



School Counseling Program (K-12)

Evaluation Update

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Program Overview

The Virginia Beach City Public Schools comprehensive school counseling program is “an integral part of each school’s total educational program designed to promote”¹ the growth of all students from kindergarten through grade twelve in the areas of academic success, college and career readiness, and personal and social development. The design and delivery of the VBCPS school counseling program is based on the American School Counseling Association (ASCA) national model because it “emphasizes a comprehensive and developmental approach” to build a foundation for student learning and academic success.² Based on the ASCA framework, the “concepts of student advocacy, leadership, collaboration, and systemic change are infused” throughout the program.³ The program is “developmentally designed to serve all students” and consists of the following services according to the VBCPS website:⁴

- *Counseling Services* – This component includes assistance to individuals and groups and may include preventive or remedial interventions; crisis intervention; and referrals from students (self), parents, teachers, or others.
- *Classroom Guidance Services* – These services include academic planning, career awareness, decision making, and the development of personal/social skills.
- *Consultation Services* – Consultation may occur with parents, teachers, administrators, and/or community agencies.
- *Coordination Efforts* – This area may include a host of activities, including, but not limited to, the oversight of new student registration, student records, testing, orientation programs, parent workshops, peer facilitation programs, referral to community agencies, military child support (e.g., deployment and transitioning), and college and career information (e.g., SAT/PSAT, financial aid, scholarships, and transcripts).

After being selected for evaluation by the Program Evaluation Committee, the School Board approved the school counseling program for an evaluation readiness report on August 18, 2015. The recommendation from the evaluation readiness report was that the school counseling program undergo a three-year comprehensive evaluation beginning in 2016-2017 with an examination of the program’s academic component, followed by an evaluation focused on the college and career component in 2017-2018 and an evaluation focused on the personal and social component in 2018-2019. The recommended evaluation plan was approved by the School Board on December 20, 2016.

The Office of Research and Evaluation (ORE) conducted the three comprehensive evaluations focused on each component, with the School Board receiving reports on September 6, 2017; November 27, 2018; and December 10, 2019. This evaluation update for the school counseling program was conducted as a result of a recommendation from the December 2019 program evaluation, which was approved by the School Board on January 14, 2020. The approved recommendation was to “Conduct an evaluation update during 2019-2020 focused on the extent to which additional staffing allocations and programmatic efforts enable the school counseling program to meet students’ needs as well as progress related to the year-three evaluation recommendations.” Therefore, the purpose of this evaluation update was to focus on progress related to modifying the personal and social development component for high school students; supporting academic and career planning for secondary students; and engaging parents as well as the extent to which allocations and programmatic efforts enable the school counseling program to meet students’ needs. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and school closure during March of the 2019-2020 school year, the evaluation update that was planned for 2019-2020 was postponed to the 2020-2021 school year. Information related to actions taken regarding the recommendations from both the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years was gathered and included in this report.

Data Collection and Methodology

As part of a larger survey effort of multiple initiatives, ORE invited school counselors, administrators, teachers, students, and parents to complete survey items regarding their perceptions of the school counseling program. Staff and parents received an email invitation with a link to participate in the online survey in April 2021. Of the school counselors, administrators, and teachers invited to complete the survey, 62 percent of school counselors, 72 percent of administrators, and 55 percent of teachers completed the survey. See Table 1 for response rates by school level. Of the students in grades 5 through 12, 60 percent completed the survey.⁵ Of the parents of students in kindergarten through grade twelve invited to take the survey, 18 percent completed the survey. Surveys in previous years were conducted through random sampling of students and parents.

Table 1: Staff, Student, and Parent Survey Response Rates by Level

Group	ES	MS	HS	Overall
Administrators	64.3%	80.8%	77.8%	72.0%
School Counselors	54.4%	58.0%	74.0%	62.0%
Teachers	37.5%	76.5%	65.8%	54.7%
Students (Grades 5-12)	62.7%	71.3%	51.2%	60.0%
Parents (Grades K-12)	18.6%	19.0%	16.5%	18.0%

Of the students and parents who responded to school counseling program questions, the majority of students at all levels and the majority of parents at the elementary and middle school levels indicated the student was receiving instruction in person at school (see Table 2). Slightly more than 40 percent of parents of high school students indicated their child was either receiving instruction in person at the school or virtually (see Table 2).

Table 2: Percentages of Students and Parents by Reported Instructional Option

Group	Face-to-Face			Virtual			Combination		
	ES	MS	HS	ES	MS	HS	ES	MS	HS
Students	66.7%	61.6%	55.4%	30.8%	36.5%	42.3%	2.5%	1.9%	2.3%
Parents	65.8%	52.8%	41.6%	32.7%	39.8%	43.0%	1.6%	7.4%	15.4%

Additional data were collected to obtain school counselor allocation information for the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years and actions taken during the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years regarding the recommendations from the 2018-2019 comprehensive evaluation. School counselor staffing information by school was obtained from the Department of Human Resources for the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years. Information related to the actions taken regarding the recommendations from the 2018-2019 comprehensive evaluation was provided by the coordinator of school counseling services. Throughout the report, any references to changes in survey data (i.e., increases or declines) from previous surveys were based on changes of at least two percentage points.

Results

The comprehensive school counseling program serves all the division's students through various activities and programs. Students were asked the extent to which they knew their school counselor and met with him or her during the school year. Of the 24,339 grade 5 through 12 students across the division who responded to the survey item, 84 percent indicated that they knew who their school counselor was. Percentages varied slightly by school level with 94 percent of fifth-grade students, 79 percent of middle school students, and 85 percent of high school students reporting that they knew who their school counselor was. As shown in Table 3, there were declines in the percentages at all levels in comparison to the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 survey results, which could be related to the extent to which students were participating in virtual instruction during 2020-2021. Given the declines, data were examined separately by student selected instructional option

(face-to-face or virtual only). Results showed that lower percentages of elementary school (91%) and middle school students (74%) who reported they were receiving virtual instruction indicated they knew their school counselor than elementary school (96%) and middle school students (82%) who indicated they were receiving face-to-face instruction. In contrast, slightly higher percentages of high school students (87%) who reported they were receiving virtual instruction indicated they knew their school counselor than high school students (84%) who reported they were receiving face-to-face instruction.

