

ASSESSMENT OF THE GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING NEEDS OF AT-RISK  
STUDENTS IN AN ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL

by

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the career, academic, and personal-social needs of at-risk youth attending a charter school. Charter schools are a new trend in education because they provide increased opportunities for students not served well by traditional forms of education. For the purpose of this study, the charter school that was selected was designed to serve students who are at-risk for not completing high school.

Students attending a rural charter school located outside a small city in a midwestern state were surveyed for the study. The researcher modified a survey used by the guidance counselor in the school district to measure the subjects' guidance and counseling needs. The study addressed four questions. First, students were asked to

indicate the guidance and counseling services provided by their schools. Second, students indicated services that would be useful to their educational needs. Students then indicated the most important service of the guidance counselor as the third question. The fourth question was asked to understand the specific interests students have in small group counseling services.

Overall, the findings suggest that there are important guidance and counseling services that need more attention from charter schools. Students attending the charter school used for the survey indicated they are generally concerned about academic progress and their future. They indicated most interest in receiving individual counseling, academic support, and information on post high school options. Individual counseling was the guidance service that received the most responses from survey participants.

The researcher's goal was to determine the value of a guidance counselor for charter schools. The findings from this research suggest that students benefit from the programs implemented by guidance counselors. It is recommended that additional research be done on the guidance and counseling needs of students attending charter schools to better understand the degree of their needs.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

The time children spend in education is considerable. Ideally children will begin learning in an educational setting from the time they are 4 or 5 years of age. This can continue for many years depending on the level of education each child wishes to pursue. The period of time spent in education overlaps with the period when a child is developing into an adult. A child's life is marked by constant physical, emotional, and mental changes. Because students spend much of their development in a school setting, as educators we need to plan for how we can best meet the needs of students.

Adolescence is one period in a student's development that is marked by constant changes. According to Erik Erikson's fifth stage of human development, identity versus identity confusion, adolescence is a time when individuals are searching for who they are and what they want out of life (cited in Santrock, 2005). Adolescents may have different attitudes and perspectives for what is important to them at this stage of development. Erikson also stated during this stage of development, that adolescents will experiment with different roles and personalities. Because there are a variety of changes going on for adolescents, it is essential for individuals who work with adolescents to be aware of these changes and how they can promote healthy development.

The introduction of guidance counselors in public schools was one way schools attempted to help adolescents with their development. The evolution of guidance and counseling occurred during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Initially, the role of a guidance counselor was to provide vocational training for children. Counselors were used to help students prepare for the work place (Muro & Kottman, 1995). Eventually, the

responsibilities of a school counselor increased. In addition to helping students learn skills needed for the work place, students were given lessons that would help them in other areas of their lives. Today, counselors are accountable for helping students learn personal/social, academic, and career skills. The school counselor has an important role within the school. This person needs to find ways to meet the needs of all students. Due to the changing needs of students, this has become a difficult responsibility for school counselors.

Completion of high school and receiving a high school diploma is desired for having increased opportunities for success. Today, fewer career opportunities are available for students who have not received a high school education. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES; 2000), the value of completing high school has made dramatic changes since the middle 20th century. Christenson, Sinclair, Lehr, and Hurley reported that students who do not finish high school influenced a loss of revenue in society because of needed "welfare programs, unemployment programs, underemployment, and crime prevention and prosecution" (cited in Christenson & Thurlow, 2004, p. 36).

Unfortunately, 1 in 7 children will not graduate from high school (Children's Defense Fund, 2004). In addition, the NCES (2000) reported that 5 out of every 100 students enrolled between October 1999 and October 2000, had left high school before successfully completing a high school program. Demographic characteristics, past school performance, personal characteristics, and school or neighborhood characteristics were the leading variables that indicated students at risk for not graduating (Gleason & Dynarski, 2002). These variables are important for educators to understand when trying

to create programs for those at-risk youth. Therefore, these problems that schools and students face will not go away unless schools take a proactive role in helping students who are at risk for not graduating.

In order to meet the needs of all students, schools need to improve and reform some of their strategies for educating youth. One way schools have been successful for reaching out to more students is through the creation of alternative education programs. Some of these programs are specifically designed to meet the needs of at-risk youth. Charter schools are one example of an alternative education program that public schools are utilizing. Children have different learning styles and charter schools are one form of alternative education programs that are designed to appeal to the needs of students. According to the LaCrosse School District, "one size does not fit all" is the motto for charter schools (n. p.). These charter schools were created to provide more choices for students in the public education system (Vergari, 1999). Many charter schools are most concerned with providing an education to at-risk youth. Charter schools provide more opportunities for learning to at-risk students because these schools can cater to their individual needs.

The goal of these alternative programs is to find a way to increase the percentages of students obtaining a high school diploma. This study will examine the needs of at-risk adolescents in charter schools. It will also look at what the developmental guidance and counseling needs are for these students. By answering these questions, counselors will have a better understanding of how they can be more effective in providing services to at-risk youth. In addition, this study will benefit students because they will understand how they can make use of the counseling services offered by schools.

### *Statement of the Problem*

The purpose of this study is to explore the needs of at-risk students in an alternative school program. The study will look at the guidance and counseling needs of students in charter schools as perceived by those students. Data will be collected during the spring of 2005 through the use of a survey adapted from Angela Ruchti (personal communication, September 29, 2004). The survey will be distributed to students attending a rural charter school located outside a small city in a midwestern state.

### *Research Questions*

There are three questions that this study will address. They include:

1. What are the services needed by students at charter schools?
2. Of these perceived needs indicated by students, what needs are being provided by the charter school?
3. What is the one most important service adolescents want charter schools to provide?

### *Definition of Terms*

For clarity of understanding, the following terms need to be defined:

*Alternative School:* Term will be used synonymously with the term charter school. See charter school definition.

*At-risk:* Students who are not served well in their traditional high school programs and are in danger of not obtaining a high school diploma.

