisions. It affects income, standard of living, personal and social identity, self-esteem, and educational attainment. Career counseling is essential to the success of all students. It is simply not enough to file a plan of study without a follow-up or an update. It is equally important to give all students career awareness and exploration at all levels. The School-to-Work system ensures these things will happen.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to determine if secondary school counselors were using a plan of study with students. This study sought to determine the extent counselors were using a plan of study with students, the grade level of students, and how often the plan of study was revisited. Additionally, this study sought to identify the amount of parental/legal guardian involvement and recognize who assists the student in selection of their course work. This study further sought to identify the affect of the School-to-Work Opportunities Act (1994) on the use of a plan of study.

Type of Research

The study was conducted using descriptive research. According to Key (1996) "Descriptive research is used to obtain information concerning the current status of the phenomena to describe "what exists" with respect to variables or conditions in a situation" (p. 125). Key (1996) also stated, "The methods involved range from the survey which describes the status quo, the correlation study which investigates the relationship between variables, to developmental studies which seek to determine changes over time" (p.125).

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Descriptive research uses descriptive statistics which provide a picture of what happened in the study. More formally, the term descriptive statistics refers to a set of concepts and methods used in organizing, summarizing, tabulating, depicting, and describing collections of data. The data can be test scores, reaction times, or ratings. They can also be ranks (e.g., political party affiliate, personality type, sex). The goal of descriptive statistics is to provide a representation of the data that describes, in tabular, graphical, or numerical form, the results of the research (Shavelson, 1995, p. 8).

Population and Sample

The population for this study was the 975 Oklahoma secondary school counselors which included Carl Perkins Counselors, Area Vocational and Technical (Vo-Tech) School Counselors, Public School Counselors, and others who served in the counseling role. The population and sample were the same. The secondary school counselors names and school addresses were obtained from the Oklahoma Department of Vocational and Technical Education (ODVTE) Guidance Department.

The Instrument

A survey is an effort to gain information from sources. It is prepared for specific reasons, distributed to sources, returned to the sender and analyzed by the researcher. The survey is an accepted tool used frequently to find out what large numbers of people think and feel about an issue (Rossett, 1987).

There are several advantages the researcher may obtain from using a survey instrument. A larger number of people may be reached at a lesser cost than by telephoning them or meeting them. Anonymity can be promised and delivered with the use of an uncoded survey and respondents have more time to think about their responses (Rossett, 1987).

The uncoded survey instrument for this study was a combination closed/open ended survey and was modified from an April 1995 ODVTE survey sent to secondary public school counselors and Area Vo-Tech School (AVTS) counselors/Carl Perkins counselors in Oklahoma. The April 1995 survey was modified for the purpose of this study with the assistance of the ODVTE Guidance Department.

The modifications for this study included adding questions to determine what type of plan of study was used, who aids the student in the selection of their course work and who assisted the secondary school counselor in completing the plan of study for the student. Additional questions on the modified survey included asking for the frequency of parental/legal guardian involvement and if the secondary school counselor was involved in updating the students' plan of study. The last modifications included adding questions about the School-to-Work Opportunities Act (1994). The modified survey was reviewed by four Oklahoma State University faculty for content and face validity prior to the mail out.

The final survey instrument (Appendix A) contained eleven questions. Questions one through seven dealt exclusively with the plan of study. Questions eight through ten determined the affect of the School-to-Work Opportunities Act (1994) and the plan of study. Question eleven was to ascertain the position of the counselor.

Instrument Validity

In April 1995 the ODVTE sent a survey to 900 secondary school counselors. The purpose of their study was to determine schools using plans of study. The total number of public school counselors responding to the survey was 489 for a return rate of 54%. The total number of AVTS counselors responding to the survey was 30 for a return rate of .03%. The study reported the total number of public schools using plans of study with students was 388 (79%). The total number of AVTS counselors using a plan of study with their students was 27 (90%). Additionally the study reported of the 388 public schools using a plan of study, 233 (60%) start the plan of study in the eighth grade. Results for the grade level AVTS starts a plan of study was not provided to the researcher.

Data Collection

The study and data collection process was approved by the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board, approval number ED-98-113 (Appendix B).

Each individual chosen to participate in the study was an Oklahoma certified school counselor of some capacity (public school counselor, AVTS counselor, Carl Perkins counselor). The surveys and cover letter were mailed from the ODVTE in an ODVTE envelope. A cover letter representing the objectives of this study and a color coded self-addressed envelope with postage prepaid were included with each survey. The

return envelope was color coded so it could be recognized as part of an independent study and thus set aside to be delivered only to the researcher.

The cover letter (Appendix A) explained to each participant that this study was a modified survey of the one conducted by the ODVTE in April, 1995. Each participant was informed that parts of the study would be used by the ODVTE. Additionally, each participant was informed that although the surveys were to be returned to the ODVTE they would be opened only by the researcher.