Table 3: Percentages of Students Indicating They Knew Who Their School Counselor Was

Survey Item	2017-2018			2018-2019			2020-2021		
	ES	MS	HS	ES	MS	HS	ES	MS	HS
Knew school counselor	98.3%	91.2%	88.3%	99.2%	95.1%	94.1%	94.3%	79.0%	85.1%

Students were also asked how many times they worked with their counselor individually and in a group or classroom setting during the 2020-2021 school year. Higher percentages of elementary and middle school students indicated they met with their school counselor in a classroom or group setting at least once than meeting with them individually, while a higher percentage of high school students indicated they met with their school counselor individually than in a classroom or group setting (see Table 4). This overall pattern was consistent with perceptions from 2017-2018 and 2018-2019, although there was an increase in the percentage of elementary school students who reported they met with their school counselor individually at least once, while there were declines in the percentages of middle school students who reported meeting with their school counselor in both settings.

Table 4: Percentages of Students Indicating They Met With Their School Counselor at Least Once

Met With Counselor at Least Once	2017-2018			2018-2019			2020-2021		
	ES	MS	HS	ES	MS	HS	ES	MS	HS
Individually	45.1%	38.2%	65.9%	47.4%	40.8%	72.8%	56.1%	33.9%	67.2%
In class*	91.5%	79.0%	49.3%	92.5%	79.7%	43.6%	93.0%	58.5%	44.8%

Note: * In 2020-2021, students were asked about meeting with their counselor in class or in a group setting.

Personal and Social Development Component

Based on results of the 2018-2019 program evaluation, one recommendation focused on modifying the personal and social development component of the school counseling program for high school students by assessing students' needs in this area and using the information to revisit the expectations and responsibilities of school counselors, along with related professional development opportunities to support school counselors' work. Although the recommendation initially focused on high school students, actions were taken that impacted all school levels, and the COVID-19 pandemic impacted students' needs related to the personal and social development component. Therefore, information in this section includes all school levels.

Throughout the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years, there were several steps taken regarding this recommendation. In 2019-2020, a spring survey was administered to students in grades 4 through 12 to gauge students' levels of agreement with social-emotional learning (SEL) competencies. In addition, various professional learning opportunities related to personal and social development were offered to school counselors throughout the 2019-2020 school year. Topics included supporting LGBTQ students, suicide and depression awareness, yoga and mindfulness to support data-driven school counselor programs, and responsive classroom elements. In addition, school counselors attended the Virginia School Counselors Association Annual Conference in October 2019, which had an SEL focus.

In 2020-2021, there was a change in protocol regarding supporting students in need of additional mental health support, which involved school counselors directly connecting families with community mental health providers instead of only providing contact information to families. From November 2020 to April 2021, there was increased communication with Safe Schools staff regarding responding to alerts received through Securly, which monitors students' internet usage and flags potential safety concerns. From January to April 2021, meetings were held with Erika's Lighthouse and Health and PE central office staff to plan professional learning for school counselors, which will focus on the delivery of depression awareness and suicide prevention through cofacilitated lessons in Health and PE courses. From February to March 2021, school counselors provided the National Alliance on Mental Health Illness Coastal Virginia presentations titled "Ending the Silence" at several schools across the division, which focused on decreasing stigma around mental health. From February to May 2021, the Office of Student Support Services led a mental health task force that worked to identify current actions being taken to address mental health, gaps in and barriers to accessing mental health supports, and provided recommendations for improvements. In May 2021, Mental Health Awareness posters were delivered and posted in every secondary school.

To gather perceptions regarding the clarity of the school counselor's role in the personal and social development component of the program, school counselors and administrators were asked several survey items about expectations related to personal and social development counseling. Although the recommendation was focused on high school students, staff from each level responded to the survey items given the potential impact of the pandemic on this component of the school counseling program. Overall, at the division level, 86 percent of school counselors and 92 percent of administrators agreed that expectations in personal and social development counseling were clearly defined. As shown in Table 5, comparisons by level showed that slightly lower percentages were found at the high school level, although the agreement percentages were still high with 81 percent of high school counselors and 88 percent of high school administrators agreeing. In comparison to perceptions in 2018-2019, there were increases in agreement percentages for school counselors at the secondary level and for administrators at all levels, with the largest increases for both groups at the high school level.

Table 5: Perceptions Regarding Expectations in Personal and Social Counseling Being Clearly Defined

Group	2018-2019			2020-2021		
	ES	MS	HS	ES	MS	HS
School Counselors	90.9%	88.5%	70.6%	88.4%	93.1%	80.7%
Administrators	80.4%	89.3%	61.8%	94.6%	95.1%	87.5%

Lower agreement percentages were found regarding the expectations in personal and social development counseling being reasonable, with 64 percent of school counselors and 83 percent of administrators agreeing divisionwide. As shown in Table 6, comparisons by school level showed that agreement was lower at the high school level. However, in comparison to perceptions in 2018-2019, there were increases in agreement percentages for school counselors and administrators at all levels, although the increase was smaller at the high school level for school counselors.

