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Motivation and Mandatory Standardized Testing: Utilizing the School Counselor as Consultant, Liaison, Trainer, and Advocate

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Motivation and Mandatory Standardized Testing: Utilizing the School Counselor as Consultant, Liaison, Trainer, and Advocate

Abstract

Since the publication of "A Nation at Risk" in 1983, the emphasis on using standardized testing has dramatically increased (Burke & Lombardi, 1998). Political candidates at all levels are using the issues of accountability and testing in campaign advertisements and as focal points to attack opponents. Today, hundreds of thousands of achievement and aptitude tests are administered each year in educational settings (Hood & Johnson, 1997).

Motivation and Mandatory Standardized Testing:
Utilizing the School Counselor as Consultant, Liaison, Trainer, and Advocate

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Motivation and Mandatory Standardized Testing:

Utilizing the School Counselor as Consultant, Liaison, Trainer, and Advocate

Since the publication of “A Nation at Risk” in 1983, the emphasis on using standardized testing has dramatically increased (Burke & Lombardi, 1998).

Political candidates at all levels are using the issues of accountability and testing in campaign advertisements and as focal points to attack opponents. Today, hundreds of thousands of achievement and aptitude tests are administered each year in educational settings (Hood & Johnson, 1997).

States have gone toward more accountability, using standardized tests to define how a teacher, school, or student is doing. Teachers’ professional advancement has become dependent on how well students perform on standardized tests, a condition known as “high stakes testing”. High stakes testing uses standardized test scores to make high impact educational decisions. (D. Scott, personal communication, October 20, 2000)

Testing, originally designed for instructional purposes, educational guidance, and curricular modification (Feldt, Forsyth, Ansley & Alnot, 1994), is now a tool used to evaluate a school’s performance. Therefore, schools must maintain the integrity of standardized achievement tests and administer them without using unethical practices. Schools must also promote motivation in standardized testing as a district-wide goal. In addition, they should do the following: a) encourage students to view testing as valid and having purpose,

b) encourage students to take standardized tests so the results of those tests give educators a true representation of how they are doing, c) encourage teachers to do their best job possible without threatening students with removal, shame, or embarrassment, d) encourage parents to promote testing regardless if they took the same tests and did not view them as valuable (Stiggins 1998).

Educators are asked to help instill aspiration, independent learning, goal achievement, and resiliency in their students (Alderman, 1999). Educators are expected to not only instill in students the academic skills necessary to lead independent and functional lives, but also the motivation to master those skills. If teachers are to be held accountable by standardized testing, then teachers must focus on all students to instill the value of periodic testing.

While it may never be possible for students to develop the intrinsic motivation to do well on standardized tests, it might be possible to create a school environment where students are encouraged to do well on standardized tests without unethical preparation or coaching. It may also be possible to create a school environment where teachers view standardized tests as a means of improving their teaching skills by getting constructive feedback, without anxiety and fear of public ridicule.

Developing this type of learning environment will take cooperation as well as organization, planning, and leadership from a designated standardized test coordinator. Schools need someone to encourage and facilitate motivation in the

students and staff. In many settings, the school counselor is often given this duty. The school counselor, in this capacity, has the ability to serve as consultant, liaison, trainer, as well as student and staff advocate. No other person on a school's staff has the knowledge and flexible schedule to provide such a service. Implementing a motivational strategy to improve and maintain standardized test scores will take a huge time commitment, compassion, understanding, diplomatic skills, communication skills, and creativity.

Hitchner and Hitchner (1987) questioned whether or not standardized testing is a counselor function. Some counselors would argue that they should not be test administrators, but agree that they should be test interpreters. Others might see merit in both functions. Those who see both roles as appropriate noted the counselors' valuable role in advising students on course selection, which in itself draws on test results, and therefore necessitates that counselors supervise the school's entire testing program.

The purpose of this paper is to describe the types of testing used in the school setting, to discuss the factors that influence motivation, to describe how these factors can be related to standardized testing, and to share ideas on what school counselors in their unique position can do to motivate students to take testing seriously.