To enhance the response rate, each packet included an easy to read, double spaced instrument, and a self-addressed postage paid envelope. Each respondent was encouraged to make an accurate assessment of each element of the instrument in order to provide data to evaluate what type of plan of study was being used. The grade level in which the plan of study was initially filed, identifying who aids the student in the selection of their course work, and who assists the counselor in completing plans of study was to be also assessed. The frequency of parental/legal guardian involvement, how often the plan of study was updated, and the affect of the School-to-Work Opportunities Act (1994) and the plan of study were the final elements to be assessed.

A follow-up letter or phone call was not made by the researcher due to limitations imposed upon the study. Consequently, there was not a comparison of respondents versus non-respondents made.

Analysis of Data and Statistical Analysis

To present findings for this study from the respondents, two statistical methods were used to develop interpretation of raw data. The statistical methods were frequency distribution and cumulative percent.

According to Witte (1985) frequency distribution is the organization of observations into class intervals or categories that show frequencies of occurrence. A table is created with columns and rows. A tally is placed next to the defined category each time its value appears in the original data. Once this process has been completed, a number indicating the frequency of occurrence is substituted for the tallies. "A frequency distribution, then, summarizes the data collected on a particular variable by arranging the score values in order of size or magnitude and indicating how often each is obtained" (Shavelson, 1996, p. 46).

To determine cumulative percent, the cumulative proportion must be figured. Cumulative percent is used to interpret the cumulative frequencies more easily. This is accomplished by dividing the frequency of occurrence by the total frequency. The cumulative proportion is then simply multiplied by 100 (Witte, 1985). Cumulative percent are used as a means of interpreting the cumulative frequencies more easily (Shavelson, 1996).

The researcher placed a tally mark next to the response each time the response was checked from the 316 returned surveys. The tally marks were added and converted to a number to indicate the frequency of occurrence. The cumulative proportion was figured by dividing the frequency of occurrence by the total frequency. Finally, the cumulative

proportion was converted to a cumulative percent by dividing the cumulative proportion by 100. Thus the result was a frequency distribution for ungrouped data because the observations were organized into classes of single values.

Frequency distribution and cumulative percent were used when respondents were asked to rank factors or services. Raw data were used when percentages would not report accurate findings. Data from questions asking for written "other" response or explanations to the response were maintained in a separate file. These data were then analyzed by the researcher and are reported in the Presentations of Findings.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The purpose of the study was to determine if secondary school counselors were using a plan of study with students. This study sought to determine the extent counselors were using a plan of study with students, the grade level of students, and how often the plan of study was revisited. Additionally, this study sought to identify the amount of parental/legal guardian involvement and recognize who assists the student in selection of their course work. This study further sought to identify the affect of the School-to-Work Opportunities Act (1994) on the use of a plan of study.

Responses

The survey instrument was mailed to 975 Oklahoma secondary school counselors. The names and addresses were provided by the Oklahoma Department of Vocational and Technical Education (ODVTE). As indicated by Table I there were 316 surveys returned of the 975 mailed providing this study with a 32% return rate. Two surveys were returned incomplete (.002%) while 657 were not returned (67.998%).

TABLE I

ANALYSIS OF SURVEYS
N = 975

Surveys	Frequency	Percent
Returns	316	32.000
Incomplete	2	0.002
Not returned	657	67.998
Total	975	100

Analysis of Research Questions

Table II shows that on question one, which asked what plan of study was being used, 220 respondents indicated they were using the four year plan of study (70%), 80 said they were using the six year plan of study (25%), while 13 reported using other types of plans of study (4%). Four respondents did not respond to this question (1%).

In the category marked "other" five respondents reported using a five year plan of study and three reported using a seven year plan of study. One respondent reported using a middle school preplanning form while two reported using career option's folders and one reported using a career action planning form. One respondent reported using a self-designed credit sheet.

Based on the respondents answers it is determined that the typical plan of study used by secondary school counselors is the four year plan. The six year plan of study is used by one fourth of the counselors responding to this study. Other forms of plans of study include a five year plan and a seven year plan. A small number of respondents are

using another form of a plan of study such as career options folders and self designed plans.

TABLE II

ANALYSIS OF THE PLAN OF STUDY USED
N=316

Question One: What Plan of Study are you using?

Option	Frequency	Percent
4 year	220	70
6 year	80	25
Other	12	4
No response	4	1
Totals	316	100

Table III represents Question two, which asked respondents to indicate the grade level the plan of study is initially filed. There were 195 respondents that indicated they initially filed a plan of study with grade eight students (62%), 105 indicated grade nine was the grade level the plan of study was initially filed (33%), while two indicated grade 10 was the initial grade (.6%). One respondent indicated grade six was the initial grade (.3%) and three respondents indicated grade seven was the grade a plan of study was initially filed (.9%). Seven respondents did not respond to this question (2%).

Based up the respondents answers it is determined a plan of study is typically filed with grade eight students. The next distinctive grade level is grade nine. A few of the

counselors are filing plans of study with grade ten students. A plan of study has been filed with students as early as grade six and seven and as late as grade twelve. It is questioned how effective the plan of study really is at this late stage of the students educational career. The plan of study is used to guide the student with correct choices of course work and if it is file at grade twelve then not much guidance has been provided to the student.