Table 6: Perceptions Regarding Expectations in Personal and Social Counseling Being Reasonable

Group	2018-2019			2020-2021		
	ES	MS	HS	ES	MS	HS
School Counselors	54.5%	60.0%	52.9%	69.0%	72.4%	55.4%
Administrators	71.4%	78.6%	55.9%	81.1%	90.0%	80.4%

Teachers were asked whether they clearly understood the overall role of school counselors and the school counselor's role in personal and social development. Overall, 90 percent of teachers agreed that they understood their overall role and 87 percent agreed that they understood their role in personal and social development. At least 80 percent of teachers at all levels agreed with both items (see Table 7). In comparison

to perceptions in 2018-2019, there were increases in agreement percentages for both survey items at all levels, with the most notable increases at the secondary level.

Table 7: Teachers' Perceptions Regarding Understanding the Role of School Counselors

Area	2018-2019			2020-2021		
	ES	MS	HS	ES	MS	HS
Overall role	86.1%	77.1%	81.2%	93.6%	88.6%	86.7%
Role in personal and social development	91.1%	65.4%	54.3%	94.0%	86.9%	79.9%

When surveyed about professional learning focused on personal and social development, 88 percent of school counselors divisionwide agreed that they received adequate professional learning in this area. At least 83 percent of school counselors at each school level agreed (see Table 8). In comparison to perceptions in 2018-2019, there were increases in agreement percentages at all levels, most notably at the secondary level.

Table 8: School Counselor Agreement Regarding Adequate Professional Learning Opportunities

Area	2018-2019			2020-2021		
	ES	MS	HS	ES	MS	HS
Adequate PL opportunities in personal and social development	93.9%	69.2%	69.7%	95.3%	86.2%	82.5%

Students were asked to respond to several survey items related to school counselors providing support in the area of personal and social development. In particular, students were asked their agreement regarding their school counselor being an important resource in dealing with personal and social issues, knowing them and understanding their personal and social goals and challenges, helping them manage transitions and adapt to change, and providing class presentations and small-group instruction on personal and social development. Students were also asked about feeling informed about the different personal and social development resources available to them. Highest student agreement percentages were found at the elementary school level, with at least 72 percent of elementary school students agreeing with these statements (see Table 9). Middle school student agreement regarding their school counselors in these areas ranged from 49 to 76 percent, while high school student agreement ranged from 51 to 65 percent. Overall, highest agreement at the middle and high school levels was found regarding feeling informed about resources (MS: 76%, HS: 65%).

Table 9: Student Agreement Regarding School Counselors' Responsibilities in Personal and Social Development

Survey Item	2018-2019			2020-2021		
	ES	MS	HS	ES	MS	HS
Important resource for personal and social issues	80.6%	63.0%	54.2%	74.6%	59.3%	54.8%
Knows me and understands my personal and social development goals and challenges	78.2%	52.8%	54.2%	71.6%	49.3%	55.9%
Helps me demonstrate the ability to manage transitions and to adapt to changing situations and responsibilities	86.3%	69.7%	63.7%	82.9%	58.0%	57.9%
Provides class presentations or small-group instruction	90.3%	70.9%	42.1%	91.4%	63.6%	51.0%
I feel well-informed about personal and social development resources	86.0%	70.9%	59.1%	88.4%	76.2%	65.1%

In comparison to perceptions in 2018-2019, there were increases in agreement percentages at all levels regarding students feeling informed about resources. In addition, high school students had increases in agreement levels regarding their school counselor providing class presentations or small-group instruction and that their school counselor knew them and understood their personal and social goals and challenges (see Table 9). For other survey items, there were decreases in agreement or similar results from the prior survey period. Given the declines at the elementary and middle school levels, data were examined by student

selected instructional option (face-to-face or virtual only). Results showed that overall, higher percentages of elementary school students who reported receiving face-to-face instruction agreed with the various survey items regarding school counselors' support in personal and social development than elementary school students who indicated they were receiving virtual instruction. In contrast, at the middle school level, higher or similar percentages of middle school students who reported receiving virtual instruction agreed with the various survey items regarding school counselors' support in personal and social development than middle school students who indicated they were receiving face-to-face instruction.

Academic and Career Planning Process

Another recommendation from the 2018-2019 program evaluation focused on continuing to ensure secondary students are supported through the academic and career planning process to develop their academic and career goals and plans. Throughout the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years, there were several steps taken regarding this recommendation. In 2019-2020, two special events related to providing college and career information were offered to students, such as the Annual College Night in October 2019 and the On-site College Admissions and Postsecondary Options Night in February 2020. In addition, college representatives visited high schools to provide information beginning in September 2019. For staff, a professional learning opportunity focused on innovative middle and high school strategies to employ the academic and career planning process was offered to school counselors. Advanced Technology Center (ATC) and Career and Technical Education Center information sessions were offered for new staff members in October 2019. In November 2019, secondary school counselors were offered a tour and overview of the Old Dominion University (ODU) school of nursing program, and in December 2020, they were offered a visit to ODU's Darden College of Education to learn more about postsecondary options.

During the 2020-2021 school year, postsecondary planning events were held for students and families to attend, which included discussing the college application process, enlisting in the military, and becoming employed full time. From November to December 2020, the school counseling program partnered with the Posse Scholars Foundation to assist students with securing full scholarships to partner institutions. As a result, VBCPS had three winners from three different schools in the inaugural year. From November 2020 to April 2021, the school counseling program collaborated with Technical and Career Education (TCE) to offer industry and trade panel discussions with local corporations. From December 2020 to June 2021, the school counseling program partnered with Going Merry, which is a Common App approach to scholarship applications, to assist students in broadening their scholarship search and posting local scholarships on the platform. From February to April 2021, innovative and engaging academic and career planning activities were held at school throughout the division, including a Career Truck Parade, Virtual Career presentation, and hands-on career awareness lessons. On February 22 and March 1, 2021, a Virtual On-Site Admissions and Career Program was held, which involved students applying to colleges and universities and receiving admissions results during meetings with college representatives; students meeting with college representatives to ask questions and discuss potential admissions; and meeting with military recruiters and trade and technical school representatives. In April and May 2021, middle school students engaged in three to five lessons on academic and career planning through the Major Clarity Platform.

