



AN INTRODUCTION TO THE
SCHOOL COUNSELING
PROGRAM OF DISTINCTION

**MIDDLE STATES ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS
COMMISSIONS ON ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

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INTRODUCTION TO THE MIDDLE STATES PROGRAMS OF DISTINCTION

Middle States *Programs of Distinction* recognize outstanding individual programs within MSA accredited and candidate schools and school systems. MSA offers schools and school systems the opportunity to assess the following areas of their curricula for excellence against internationally recognized Standards and Indicators of Quality in each field.

21st Century Skills
Early Childhood Education
Global Literacies
Music
Service Learning
School Counseling
STEM
Visual Arts
World Languages

If a school/system's program demonstrates that it meets the expectations of the Standards and Indicators of Quality at a consistently high level and exhibits the characteristics essential to serving as a high quality exemplar program for other schools, the *Program of Distinction* will be awarded. The expectations for earning recognition as a MSA *Program of Distinction* are very high. As such, a small percentage of programs will be determined eligible to receive the **award**.

Alternatively, schools and school systems can use the MSA *Program of Distinction* process as a tool for **program evaluation** that will yield comprehensive feedback for growth and improvement of the chosen area.

For **award or program evaluation**, the school/system will complete a rigorous self-assessment that is presented in a self-study report of the school/system's program. The self-study report is sent to MSA for review and if all is determined to be in order, a specialist visitor or visitors will be assigned to visit the school to validate the program's self-assessment and offer feedback. For schools/systems applying for an **award**, the specialist visitor(s) will make a recommendation to award or defer recognition of the program as a MSA *Program of Distinction*. For schools/systems engaging in **program evaluation**, a detailed feedback report including recommendations and resources will be provided to the school/system.

The specialist visits can be scheduled either in conjunction with a Team Visit for accreditation or reaccreditation, or independently at any time during the accreditation period.

Schools and school systems that have engaged in the MSA *Program of Distinction* evaluation process either for the purpose of seeking an award or for conducting a program evaluation have benefitted greatly from the actual experience as well as the outcome of the process. We encourage you to consider either of these approaches for realizing recognition and growth and improvement of your school or school system.

After review of this document, if you are interested in receiving the application for this *Program of Distinction*, please contact Audra Chin at achin@msa-cess.org.

WHAT IS THE SCHOOL COUNSELING PROGRAM OF DISTINCTION?

The School Counseling Program of Distinction is one of a series of Programs of Distinction designed by the Middle States Association Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools (MSA-CES) to recognize exemplary programs in various content and specialty areas. The School Counseling Program of Distinction recognizes schools that support a comprehensive and coherent school counseling program that is modeled on national school counseling standards. For schools granted the School Counseling Program of Distinction, it is evident that the program outcomes are focused upon the academic, social and emotional development of all students so they are prepared for the ever-changing world of the 21st century school.

The genesis of school counseling in the United States may be traced to the beginning of the 20th century. Difficulties associated with the widespread abuse of child labor at that time spurred the social reform movement resulting in efforts for compulsory education and, in particular, the vocational guidance movement. The 1920s and 1930s saw an expansion of counseling roles beyond working only with vocational concerns. Social, personal, and educational aspects of a student's life also needed attention. The Great Depression of the 1930s led to the restriction of funds for counseling programs. Not until 1938, after a recommendation from a presidential committee and the passage of the George Dean Act, which provided funds directly for the purposes of vocational guidance counseling, did guidance counselors start to see an increase in support for their work.

The work of Carl Rogers influenced a change in the role of the school counselor after World War II. His work defined a new counseling theory in complete contrast to previous theories in psychology and counseling. This new theory minimized counselor advice-giving and stressed the creation of conditions that left the client more in control of the counseling content.

Other developments emphasizing the important role school counselors play in American education may be traced to the National Defense Education Act (NDEA), the Soviet Union's launching of Sputnik, the forming of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) in the 1950s, the works of C. Gilbert Wrenn, Fredrick Perl, William Glasser and John Krumboltz to name a few.

The 1970's brought an emphasis on accountability of services provided by school counselors and the benefits that could be obtained with structured evaluations. The 1980s saw the development of training standards and criteria for school counseling. This was also a time of more intense evaluation of education as a whole, and counseling programs in particular. Passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990 also impacted the role of the school counselor.

Today the demands and expectations of school counselors continue to grow. Family structures have shifted more responsibilities to the school counselor for the development of children's attitudes personally as well as about the world at large. Thus, there exists a need for a systematic approach to school counseling programs with measurable outcomes and increased accountability.