TABLE III

ANALYSIS OF GRADE LEVEL PLAN OF STUDY IS INITIALLY FILED
N=316

Question Two: Please indicate the grade level the Plan of Study is initially file.

Option	Frequency	Percent
Grade 8	195	62.0
Grade 9	104	33.0
Grade 10	2	0.6
Grade 11	1	0.3
Grade 12	3	0.9
Other	4	1.2
No response	7	2.0
Totals	316	100

Question three, which asked respondents to identify who aids the student with the selection of their course work, was completed with multiple answers, thus, only raw scores are reported in Table IV. One respondent indicated no one aided the student in the selection of their coursework. There were 200 respondents that indicated parents/legal

guardians aided the student, 205 indicated teachers/advisors aided the student, 142

indicated students were aided by other counselors, 233 respondents indicated they were

the ones who aided the student while 39 indicated others aided the student. One

respondent did not respond to this question.

In the category identified as "other" two respondents indicated career teachers

aided the student in the selection of their course work while one reported a career aide

assisted the student. Twelve respondents reported the principal aided the student. Four

respondents said Vo-Tech advisers aided the student while one reported a Vo-Tech

worker provided the aid. Three respondents indicated the Carl Perkins Counselor aided

the student. Two respondents said the superintendent was the one who aided the student

and two reported the aid was provided by the administrator. One respondent reported the

School-to-Work coordinator aided the student. A mentor was reported by one respondent

who aided the student while nine reported school counselors were the ones who aided the

student.

Based upon the respondents answers it is determined that the student is aided in

the selection of their coursework by their parents/legal guardians and equally by

teachers/advisors as well as the secondary school counselor surveyed. Students also

receive aid from a percentage of other counselors that included Vo-Tech advisors, high

school counselors, Reserve Officers Training Corp (ROTC) leaders, career aides, and

career advisors. Principals play a large role in aiding students with their course work

selection. However, their participation more often occurs in smaller schools. It is also

determined that superintendents and administrators aid the student in selection of their

course work. Again, this is more often occurs in smaller school districts. Other types of

assistance comes from ROTC representatives and mentors.

TABLE IV

ANALYSIS OF WHO AIDS THE STUDENT IN THEIR COURSE SELECTION

Question Three: Who aids the student in the selection of their course work?	
Option	Raw Score
No one	1
Parents/legal guardians	200
Teachers/advisors	205
Other counselors	142
You	233
Other	39
No response	1

Question four asked who assisted the secondary school counselor in completing

plans of study for the students. This question was completed with multiple answers, thus,

only raw scores are reported in Table V. There were 44 respondents that indicated no one

assisted them in completing a plan of study for students, while 141 indicated parents/legal

guardians assisted them, 66 indicated administrators assisted, 74 indicated vocational

teachers assisted, 144 indicated academic teachers assisted, 143 indicated other counselors

assisted and 34 indicated students were assisted by others. Three respondents did not respond to this question.

In the category identified as "other" four respondents indicated the Carl Perkins Counselor assisted them in completing the plan of study. Seven respondents said that Vo-Tech counselors assisted while four reported Vo-Tech workers assisted. Three respondents reported the career adviser assisted them, one reported the career center director was the one who assisted, one reported it was the career aide and one reported the assistance came from the career teacher. One respondent said the gifted resource teacher assisted.

Four respondents indicated teachers/advisers were the ones who assisted while one reported the assistance was provided by a mentor. Two said the School-to-Work coordinator assisted them while one reported the career partner gave the assistance. The special education teacher was reported by one as the assistant and one respondent indicated the assistance came from the business class. One respondent indicated the Tech Prep coordinator provided the assistance while one reported the administrator was the person who provided them assistance with completing the plan of study.

Based upon the respondents answers it is determined that parents/legal guardians, academic teachers and other counselors assisted the secondary school counselors in completing a plan of study for the students. Others who assisted the secondary school counselor in completing a plan of study for students included Special Education teachers, Carl Perkins Counselors from Vo-Tech, Vo-Tech workers, a Career Center Director and mentors. A few secondary school counselors received no assistance from others. There

appears to be a large amount of collaboration between the respondents and other types of

counselors such as Carl Perkins counselors and Vo-Tech counselors.

TABLE V

ANALYSIS OF WHO ASSISTS THE SCHOOL COUNSELOR IN FILING A PLAN
OF STUDY

Question Four: Who assists you in completing Plans of Study for the students?

Option	Raw Score
No one	44
Parents/legal guardians	141
Administrators	66
Vocational teachers	74
Academic teachers	144
Other counselors	143
Others	34
No response	3

Respondents were asked on question five to specify the frequency of parental/legal

guardian involvement in developing a plan of study. This question was completed with

multiple answers, thus, only raw scores are reported in Table VI. Additionally, question

five was a two part question. The first part determined the frequency of parent/legal

guardian involvement in the initial filing of a plan of study. There were 22 respondents

who indicated there was no parent/legal guardian involvement, 165 indicated sometimes

there was involvement and 28 indicated there was always parent/legal guardian involvement. One respondent did not respond to this part of question five.