*Charter school:* A charter school is a school that is established through a contract with either a local school board or a state agency. The charter school is held accountable for achieving the goals set by the contract for improving student performance (National

Education Association, 2004). The focus of a charter school in this study is to serve students who are at risk for not completing high school.

*Charter School Teachers:* The teachers, paraprofessionals, and principal employed at a midwestern charter school during the 2004-2005 school year who provides education to students in grades 9-12.

*Developmental Guidance and Counseling:* "describe activities and services that are designed to help students focus on the attainment of knowledge and skills for developing healthy life goals and acquiring the behaviors to reach these goals" ( Schmidt, 2003, p. 29).

*Drop-Out:* According to Kushman, Sieber, and Heariold-Kinney (2000, p. 472), "Dropout is defined as a student who has been enrolled at any time during the previous school year and is not enrolled on October 1 of the current school year" (cited in Capuzzi & Gross).

#### *Assumptions and Limitations*

Due to the small number of participants in the study, it is important to understand that the findings of this study are not generalizable to all students attending charter school programs. It is also noted that students and charter schools in the Midwest may differ from students and charter schools elsewhere in the country.

It is assumed that the students who participated in the study were truthful in filling out the survey. It is hoped that the findings of the study are a valuable source of information to those who serve the at risk population, and will provide for further research on effectiveness of guidance and counseling programs for at-risk students.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature Review

This chapter will discuss the important aspects of charter schools and how they are designed to meet the special needs of at-risk students. General information about the structure and organization of charter schools will be discussed. In addition, this chapter will look at the roles of the classroom teachers and the characteristics of the youth served by alternative schools. In conclusion, the final section of this chapter will review current literature of the services needed by at-risk adolescents in charter schools.

#### *Structure of Charter Schools*

During the mid 1980s, America recognized a problem in its traditional public education system. In a report released during the Reagan administration by the U.S. Department of Education, the United States was declared to be a "nation at-risk" (Finn, Manno, & Vanourek, 2001, p. 58). This report criticized the lack of services being provided to at-risk students. In addition, this report provided an incentive for educational reformers to design new educational institutions that would serve the changing needs of youth. Senator Joseph Lieberman stated that "school reform is no longer an option--it is a necessity" (cited in Finn, Manno, & Vanourek, 2001, p. 58). Because there was such strong opposition regarding the performance of the traditional public school system, many educational reformers searched for alternative forms of education.

Albert Shanker and Ray Budde were two leading reformers in the development of charter schools (Finn, Manno, & Vanourek, 2001). During the late 1980s, both of these men released reports that proposed charter schools were better capable of meeting the needs of youth who were in some way failing the current educational system. Both

educational reformers believed that charter schools would help increase students' choices and the opportunities for success within the public school system (Vergari, 1999). Charter schools became the new educational initiative which hoped to reach out to those students who were not succeeding in traditional public schools.

The charter school movement opened the eyes of many and provided a vision for better serving students. Finn, Manno, and Vanourek, (2001) said:

Charter schools...change the emphasis from inputs to results by focusing on student achievement. They flip the structure from rule-bound hierarchy to decentralized flexibility by allowing individual schools to shape their own destinies. They constitute education's version of civil society, a hybrid that draws on the best of the public and private sectors. They introduce enterprise, competition, choice, community, and accountability into a weary system. (p. 62)

There are many obstacles those traditional public school systems faces that inhibit their ability to reach out to the diverse needs of students. Charter schools were designed to offer more flexibility and autonomy for public schools to reach out to the individual needs of students. This flexibility that Finn, Manno, and Vanourek spoke about created the basis for why charter schools have become so important.

The structure of charter schools is very different from the structure of traditional public schools. Charter schools can be created by almost anyone, depending on each state's charter school law. Generally, charter schools do not have to follow most state and local regulations. These schools are designed to provide students with more flexibility. They are also a school of choice; parents, teachers, and students choose to become members of a charter school district. Charter schools can also be designed to serve

specific student populations. Typically, charter schools serve students who are underserved by the traditional public school system. As a final point, charter schools are held accountable. Their contracts will be terminated and the school will close if the board that gave the charter is not satisfied with the charter school's results (Finn, Manno, & Vanourek, 2001). Traditional public schools do not have to meet the guidelines that charter schools must meet in order to keep their funding. These listed features serve as the basic principles for describing the major differences between conventional public schools and public charter schools.

In some ways, the factors suggested above demonstrate how charter schools closely resemble the structure of a private school. Similar to private schools, the mission and educational approaches of charter schools can vary according to the types of students the school serves. In addition, charter schools have an extensive control over their curriculum, instruction, and the overall structure of the school. This is similar to the freedom that private schools have in determining their educational structure. Vergari (1999) stated that charter schools can benefit low-income families because they offer them with "types of educational options that have largely been available only to wealthy families able to afford the tuition expenses of private schools" (p. 390). Charter schools provide students, parents, and the community with an opportunity to be engaged in a variety of specialized learning environments without the added cost of a private education.

Charter schools are funded in a variety of ways. In the original planning phase for the chartering district, the contract will determine how the school will be funded. For example, in the state of Wisconsin, the school board which sponsors the charter school

will indicate the amount of money allocated by the district for the charter school (Wisconsin Charter Schools Association, 2004). Oftentimes, money can be generated through different grants received from the community, state, or federal organizations. In addition, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) offers Public Charter Schools Program (PCSP) grants that will also help provide funding for operating public charter schools (Burmester, Dold, Soldner, & Decker, 2002). These sources of funding help to create the wide range of learning environments that is needed to reform education.

Once funding has been made available, a chartering district must decide how to govern the school. Governance of a charter school can involve a variety of individuals. The charter school for this researchers' study utilized a charter school governance board to regulate its school. This board consisted of individuals that represented the local school district board of education, charter school teachers, members of the community, staff from the chartering district, parents, and students (T. Schmelzle, personal communication, October 13, 2004). These individuals work together to address the needs and the concerns for managing the charter school. Generally this pattern of governance is a common form of administration and organization for charter schools across the United States.