Standardized Tests

There are a number of generally held objectives or skills that all students are expected to achieve as they go through school, regardless of the specific courses they take. These skills include recognizing the essentials of correct and effective writing, solving quantitative problems, interpreting a wide variety of reading materials, critically analyzing discussions of social issues and reports on scientific matters, recognizing sound methods of scientific inquiry, and using sources of information (Feldt, et al., 1994). In many cases these skills cut across the curriculum and are the province on not just one department, but of several. The major standardized achievement tests address these skills.

A standardized test is any examination that is administered and scored in a predetermined, and standardized way (Kohn, 1999). There are two major kinds of standardized tests used in educational settings: aptitude tests and achievement tests. Standardized aptitude tests predict how well students are likely to perform in a post-secondary setting. The most common examples are the SAT I and the ACT, which attempt to forecast how well high school students will perform in college. It is important to note that this forecast has an accuracy of less than 50 percent (Chenoweth 1997).

Standardized achievement tests are what citizens and school board members are interested in when they evaluate a school's effectiveness. Nationally five such tests are commonly used: California Achievement Tests,

Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills, Iowa Tests of Basic Skills, Metropolitan Achievement Tests, and Stanford Achievement Tests (Popham, 1999).

In most cases, achievement tests in the educational setting are strongly encouraged, if not mandatory. School districts require specific, or all grade levels, to take a battery of tests that often include seven to nine sub tests. The time required to take these tests ranges from three hours to seven hours. The sub-tests normally run from fifteen to forty minutes in length but the actual time needed to administer the tests is considerably longer. Taking tests during the school day often requires the rescheduling of classes and the disruption of schedules and may take the majority of the school day or a part of several days.

During testing, students are required to sit quietly, taking tests that may or may not parallel what they have studied in school. Students answer multiple choice questions by filling out computer read bubble sheets that may or may not represent their learning styles. It is not unusual for students to take similar, if not the identical tests, for many years. In many cases the students are not given the necessary feedback on their scores. This feedback is what would allow students to make comparisons or to monitor their progress from year to year

Because of this lack of feedback, many students associate tests with monotony and an unnecessary disruption of the school day. With this description of the test taking process in mind, the need to motivate and prepare students to perform on standardized tests becomes quite apparent.

How to get students to view the tests as relevant and take them seriously is a concern. An even more pressing question is: Do we want students to feel like they are in a high stakes testing situation? Stiggins (1998) explained it well by describing four major obstacles schools face when trying to improve assessment practices: a) the belief that standardized testing is the best way to show a school's performance; b) the fear of being held accountable for student achievement by use of test scores only; c) the fact that parents and communities define good standardized testing by their own experiences and do not consider current educational practices; d) the routine of making unstudied conclusions about the relationship between testing and student motivation.

Standardized Test Reliability and Validity

Simply put, reliability and validity refer to a test's ability to be repeated and whether the test battery actually covers what it is intended to cover (Alderman, 1999). Standardized tests have a high level of reliability due to the standardized approach to their administration.

The more difficult question to address is the one of validity. Do standardized tests truly represent the educational level of the student and the job being done by the teacher? Popham, (1999) stated that test scores are a result of six variables that include demographics, physical environment for testing, attitudes of teachers and students toward the testing program, student test taking skills, alignment of the curriculum content with the test content, and the quality of the

instructional program. The first five variables are outside influences unrelated to the quality of the educational program and can not be controlled by the educational system. With these obstacles present, validity and other problems with testing have to be addressed.

Dreher (1997) noted that current standardized testing methods place most of the emphasis on linguistic and logical-mathematical skills while ignoring learning styles. In her study, Dreher noted that the top ten students in her senior class reported feeling nervous, uncomfortable, and awkward in the standardized test setting. If the top ranked students felt that way, how did the rest of the students perceive testing?

Chenoweth (1997) and MacGowan (2000) concluded that standardized tests are reliable but often misunderstood and misused. For example, tests like the SAT were not designed, nor were they ever intended, to be a measure of a college's quality. However, the SAT is no longer just a predictor of freshman success, but is now considered a measure of a college's quality. This may put colleges in conflict about whether to reach out to under represented populations because colleges that do not make admitting students with the high SAT scores a priority are penalized in national collegiate rankings. This example of the misuse or misunderstanding of ability testing at the post-secondary level parallels what is happening with aptitude tests in elementary and secondary grades.

All of the examples given question the validity of current standardized tests in the context in which they are used.