The second part of question five determined the frequency of parent/legal guardian involvement in updating the plan of study. There were 34 respondents who indicated there was no parent/legal guardian involvement, 144 indicated sometimes there was involvement and 24 indicated there was always parent/legal guardian involvement. Four respondents did not respond to this part of question five.

Based upon the respondents answers it is determined that typically parents/legal guardians are only sometimes involved in the initial filing of the student's plan of study. There are a small number of parents/legal guardians who are not involved with initially filing a plan of study. Also, there are a few parents/legal guardians who are always involved with the initial filing of a plan of study. Most of the parents/legal guardians are involved with updating the student's plan of study. It is determined that there are a few parents/legal guardians who are not involved with updating the plan of study. Also, it is determined that a small number of parents/legal guardians are always involved with updating the student's plan of study.

TABLE VI

ANALYSIS OF FREQUENCY OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Question Five: What is the frequency of parental/legal guardian involvement in developing a plan of study?

Option	Raw Score
Initially:	
Not at all	22
Sometimes	165
Most times	97
Always	28
No response	1
Updating:	
Not at all	34
Sometimes	144
Most times	68
Always	24
No response	4

Table VII reports Question six, which asked respondents to determine when the students update the plan of study. There were 192 respondents who indicated that students update the plan of study once during the school year (60%), and 65 said the plan of study was updated each semester (20%). There were no respondents who indicated a monthly update (0%) while 56 respondents reported the plan of study was updated at other times (17%). Ten respondents did not respond to this question (3%).

In the category identified as "other" seven respondents indicated the plan of study is updated at the high school level while six reported the plan is updated in the tenth grade. Six respondents reported the plan of study is updated at enrollment. Six respondents said the plan of study is updated at the student's request while one reported the plan of study is not updated at all. One respondent reported the plan of study is updated every nine weeks while one reported the plan is updated every other year. One respondent indicated the counselor updates the plan of study without student input.

Five respondents reported they did not know when the plan of study is updated and one indicated this question was not applicable. Three respondents reported the plan of study is updated as students schedules changes while fourteen indicated the plan of study is updated as needed. One respondent reported the plan of study is updated periodically. One respondent said the plan of study is updated at the beginning of the school year and again at the end of the school year. One respondent reported the plan of study is only updated once at the beginning of the senior year of school and one respondent indicated the plan of study is updated only at a minimum.

Based on the respondents answers, it is determined that the plan of study is updated at the high school level. It is also determined the update takes place at enrollment and/or at the end of the school year. Additionally, it is determined that plans of study are not updated monthly. It is of great concern that one respondent reported updating the plan of study only at the senior year level. This implies a lack of counseling for the student. It is also of great concern that the counselors did not know when the plan of study was updated. However, this might be because the respondents could be middle school counselors and they are involved with only filing a plan of study and not with the

updating. It is also determined from this study that the student can update the plan of
study as needed and/or when schedules change. This shows the plan of study is readily
available to the student.

TABLE VII

ANALYSIS OF HOW OFTEN THE STUDENT UPDATES THE PLAN OF STUDY
N=316

Question Six: The students update the Plan of Study:

Option	Frequency	Percent
Once	190	60
Each Semester	63	20
Monthly	0	0
Other	53	17
No response	10	3
Totals	316	100

Table VIII reports Question seven, which asked if the secondary school counselor
was involved with updating the students' plan of study. This question had 24 respondents
who indicated they were not involved with updating the students' plan of study (7%), 233
respondents said they were involved (74%), while 46 reported they were involved only
sometimes (15%). Fourteen respondents did not respond to this question (4%).

In the category identified as "sometimes" five respondents reported they are
involved with updating the students' plan of study when the students or teachers come to

them. Five indicated the plan of study is updated at enrollment while twelve respondents reported the high school counselor is the one who updates the plan of study. Three respondents indicated the plan of study is updated in a group session. One respondent reported the plan of study is updated with the teacher in the Teachers as Advisers Program. Two respondents said the vocational counselor does most of the work while one reported to have 400 students and no time to update the plan of study. Two respondents indicated the plan of study is updated with teachers/advisers. Two respondents reported updating the plan of study with the Carl Perkins counselor. Twelve respondents did not explain their answer.

Based upon most of the respondents who checked 'sometimes' it is determined that secondary school counselors are involved with updating the plan of study. A few secondary school counselors are not involved with updating the plan of study and others are involved only sometimes. It is also determined that other types of counselors such as Carl Perkins counselors and Vo-Tech counselors are assisting with the updating of plans of study. This implies that communication and collaboration is taking place among counselors. There is a great concern that one counselor reported having no time to update the plan of study due to a large case load.

TABLE VIII

ANALYSIS OF SCHOOL COUNSELORS INVOLVEMENT WITH UPDATING THE
STUDENTS' PLAN OF STUDY
N=316

Question Seven: Are you involved with updating the students' Plan of Study?