Secondary students in grades 7 or 8, and 10 were required to complete an academic and career plan with their school counselors that detailed their desired courses. On the 2020-2021 survey, 54 percent of grade 7 students, 65 percent of grade 8 students, and 42 percent of grade 10 students indicated that their school counselor completed academic and career plans with them to help them prepare for college and career. There were increases in percentages of students who indicated they received this help at all grade levels in comparison to perceptions in 2018-2019 (see Table 10). When secondary school counselors were surveyed about providing this support, 93 percent of middle school and 98 percent of high school counselors indicated

they worked with students to help them complete academic and career plans to prepare for college and career.

Table 10: Percentage of Students Who Indicated Completing Academic and Career Plans With Counselor

Grade	2017-2018	2018-2019	2020-2021
7 th Grade	46.2%	44.5%	54.0%
8 th Grade	53.4%	49.5%	65.1%
10 th Grade	40.0%	34.4%	41.9%

When students were asked more specifically about their counselor helping them identify goals related to academic and career planning, between 51 and 67 percent of middle school students and 48 and 70 percent of high school students agreed their counselor helped them identify their goals (see Table 11). In comparison to perceptions in 2018-2019, there were declines in the agreement percentages, with the exception of high school student agreement regarding their academic goals, which increased, and career goals, which remained relatively the same.

Table 11: Student Percentage Agreement Regarding Counselor Helping Identify Goals

Area	2017-2018		2018-2019		2020-2021	
	MS	HS	MS	HS	MS	HS
Academic	75.3%	63.8%	77.0%	67.5%	66.8%	69.5%
Career	64.3%	45.0%	68.9%	50.3%	62.2%	49.0%
College	52.3%	49.4%	56.0%	54.8%	50.8%	48.3%

Students were also asked their agreement regarding their school counselor helping with awareness of classes related to their academic and career pathways. Overall, 65 percent of middle school students and 66 percent of high school students agreed that their school counselor helped them understand classes related to their career interests. In comparison to perceptions in 2018-2019, there was an increase in the agreement percentage at the high school level, while the percentage remained about the same for middle school students (see Table 12).

Table 12: Student Perceptions Regarding School Counselor Helping Them With Awareness of Academic and Career Pathways

Survey Item	2017-2018		2018-2019		2020-2021	
	MS	HS	MS	HS	MS	HS
Understand classes related to career interests	64.4%	54.2%	65.5%	57.4%	65.1%	66.1%

Parent Involvement

A final recommendation from the 2018-2019 program evaluation focused on continuing to implement new strategies for school counselors to involve, engage, and communicate with parents. Throughout the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years, there were several steps taken regarding this recommendation. In 2019-2020, several information sessions were offered to parents, such as Family Information Nights offered across the division in all schools and centers in the fall of 2019, Navigating the Journey Night in October 2019, and the Family and Student Wellness Expo in March 2020. In addition, from March to June 2020, school counselors created Bitmoji classrooms, virtual cafes, and virtual information events throughout the pandemic closure, and they also sent newsletters to parents.

Throughout the 2020-2021 school year, the school counseling program at several schools maintained active Twitter accounts to diversify how information was shared with external stakeholders, and newsletters, emails, and websites for school counseling departments were updated to share information for families. From September 2020 to January 2021, the Pathway Panel Series was provided, which involved recorded

presentations on college applications, out-of-state college applications, scholarships, trade schools, service academies, and military enlistments. From November 2020 to April 2021, the school counseling program worked with Communications and Community Engagement staff to collaborate on messaging and to share resources with families through multiple methods.

Parents of students in kindergarten through grade twelve were asked on the parent survey whether they knew who their child's school counselor was and whether they talked with their child's school counselor during the 2020-2021 school year. If parents did not talk with their child's school counselor, they could indicate if they would have liked to talk with their child's school counselor or if they did not need to. Overall divisionwide, 73 percent of parents indicated they knew who their child's school counselor was. As seen in Table 13, 64 percent of elementary school parents, 75 percent of middle school parents, and 82 percent of high school parents reported knowing who their child's school counselor was. In comparison to previous years, there were increases at all levels in these percentages.

Table 13: Parent Indicated Knowing and Talking With Their Child's Counselor

Survey Item	2017-2018			2018-2019			2020-2021		
	ES	MS	HS	ES	MS	HS	ES	MS	HS
Knew counselor	47.3%	68.7%	72.5%	45.1%	70.5%	77.6%	64.3%	75.2%	82.3%
Yes, talked with counselor	31.3%	53.0%	45.0%	24.7%	54.3%	55.2%	24.9%	49.8%	58.9%
No, would have liked to talk with counselor	16.1%	14.5%	22.5%	19.1%	14.9%	12.7%	11.6%	10.7%	11.8%
No, did not need to talk with counselor	52.7%	32.5%	32.5%	56.2%	30.9%	32.1%	63.5%	39.5%	29.2%

Regarding whether parents talked with their child's school counselor, divisionwide 42 percent of parents indicated they talked with their child's school counselor, while 12 percent indicated they would have liked to, and 47 percent indicated they did not but did not need to. Results by school level are shown in Table 13. In general, higher percentages of parents of high school students reported talking with their child's school counselor in 2020-2021 than prior years, while higher percentages of parents of elementary and middle school students reported that they did not talk to their child's school counselor and did not need to.