The Program of Distinction has been reviewed and endorsed by a number of practicing school counselors in the field, as well as by leaders in the field of school counseling. The School Counseling Program of Distinction has "set the bar high" in the interest of recognizing and promoting successful school counseling programs throughout the world. Programs achieving the Program of Distinction will serve as exemplary models for others to emulate as well as attain highly deserved recognition in the form of external validation. Middle States member schools with quality programs at the elementary, middle, and/or secondary school levels are invited to apply for the Program of Distinction. Schools should not hesitate to apply even if they believe they have not yet achieved the described criterion. The self-study process and feedback from the Middle States visitors can serve as a valuable program evaluation tool and effective guide toward attaining the Program of Distinction in the future.

THE SCHOOL COUNSELING PROGRAM OF DISTINCTION CRITERION

Today, in a world enriched by diversity and technology, School Counselors' chief mission remains the support of the academic, social and emotional development of all students so they are prepared for the ever-changing world of the 21st century school.

The Criterion: The school's administration, faculty and governing body, and community of stakeholders support a comprehensive and coherent school counseling program that is modeled on national school counseling standards. School counselors are encouraged and supported in their efforts to design, implement, coordinate, manage and evaluate a program of services that is well planned and at the same time flexible and responsive to meet the needs of the school's students. Counseling services are age and developmentally appropriate and responsive to the particular needs of all the school's students. The counseling program is informed by and responsive to information and data about the schools students from a variety of sources as well as best practices in school counseling. School counselors are given a leadership role in providing services to students and serve as change agents, collaborators, and advocates in ensuring equity in access to all of the school's educational opportunities for students. School counselors must be proficient in retrieving, managing, and analyzing student data to influence systematic change with program goals and objectives aligning with the school's mission.

THE INDICATORS OF QUALITY

Vision of the School Counseling Program

- SC.1 The school counseling program reflects the mission and values of the school district by developing mission and belief foundation documents that have been collaboratively developed by a team of district stakeholders describing what every student will receive as a benefit of the school counseling program. Foundation documents have been approved by the governing board and district administrators.
- SC.2 Written policies and procedures, in partnership with families and the community, have been developed that provide all students with, or refer them to, services that are age- and developmentally appropriate to optimize opportunities for life-long success.
- SC.3 The school's governance, staff, parents, and broader educational community understand and accept the value and benefits of the school counseling program and provide appropriate support resources (financial, human, physical, time, etc.) to ensure its success.
- SC.4 The school counseling program focuses upon what all students should know, understand and be able to do in three domains: academic, career and personal/social.
- SC.5 School Counselors establish programmatic goals, expectations, support systems and experiences to meet the needs of all students in the school at various growth and developmental stages.
- SC.6 School Counselors responsible for the delivery of services are appropriately certified, are qualified to carry out their duties and responsibilities and adhere to a strict set of ethical standards.
- SC.7 Program design is outcome based with accountability linked to collected data on student achievement data, achievement related data (e.g. course enrollment patterns, discipline referrals, suspension rates, substance abuse violations, attendance rates, co-curricular participation rates, homework completion rate) and competency related data (e.g. percentage of students with four year plans on file, job

shadowing or other career awareness related activity data, percentage of students who have set and attained academic goals, percentage of students who successfully apply conflict resolution skills.

Program Planning and Organization

- SC.8 Goals and objectives for program outcomes have been developed collaboratively with school counselors an advisory board and committee of district stakeholders.
- SC.9 Program goals and objectives reflect measurable competencies in terms of knowledge, attitudes and skills which students will acquire as a result of program initiatives.
- SC.10 Program goals and objectives have been endorsed by central and school administration.
- SC.11 Action plans for the delivery of services are created collaboratively among school counselors and are consistent with approved program goals and objectives. Plans include specificity indicating activities, timelines, resources, responsibility and accountability and outcome data.
- SC.12 Action plans reference American School Counselor Association’s competencies and standards.
- SC.13 Counselors regularly review and monitor the action plan using student growth indicators to gauge success or needs for plan modification.