Option	Frequency	Percent
No	23	7
Yes	233	74
Sometimes	46	15
No response	14	4
Totals	316	100

Table IX reports Question eight, which asked if the secondary school counselor

was using a plan of study because it is required by the School-to-Work Opportunities Act

(1994). This question had 225 respondents who indicated that they were using a plan of

study but not because it is required by the School-to-Work Opportunities Act (1994)

(71%), while 81 said they were using a plan of study because it is required by the Act

(26%). Eleven respondents did not respond to this question (3%).

Based on the respondents answers it is determined that most of the secondary

school counselors are using a plan of study but not because it is required by the School-to-

Work Opportunities Act (1994). About one fourth are using the plan of study because of

the Act.

TABLE IX

ANALYSIS OF SCHOOL-TO-WORK OPPORTUNITIES ACT (1994) REQUIRING A
PLAN OF STUDY
N=316

Question Eight: Are you using a Plan of Study because it is required by the School-to-Work Opportunities Act (1994)?		
Option	Frequency	Percent
No	224	71
Yes	81	26
No response	11	3
Totals	316	100

Table X reports Question nine, which asked if the secondary school counselor was using a plan of study prior to the Act. This table illustrates 99 respondents indicated that they were not using a plan of study prior to the School-to-Work Opportunities Act (1994) (31%), while 209 said they were using a plan of study prior to the Act (66%). Twelve respondents did not respond to this question (3%).

Based on the respondents answers it is determined that secondary school counselors were using a plan of study prior to the Act. Additionally, it is determined a third of secondary school counselors were not using a plan of study prior to the Act.

TABLE X

ANALYSIS OF USING A PLAN OF STUDY PRIOR TO THE PASSAGE OF THE
SCHOOL-TO-WORK OPPORTUNITIES ACT (1994)
N=316

Question Nine: Were you using Plans of Study prior to the Act?

Option	Frequency	Percent
No	97	31
Yes	207	66
No response	12	3
Totals	316	100

Question ten asked secondary school counselors to determine how the School-to-Work Opportunities Act (1994) affected their use of plans of study. Respondents answered question ten with multiple answers, thus, only raw scores are reported in Table XI. There were 161 respondents indicate the School-to-Work Opportunities Act (1994) increased the use of a plan of study, 62 said the Act changed how a plan of study is used, 25 said the Act changed when a plan of study is used while 62 checked 'other' as their response. Thirty-five respondents did not respond to this question.

In the category identified as "other" thirty-seven respondents indicated the School-to-Work Opportunities Act (1994) did not affect the use of plans of study. Four respondents indicated Question ten was not applicable while three respondents reported change was unknown. One respondent suggested this question was rhetoric and that it is impossible to do the extra paper work for each student, unless dollars are provided to employ a School-to-Work person. Two respondents reported the Teachers as Advisor's

Program was started while one indicated the frequency of updating a plan of study has increased. One respondent reported it was unlikely they would use any School-to-Work connection due to highly vocal parents who are opposed to it in spite of strong support from staff. Four respondents indicated the Act has affected the use of plans of study by changing to a six year plan while one respondent reported having available grant money because of the Act.

One respondent indicated the plan of study is more structured now while one respondent stated the Act introduced Plans of Study to their school. Interest by administrators and counselors has increased due to the Act as reported by one respondent. One respondent reported awareness of plans of study has increased and one respondent indicated the use of plans of study and the Act has seemed to aid students and parents in focusing on a plan. One respondent said the forms used are better and there is updated information because of the Act while one responded reported the Act has made plans of study user friendly.

Based upon the respondents it is determined that the School-to-Work Opportunities Act (1994) does increase the use of a plan of study. How a plan of study is used and when a plan of study is used has been affected by the Act. Other ways the Act has affected the use of a plan of study included having the availability of grant money, the idea of using a plan of study has risen, and the frequency of updating the plan of study has increased. Additionally, the Act introduced the plan of study to a school, teacher advisor programs were initiated, and the plan of study is more structured now. It is noted that the School-to-Work Opportunities Act (1994) is still being received negatively as suggested

by two respondents. But the overall affect caused by the Act indicates it is a positive

affect.

TABLE XI

ANALYSIS OF THE AFFECT OF THE SCHOOL-TO-WORK OPPORTUNITIES ACT
(1994) AND THE USE OF A PLAN OF STUDY

Question Ten: How has the School-to-Work Opportunities Act (1994) affected your
use of Plans of Study?

Option	Raw Score
Increased	161
How used has changed	62
When used has changed	25
Other	62
No response	35

Table XII reports question eleven which asked secondary school counselors to list

their position. This question had five respondents indicate they were a Carl Perkins

Counselor (2%), zero indicated they were an Area Vo-Tech School Counselor (0%), 294

indicated they were a Public School Counselor (93%), while 15 indicated they were

another type of counselor (5%).