Assessment Format and Purpose

The goal for those who construct standardized achievement tests is to create an assessment that yields valid norm-referenced interpretations of a student's status and covers a large amount of content. Items that do the best job of discriminating among students are those that are answered correctly by roughly half of the students. Test developers avoid including test items that are answered correctly by too many or by too few students. But is this what is needed to measure educational success? Bracey (1992) does not think so. He noted that in the late 1980's and early 1990's each newer set of norms on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills/Iowa Tests of Educational Development was designed to be harder than the previous one. Nevertheless, Iowa Test of Basic Skills and Iowa Tests of Educational Development scores were rising to all time or close to all time highs. This is one of the major criticisms of using norm-referenced tests instead of criterion referenced tests. Norm referenced tests compare students, while criterion referenced tests compare the students skills to a predetermined set of skills or knowledge. By using norm referenced tests, it is therefore possible for a student to have increased skills but lose ground on paper compared to their own previous percentile ranks scores. This has the potential of being a huge motivational hurdle.

Standardized achievement tests, according to Popham (1999), are to give students, teachers, and parents an approximate idea of how their child stacks up against students in a national norm group. They are a rough comparison of their child's knowledge and skill with far less measurement than most parents assume. Popham also noted that researchers have concluded that between 50 and 80 percent of what was measured on the tests was not suitably addressed in the textbooks. In fact, the proportion of topics presented on standardized tests that received more than superficial treatment in the textbooks was never higher than 50 percent. In addition, Lomax, West, Harmon, Viator & Madaus (1995) found that the dominate standardized test batteries used in the United States, especially the tests on mathematics and science, do not reflect recommended standards, and over emphasize low-level thinking skills, as well as a lack of procedural knowledge. These negative consequences were even worse in classrooms with high percentages of minority students. The problem also lies in the fact that motivation for standardized testing is not just a student issue, it is a teacher issue too.

Most educators are not familiar with the make up of standardized tests. They often assume that if a test asserts that it is assessing reading comprehension then it is likely that the test meshes with the way reading is being taught locally. Educators often do not look at the testing material in advance and have been convinced that the prominent tests are accurate. If a test battery has been around

for many years and is used by countless school districts, they assume it must be good. The assumed match between what is tested and what is taught is not accurate (Popham, 1999).

Student Perception

In a survey of students in grades 2-11, Paris, Lawton, Turner, & Roth (1991) reported that by the time they reach adolescence, many students have become suspicious and cynical about tests. Because of the similarity of test formats, students lose interest in doing well, especially if previous scores and results were not shared and explained.

The way in which the results of previous testings were presented affect students' attitudes toward testing. If in previous years students were told that the results would be useful and interesting to them but afterward no attempt was made to help them interpret the scores, they may be justifiably skeptical (Feldt, Forsyth, Ansley & Alnot, 1993).

Paris et. al (1991) found that a large number of students, especially low achievers, become anxious, try to cheat, give a halfhearted effort, or use poor test taking strategies. This occurs after several exposures to standardized tests and similar regular classroom assessments. As students progress through school, their perceptions of their own competence and control change. Young children adopt an optimistic view of their own abilities and count their own efforts, teacher praise, and tangible rewards as evidence of their learning. Children tend to lose

this optimistic view as they grow. Learning becomes more of a chore or something unpleasant that has to be done. This unpleasantness is often associated with standardized testing, most of which seems very repetitive and prevents creativity and expression. In addition, in many cases standardized tests are mandatory and have high stakes implications. In fact, one in four students will leave school before graduation. Those remaining fail to invest themselves fully in the experience of learning (Lumsden, 1994).

Alderman (1999) noted that young children tend to overestimate their likelihood of success and their evaluation of competence changes with age and experience. Alderman also found that self-perceptions of academic competence declines with age. This problem can be described as student's reduction in self-efficacy, which is their belief about their competence to perform a task. A reduction of self-efficacy is often associated with test taking. Secondary level students are evaluated more on testing than on activities and participation found in the primary grades. These declines in self-efficacy are assumed to be a result of both developmental changes and the classroom environment.