One of the hallmarks of charter schools is that they offer more parental involvement and participation in its structure than the traditional public school system offers (Burmester, Dold, Soldner, & Decker, 2002). Active participation from parents is one way to guarantee a successful program. In addition to parents, teachers are also vital components for successful charter schools. It is through these educators that the individual needs of students can be met.

### *Charter School Teachers*

A charter school teacher may take on many responsibilities within the school. The roles of charter school teachers vary dramatically from traditional public school teachers. In addition to teaching multiple subjects and multiple ages, charter school teachers may serve in a variety of roles, such as: advisor, Individual Educational Plan (IEP) coordinator, mentor, and/or counselor (T. Schmelzle, personal communication, October 13, 2004). Charter schools often can be very small schools, so it is necessary for these schools to maximize the resources that they have available. The result of this limitation is that these teachers may also be needed to share the administrative responsibilities for running a school. These responsibilities could include: board membership, hiring and dismissing teachers, establishing school policies, and organizing the school budget (Regents of the University of Minnesota, 1999). The success of a charter school can be attributed to the involvement and determination of the charter school teachers and their willingness to take on extra responsibilities.

In order to allow for teachers to take on different roles within the charter school, DPI provides special teaching licenses to charter school teachers. This license allows teachers to teach any subject or any grade within the charter school. In addition, a special license can be given to professionals who are not trained to be teachers, as long as they have formal proof of education or mastery in a specific trade (Burmester, Dold, Soldner, & Decker, 2002). According to the Charter School Instructional Staff License, charter school teaching permits may be renewed each year if the permit holder proves that he or she has met specific requirements required by the state (Burmester, Dold, Soldner, & Decker, 2002).

Individuals who choose to teach in charter schools must be committed to teaching to the individual needs of students. These educators need to be enthusiastic, creative, and flexible to ensure success for themselves and for students (Wisconsin Charter Schools Association, 2004).

According to the School District of Lacrosse, WI, charter school teachers need to work with students to appeal to their different learning styles and to encourage them in finding their voices (n. p.). Charter school teachers provide structure and a comprehensive learning environment that is most appropriate for students. The emphasis on curriculum is for real world experience. Educators in charter schools realize that students need to be given the skills that will help them become successful adults. Shulla-Cose and Day (2003) reported that there is more to education than helping students receive good grades; this education should also help build strong relationships with students. Educators need to facilitate and promote learning of students who are at risk for not receiving a high school diploma.

#### *Characteristics of Students in Charter Schools*

Charter schools are designed to provide education for students with many different learning needs. One common special population that is served by charter schools is at-risk youth. During adolescence, children will stumble upon a variety of experiences that may cause them to be at risk. Youth who are exposed to certain life experiences may be at a higher risk than other adolescents. In order to understand the diverse needs of students in charter schools, it is necessary to also look at the process of adolescent development and to review the theoretical implications for their development.

### *Adolescent Development*

The course of adolescent development can be affected through a combination of three factors: heredity, childhood experiences, and adolescent experiences (Santrock, 2005). The effects of these factors will influence the behaviors of adolescents and the choices they make throughout their lives. It is also important to understand that human development is a continuous process of change that is "determined by biological, cognitive, and socio-emotional processes" (Santrock, 2005, p. 20). The underpinnings of many theoretical perspectives are related to these continuous processes of change.

Social cognitive theory is one theory of human development. This theory suggests that behavior, environment, and cognition are important factors in understanding adolescent development. Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory states that environmental experiences and observable behaviors will influence the development of adolescents (cited in Santrock, 2005).

Another well known theory suggests that cognitive factors in humans will influence development. Cognitive theorists like Jean Piaget believe that humans begin to understand because they are able to consciously organize their thoughts and experiences. Piaget proposed that humans progress in stages of understanding (cited in Santrock, 2005).

Erik Erikson also proposed the concept of human development progressing through developmental stages. These stages of development, however, are more dependent on the impacts of life experiences in shaping personality. As stated earlier in this study, Erikson believed that different experiences will lead an individual to advance to the next stage of development. The primary focus of Erikson's fifth stage of

development explores adolescence and the experiences that will shape the identities of adolescents (cited in Santrock, 2005). Initiating independence, making decisions, and establishing self identities are the hallmarks for this stage of adolescent development.

There are many different theories that suggest the pattern of development for adolescents. However, it is important to realize that there is no single theory that is able to describe all patterns of how adolescents will develop. The many different changes and challenges that adolescents encounter illustrate how important it is to be aware of their diverse needs. Adolescent development is influenced in many ways; therefore, it is essential that adolescents are provided with different learning opportunities within the educational system.

#### *At-risk Youth*

Capuzzi & Gross (2000) believe that all youth are subject to being at risk. They cited in a passage that it is necessary to look at the developmental period of adolescents to best describe the problems they may encounter.

The developmental period from childhood through adolescence is characterized by rapid physical change, striving for independence, exploration and implementation of new behaviors, strengthening peer relationships, sexual awakening and experimentation, and seeking clarity relating to self and one's place in the larger society. Pressures exerted by family, school, peers, and society to conform or not conform to established standards contribute to the highly charged environment in which this developmental process takes place and the degree of vulnerability that exists within it for the individual (10).

Adolescents often are determined at risk by their family and school characteristics because these societal institutions are most responsible for influencing a child (Duncan & Hannaway, 1996). When we combine these pressures with the negative environmental experiences that many students have, the students are more susceptible to having problems in school and having difficulty learning. At-risk students fall behind in traditional school systems and are often forgotten. Consequently, charter schools have been created to provide more learning opportunities and higher student achievement for these at-risk students.