In the category identified as "other" three respondents indicated they were a Public

School Counselor/Carl Perkins Counselor while one said he/she was a Public School

Counselor/Assistant Superintendent. One respondent reported being a Title IV/JOM

Counselor. One respondent indicated he/she was a vocational counselor while one

respondent indicated being a Public School Counselor one-half time and teaching four

classes the remaining time. One respondent held the position as Public School Counselor

one half time and School Psychologist one half time. One respondent indicated he/she was

a Public School Counselor/Librarian while another indicated holding the position of Public

School Counselor/Federal Program Director. One respondent indicated being the School-

to-Work Coordinator and another reported being the Public School Counselor/Vocational

Home Economics Instructor. Three respondents did not list what their position was.

Based upon the respondents answers it is determined that the majority of the

respondents were Public School Counselors. Additionally, it is determined that a small

number of the respondents were Carl Perkins Counselors or other types of counselors.

Fifteen of the 316 respondents had dual roles. This suggests that holding a dual position is

not the norm but does exist.

TABLE XII

ANALYSIS OF THE POSITION OF THE SURVEYED SECONDARY SCHOOL
COUNSELOR

Question Eleven: What is your position?		
Option	Frequency	Percent
Carl Perkins Counselor	5	2
Area Vo-Tech Counselor	0	0
Public School Counselor	296	93
Other	15	5
Totals	316	100

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was conducted to determine if secondary school counselors were using

a plan of study with students. This study sought to determine the extent counselors were

using a plan of study with students, the grade level of students, and how often the plan of

study was revisited. Additionally, this study sought to identify the amount of

parental/legal guardian involvement and recognize who assists the student in selection of

their course work. This study further sought to identify the affect of the School-to-Work

Opportunities Act (1994) on the use of a plan of study.

Seven major research questions guided the study:

1. What plan of study does the counselor use?

2. To what extent is a plan of study being used by secondary school counselors?

3. What is the grade level of students filing a plan of study?

4. How often is the plan of study revisited?

5. What is the amount of parental/legal guardian involvement in developing and
   updating the plan of study?

6. Who aides the student in the selection of their course work?

7. Does the School-to-Work Opportunities Act (1994) effect the
   counselors use of plans of studies?

The subjects for this study were Oklahoma secondary school counselors which included Carl Perkins Counselors, Area Vo-Tech School Counselors, Public School Counselors, and others who served in the counseling role. The names and addresses were obtained from the Oklahoma Department of Vocational and Technical Education. Nine hundred seventy-five names were on the list for this study. Each received a cover letter, a survey and a postage paid return envelope. Three hundred sixteen (316) of the 975 surveys mailed were completed and returned.

Findings and Conclusions

Research Question one asked what plan of study was being used (4-year, 6-year, other). More than half the respondents reported the plan of study used is the four year plan of study. The six year plan of study was the second common type of plan of study used. Other types of plans of study are used by secondary school counselors. Those types included: Career options folders, 5 year plan of study, and self designed credit check sheet. Based on the finding it can be concluded that despite the opportunity for counselors to use the six year plan of study, the four year plan continues to be used most often.

Research Question two asked to what extent a plan of study was used by secondary school counselors. The study revealed all respondents use a plan of study. Based on the finding it can be concluded all secondary school counselors use a plan of study.

Research Question three asked the grade level students file a plan of study. The typical grade level a plan of study is filed is the eighth grade. The next common grade

level is the ninth grade. Some plans of study have also been filed in grades 10, 11, and 12 but this has been done by only a very small number of secondary school counselors. Other grade levels a plan of study is filed included grade six and seven. Based on the finding it can be concluded that the initial grade students file a plan of study is grade eight.

Research Question four asked how often a plan of study is revisited. A plan of study is typically revisited once during the school year. The second common time a plan of study is revisited is each semester or at other times. These other times included: when schedule have changed, at enrollment, at the end of the school year, and as needed. Based on the finding it can be concluded that the plan of study is revisited once during the school year.

Research Question five asked the amount of parental/legal guardian involvement. Parents/legal guardians are involved with the students plan of study. This included aiding the student in the selection of their course work and also in the initial filing of the plan of study. However, parent/legal guardian involvement is lacking when a student updated the plan of study. Additional involvement included assisting secondary school counselors in the initial filing and updating of the plan of study. A percentage amount of parent/legal involvement could not be determined by this study. Based on the finding it can be concluded that while the amount of parent/legal guardian involvement cannot be determined, there is parental/legal guardian involvement.

Research Question six asked who aids the student in the selection of their course work. The student is aided in the selection of their course work by parents/legal guardians, teachers/advisors, and the secondary school counselor. Other counselors such as Carl Perkins counselors from Vo-Tech also aided the student. Additionally, the student

is aided by ROTC leaders, principals, mentors, career advisors and administrators. Based on the finding it can be concluded that the student is aided in the selection of their course work by parents/legal guardians, teachers/advisors, and the secondary school counselor.

