

The School Counselor and Test Preparation Programs

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American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Position

School counselors understand the impact of testing and test scores on college admissions, industry credentialing and other areas pertaining to students' postsecondary plans and goals. School counselors assist students in preparing for standardized tests by promoting opportunities designed to increase knowledge and improve test-taking skills. School counselors help students and their families become knowledgeable about test preparation programs and assist them as they decide which programs best meet their needs.

The Rationale

Students are often apprehensive about standardized tests and sometimes view tests as intimidating or threatening. Compounding these feelings is the fact that, since 1990, average increases in first-time college applications has increased yearly, while the number of students being accepted to college has remained relatively stable (National Association for College Admission Counseling, 2015). Research has demonstrated that markers predicting college success occur across a student's development and include reading proficiency by third grade, sound school attendance, positive social skills, rigorous course-taking pathways and maintenance of a 3.0 GPA or higher (College and Career Readiness & Success Center, 2013).

Although many postsecondary institutions require applicants to take a college entrance test to be considered for admission and/or placement, not all schools do. School counselors recognize that test-taking strategies for standardized tests are test-specific and will not necessarily be applicable to all standardized tests or other assessments students would take during their academic career. Even so, school counselors are often asked for advice on test preparation programs to increase scores and opportunities.

Research on test-taking and test-wise strategies, such as time-use and guessing strategies, revealed that such preparation can improve scores. These gains are even larger when a student participates in a longer test preparation program that allows the student to practice and develop broader cognitive skills (Plakans & Gebril, 2015). Many students benefit from becoming familiar with the test format and test-taking strategies before taking a standardized test. Content area review and repeated test-based practice have shown to be beneficial for students as they prepare for exams (Turner, 2009).

The School Counselor's Role

School counselors provide test-taking strategies as a part of a comprehensive school counseling program promoting academic, career and social/emotional development of all students. Test-taking skills and strategies include:

- Time use
- Error avoidance and guessing
- Memory and recall techniques
- Deductive reasoning
- Test-wiseness (including scoring rubrics, test format and item formats)
- Stress management and anxiety reduction (Selend, 2012)

School counselors collaborate with teachers and other school staff to coordinate and provide information on integrating test-taking strategies, content and practice tests into regular classroom instruction. Examples include providing students and families with research and information on a variety of test preparation options to enable them to make informed decisions about commercial test preparation programs, free programs, tutoring and other options. The school counselor collaborates with staff to encourage integration of test-taking strategies and content across the curriculum.

Summary

Research shows test preparation can help students improve test scores (What Works Clearinghouse, 2016). School counselors collaborate with school staff to assist students as they prepare for tests by providing instruction on test-taking skills and research and information about test preparation programs to students and their families.

References

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