Students who want to attend charter schools must fall under certain guidelines in order to be eligible for enrollment. Some of these common eligibility guidelines for enrolling a student in a charter school include: student is one or more years behind in high school credits, a student is truant, a student refuses to do school tasks, student is explosive or regularly disrupts the classroom learning environment, student dislikes school, student demonstrates defiance, or student exhibits behaviors that could lead to expulsion (personal communication, Angela Ruchti, September 29, 2004). These eligibility standards are specific standards for the at-risk youth attending the charter school that is used for this researcher's study. These eligibility requirements are also similar to how the State of Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction identifies at-risk youth:

Children at risk of not graduating from high school are defined as pupils in grades 5 to 12 who are dropouts, or are two or more of the following: (1) one or more years behind their age group in the number of credits attained, (2) two or more years behind their age group in basic skills levels, (3) habitual truants, (4)

parents, (5) adjudicated delinquents, (6) eighth-grade pupils whose score in each subject area on the examination administered under §118.30 (1m) (am) 2.; and eighth-grade pupils who failed to be promoted to ninth grade (Burmaster, 2004, 12).

There are many different ways we can classify youth who are at-risk. When designing a charter school it is essential that the school decides the type students it wishes to serve. Charter schools have the ability to create eligibility requirements for students because this helps them to design a program that meets the needs of at-risk youth. There are numerous characteristics that may be used to judge those students who are in greater danger of not receiving a high school diploma. School officials and school counselors can work together to identify these characteristics to better serve these students.

#### *Services Needed by At-risk Students in Charter Schools*

Since the inception of charter schools, much interest has been indicated to identify the impact charter schools have had on at-risk adolescents. It is assumed that smaller class sizes, individualized learning opportunities, self-paced programs and the flexibility of each class are some of the reasons why charter schools are enabling many youth to obtain a high school diploma. In spite of these common characteristics that increase the likelihood for success of a charter school program, it is also necessary to appeal to the students' personal, social, and vocational needs. These needs can be met through a developmental guidance program. It should be noted that through exhaustive research by the researcher, no studies have been conducted with at-risk high school students to identify their guidance and counseling needs.

Providing a means for at-risk youth to receive a high school diploma is the primary mission of charter schools. To provide these opportunities schools need to provide students with instruction that is accommodated to their specific needs. Schools must provide vocational training and educate students on certain life skills that will help them to be successful adults. Post-high school students from a traditional school provided an evaluation of the high school programs they were offered. Of those who responded 65% believed the counseling services were beneficial in preparing them for the future (Wilkinson, 1991). In addition, these suggestions of the guidance program were made by the respondents: fewer students to counselor ratio, more individual assistance on preparation for college, more college information, provide information on financial management, and provide more presentations from persons in the real world (Wilkinson, 1991). If these data are typical of traditional school participants, it could be assumed that charter school participants would agree with these.

There has been little or no research on at-risk youth and their perceptions on the effectiveness of the services provided by charter schools. Generally, students who are at-risk tend to have negative reports about education. This may be associated with the reasons why students are at risk and are placed in alternative learning environments.

One study on the preferences of at-risk students attending a charter school indicated that the students preferred to have counselors that have similar background and similar economic status. The students indicated that this would help create a more comfortable counseling relationship (Esters, 2001). Students, therefore, benefit more from the services provided by a guidance counselor whom they can better relate to.

Students who attend charter schools because they are in danger of not receiving a high school diploma may have personal, social, academic, and vocational concerns. These students are labeled at-risk because they have met the requirements that were previously mentioned. These students have specific needs that could be met by a comprehensive guidance program. Feedback from students, parents, and school officials, can help school counselors to provide services that are appropriate and successful for meeting the needs of at-risk youth in charter schools. Therefore, this study will be a valuable contribution to the meager literature available on charter schools and the guidance and counseling needs of charter school students.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Methodology

The purpose of this study was to determine the guidance and counseling needs for students attending a charter school targeting at-risk adolescents. This chapter will include a brief discussion on how the subjects were selected for this study as well as a description of those subjects. In addition, this chapter will describe the instrumentation that was used and the procedures for collecting the data. After an explanation on how the information will be analyzed, the chapter will conclude with a description of the limitations of the study that exist.

#### *Subject Selection and Description*

A rural charter school district located outside a small city in a midwestern state was selected for the study. The subjects for this study were students enrolled in the charter school. Approximately, 50 students, in grades 9 – 12, were enrolled at the time of the data collection. To attend this charter school students must exhibit three or more of the following behaviors: physical aggression, at-risk for expulsion, credit deficient, truant, dropout, school resistant, disruptive, confrontational, passive-aggressive, or having mental health issues. Ages of the participants ranged from 16 to 19. Fourteen students were present the day of data collection. Twelve students participated in the study including eight males and four females.

The researcher was given approval by the charter school principal before subjects were surveyed. Parental permission was required for participants under age 18 (Appendix A). Seven students who were 18 years or older gave consent for their participation. Signed consent forms were received from all participants before the survey was

distributed. All students who participated in the study were given forms describing their participation in the research study (Appendix B). Confidentiality of each student was maintained and students had the right to withdraw or decline participation from the research study. There was no attempt to identify participants of the study.

### *Instrumentation*

The researcher modified a survey created by Angela Ruchti, a guidance counselor, to obtain the specific information needed for this study. A total of eight questions were asked of participants. The first four questions pertained to the demographic information of the participants. The other items on the survey were related to the guidance counseling needs of students in a charter school (Appendix C). In addition, respondents were asked to include other thoughts or ideas that were not included on the survey and were considered important guidance and counseling services for their school.

### *Data Collection Procedures*

Once the Institutional Review Board (IRB) granted permission for the data collection, the charter school teachers were contacted to approve the distribution of surveys. The surveys were administered to small groups of students during their free period. All participants were given identical instructions and surveys. Students were allowed to write down responses to questions if they were not happy with the choice selection on the survey. All students were able to complete the survey in approximately 5 - 10 minutes. Once students completed the survey, they returned the surveys to the researcher and placed them in a large envelope. To protect the anonymity of the

participants all surveys were destroyed after the surveys were processed for this research analysis.