By middle school, however, students rely more on comparative information like tracking, grades, and test scores, (Maehr & Midgley, 1991). Their feelings of self-worth and their perceptions of their competence are established in part by the visible signs of achievement. Their perceptions of control undergo similar changes. As students grow older they change from viewing success as

stemming from ability, luck, or other people instead of hard work. Less successful students in particular feel powerless to control their own success in school and may feel victimized by tests that confirm their low performance, especially tests that make comparisons in the form of percentile ranks.

Brown and Walberg (1993) also speculated that standardized tests may lead both bright and dull students to do poorly. Bright students may feel heightened parental, peer, or self-imposed expectations to do well on tests, which makes them anxious. Slower, disadvantaged students may do poorly, then rationalize that school and tests are unimportant and, consequently, expend less effort on the tests.

Racial differences may also lead to different motivational levels in standardized testing. Urdan & Davis (1998) conducted a study involving 385 fifth and eighth grade students, in which students were asked to complete a 78 item survey the week before taking the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. Results indicated that fifth graders were more optimistic, more trusting of the testing, and more concerned with their performance than eighth graders on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. In this study, European American students had higher scores if they valued the test, and as African American students scored lower on the test, the more they viewed the test as an indicator of academic performance. However, African American students were also more likely than European American students to use what was referred to as “ego-protection strategy” (Urdan &

Davis, 1998, p.7). This means that despite their scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, African American students did not relate their academic performance with how they viewed themselves. In other words, low test scores were not viewed as a deficit in personal worth.

Another critical point was made by Anderson & Clapham (1995), who stressed the relationship of a students' ability to use the English language and their success on standardized tests. Although reliable, many standardized tests may not be valid when used with ESL (English as a Second Language) students. Not only is language proficiency a concern, but regional, geographic, or ethnic variations in the test questions impacts test scores. For example, the words toboggan or kayak may seem common for a student in Alaska but may not be part of a student's vocabulary in Arizona or New Mexico. Due to the diversity of the United States, it may be next to impossible to develop a test battery that is culturally unbiased.

In the United States educational society, standardized testing may involve a cultural or social element in terms of the actual value of testing. According to Ankenman, Professor, University of Iowa (personal communication, October 23, 2000), U.S. students do not have a specific loyalty to their school to perform well on standardized tests, especially those tests that do not, in their opinion, have a value to the student for college admissions. In other countries, such as South Korea, students see testing as extremely valuable and feel the need to perform well

for their school. The test itself is a competition and it is honorable to do well and represent his or her school.

Teacher Perception

Stiggins (1998) strongly stated that school administrators need to take the lead to make themselves assessment literate and to be the leader and support system for the teachers to improve their assessment skills as well. This parallels the assertion that teacher motivation and attitude is the key factor in student motivation and attitude. (Forsyth, personal communication, October 23, 2000). Forsyth stated that a critical review of the tests is needed, followed by the opportunity for teachers to share the results of the tests with students and allow them to make their own observations and conclusions. It is also extremely important for teachers to have a clear understanding of what the test does and does not in order to share their observations with students.

Results from standardized tests like the Iowa Test of Educational Development can be useful in assessing the educational development of individual students. How worthwhile the results will be to individual teachers depends to a large extent on how familiar they are with the test and its interpretation. The most effective way to gain insight into the skills demanded by an achievement test is to take the test. However, teachers may not have access to the materials in a timely fashion or have the time to take a series of tests lasting several hours (Feldt, Forsyth, Ansley & Alnot, 1994).

Teachers feel increasingly pressured to take time away from real learning in order to prepare students to take these tests. When teachers feel pressured, they tend to pressure their students (Kohn 1999). If teacher motivation and teacher attitude are essential to improve student test scores, then it is important to understand how testing affects teachers. Bracey (1991) generalized that publishing test scores makes teachers feel ashamed, embarrassed, guilty and angry. Furthermore, they question the validity of the test and the necessity to raise scores. Testing also takes time away from regular instruction and narrows the curriculum and reduces teachers' creative ability. Also, because teachers feel that testing has too much of an emotional impact on young children, they may feel anxiety and guilt. In many cases, teachers feel multiple choice testing leads to multiple choice teaching, which reduces their options. This final example became so apparent in Arizona that the legislature studied the impact of standardized testing on education, and, as a result, abolished such testing in favor of alternatives to multiple choice formats (Burke & Lombardi, 1998).