School Climate and Organization

- SC.14 The school’s academic mission is supported as a result of the integration of academic, career and personal/social activities and programs initiated by the school counselors.
- SC.15 Provisions are made to ensure equity among students regarding access to counseling services, programs and activities.
- SC.16 The school recruits and hires appropriately state credentialed school counselors.
- SC.17 Organization, design, climate and leadership of the school supports attainment of the school counseling program’s goals and objectives as evidenced by student to counselor ratio assignments. (ASCA recommended ratio: 1:250)
- SC.18 School counselors work cooperatively with parents/guardians, community members and other support personnel as part of a student services team.
- SC.19 The school’s professional development opportunities for school counselors provide training in the effective use of research-based counseling practices.
- SC.20 School counselors work collaboratively with school resource officers, school nurses, child study team members and other school based intervention teams in the interest of student and family assistance.
- SC.21 The school counseling program is designed to be proactive and preventive. School guidance curriculum coordinates prevention education programs in concert with classroom instruction on topics such as, but not limited to conflict resolution, anti-violence, cyber bullying and suicide prevention.
- SC.22 School counselors provide support and training for faculty and staff through awareness activities focusing upon symptoms of student substance abuse, depression, familial issues and learning disabilities and appropriate referral services.
- SC.23 School counselors serve on departmental curriculum committees, district level curriculum committees, community councils and advisory teams.

Curriculum, Standards and Competencies

- SC.24 Student competencies have been established that relate directly to academic, career and personal/social domains.
- SC.25 Developmentally appropriate competencies are specified for each grade-level.
- SC.26 Competencies are based upon assessment of student needs and are measurable and observable.
- SC.27 Outcomes exhibit a link between the school counseling mission, the school mission and expected student results.
- SC.28 Curriculum has been established addressing delivery of counseling services, experiences and assessment.
- SC.29 The school demonstrates the capacity i.e. equipment, facilities, personnel to support program delivery.
- SC.30 Methodology has been implemented for continuous program and services evaluation.

Development of Individual Student Plans for the Future

- SC.31 A systematic plan is in place to assist students with continued educational planning and personal pathway skills.
- SC.32 A systematic plan exists to assist students interpret personal standardized test performance and the relationship between demonstrated proficiencies and career and educational options.
- SC.33 Student advising is conducted on a personal level assisting students to develop a realistic personal appraisal of strengths for the purposes of course placement.
- SC.34 Printed materials are available to inform and guide students and parents through the post-secondary educational and/or career planning process.
- SC.35 Programs and/or services are in place providing students with experiences to raise awareness about career readiness skills.

Responsive Services

- SC.36 Every student (K-12) receives prevention education to address life choices in the academic, career and social/personal domains.
- SC.37 A system exists where students receive immediate assistance in solving immediate problems that affect their social/emotional functioning.
- SC.38 Procedures exist for the referral of students who exhibit behaviors that may present barriers to learning.
- SC.39 Evidence exists that responsive services are in place such as, but not limited to: crisis counseling, individual and small group counseling, peer facilitation, referral services.

Use and Collection of Data to Monitor Student Growth

- SC.40 School counselors routinely collect and manage disaggregated data to inform and affect changes in the school program and guidance services.
- SC.41 There is an established means to monitor students' progress in guidance related competencies inclusive of academic growth indicators.

- SC.42 Systematic collection of individual student data is used to inform and affect student course placement.
- SC.43 Analysis of disaggregated student performance data is routinely used to affect program and service delivery aimed at closing the achievement gap.

Performance Standards and School Counselor Evaluation

- SC.44 School counselors have input into program evaluation and the creation of a multi-year action plan aimed at program growth and improvement.
- SC.45 School counselors adhere to a strict set of ethical standards as outlined by the American School Counselors Association.
- SC.46 School counselors are provided performance appraisals by appropriate certified staff on a regular basis. Performance appraisals are formative in nature based upon written job descriptions which clearly delineate professional duties and responsibilities.
- SC.47 School counselors pursue and engage in a continuum of professional development and/or continuing education activities.

Technology

- SC.48 School counselors advocate for equal access to technology for all students, especially those historically underserved.
- SC.49 The school counseling team takes appropriate and reasonable measures to ensure that confidentiality is respected of electronically stored student information.
- SC.50 School counselors demonstrate competency with the use of technology for the management of student performance data and that of a personal nature.
- SC.51 School counselors demonstrate competency with the use of commercial programs and on-line services that provide access to students to assist with academic, career and social/emotional awareness programs.

Development of this Program of Distinction is based largely upon the American School Counselor Association National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs.