Research Question seven asked if the School-to-Work Opportunities Act (1994) affects the counselors use of plans of study. The School-to-Work Opportunities Act (1994) has affected the secondary school counselors use of a plan of study. This affect included the increase in usage of a plan of study. Additional affects are how a plan of study is used and when a plan of study is used has changed. Other affects included the use of a more structured plan of study, introduction of plans of study to secondary school counselors, an increase in the awareness of plans of study, and the initiation of Teachers as Advisors Programs. Based on the finding it can be concluded that the School-to-Work Opportunities Act (1994) does affect the secondary school counselors use of a plan of study.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research, the following recommendations are made:

The six year plan of study was designed for students in grades nine through twelve with two additional years of postsecondary education. It is intended to be initially filed by eighth grade students prior to entering the ninth grade. The purpose of the six year plan of study is to get individuals to look beyond secondary education. This plan is relatively new and may require secondary school counselors to receive additional training. It is recommended the six year plan of study be used in place of the four year plan of study.

The plan of study is a tool to be used by secondary school counselors to assist students in the choice of their coursework. Additionally, a plan of study aids the student in defining their plans, goals, and learning activities. It is recommended that a standard form of a plan of study be used by all secondary school counselors.

The plan of study provides students direction. It is to be used to guide the student in the selection of course work that will prepare them for the future. It is recommended that a plan of study continue to be filed in grade eight with close follow-up as the student progresses to higher grades and to postsecondary education.

Because the plan of study is a guide for students and a tool for counselors, it should be revisited at least once a year. A yearly revisit ensures the student is receiving adequate counseling and guidance. It is recommended that the plan of study be revisited and documented at a minimum once a year by both the secondary school counselor and the student.

Parents/legal guardians are very important role models to the student. Research has shown parent/legal guardian influence is greater to the student than that of the student's peers. It is recommended that the parent/legal guardian be encouraged to participate regularly in the selection of course work, and filing and updating of course work on the students' plan of study.

The selection of one's course work can often be confusing and even overwhelming for some students. The student should be able to depend on trustworthy figures to aid them in their selection. It is recommended parents/legal guardians, teachers/advisors, and the secondary school counselor continue to be involved with aiding the student in the selection of their course work.

The School-to-Work Opportunities Act (1994) can make a difference in the lives of today's youth. Students involved in the school-to-work system are more interested and challenged by these programs than by traditional course work. However, there are guidelines a secondary school counselor must follow which includes developing a program of study for the student. It is evident that not all counselors are aware of the guidelines and elements of the School-to-Work Opportunities Act (1994) even though the Act has affected the use of plans of study. It is recommended that secondary school counselors further explore the School-to-Work Opportunities Act (1994) in order to be more familiar with the Act.

Implications for Future Research

This study indicates changes need to be made in using a plan of study. The purpose of a plan of study is to guide the student in choosing coursework that will prepare them for future education choices or career choices. Students need to know their options and opportunities and then have a guide to obtain their goals. A plan of study provides this guidance.

Parents/legal guardians are major influences on education and career decisions made by students. This study has shown the majority of parents/legal guardians are involved with aiding the student in the selection of their coursework and in the initial filing of their plan of study. However, there is a lack of parental/legal guardian involvement with updating the plan of study. Guidance and support should not stop with the initial involvement. Parents/legal guardians need to stay involved with the decisions made by the student and changes the student may feel need to be made.

Secondary school counselors are responsible for a large number of students and often serve in dual roles. Some have admitted they just do not have enough time to spend with the student. Others have stated their case loads are too large to administer effective guidance. This needs to be changed if students are going to receive adequate guidance and counseling that affects their entire life. One solution is to delegate the guidance counseling to teachers and/or include this in part of the curriculum. It would not be difficult say for a English teacher to assign a report on a career subject a student has chosen. The student would research and explore the career and decide if that particular career is right for them.

Further studies and greater input from secondary school counselors are needed to make Plans of Study the tool they were designed to be. Such studies might include a four or six year longitudinal study carefully following a controlled group of students, integration of career guidance in the curriculum and other types of alternative career guidance and counseling. There are implications for many types of studies as more School-to-Work systems are initiated. It is hoped the results of this study promote further research in the area of career guidance and the School-to-Work Opportunities Act (1994).

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A
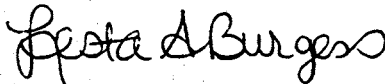
COVER LETTER AND

SURVEY

May 4, 1998

Dear Counselor,

As part of my doctoral program at Oklahoma State University in Occupational and Adult Education, I am conducting research to provide an analysis of secondary school counselors and the use of a Plan of Study. This study is seeking to show to what degree counselors are using a plan of study, the grade level of students, and how often the plan of study is revisited. Additionally, this study will identify the amount of parent/legal guardian involvement and recognize who aides the student in selection of their course work. This study further seeks to identify the effect of the School-to-Work Opportunities Act (1994) and the use of Plans of Study.

This study is similar to one conducted by the Oklahoma Department of Vocational Education in April 1995. Parts of the results of this study will be used by ODVTE. The survey will be mailed to ODVTE in coded envelopes and will be opened only by me.