Herman and Golan (1993) reported that for the most part, teachers are rather neutral about the fairness of testing. Although they agreed that teachers can influence how well their students perform on standardized tests, teachers feel a discrepancy between what they think should be taught and what standardized tests actually emphasize. In short, instead of exerting a positive influence on student learning, testing may trivialize the learning and instructional process,

distort curricula, and steal valuable instructional time. The attitude of teachers toward a testing program can have a significant effect on student motivation. If teachers are indifferent toward or openly critical of the program - especially during test administration - students will question the importance of the tests (Feldt et.al ,1993).

Shephard (1991) identified an additional concern linking standardized testing and learning: externally mandated tests reduce the professional knowledge and status of the teacher. If teachers and the local school system do not influence the direction and purpose of testing, they are less likely to encourage students to put forth their best efforts. This could lead to serious ramifications if the tests have higher stakes because they influence student and staff retention.

High stakes testing, though intended to increase accountability, often leads to negative outcomes. It has been said that high stakes testing leads to a “paradox of test scores - test scores mean something only when you don’t pay attention to them” (Bracey, 1991, p. 255). Teachers face this paradox. As standardized testing becomes more high stakes, teachers will face pressure to intervene and coach students toward the test. At that point the value of the test results is diluted and test score pollution can occur. Bracey (1991) described test score pollution as the change in test scores without changing the original factors that may influence test scores. Test score pollution can occur from varying test preparation activities and the motivational level of the student from year to year,

the key concern in this research. Until there is serious reform in the way schools prepare students for standardized achievement tests, test results will continue to have the potential of misrepresenting American public education and its accomplishments (Bracey, 1991, p.255).

Another teacher concern that affects their perceptions of testing is the impact of special needs students on the overall scores of a school district. Burke & Lombardi (1998) used West Virginia as an example. West Virginia requires all students in grades 1-11 to take the Stanford Achievement Test. A minimum of 50 percent of a school's students in grades 3-11 must perform in the third quartile or the school, as well as the student, will be considered deficient. For a student to be promoted to the 11th grade level, the student must have taken the test with no modifications. This policy applies to all students regardless of special needs, which puts a huge responsibility on teachers to raise test scores although they are dealing with a student population that may never reach governmental standards.

Motivation

Motivation in its most basic form comes in two categories, intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation refers to a person's belief that something is worth doing for its own sake without the need for any prompt or reward. Extrinsic motivation is when a person engages in an activity to obtain a reward such as praise, grades, special privileges, or money (Alderman, 1999). Intrinsic motivation is the critical factor in relation to standardized testing.

Brown and Walberg (1993) related motivation in standardized testing situations as the propensity to engage in full, serious, and sustained effort on academic tests, (p. 133). The reality is that the majority of students do not view multi-battery standardized tests as an activity worthy of intrinsic motivation. This is the central issue: Can intrinsic tendencies be instilled in students for the purpose of doing well on standardized tests? If not, how much extrinsic motivation should be used and what are the implications of using too much extrinsic motivation? Kohn (1987), referred to an old joke that illustrates the principle of extrinsic motivation.

An elderly man, harassed by the taunts of neighborhood children, finally devises a scheme. He offered to pay each child a dollar if they would all return on Tuesday and yell their insults again. They did so eagerly and received the money, but he told them he could only pay 25 cents on Wednesday. When they returned, insulted him again and collected their quarters, he informed them that Thursday's rate would be just a penny. "Forget it," they said - and never taunted him again. (p. 2)

Kohn's point was that if extrinsic rewards are used to get students to perform well on standardized tests, students will expect more and more elaborate rewards in the future. If extrinsic rewards are then eliminated, test scores could drop even if there is not a drop in student ability.

Intrinsic motivation is overlooked and students may not perform to their ability simply for the sake of doing their best.

Extrinsic motivation does have certain negative ramifications. Brandt (1995) noted that there are at least 70 studies showing that extrinsic motivators - including A's, praise, and other rewards - are not merely ineffective over the long haul but are counter productive with respect to the things that educators want most from students: desire to learn, commitment to good values, and so on.

Brandt identified another group of studies which showed that when people are offered a reward for doing a task that involves some degree of problem solving or creativity - or for doing well - they will tend to do lower quality work than those offered no reward. Rewards are most damaging to interest when the task is already intrinsically motivating. This may not be the case with standardized testing but is worthy of consideration.