APPLYING FOR THE PROGRAM OF DISTINCTION

QUALIFICATIONS

The following qualifications must be met in order for a School/System to apply for the Program of Distinction:

- The School/System must be accredited by MSA-CESS or be a candidate for accreditation by MSA-CESS.
- If applying for the Program of Distinction independent of a current self-study and accreditation/reaccreditation process, the School/System must:
 - Be an accredited member of MSA-CESS;
 - Demonstrate that it meets all of the appropriate Standards for Accreditation at the time of its last evaluation; and/or

- Provide evidence that it has addressed successfully all areas of the Standards identified for improvement through Stipulation or Accreditation Maintenance Reports.
- If applying for the Program of Distinction as a part of a current self-study and accreditation process in preparation for a Team Visit, the School/System will integrate the Program of Distinction application as an additional component of the self-study and Team Visit.

GUIDELINES

The following guidelines are offered to Schools/Systems wishing to apply for the Program of Distinction:

Schools/systems:

- Must be a candidate or accredited member in good standing of MSA-CESS or an Alliance partner.
- Must be willing to accept an on-site Team Visit to validate the Program of Distinction application. If the School/System is seeking the Program of Distinction as a part of a Team Visit or Mid-Term Review, the School/System must be willing to accept at least one additional team member to focus on the Program of Distinction Application.
- Must give MSA-CESS notice of its intention to apply for the Program of Distinction at least six months prior to the date of the expected evaluation visit.
- Must meet all of the Standards for Accreditation in order to be awarded the Program of Distinction.
- May seek the Program of Distinction at any time.
- May seek the Program of Distinction as a program evaluation for an additional fee.

If a School/System is receiving a Program of Distinction Visitor as a part of a Team Visit, the Program of Distinction Visitor will integrate his/her activities into the three and one-half-day schedule of the Team Visit. If a School/System is receiving a Program of Distinction Visitor as a part of a Mid-Term Review or independent of any other accreditation activities, the Program of Distinction Visitor(s) will develop a separate schedule of meetings specifically targeted on validation of the findings in the School's/System's Application for the Program of Distinction. This may require an additional day extension to the typical one-day Mid-Term Review.

The decisions that the Visitor will recommend are either to award the Program of Distinction or to deny awarding the Program of Distinction. When the awarding of the Program of Distinction is denied, schools/systems may reapply at a later date by submitting a new Application for the Program of Distinction.

ACTIVITY	DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION
Submission of the Program of Distinction Commitment Form	At least six months prior to the intended date of visit
Submission of the completed Application for the Program of Distinction	At least two months prior to the date of the intended visit

*Schools/Systems may also complete the application for the purpose of a program evaluation and not for seeking the Program of Distinction. Full details will follow in a separate section.

STEPS TO EARNING AND MAINTAINING THE PROGRAM OF DISTINCTION

- 1) The School/System contacts Audra Chin at achin@msa-cess.org expressing interest in applying for the Program of Distinction.
- 2) The MSA Staff Coordinator for the Program of Distinction will be informed and contact the school/system to discuss readiness and availability. The School/System will then be sent the Commitment Form and Application.
- 3) The School/System submits the Program of Distinction Commitment Form.

- 4) The School/System submits the Application for the Program of Distinction to MSA-CESS along with payment.
- 5) The MSA Staff Coordinator for the Program of Distinction evaluates the Application to determine how well it meets the Criterion and Indicators of Quality and the school/system's readiness to host the Visitor. The staff coordinator will provide feedback to the school/system and a recommendation regarding whether or not a Visitor should be appointed at this time.
- 6) The Visitor(s) appointed by MSA to evaluate the School/System's application have substantial educational, and/or administrative experience. The number of visitors will vary depending upon the comprehensiveness of the School/System's initiatives in the Program of Distinction area, the size of School/System, etc.
- 7) Upon the completion of the visit, the Visitor submits the Report and a recommendation for award or denial of the Program of Distinction. Upon the receipt of the Visitor's report, the Staff Coordinator develops an analysis of the Visitor's report and makes a staff recommendation on the award of the Program of Distinction.
- 8) An MSA Accreditation Advisory Committee reviews the Visitor's report and the School/System's application and determines its recommendation on the award of the Program of Distinction. The Middle States Commissions' Membership and Accreditation Committees review the recommendations of staff and the accreditation advisory committee and make a recommendation to the full Commissions.
- 9) The Commissions make a final decision on the award of the Program of Distinction.
- 10) The school/system ensures that all future accreditation maintenance activities (e.g. Periodic Reviews, Mid-Term Reviews Visits, etc.) will examine progress on recommendations outlined in the school/system's Program of Distinction application and the Visitor's report.
- 11) The School/System may reapply for the Program of Distinction in any subsequent year.