When parents were asked about their satisfaction regarding the level of communication with their child's school counselor, 78 percent of parents indicated they were satisfied divisionwide. Comparisons by level showed that 79 percent of elementary school parents, 78 percent of middle school parents, and 75 percent of high school parents agreed that they were satisfied with the level of communication (see Table 14). In comparison to perceptions in previous years, there were notable increases in satisfaction percentages at all levels.

Table 14: Parent Perceptions Regarding Communication With Their Child's Counselor

Survey Item	2017-2018			2018-2019			2020-2021		
	ES	MS	HS	ES	MS	HS	ES	MS	HS
Parents satisfied with communication	64.9%	44.8%	41.1%	54.1%	60.0%	48.3%	78.8%	77.9%	75.4%

Lastly, parents and staff were asked to rate their perceptions of the extent to which school counselors engaged parents to support children's development. All school counselors at the middle and high school levels (100%) and 95 percent of elementary school counselors agreed that school counselors engaged parents with the goal

of helping them support their child's development (see Table 15). In addition, at least 93 percent of administrators, depending on level, agreed that school counselors engaged parents. Slightly lower agreement was found for parents, with 79 percent of elementary school parents, 77 percent of middle school parents, and 72 percent of high school parents agreeing. In comparison to perceptions in 2018-2019, there were increases in agreement percentages for parents and administrators at all levels, most notably for parents.

Table 15: Perceptions of School Counselor Engaging Parents to Support Children's Development

Survey Item	2017-2018			2018-2019			2020-2021		
	ES	MS	HS	ES	MS	HS	ES	MS	HS
Parents	70.8%	44.6%	49.5%	57.5%	62.3%	43.6%	79.2%	77.0%	71.9%
School Counselors	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	90.3%	95.3%	100%	100%
Administrators	93.1%	89.2%	91.2%	91.1%	93.1%	82.9%	100%	97.6%	92.9%

School Counseling Staffing Allocations

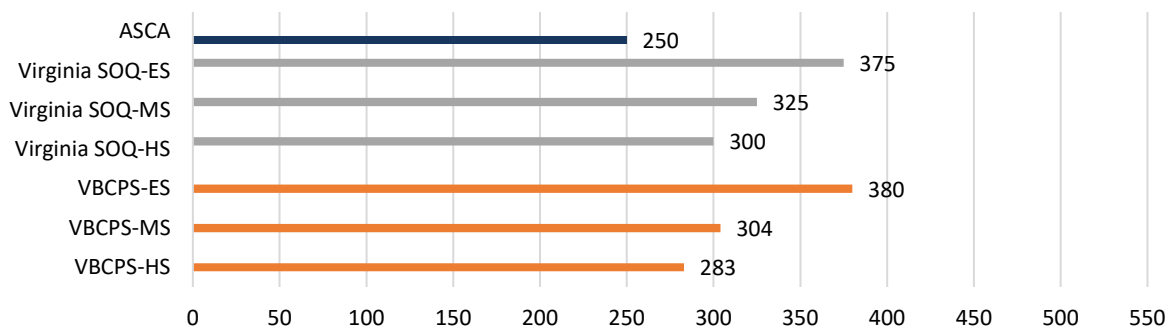
Due to new legislation regarding staff allocations, additional school counselor and mental health-related staff positions (e.g., behavior intervention specialists, psychologists) were added for the 2019-2020 school year. In 2019-2020, there were 13.5 school counselor positions added at the elementary school level⁶ as well as 5 elementary behavior intervention specialist and 5 school psychologist positions added.⁷ Therefore, an additional focus of this evaluation update was on the extent to which the additional staffing allocations, along with the programmatic efforts, enabled the school counseling program to meet students' needs.

School Counselor Allocations

The ASCA recommends staffing of comprehensive school counseling programs at a ratio of one counselor for every 250 students in a school,⁸ while the Virginia Standards of Quality (SOQ) recommendations vary by school level. In 2017-2018 and 2018-2019, the Virginia SOQ recommendation was that one full-time equivalent (FTE) school counselor for every 500 students should be employed at elementary schools, one school counselor for every 400 students should be employed at middle schools, and one school counselor for every 350 students should be employed at high schools.⁹ The new legislation effective July 1, 2019 recommended that one school counselor be allocated for every 375 students at elementary schools, one school counselor be allocated for every 325 students at middle schools, and one school counselor be allocated for every 300 students at high schools.¹⁰ Full funding was not provided by the state to ensure these guidelines were met for 2019-2020; therefore, the Appropriation Act Item 136.B.7.g provided revised recommended ratios *for the 2019-2020 school year only* to be one school counselor for every 455 students at elementary schools, one school counselor for every 370 students at middle schools, and one school counselor for every 325 students at high schools.¹¹ The SOQ guidelines for the 2020-2021 school year followed the new legislation recommendation of one school counselor for every 375 students at elementary schools, one school counselor for every 325 students at middle schools, and one school counselor for every 300 students at high schools.

Staffing in each Virginia Beach school supports the school counseling function with a guidance department chair at each secondary school and from 1 to 1.9 school counselor FTE allocations at each elementary school, 2 to 5 school counselor FTE allocations at each middle school, and 5 to 7 school counselor FTE allocations at each high school. Based on the total school counselor FTE allocations at each school level in 2020-2021, the school division allocated one school counselor for approximately every 380 elementary school students, which was nearly equivalent to the SOQ guideline of 1:375. At the middle school level, VBCPS staffed school counseling departments at a rate of one school counselor for every 304 students, which was a better staffing ratio than the SOQ guideline of 1:325. The VBCPS staffing ratio was also better at the high school level with one school counselor for every 283 students compared to the guideline of 1:300. See Figure 1 for a comparison of staffing by school level.