### *Data Analysis*

Frequency counts and percentages were used to calculate the information received in this study. Individual responses to the questions will be discussed. In chapter 4, the researcher will report the findings from the survey.

### *Limitations*

There are many limitations to this study pertaining to the instrument, the sample size, and the data collection procedure. A limitation of the instrument was that there were no measures of reliability or validity because the survey was created specifically for this research study. Any results from the study should be used with caution due to the population of students sampled. The sample size was small because many of the enrolled students have truancy problems and was not present the day of the data collection. The small sample size indicates that the results of the study may only pertain to the needs of the students attending that charter school. These results should not be generalized to students attending other charter schools because the perspectives of the participants were not compared to other students attending an at-risk charter school. Additionally, since this charter school's target population is at-risk adolescents, the results are not generalizable to all charter schools. A final limitation was the data collection procedure. More students may have been able to participate in the study had the research been collected on a different time or a different day.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Results and Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the current guidance and counseling needs of at-risk students attending charter schools. It was also intended that the survey instrument would serve as a needs assessment for the guidance and counseling program of the charter school.

This chapter will include the findings of the study. Important demographic information related to gender, age, anticipated year of graduation, and number of year's students attended the school will be included. In addition, this chapter will discuss the results provided by the student responses on the survey and item analysis will be discussed. The following research questions will be answered: What are the services needed by students at charter schools? Of these perceived needs indicated by students, what needs are being provided by the charter school? What is the one most important service adolescents want charter schools to provide? The results provide support that the guidance counseling needs of students in charter schools is important and that more research on this topic is needed.

#### *Demographic Information*

Thirteen surveys were distributed to charter school students in April 2005. Twelve surveys were completed and returned to the researcher, representing 92.3% of the total possible participants. The survey did not ask for specific demographic information regarding race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status.

### *Item Analysis*

Survey items one through four indicated demographic data of the participants. Of the twelve surveys returned, a majority of students were male (n= 8; 66.7%), age 18 or older (n = 7; 58.3%), graduating in 2005 (n = 7; 58.3%), and were in their first year at the charter school (n = 7; 58.3%). The last four items (questions five through eight) concerned the guidance counseling needs of students as perceived by those students. Total results of the survey can be found in Appendix D.

Survey item number five asked students what types of guidance services were currently being provided by the charter school. A majority of students indicated that academic support (n = 7; 58.3%) and individual counseling (n = 6; 50%) were services currently provided by their guidance counselor or charter school teacher. In examining gender-based responses, all female participants indicated that individual counseling was currently provided to students (n = 4; 100%). Only male participants recognized being provided with classroom guidance (n = 4; 50%), information on options after high school (n = 4; 50%), and new student orientation (n = 2; 25%). High percentages of both males (n = 5; 62.5%) and females (n = 2; 50%) indicated that academic support was currently provided to students.

Survey item number six asked students to identify the types of guidance services which they believed would be useful to have in their charter school. Half of the students surveyed indicated they would like more individual counseling and academic help (n = 6; 50%). More male participants (n = 5) than female participants (n = 1) indicated that individual counseling would be useful. Only male participants specified that options after

high school would be an important service (n = 6; 50%). Half of the male participants wanted the charter school counselor to provide more academic support (n= 4; 50%).

Survey item number seven asked students to describe the single most important service they wanted from the guidance counselor. Four of the twelve students (33.3%) indicated that individual counseling was the single most important service. Three students (25%) stated they would like the guidance counselor to provide information about options after high school or job training. One student (8.3%) indicated that academic monitoring was the most important service. Another student (8.3%) indicated the most important service was providing guidance on home and life problems. Only one student (8.3%) indicated that there was not one important service of the guidance counselor. This student stated that all the services on the survey were equally important.

Survey item number 8 asked students to indicate types of small groups that should be offered to charter school students. Seventy-five percent of students (n = 9) indicated that a small group on post-high school issues would be a valuable service. Conflict resolution was the second most prevalent group that students indicated would be useful (n = 7, 58.3%). Stress management, anger management, and interviewing skills were other small group topics that 50% (n = 6) of the participants showed interest in. Only one student stated that he or she believed that individual counseling was more important than small group. Five of the six respondents indicating interest in a small group on interviewing happened to be male. In addition, a majority of males also indicated that post high school issues would also be another beneficial small group topic (n = 7; 87.5%). Female respondents showed greater interest in small groups that provide counseling on interpersonal issues than the other listed small group topics.

### *Research Discussion*

It was discussed in this chapter the responses from students attending a charter school concerning their perceived guidance and counseling needs. The results of the study reveal that although there are some guidance and counseling needs being met, there are still more that charter schools can do to provide all students with the essential academic, personal/social, and career skills. The literature review revealed that charter schools serve at-risk students, whose needs of guidance and counseling are unclear as there is little research documenting those needs.

In response to *Research Question 1: What are the services needed by students at charter schools?* The results of this study indicate there to be a need for individual counseling, post high school options, and academic support from guidance counselors. The type of services that students considered to be the least important included consultation and coordinating school activities. These research findings indicate that students attending this charter school are more concerned with personal issues.

*Research Question 2: Of these perceived needs indicated by students, what needs are being provided by the charter school.* According to the responses from students, individual counseling and academic support services were the most common guidance counseling services provided to students. A majority of these students indicating individual counseling as a current charter school service were female (n = 4; 66.7%). This research finding suggests that female students may be having their individual needs met; whereas, male students may not participate in these services, but still have interest in receiving individual counseling.

*Research Question 3: What is the one most important service adolescents want charter schools to provide?* Individual counseling and post high school options were the two most prevalent services students wanted charter schools to provide them. The findings from this question and the previous two research questions indicate that the academic, personal/social, and career needs of students are best met through individual counseling. Survey respondents also showed interest towards small group counseling to meet their individual needs. The students indicated that small groups on post high school options, conflict resolution, interpersonal relationships and interviewing were also noted to be of interest. These findings suggest that students have specific interests and feel that individual counseling or issue focused small group counseling would better serve their individual needs.