Another type of extrinsic reward is praise (Kohn, 1999). When positive feedback is used, feedback that is perceived by the student as informative is not destructive but can be quite constructive. However, most praise given to children takes the form of verbal reward, which can have the same destructive impact as other rewards because it feels controlling.

According to Kohn (1999), there are five undesirable issues associated with student motivation that are likely to accompany an obsession with standards and achievement. First, students may come to regard learning as a chore because

the tests lack the opportunity to explore and experiment. Second, their attitude toward learning may suffer. Third, students may also try to avoid challenging tasks and tend to think less deeply. The fourth consequence is that students may fall apart when they fail and may regard themselves as failures and act as though they are helpless to do anything about it. Finally, students value ability more than effort. Attitude and effort are key components in motivation.

If given a choice, almost everyone would choose effort over ability (Kohn, 1999). It lends itself well for the future when students attribute a good score to how well they prepared for the test. In many cases a student's desire to try on standardized tests declines after repeated sessions because the student can not see the value of the tests in relation to their long term goals.

The Effect of School Environment on Motivation

Much of the emphasis in this paper thus far has been based on the descriptions of motivation and the implications of it. However, a very important variable associated with student motivation that is often overlooked is the school environment. School environment influences students on a daily basis.

When a healthy school environment exists and teacher morale is high, teachers feel a sense of accomplishment from their jobs. Where morale was high, schools showed an increase in student achievement (Lumsden, 1998). In a cross cultural study of teacher enthusiasm and discouragement that included teachers from the United States and six other nations, teachers clearly identified students as

the primary and central factor that impacts both their professional enthusiasm and discouragement. Teachers almost universally treasured student responsiveness and enthusiasm as a vital factor in their own enthusiasm, and conversely listed low motivation in students as a discourager. This study clearly identified the importance of school culture and teacher perception in the motivation of students

In another finding, Lumsden (1994) found that motivation to learn is gained through general experience but it is gained more so by modeling communication of expectations and from the influence people like parents and teachers have. Teachers need to view themselves as active socialization agents capable of stimulating student motivation to learn. The beliefs teachers themselves have about teaching and learning and the nature of the expectations they hold for students also exerts a powerful influence. To a very large degree, students expect to learn if their teachers expect them to learn.

Maehr and Midgley (1991) complimented Lumsden's findings by emphasizing the promising results in a study designed to determine if motivation could be enhanced by a program aimed at developing a teacher's perspective first and then in their students. Addressing the perspectives held by the whole educational system, and the impact of school culture on both teachers and students seems to be a starting point for improving student performance which could improve standardized test scores.

Another important factor is school culture. According to Stolp (1994), school culture is the “historically transmitted pattern of meaning that includes the norms, values, beliefs, ceremonies, rituals, traditions, and myths understood by the school community” (p. 1). School culture is a product of the diverse and ever-changing social relationships among those who work in the school and live in the school community. School culture often shapes what people think and how they act in reference to school dynamics. School systems must think that standardized testing is important and have strategies in place that promote a good faith effort from their students. Those strategies must be developed as they relate to each individual school district.

Healthy and sound school culture correlate strongly with increased student achievement and motivation. The main measurement of student achievement is the use of standardized test scores. Stolp referred to a survey of 16,310 fourth-, sixth-, eighth-, and tenth-grade students from 820 public schools in Illinois, where he found support for the proposition that students are more motivated to learn in schools with strong cultures. Strong school cultures also had better motivated teachers.

Student motivation, school environment, school culture, and teachers’ perceptions and morale can be improved ethically and efficiently. Improvements in standardized tests scores will not happen without a considerable amount of time and effort. This will necessitate actions of a school official with the skills

and training to meet the spectrum of student, staff, administration, and community needs. That person can be the school guidance counselor.

Test Taking Motivational Interventions

It is as important to identify what to do as well as it is to identify the factors involved with test motivation. Educators do not want to hear what they have or have not done. This becomes redundant and confrontational. Educators want something practical. Interventions that counselors and educators implement can improve student test scores and obtain scores that accurately represent students' ability are subsequently discussed. While most teachers would be willing to assist in the implementation of these interventions, the majority do not have the training or means to do so. The one person who has the ability to direct these interventions is the school counselor. Interventions that counselors can help implement to improve students test scores and obtain scores that accurately represent students' ability are subsequently discussed.

