

Building A Solid Foundation: The “What” of the School Counseling Program

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The foundation of the Iowa school counseling framework is the basis upon which the counseling program rests. Just as a building structure is as strong as the foundation upon which it has been built, a strong counseling program rests securely upon its foundation. The “why” and the “what” of your counseling program will be answered in the elements of the foundation. Your foundation ties into your specific school improvement goals and includes a mission statement and the program’s philosophy and beliefs. If someone were to question you about the entire reason your counseling program exists, you should be able to answer this question by citing your mission statement. In other words, it is a very precise way of stating why your comprehensive counseling program is needed and how it benefits all students.

The school counseling beliefs and philosophy are the guiding forces in the development of an effective program. They are the principles identified by the district counseling team as essential to the development of their program. It is upon these beliefs that you will build your comprehensive program. Examples of belief statements and district guidance philosophies can be found on the Department of Education website.

The final touches to your counseling foundation are the academic, career and personal/social domains which you will tie into your local and national standards and benchmarks. Benchmarks, another name for competencies, define the specific knowledge, attitudes and skills you hope that all students will possess as a result of your school counseling program. The standards and benchmarks serve as the final layer of an effective a program.

Developing a mission statement, a philosophy and a set of beliefs should be a joint effort undertaken by your K-12 counseling team. It is helpful to take into consideration how your program will benefit the students, the staff, the parents and the community you serve before you finalize your work. Many counselors find it helpful to look at other school district models by visiting their websites, and you can find additional examples of the elements of a counseling foundation on the Department of Education website.