Of these services previously mentioned a common theme arises. Students desire to have more direct contact with their counselors. Regarding age breakdown there was no percentages over 33% ( $n = 4$ ) except for interest in a small group concerning post high school which half of the students age 18 or older had interest in ( $n = 6$ ; 50%). A limitation of this research study includes the gender imbalance of more male participation than female participation. Overall, the results of this study indicate that students are more concerned with personal issues and require direct services from the school guidance counselors.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Summary, Conclusion, Recommendations

This chapter will discuss the findings of the study and a summary of the significant results and limitations demonstrated by the study. The chapter will conclude with recommendations for charter schools and recommendations for future research on this topic.

#### *Summary*

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the career, academic, and personal-social needs of at-risk youth attending a charter school. Charter schools are a new trend in education because they provide increased opportunities for students not served well by traditional forms of education. Many alternative education programs like charter schools are created to fit the special needs of its members. For the purpose of this study, the charter school that was selected was designed to serve students who are at-risk for not completing high school.

A survey was developed from Angela Ruchti and was adapted by the researcher to assess at-risk adolescents attending a charter school. The survey included eight questions including demographic information, services that were currently being provided, services that would benefit their education, and small group topics of interest to students. Twelve students (8 male, 4 female) participated in the research. Students showed interest in a variety of the services indicated on the survey. For the first question, students responded that individual counseling and academic support were being provided. For the second question, the majority of students would like individual counseling, academic support, or post high school options. Additionally, male respondents favored

more than female respondents that individual counseling and post high school options were needed services. A higher percentage of females indicated that small group counseling would be useful guidance services. For the third question, a third of students indicated that individual counseling was the most important guidance and counseling service. The final question asked students about the type of small groups they would like to attend and the responses from students indicated that post-high school options were of most interest.

The results of the study support that students have interest in more guidance counseling services. Male students demonstrated greater interest in receiving individual counseling, academic support, and information on post-high school options. These research findings indicate that male students are not being provided with the individual counseling services that female students are provided with. All female (n = 4) survey participants indicated that the charter school was providing individual counseling. In comparison to females, only 2 male (n = 8) survey participants indicated receiving individual counseling. It is the goal of this study to help school counselors working in alternative programs to have a better understanding of how they can be more effective in providing services to at-risk youth.

### *Conclusion*

At one time, vocational education was the most important focus of guidance counselors (Muro & Kottman, 1995). However the roles and responsibilities of school counselors have shifted. In order to meet the changing needs of students, the services provided to students must also change to better serve them. According to Lambie and Williamson (2004), guidelines for an effective program include a three-prong approach:

counseling, coordination, and consultation with students, families, and parents. These have all proven to be important responsibilities of school counselors. In addition to vocational counseling, individual counseling, classroom guidance, small group counseling, and academic monitoring are some of the recent additions to the services provided by school counselors. Findings from the research study conclude that individual counseling is the most important guidance and counseling service provided by school counselors.

The responses from students in this research study indicated that students are interested in receiving vocational education on post-high school options ( $n = 6$ ; 50%). In addition, individual counseling was another service many students indicated as important. By talking to students and gaining insight on their individual needs, a charter school can provide assistance to students and support their educational development. The results from this study establish a starting point for future research. It is essential that all schools, including charter schools, evaluate their guidance programs to ensure that all needs of students are being served. In addition, this will ensure that there is value in having a guidance counselor to implement these services to prepare students for adulthood.

#### *Limitations*

We must consider the limitations previously mentioned in earlier chapters when we interpret the results of this study. Due to the small sample size and the selection of one school district, the results shall not be generalized to all populations of students attending charter schools. The charter school selected for the purpose of the study was small and located in a rural district. In addition, with larger samples of students, more

specific demographic information may need to be obtained to illuminate the results in future research studies.

It is recommended that future research on the needs of at-risk youth attending charter schools be done on larger sample sizes and larger school districts. It is also important that further research be conducted on the needs of adolescents attending charter schools in urban settings to compare their needs with those of students attending similar schools in a rural setting. A larger sample size of students, and a larger representation of female students are also important to obtain accurate findings to compare different responses by gender. One final recommendation for future researchers is to use pre-test and post-test assessments to determine if the academic, personal/social, or career needs of students changes over time.

#### *Recommendations for Charter Schools*

Charter schools are a recent development in our educational system. Little data exist on their effectiveness; even less is known about the role and the need for guidance counselors in charter schools. Charter school teachers, guidance counselors, and students need to work together to create the most effective program. Because there are many services a guidance counselor can provide to students, it is essential that the guidance program is a collaborative effort among all staff, students, and families.

It is recommended that due to the increase of charter schools, more future research be conducted on the guidance and counseling needs of students attending charter schools. This research should also be done with other populations of charter school students to gain better understanding of their developmental needs. Continual assessment of

guidance programs is recommended for accurate understanding of the needs of the students it serves.

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Appendix A – Parent Consent

Dear Parent or Guardian:

Spring 2005

My name is Amanda Faber and I am currently a practicum student at Menomonie High School. I am conducting research on the guidance and counseling needs of students in charter schools. The purpose of this study is to ask students how they can be most helped by a school guidance counselor.

With your permission, a brief one-page needs assessment will be distributed to your child. The survey will take no longer than 10 minutes to complete.

- All responses to the surveys will be kept completely confidential
- The name of your child will not be required or used in any way
- No consequences will occur if your child chooses to not participate

Please sign the attached form indicating your consent for your child's participation and send it back to the researcher Amanda Faber. Otherwise, you can have your child give it to the Lucas guidance counselor, Amy Brenegan, by March 23, 2005.

Thank you so much for your time and support!!!