Student Motivation

A frequent problem related to standardized testing is understanding why it is important to take standardized tests. Harris (1991) shared that many students do poorly on assignments or in participation because they do not understand what to do or why they should do it. Educators, especially school counselors, can spend more time explaining why something is being taught, and why the approach or activity is important, interesting and worthwhile.

School counselors are equipped to relate subject areas with occupations, thereby motivating students to relate what they learn and what they are tested on with potential occupations after school. In the process, some of the counselor's enthusiasm will be transmitted to the students, who will be more likely to become interested. Students who are uncertain about what to do will seldom perform well.

Feldt, et.al. (1993) noted that the way testing is announced and explained can directly affect motivation. Students should thoroughly understand the purposes, values, possible practice or preparation, limitations of the testing program and know what use will be made of the test results. Attitudes can be improved if, prior to testing, an effort is made to provide students with information related to the specific tests taken.

School Facilities

According to Anderson (2000) educational leaders pay little attention to school facilities. Such things as multifunctionality of the facility, play areas, activity pockets, green areas, and exit doors have significant positive correlations to success on Iowa Test of Basic Skills scores. If a school system doesn't have these conditions, find an environment that does, like a local community college, church, or mall . Consider administering the tests outside of the school setting. Local junior colleges often have rooms available that are large enough to serve a large number of students, or use nearby testing areas that are used to administer

aptitude tests like the SAT and ACT. Relate taking achievement tests to ability tests like the ACT or SAT. Students, especially high school students, see ability tests as valuable because these test results are used for college admission. Even though achievement tests are not used for college admission, promote this testing opportunity as a practice for the future, a central focus of education.

Prompts

Brown & Walberg (1993) suggested using prompts. They used the Iowa Test of Basic Skills as the assessment tool and divided students into groups, with one group receiving the following prompt from their teacher before beginning the Mathematics Concepts sub-test:

It is really important that you do as WELL as you can on this test. The test score you receive will let others see just how well I am doing in teaching you math this year. Your scores will be compared to students in other grades here at this school, as well as to those in other schools. That is why it is extremely important to do the VERY BEST that you can. Do it for YOURSELF, YOUR PARENTS, and ME. (p.134)

Students who received the prompt did better than the control group.

Individual school districts can create their own script based on its own culture and student body.

Provide Breaks

Education must be challenging and, in some respects, entertaining, if we hope to have students remain in school and reach their maximum potential (Poirot 1993). The same is true for testing, so it is important to provide some form of break in conjunction with testing. This break can be in the form of a actual reprieve during the testing sessions or a future opportunity in conjunction with a good performance. Such a reprieve could be a privilege like letting the students go outside the last few minutes of the school day or providing an extended lunch period. Consider the age of the student, the time of day, and the climate of the testing site when scheduling breaks.

Developmental Stages

It is important to understand the developmental stages of the student: Keep in mind that it may be normal for students to become disenchanted by having to take the same test, or similar tests, over and over again. Understanding the students' dislike or distrust of the validity of the test can help teachers relate the actual importance and future value of the test results (Paris, et al. 1991; Urdan and Davis 1998).

Educators also need to recognize that even when students use strategies that are ultimately self-defeating, such as withholding effort, cheating, and procrastination, their goal is actually to protect their sense of self-worth. Simply approach the students differently. Students respond with interest and motivation

to educators who appear to be human and caring. Educators can help produce these feelings by sharing parts of themselves with students, especially little stories of problems, frustrations, or mistakes they have had, either as students or even recently (Harris, 1991). Personalizing the relationship helps the students see educators as approachable human beings and not just authority figures. Students can also be insecure, and they secretly welcome the admission by adults that insecurity and error are common to everyone.

Extrinsic Motivation

Motivation has two basic forms. Even though educators hope for intrinsic motivation by their students, extrinsic forms of motivation, or the chance of extrinsic rewards, have been known to work temporarily. For example, Chico High School was poised to receive a \$66,000 incentive if the school could get 93% of its senior class to test in reading, written expression, mathematics and spelling, and show improvement. The seniors of Chico High found out about the money and were willing to make a deal. They would take the tests and pass them in exchange for the removal of speed bumps, the right to smoke on school grounds, and a senior trip. The administration refused. The scores dropped from the 70th percentile into the teens, and one sub-score went from 73% down to 2% (MacDonald 1985).