The information you provide in this survey will be kept strictly confidential. A coding system will be used for follow-up purposes only and will be available only to the researchers. The information gathered by this study will be reported in the aggregate with no identification of individuals or information from individuals. Any risk to individuals involved in this research will be minimal. If you have any questions concerning this research, you may contact Dr. Connie Anderson or Lesta A. Burgess, 245 Willard Hall, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK 74078 or Gay Clarkson, the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board Executive Secretary, at 305 Whitehurst, Stillwater, OK 74078, phone 405-744-5700.

Sincerely,

Lesta A. Burgess

Survey

1. What Plan of Study are you using?
   _____ 4 year   _____ 6 year   _____ Other (please specify) _____

2. Please indicate the grade level the Plan of Study is initially filed: (circle one)
        8   9   10   11   12

3. Who aides the student in the selection of their course work?
   _____ no one   _____ parents/legal guardians   _____ teachers/advisors
   _____ other counselors   _____ you   _____ other (please list) _____

4. Who assists you in completing Plans of Study for the students? (check all that apply)
   _____ no one   _____ parents/legal guardians   _____ administrators   _____ vocational teachers
   _____ academic teachers   _____ other counselors
   _____ others (please list) _____

5. What is the frequency of parental/legal guardian involvement? (check)
   Initially:
   _____ not at all   _____ sometimes   _____ most times   _____ always
   Updating Plan of Study:
   _____ not at all   _____ sometimes   _____ most times   _____ always

6. The students update the Plan of Study: (check)
   _____ once during school year   _____ each semester   _____ monthly
   _____ other (please explain) _____

7. Are you involved with updating the students' Plan of study? (check)
   _____ no, strictly the student decision   _____ yes, the student is counseled
   _____ sometimes (please explain) _____

8. Are you using a Plan of Study because it is required by the School-to-Work Act? (check)
   _____ no   _____ yes

9. Were you using Plans of Study prior to the Act? (check)
   _____ no   _____ yes

10. How has the School-to-Work Opportunities Act (1994) effected your use of Plans of Study?
    (check)
    _____ using a Plan of Study has increased   _____ how a Plan of Study is used has changed
    _____ when a Plan of Study is used has changed
    _____ other (please explain) _____

11. What is your position? (check)
    _____ Carl Perkins Counselor   _____ Area Vo-Tech School Counselor
    _____ Public School Counselor   _____ Other (please list) _____

APPENDIX B

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB)

APPROVAL FORM

OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW

Date: 04-28-98   IRB #: ED-98-113

Proposal Title: SECONDARY SCHOOL COUNSELORS USE OF A PLAN OF STUDY AND
SCHOOL-TO-WORK ACT

Principal Investigator(s): Connie Anderson, Lesta A. Burgess

Reviewed and Processed as: Exempt

Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved

ALL APPROVALS MAY BE SUBJECT TO REVIEW BY FULL INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD AT
NEXT MEETING, AS WELL AS ARE SUBJECT TO MONITORING AT ANY TIME DURING THE
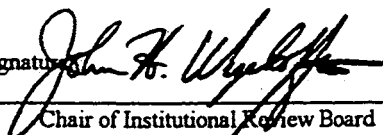APPROVAL PERIOD.
APPROVAL STATUS PERIOD VALID FOR DATA COLLECTION FOR A ONE CALENDAR YEAR
PERIOD AFTER WHICH A CONTINUATION OR RENEWAL REQUEST IS REQUIRED TO BE
SUBMITTED FOR BOARD APPROVAL.
ANY MODIFICATIONS TO APPROVED PROJECT MUST ALSO BE SUBMITTED FOR APPROVAL.

Comments, Modifications/Conditions for Approval or Disapproval are as follows:

Signature   Date: April 29, 1998
Chair of Institutional Review Board
cc: Lesta A. Burgess

VITA

Lesta A. Burgess

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Thesis: SECONDARY SCHOOL COUNSELORS USE OF A PLAN OF STUDY AND
THE SCHOOL-TO-WORK OPPORTUNITIES ACT (1994)

Major Field: Occupational and Adult Education

Biographical:

Education: Received Bachelor of Science in Graphic Arts/Printing Management,
Northeastern State University, Tahlequah, Oklahoma, 1993; received
Master of Science in Industrial Technology, Northeastern State University,
Tahlequah, Oklahoma, 1994; completed requirements for Doctor of
Education degree at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma,
July 1998.

Professional Experience: Staff Analyst, Conoco Oil Company, Ponca City,
Oklahoma, November 1981-August 1990. Intern in the Production
Printing Services, Northeastern Oklahoma State University, Tahlequah,
Oklahoma, August 1992-May 1993. Graduate Assistant in the Department
of Industry, Northeastern State University, Tahlequah, Oklahoma, August
1993-December 1994. Instructor for Graphic Arts/Printing Management
program, Northeastern State University, Tahlequah, Oklahoma, January
1995-May 1995. Graduate Research Associate in Occupational and Adult
Education at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, August
1995-May 1998.

Professional Organizations: American Vocational Association; Epsilon Pi Tau;
Oklahoma Vocational Association.