The Middle States Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools meet twice a year (typically in April and October) to make accreditation decisions. It is at that time that decisions regarding the award of the Program of Distinction will be made, although the School/System will be informed of the recommendation of the Visitor prior to their departure.

USING THE APPLICATION FOR A PROGRAM EVALUATION

The following guidelines are offered to schools wishing to use the Program of Distinction **ONLY** as a Program Evaluation tool:

- Schools/Systems may seek the Program of Distinction as a program evaluation tool at any time.
- Schools/Systems seeking to use the Program of Distinction as a formal program evaluation tool must be willing to accept an onsite visit to validate the findings of the self-study. If the school/system is seeking the program evaluation as a part of a team visit or Mid-Term review, the School/System must be willing to accept at least one additional team member to focus on the components of the program.
- If a school is receiving a Visitor as a part of a team visit, the Visitor shall integrate his/her activities into the 3 and ½ day schedule of the team. If a school is receiving a Visitor as a part of a Mid-Term Review or independent of any other accreditation activities, the Visitor shall develop a separate schedule of meetings specifically targeted on validation of the findings in the school's self-study of the program. This may require an additional day extension to the typical one-day Mid-Term Review.
- Schools must give MSA-CESS notice of its intention to apply for the Program Evaluation at least six months prior to the date of the expected evaluation visit.
- Schools seeking a Program Evaluation independent of any other MSA-CESS accreditation activities shall adhere to the following timelines:

ACTIVITY	DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION
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Submission of the Program of Distinction/Evaluation Commitment Form	At least six months prior to the intended date of visit
Submission of the completed Application for the Program of Distinction/Evaluation	At least two months prior to the date of the intended visit

PREPARING FOR AND HOSTING THE VISITOR(S)

When the school’s application has been received and reviewed by the Middle States staff, a visitor(s) will be assigned, and the length of the visit will be determined based upon the size and scope of the school’s School Counseling Program and the type of visit. The visit may be arranged as a “stand alone” or in conjunction with a regularly scheduled accreditation visit. The visitor(s) will contact the school to arrange the details. The purpose of the visit will be to validate the school’s application, ascertain the quality of the program vis à vis the Criterion and Indicators of Quality, and present a formal report of the findings to the school and to the Middle States Association. The formal report of the findings for a program evaluation will be presented to the school only. A schedule will be developed by the visitor(s) and School Counseling Program liaison that will include interviews, classroom observations, and review of materials and documents.

INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUPS

The School Counseling Program of Distinction/Program Evaluation Visitor(s) will more than likely wish to meet with the following individuals and groups:

- Board Member(s)
- Superintendent of Schools
- Director of Curriculum
- The Head(s) of School
- Director of the School Counseling Program
- School Counseling Steering Committee
- Facilitators of School Counseling Projects
- School Counselors
- Students
- Parents
- Community members, representatives from partnerships, consultants and other stakeholders as appropriate

MATERIALS AND DOCUMENTS FOR REVIEW

It is recommended that the school/system have available a variety of evidence in support of its self-assessment and application for the School Counseling Program of Distinction. Online documents and electronic versions including CDs and videos are welcome. The suggestions below offer a wide range of evidence that the school could provide for the Visitor(s)’ review during the visit:

- Curriculum guides and/or course outlines showing the use of School Counseling
- Program of Study (course offerings and descriptions, criteria for course placement)
- Assessment tools
- Student performance results and samples

- Documentation of partnerships with community organizations
- Documentation of field trips the school offers to support School Counseling
- Documentation of co-curricular activities and events that celebrate and promote service activities
- Documentation of the communication of the goals, value and benefits of School Counseling within the school, to parents and to the community
- Policies that show how the school promotes School Counseling
- Budget demonstrating resource allocations to the School Counseling Program
- Goals of the program and any short and/or long range plans that have been developed or are currently being developed to attain them
- Documentation of recognition, grants and/or scholarships the program, staff and/or students have been awarded related to the School Counseling Program

FEEDBACK FROM THE VISITORS

At the conclusion of the visit, the Visitor(s) will meet with the Head of School, School Counseling Director and/or other key personnel as appropriate to offer feedback on the interviews, discussions and review of materials and documents. A report of the visit that includes the Visitor(s)' observations and findings will be forwarded to the Head of School within two months. If the school is seeking the School Counseling Program of Distinction, the award will be officially conferred after review of the report and approval of the recommendation by the Accreditation Advisory Committee and the MSA Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools.