Counselling Services Survey

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The survey checklist was completed through discussion with Sharon Cooper, one member of the counselling team at Yorkson Creek Middle School (YCMS), a grade six to eight school situated in a rapidly growing, a socially, economically, and racially diverse neighbourhood in Langley, British Columbia. The school has approximately 570 students, and currently has two part-time counsellors on staff. The school should have one more full-time counsellor; however, it has been difficult to fill the position due to a shortage of certified candidates in Langley.

**Format**

The majority of counselling services provided are focused on individual counselling. Consulting with other school professionals (i.e. teachers, administrators, school psychologists, youth care workers) also accounts for a significant amount of time. Very little time is spent on small group sessions, and little-to-no time is spent on large group sessions or peer facilitation programs.

**Focus**

Crisis intervention is where the majority of time is spent on individual counselling services. It was noted that what most counsellors and other adults would define as a crisis is very different than what a middle school student would interpret as one. Most students that come into her office believe they are in crisis; therefore, this type of counselling does take up a significant amount of time. “Triage” counselling becomes a regular practice as a result of human resource shortage.

Individual counselling time spent on remedial work and preventative counselling accounts for some to quite a lot of the time. Due to the shortage of counsellors, remedial work often gets pushed to the next day due to unexpected crisis situations.

Very little time is spent on small group crisis intervention, remedial work and preventative counselling. Many of the small group activities, like friendship groups and peer mediation are handled by the youth care worker. Little to no time is spent on large group preventive counselling, although typically the counselling department will cohost with a speaker about social media and mental health each year through schoolwide assemblies. Crisis intervention in large groups usually only occurs in emergency situations or in response to a violent incident that may occur in an individual classroom; however, these cases are infrequent. Remedial work in large groups accounts for no time.

**Working Together**

A considerable amount of the counsellor’s collaborative time is spent talking to and working with parents. The counsellor noted that middle school is a critical age for working with parents, and they find that they are very receptive to support from the counselling department.

The next largest portion of time is spent meeting and collaborating with the youth care worker and the administrative team of the school. Some time is spent meeting with teachers and the other counsellor on staff. Very little time is is spent meeting with outside agencies, school psychologists and teacher assistants.

**Referrals**

A considerable number of the referrals the counselling department makes are to either school district personal or community services. Some of the referrals are to the Ministry of Children and Families, Mental Health professionals, and Crisis Response programs outside of the school district. Little to no referrals are made to substance abuse workers; however, it was noted that Langley has a substance abuse program that they would refer to first, before looking at outside program.

**Program Development and Delivery**

Due to a shortage of counselling services at YCMS, there is little to no opportunity to work on the development and/or delivery of curriculum around social responsibilities, academic achievements, and career choices. On some occasions, counselors are invited into the classroom to support conversations around mental health and physical health. As middle school counsellors, they are not responsible for any work around course planning.

**Responsibility**

At middle school, the course and curriculum are set; therefore, counsellors and classroom teachers have no responsibility around course selection. In addition, as a middle school, post-secondary options are not a focus. Grade eights are given the choice of their electives for the year, and this is completely handled by the department head and the school office staff. Individual teachers, such as the Art teacher, do not do any purposeful promotion of their program, as there are only a few choices available to students.

Classroom teachers deliver the Careers curriculum and create assignments around personal planning, social growth, career awareness, and decision making. There is a teacher who is in charge of the Careers curriculum at YCMS. They are released for one block and their duties include implementing MyBlueprint portfolio platform, organizing career related speakers and coordinating career related field trips.

A considerable amount of the paperwork completed by Counsellors at YCMS is considered helpful to student improvement and learning. In the fall, the counselling department reviews abuse and suicide reporting protocols with the staff; however, this is the extent of their time spent on delivering Professional Development (Pro-D) at the school level, mostly due to the shortage of counselling services in the school. When full allocation of counsellors is available, more Pro-D is offered by the counselling department. The remaining responsibilities listed in the survey do not account for any of the time spent.

**Additional Comments**

During our discussion, the counsellor really emphasized that counselling at middle school is unlike her previous experiences at elementary and high school. She noted that middle school was not her first choice for counselling; however, she does not want to leave middle school because she believes it is the best place to do counselling work. At this level, she finds that parents are much more invested in working with her and the school to assist their child. She noted that in her experience at elementary school. Student concerns become apparent, but there is often a parental response of ‘they will outgrow it’. In addition, when only at an elementary school one or two days a week, it often makes it difficult to work with students and establish a regular pattern of behaviour. By high school, her experience is such that many parents have “given up” and that they feel it is “too late”. It is also a busier place with different demands placed on the counselling department. However, at middle school she finds that it is easier to get everyone on board, both parents and teachers (Sharon Cooper, personal communication, June 2, 2020).