Figure 1: School Counselor Allocations by School Level for 2020-2021



When comparing the staffing allocations for the 2020-2021 school year to the previous three school years, there was an improvement in the allocation ratio at the elementary school level (see Table 16). This was due to new school counseling staffing positions added in 2019-2020. The change from 2019-2020 to 2020-2021 at the elementary school level and fluctuations at the middle and high school levels were likely due to changes in student enrollment.

Table 16: Counselor Allocations by School Level

School Level	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021
Elementary	1 to 492	1 to 497	1 to 414	1 to 380
Middle	1 to 293	1 to 303	1 to 313	1 to 304
High	1 to 337	1 to 280	1 to 278	1 to 283

Further revisions to the SOQ recommendations are anticipated for the 2021-2022 school year. Effective with the 2021-2022 school year, the SOQ guideline will be one school counselor for every 325 students in grades kindergarten through twelve. According to the 2021-2022 VBCPS Superintendent's Estimates of Needs, there was a request that "the number of elementary guidance counselors (13.0 FTEs) and middle school counselors (3.0 FTEs) be increased to meet SOQ requirements based on an amendment that reduces the staffing ratios to 325-to-1 in all schools."¹²

When surveyed about whether school counselor allocations allowed the school counseling program to meet students' needs, divisionwide approximately half of school counselors (53%), 71 percent of administrators, and 79 percent of teachers agreed the allocations allowed the program to meet students' needs. There was little variation in agreement percentages when comparing school counselor and teacher perceptions by school level in 2020-2021 (see Table 17). High school administrators were less likely to agree than administrators at the other school levels. As shown in Table 17, in comparison to perceptions from the previous surveys, there were increases in agreement percentages at each school level for all staff groups, with the most notable increases seen for school counselors at the elementary and high school levels.

Table 17: Staff Agreement Regarding Allocations Allowing Program to Meet Students' Needs

Group	2017-2018			2018-2019			2020-2021		
	ES	MS	HS	ES	MS	HS	ES	MS	HS
School Counselors	35.3%	41.9%	15.8%	17.1%	42.3%	21.2%	51.2%	51.7%	54.4%
Teachers	64.4%	68.6%	53.6%	58.1%	56.9%	61.0%	81.8%	78.1%	76.9%
Administrators	62.5%	70.3%	34.3%	44.8%	58.6%	48.6%	74.3%	73.8%	64.3%

Staff members who disagreed with this item were provided the opportunity to provide comments. Comments by school counselors focused on the large number of students on their caseload impacting their ability to meet

with students and several counselors specifically indicated their caseload was higher than the ASCA recommendation of 250 students per counselor. In addition, school counselors noted that there are many tasks that require their time, such as holding 504 meetings and completing clerical work, which impact their ability to work directly with students. Some counselors also noted that the number of tasks they need to complete has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as addressing increased mental health needs of students and receiving more questions from staff, students, and parents. Similar themes emerged from comments provided by teachers and administrators, including noting the need for additional counselors due to the number of students at the school and the number of tasks required to be completed by school counselors. Some teachers also indicated that school counselors were unable to meet with all students and that they may be difficult to reach due to their caseloads. Teachers and administrators also indicated that the increased mental health needs of their students during the pandemic impacted the ability to meet all students' needs.

Staff members were also asked whether school counselors' student caseloads afforded them adequate time to counsel students. Overall, 40 percent of school counselors and 68 percent of administrators agreed. Comparisons by school level showed that half of elementary school counselors (49%) agreed that caseloads afforded them adequate time to counsel students, while approximately one-third of counselors at the middle school (31%) and high school (37%) levels agreed. Slightly lower administrator agreement was found at the high school level (60%) compared to the elementary school (73%) and middle school (68%) levels. As shown in Table 18, although agreement percentages for school counselors were low for each school level, in comparison to perceptions from the previous surveys, there were notable increases at all school levels. There were also increases in agreement percentages for administrators at each school level.

Table 18: Staff Agreement Regarding Caseloads Allow Adequate Time to Counsel Students

Group	2017-2018			2018-2019			2020-2021		
	ES	MS	HS	ES	MS	HS	ES	MS	HS
School Counselors	17.1%	22.6%	2.6%	8.6%	19.2%	14.3%	48.8%	31.0%	36.8%
Administrators	48.4%	64.9%	31.4%	32.8%	58.6%	47.2%	73.0%	68.3%	60.0%

Students and parents were also surveyed about the school counseling program's ability to meet students' needs. Overall divisionwide, 74 percent of students and 78 percent of parents agreed that the school counseling program met their or their child's needs, respectively. As shown in Table 19, elementary school students and parents had the highest agreement levels followed by middle school students and parents and then high school students and parents.

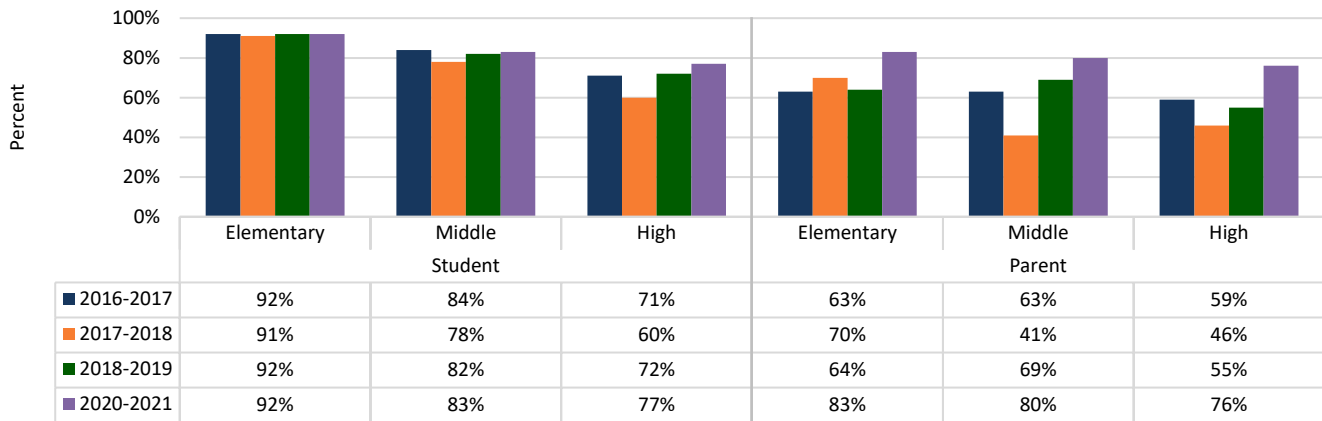
Table 19: Student and Parent Agreement Regarding School Counseling Program Meeting Student Needs