Sincerely,

Amanda Faber  
Researcher

Dr. Leslie Koepke  
Research Advisor

-----  
I  **agree**  **do NOT agree** to allow my child, \_\_\_\_\_, to participate in this study regarding the guidance counseling program at Lucas Charter School.

Signature of Student \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Parent/Guardian \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

If you have any questions or concerns about the research study please feel free to contact the researcher, Amanda Faber, at (715)271-1088, or the research advisor, Dr. Leslie Koepke, at (715)232-2237. Questions about the rights of research subjects can be addressed to Sue Foxwell, Human Protections Administrator, UW-Stout Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research, 152 Voc. Rehab., Menomonie, WI, 54751, phone (715)232-2477.

Appendix B – Student Consent

Dear Student:

Spring 2005

My name is Amanda Faber and I am currently a practicum student at Menomonie High School the Guidance Counseling Department. As a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin Stout, I am conducting research on the guidance and counseling needs of students. The purpose of this survey is to identify the counseling needs and improve the counseling needs for students attending charter schools. I would like your help with this study. Please take time to read this consent form because it will explain the potential risks and benefits for participating in this survey. Please understand that this study is anonymous! Your name will not be required in any way!

Thank you very much for your help.

Sincerely,

Amanda Faber

---

I understand that by returning this survey, I am giving my informed consent as a participating volunteer in this study. I understand the basic nature of the study and I am aware that any potential risks are exceedingly small. I also understand the potential benefits that might be realized from the successful completion of this study. I am aware that the information is being sought in a specific manner so that only minimal identifiers are necessary and so that confidentiality is guaranteed. I realize that I have the right to refuse to participate and that my right to withdraw from participation at any time during the study will be respected with no coercion or prejudice.

NOTE: If you have any questions or concerns about the research study please feel free to contact the researcher, Amanda Faber, at (715)271-1088, or the research advisor, Dr. Leslie Koepke, at (715)232-2237. Questions about the rights of research subjects can be addressed to Sue Foxwell, Human Protections Administrator, UW-Stout Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research, 152 Voc. Rehab., Menomonie, WI, 54751, phone (715)232-2477.

Appendix C – Survey

## Student Survey

Directions: *Please check all that apply.*

1. Gender:    Male \_\_\_        Female \_\_\_
  
2. Age:        14-15 \_\_\_    16- 17 \_\_\_    18-19 \_\_\_
  
3. Anticipated Year for Graduation: \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. Number of years having attended this school:    1\_\_\_    2\_\_\_    3\_\_\_    4 or more\_\_\_
  
5. What types of guidance services is your school providing you?
 

<input type="checkbox"/> Small group counseling	<input type="checkbox"/> Academic support (monitor grades, credit checks)
<input type="checkbox"/> Classroom guidance lessons	<input type="checkbox"/> Consult with parents/guardians and teachers
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual counseling	<input type="checkbox"/> Make referrals for students
<input type="checkbox"/> Resolving conflicts	<input type="checkbox"/> Coordinate with community agencies
<input type="checkbox"/> Coordinate school activities	<input type="checkbox"/> Orientation for new students
<input type="checkbox"/> Options after High School (job, military, college, technical school)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Crisis Intervention	<input type="checkbox"/> Other _____
  
6. What types of guidance services would be useful to have in your school:
 

<input type="checkbox"/> Small group counseling	<input type="checkbox"/> Academic support (monitor grades, credit checks)
<input type="checkbox"/> Classroom guidance lessons	<input type="checkbox"/> Consult with parents/guardians and teachers
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual counseling	<input type="checkbox"/> Make referrals for students
<input type="checkbox"/> Resolving conflicts	<input type="checkbox"/> Coordinate with community agencies
<input type="checkbox"/> Coordinate school activities	<input type="checkbox"/> Orientation for new students
<input type="checkbox"/> Options after High School (job, military, college, technical school)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Crisis Intervention	<input type="checkbox"/> Other _____
  
7. In your opinion what is the one most important service you want the guidance counselor to provide:
   
\_\_\_\_\_
   
\_\_\_\_\_
   
\_\_\_\_\_
   
\_\_\_\_\_
  
8. Which of the following groups should be offered?
 

<input type="checkbox"/> Anger Management	<input type="checkbox"/> Death and Bereavement
<input type="checkbox"/> Conflict Resolution	<input type="checkbox"/> Family Planning
<input type="checkbox"/> Stress management	<input type="checkbox"/> Friendship/Talk group
<input type="checkbox"/> Alcohol and Other Drug Awareness (AODA)	<input type="checkbox"/> Social Skills
<input type="checkbox"/> Community Service	<input type="checkbox"/> Bullying and Harassment
<input type="checkbox"/> Interviewing Skills	<input type="checkbox"/> Time Management
<input type="checkbox"/> Life After High School	<input type="checkbox"/> Other _____