Each school has its individual needs and interests. Know what the students need or want, within reason. It may be surprising what the students

view as rewarding. Consider privileges like a come late or leave early pass, a front of the lunch line pass, or a help your favorite teacher pass. These types of privileges do not have any monetary costs and are easy to implement and monitor.

It has been stated that the use of extrinsic rewards should be monitored carefully, and used sparingly. Alderman (1999, p.219) suggested avoiding situations where only a few students get all the rewards, avoiding public rewards which can be a demotivator to some students, rewarding for improvement instead of ability, and always trying reach the point when extrinsic rewards are not needed.

Role of the Administration

For standardized testing to work, the administration must provide the leadership, knowledge base, and if needed, cheerleading for the staff. Teachers will then feel the support and direction needed to also show the positive attitude needed to promote mandatory testing (Stiggins, 1998). Any time an administrator, counselor, or school board can take the pressure off the teacher in regard to testing, less pressure will be put on the students, who ultimately are the ones who need to perform. The school counselor and building administrator can work together to make long-range motivational plans.

Communication to Parents

Another strong motivator to students can be their parents. Most parents would help their students if they knew more about the tests and the benefits that

come with scoring well. The counselor can provide a thorough explanation of the test and test results to parents. This explanation can be relayed to parents in newsletter articles, direct contact at events, and personal letters sent home at strategic times.

Communication between school and home prior to the week of testing can also help make the test administration run smoothly and can increase the likelihood that students will make their best efforts. The primary purposes for informing parents about a testing schedule are to solicit their support in reducing absences and tardiness, to discourage them from scheduling competing activities, and to encourage a regular routine during the testing period (Feldt, et al., 1993).

Treatment of Teachers

If the goal is to improve test scores, it is important to treat teachers like professionals and encourage them and not scare them or threaten them with wage freezes and dismissal (Herman and Golan, 1993; Stiggins, 1998). Teachers can also consult with the counselor as a resource for ideas related to testing and improving test scores (Hitchner & Hitchner, 1987). Consultation between teachers and the counselor can include a broad spectrum of topics, such as interpretation of test scores, suggestions for improvement, clarification of how the scores of special education students impact them, the ethical concerns of practicing for the tests, and even the teachers' feelings and perceptions of standardized testing and the validity of the test scores.

Test Day Preparation

The logistics of setting up a testing schedule can be challenging. The school climate should be as conducive to good testing as possible. If the testing is to be done within the school, large scale room changes may be necessary. The shuffling of room assignments should be identified and done well in advance to allow teachers and students to prepare for the change. These changes may also impact things like lunch schedules, dismissal times, shared programs and shared teachers. A counselor's organizational skills and the ability to delegate are important, for it is the school counselor that can be the liaison to the staff and groups that will be effected by the change.

Conclusion

Success or failure depends on a leader's ability to motivate the people, keep a results-oriented climate, build a unified team that builds the highest quality product in its field and looks forward to taking on all competitors in fair, open competition - and beating them soundly. (Batten, 1991, p. 6)

Batten's use of descriptors like truth, diligence, pride, enthusiasm, love, laughter, expectations, mutuality, vision and leadership often fit into school counselors' job descriptions, even through not specifically stated. With mandatory standardized testing, school counselors will need to take on a leadership role, not out of choice, but out of necessity.

School counselors are in the position to lead their schools toward higher performance in standardized testing. If a motivational strategy can be successfully implemented for the purpose of improving test scores, those same motivational strategies can be implemented in every phase of the educational process from kindergarten to twelfth grade. It is a monumental task and those who confront it will face countless set backs and hurdles. But is there a better time to implement assertive leadership? School counselors can do this in conjunction with a compassionate and understanding heart. They can take the initiative and lead their schools into higher levels of achievement and be an instrument of human progress, not just to students but to all people in a school community. With standardized testing the school counselor can help educators stop asking “How motivated are students?” and start asking “How are students motivated?” (Brandt, 1995, p.3). Once this is accomplished, schools can take a proactive approach to testing and provide their communities with accurate, valid, useful and ethical test results.

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