Group	ES	MS	HS
Students	85.7%	74.1%	71.4%
Parents	80.9%	78.7%	74.6%

Satisfaction

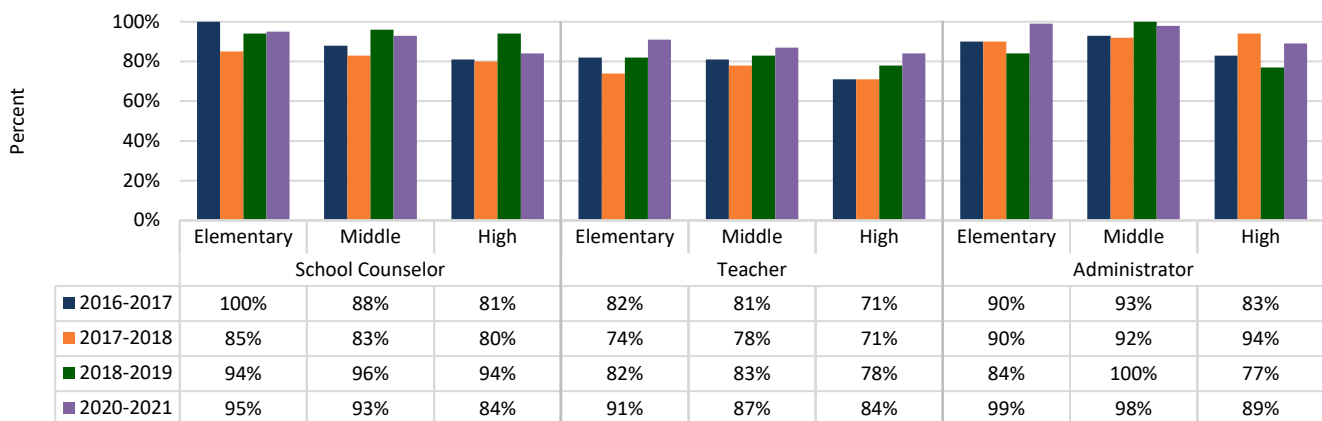
All stakeholder groups were asked to indicate their level of overall satisfaction with the school counseling program. In 2020-2021, approximately 92 percent of fifth graders, 83 percent of middle school students, and 77 percent of high school students were satisfied (see Figure 2). In comparison to satisfaction in 2018-2019, satisfaction percentages remained relatively the same for elementary school and middle school students, while there was an increase for high school students. Parent satisfaction percentages ranged from 76 to 83 percent by school level in 2020-2021. In comparison to previous years, there were notable increases in parent satisfaction percentages at each school level.

Figure 2: Student and Parent Satisfaction



Staff satisfaction levels were relatively high for all groups (see Figure 3). From 84 to 95 percent of school counselors, 84 to 91 percent of teachers, and 89 to 99 percent of administrators were satisfied with the program depending on school level. Overall, highest staff satisfaction for each group was at the elementary school level. In comparison to the previous years, at all levels, there were increases in the percentages of staff who were satisfied with the program or satisfaction remained relatively high at or above 84 percent.

Figure 3: Staff Satisfaction



School counselors were provided the opportunity to comment on the ways in which the pandemic impacted the school counseling program and the services provided. Several counselors indicated that there were increases in the duties and responsibilities asked of them, such as clerical work, processing adjustments to students' instructional option, and lunch duties. Counselors also noted that the mental health or social-emotional needs of students increased during this time, which impacted their focus. Several school counselors commented on the difficulty with connecting and meeting with the students who were virtual, which led to difficulties with meeting the needs of these students; although a few school counselors indicated that the pandemic allowed them to meet with the virtual students on an individual basis, which may not have been possible previously.

Summary

The VBCPS school counseling program promotes the growth of all students from kindergarten through grade twelve in the areas of academic success, college and career readiness, and personal and social development.

The school counseling program has had three previous comprehensive program evaluations that have focused on each of these areas. Based upon the School Board approved recommendations included in the December 2019 comprehensive evaluation, this evaluation update focused on the progress related to the 2018-2019 program evaluation recommendations, including modifying the personal and social development counseling component; supporting academic and career planning for secondary students; and engaging parents. The evaluation update also focused on the extent to which additional staffing allocations, along with the programmatic efforts, enabled the school counseling program to meet students' needs.

Regarding modifying the personal and social development counseling component, several steps were taken toward this recommendation. A social-emotional learning survey was provided to students to assess students' SEL competencies, and the school counseling program worked to create a more direct connection to mental health providers for students in need. In addition, the school counseling program provided various professional learning opportunities to staff, led a mental health task force to identify improvements in mental health support, and worked to develop depression and suicide prevention lessons that will be offered in student Health and PE courses.

When surveyed about school counselor expectations in personal and social development, 86 percent of school counselors and 92 percent of administrators agreed that expectations in personal and social counseling were clearly defined, while 64 percent of school counselors and 83 percent of administrators agreed the expectations were reasonable. Lowest agreement was found for high school counselors (55%). In comparison to agreement percentages from 2017-2018 and 2018-2019, there were increases for all staff respondent groups at all school levels. School counselors also had high agreement regarding receiving adequate professional learning in personal and social development, with at least 83 percent agreeing at each school level. Student agreement regarding school counselors providing support in the area of personal and social development was highest at the elementary school level. From 72 to 75 percent of elementary school students agreed their school counselor was an important resource for personal and social issues and knew them and understood their goals and challenges, while from 49 to 59 percent of secondary students agreed with these items. In addition, 88 percent of elementary school students agreed they felt informed about personal and social development resources, while 76 percent of middle school students and 65 percent of high school students agreed. In comparison to perceptions in 2018-2019, there were increases in agreement percentages at all levels regarding students feeling informed about resources. In addition, high school students had increases in agreement levels regarding their school counselor providing class presentations or small-group instruction and that their school counselor knew them and understood their personal and social goals and challenges.

Regarding supporting academic and career planning for secondary students, several steps were taken toward this recommendation, including offering various postsecondary planning events for students and families and offering various professional learning opportunities in this area for staff. While most middle school (93%) and high school (98%) counselors indicated they worked with students to help them complete academic and career plans to prepare for college and career, 54 percent of grade 7 students, 65 percent of grade 8 students, and 42 percent of grade 10 students indicated their school counselor worked with them on these plans. Further, from 51 to 67 percent of middle school students, and from 48 to 70 percent of high school students agreed that their school counselor worked with them specifically on identifying their academic and career goals. In comparison to perceptions in 2018-2019, there were increases in high school student agreement regarding receiving help identifying their academic goals (68% to 70%) and with understanding classes related to career interests (57% to 66%).

Regarding engaging parents, several steps were taken toward this recommendation, including offering various parent information nights and increasing the amount of communication sent to families through social media and newsletters. Overall, 73 percent of parents indicated they knew who their child's school counselor was.

While 42 percent of parents indicated they talked with their child's school counselor, 47 percent indicated they did not need to, and 78 percent agreed that they were satisfied with the level of communication with their child's school counselor. The percentages of parents who indicated they knew their child's school counselor and were satisfied with communication increased at all levels in comparison to 2017-2018 and 2018-2019.

New legislation provided recommendations regarding school counselor allocations. VBCPS school counselor allocations met or were nearly equivalent to the Virginia SOQ guidelines aligned with the legislation. When surveyed about school counselor allocations allowing the program to meet students' needs, overall, approximately half of school counselors (53%), 71 percent of administrators, and 79 percent of teachers agreed allocations allowed the program to meet students' needs. Regarding caseloads allowing adequate time to counsel students, 40 percent of school counselors and 68 percent of administrators agreed. Comparisons by level showed slightly lower agreement at the secondary level for school counselors (31% and 37% vs. 49%) and at the high school level for administrators (60% vs. 68% and 73%) regarding caseloads. In comparison to agreement percentages from 2017-2018 and 2018-2019, there were increases for all groups of staff respondents at all school levels for both survey items. When students and parents were surveyed about the program meeting students' needs, 74 percent of students and 78 percent of parents agreed.

From 84 to 99 percent of school counselors, teachers, and administrators, depending on level, were satisfied with the school counseling program. In comparison to the previous years, at all levels, there were increases in the percentages of staff who were satisfied with the program or satisfaction remained relatively high at 84 percent or above. From 77 to 92 percent of students, depending on level, were satisfied. While student satisfaction at the elementary school and middle school levels remained consistent in comparison to the previous surveys, high school student satisfaction increased. Parent satisfaction was also at least 76 percent at each school level, and there were notable increases in comparison to the previous surveys.

Endnotes

¹ Source: <https://www.vbschools.com/cms/One.aspx?portalId=78094&pageId=206121>

² Source: <https://www.vbschools.com/cms/One.aspx?portalId=78094&pageId=206121>

³ Source: <https://www.vbschools.com/cms/One.aspx?portalId=78094&pageId=206121>

⁴ Source: School Guidance/Counseling Program. Retrieved from <https://www.vbschools.com/cms/One.aspx?portalId=78094&pageId=206121>

⁵ Students in fourth grade also responded to survey items about the school counseling program, and results were provided to the Department of Teaching and Learning and the Department of School Leadership as well as schools meeting required response rates. Results for fourth-grade students are not included in this evaluation update because previous evaluations of the program did not include grade four students, and in some cases, results from 2020-2021 are compared with prior year results.

⁶ Source: 2018-2019 School Counseling Program Comprehensive Evaluation School Board Presentation Administration's Response Notes.

⁷ Source: FY 2020/21 Superintendent's Estimate of Needs. Retrieved from https://www.vbschools.com/UserFiles/Servers/Server_78010/File/About%20Us/Our%20Leadership/Our%20Departments/Budget/Archive/FY%202020-2021/SEONdoc.pdf

⁸ Source: https://www.schoolcounselor.org/asca/media/asca/PositionStatements/PS_SupportStaff.pdf

⁹ Source: 2017 Standards of Quality: §22.1-253.13.2. Standard 2. Instructional, administrative, and support personnel. Paragraph H.4.

¹⁰ Source: Superintendent's Memo #136-19. June 14, 2019.

¹¹ Source: <https://budget.lis.virginia.gov/item/2019/1/HB1700/Chapter/1/136>

¹² Source: VBCPS Superintendent's Estimate of Needs FY 2021/22. Retrieved from https://www.vbschools.com/UserFiles/Servers/Server_78010/File/About%20Us/Our%20Leadership/Our%20Departments/Budget/Archive/FY%202021-2022/SEONdoc.pdf

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