## Appendix D - Survey Results

<b>M = Male</b>														
<b>F = Female</b>														
<b>A = 16 to 17 years old</b>														
<b>B = 18 to 19 years old</b>														
	<b>Total</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>M%</b>	<b>F%</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>% of M</b>	<b>% of F</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>A%</b>	<b>B%</b>	<b>AB</b>	
Total Participants	12													
Question														
1. Gender	12	8	4	66.7%	33.3%	100.0%								
2. Age														
16-17	5	2	3	16.7%	25.0%	41.7%								
18-19	7	6	1	50.0%	8.3%	58.3%								
3. Graduation Year														
2005	7	5	2	41.7%	16.7%	58.3%								
2006	4	2	2	16.7%	16.7%	33.3%								
unknown	1	1		8.3%	0.0%	8.3%								
4. Years at current school	7	5	2	41.7%	16.7%	58.3%								
1	1	1	0	8.3%	0.0%	8.3%								
2	2	0	2	0.0%	16.7%	16.7%								
2	2	2	0	16.7%	0.0%	16.7%								
	<b>Total</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>M%</b>	<b>F%</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>% of M</b>	<b>% of F</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>A%</b>	<b>B%</b>	<b>AB</b>	
5. Provided services														
Small group	1	1	0	8.3%	0.0%	8.3%	12.5%	0.0%		1	0.0%	8.3%	8.3%	
Classroom guidance	4	4	0	33.3%	0.0%	33.3%	50.0%	0.0%	1	3	8.3%	25.0%	33.3%	
Individual counseling	6	2	4	16.7%	33.3%	50.0%	25.0%	100.0%	3	3	25.0%	25.0%	50.0%	
Community agencies	1	1	0	8.3%	0.0%	8.3%	12.5%	0.0%	1	0	8.3%	0.0%	8.3%	
School activities	1	0	1	0.0%	8.3%	8.3%	0.0%	25.0%	1	0	8.3%	0.0%	8.3%	
Options after	4	4	0	33.3%	0.0%	33.3%	50.0%	0.0%	0	4	0.0%	33.3%	33.3%	
Crisis intervention	2	1	1	8.3%	8.3%	16.7%	12.5%	25.0%	1	1	8.3%	8.3%	16.7%	
Academic support	7	5	2	41.7%	16.7%	58.3%	62.5%	50.0%	3	4	25.0%	33.3%	58.3%	
Consultation	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	
Referrals	1	1	0	8.3%	0.0%	8.3%	12.5%	0.0%	0	1	0.0%	8.3%	8.3%	
Resolving conflicts	4	3	1	25.0%	8.3%	33.3%	37.5%	25.0%	1	3	8.3%	25.0%	33.3%	
New student orient.	2	2	0	16.7%	0.0%	16.7%	25.0%	0.0%	0	2	0.0%	16.7%	16.7%	
Other	0	1	0	8.3%	0.0%	8.3%	12.5%	0.0%	1	0	8.3%	0.0%	8.3%	

<b>M = Male</b>														
<b>F = Female</b>														
<b>A = 16 to 17 years old</b>														
<b>B = 18 to 19 years old</b>														
	<b>Total</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>M%</b>	<b>F%</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>% of M</b>	<b>% of F</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>A%</b>	<b>B%</b>	<b>AB</b>	
<b>6. Useful services</b>														
Small group	5	2	3	16.7%	25.0%	41.7%	25.0%	75.0%	4	1	33.3%	8.3%	41.7%	
Classroom guidance	2	2	0	16.7%	0.0%	16.7%	25.0%	0.0%	2	0	16.7%	0.0%	16.7%	
Individual counseling	6	5	1	41.7%	8.3%	50.0%	62.5%	25.0%	3	3	25.0%	25.0%	50.0%	
Community agencies	2	1	1	8.3%	8.3%	16.7%	12.5%	25.0%	2	0	16.7%	0.0%	16.7%	
School activities	1	1	0	8.3%	0.0%	8.3%	12.5%	0.0%	1	0	8.3%	0.0%	8.3%	
Options after	6	6	0	50.0%	0.0%	50.0%	75.0%	0.0%	2	4	16.7%	33.3%	50.0%	
Crisis intervention	5	3	2	25.0%	16.7%	41.7%	37.5%	50.0%	3	2	25.0%	16.7%	41.7%	
Academic support	6	4	2	33.3%	16.7%	50.0%	50.0%	50.0%	2	4	16.7%	33.3%	50.0%	
Consultation	1	1	0	8.3%	0.0%	8.3%	12.5%	0.0%	1	0	8.3%	0.0%	8.3%	
Referrals	2	1	1	8.3%	8.3%	16.7%	12.5%	25.0%	2	0	16.7%	0.0%	16.7%	
Resolving conflicts	4	3	1	25.0%	8.3%	33.3%	37.5%	25.0%	2	2	16.7%	16.7%	33.3%	
New student orient.	4	2	2	16.7%	16.7%	33.3%	25.0%	50.0%	2	2	16.7%	16.7%	33.3%	
Other	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	
<b>8. Small groups</b>														
Anger management	6	3	3	25.0%	25.0%	50.0%	37.5%	75.0%	4	2	33.3%	16.7%	50.0%	
Conflict resolution	7	4	3	33.3%	25.0%	58.3%	50.0%	75.0%	4	3	33.3%	25.0%	58.3%	
Stress management	6	3	3	25.0%	25.0%	50.0%	37.5%	75.0%	4	2	33.3%	16.7%	50.0%	
AODA	4	2	2	16.7%	16.7%	33.3%	25.0%	50.0%	3	1	25.0%	8.3%	33.3%	
Community service	4	2	2	16.7%	16.7%	33.3%	25.0%	50.0%	3	1	25.0%	8.3%	33.3%	
Interviewing skills	6	5	1	41.7%	8.3%	50.0%	62.5%	25.0%	3	3	25.0%	25.0%	50.0%	
Post high school	9	7	2	58.3%	16.7%	75.0%	87.5%	50.0%	3	6	25.0%	50.0%	75.0%	
Coping with death	4	2	2	16.7%	16.7%	33.3%	25.0%	50.0%	3	1	25.0%	8.3%	33.3%	
Family planning	4	2	2	16.7%	16.7%	33.3%	25.0%	50.0%	3	1	25.0%	8.3%	33.3%	
Friendship group	4	2	2	16.7%	16.7%	33.3%	25.0%	50.0%	3	1	25.0%	8.3%	33.3%	
Social skills	3	3	0	25.0%	0.0%	25.0%	37.5%	0.0%	1	2	8.3%	16.7%	25.0%	
Bullying/harassment	2	2	0	16.7%	0.0%	16.7%	25.0%	0.0%	1	1	8.3%	8.3%	16.7%	
Time management	4	3	1	25.0%	8.3%	33.3%	37.5%	25.0%	3	1	25.0%	8.3%	33.3%	
Other	0	0	1	0.0%	8.3%	8.3%	0.0%	25.0%	0	1	0.0%	8.3%	8.3%	