

## **The Universal Encouragement Program: Guidance Data Assessment, Reporting and Communications System for Extending Guidance Services to All Students**

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Guidance services in secondary schools are central to improved education outcomes, but academic and career guidance services are often derailed by the demands of crisis intervention, attendance, test administration, scheduling, and many other duties that extend well beyond any reasonable definition of counseling and guidance services (Parsad, Alexander, Farris, and Hudson, 2003). In addition, unmanageable caseloads limit traditional face-to-face interventions (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007).

For guidance professionals, it is critical to have systematic intelligence to inform interventions, program development, prioritization of effort, and service delivery. However, in many situations, the needs assessment required to develop this systematic intelligence is difficult to implement. Often, guidance professionals must work with limited information and assumptions about the guidance needs of their students. Many early warnings go undetected.

Various federal and state education accountability initiatives add to the already considerable pressures on educators to foster academic achievement in all young people (Isaacs, 2003). Improved graduation rates may be attainable through response to early warnings (Pinkus, 2008, and Heppen & Therriault, 2008).

Looking for strategies to improve educational achievement and attainment, educators are examining comprehensive guidance models with renewed interest. Norm Gysbers' Comprehensive Guidance Program dates back to the 1970s (Carey, Bowers, & McGannon, 2003). The American School Counselors Association (ASCA) developed a National Model which elaborates on Gysbers' construct (Carey, Bowers, & McGannon, 2003). Comprehensive programs incorporate *assessment of student needs* in program design and establishing priorities for services.

Having data about the guidance needs of the student population is the intelligence that makes improved guidance programming possible. These data make it possible to engage teachers and school administrators in assisting students with education and career planning. Madelyn (2003) concurs with the importance of data to drive program development. According to Carey, Bowers, and McGannon (2003), the ASCA National Model includes use of needs assessment data as an important element in the design of effective guidance programs. While the need for such data is important, many counselors and youth-serving professionals have difficulty gathering, reporting, and interpreting data pertinent to education and career guidance.

Encouragement Services, Inc. (ESI) has developed an online assessment system that quickly gathers and reports student guidance data. Aided by contemporary computing technology, the Universal Encouragement Program (UEP) enables counselors and other education professionals to collect, report, and analyze key guidance data on students in grades 6-12. Extensive encouragement services (Gillie, 2002) use student self-reports to inform guidance programming, intelligently target student sub-populations, identify students at-risk, and measure the effects of guidance interventions. A defining component of the extensive model is that *all* students receive appropriate guidance information and services, hence, universal encouragement.

The program consists of two online assessments, Form 1 and Form 2. These forms target students in grades 6-8 (Form 1) and 9-12 (Form 2). The assessments enable students to report demographic information, education interests and involvement, career interests and experiences, perceived limitations and challenges, and interest in guidance and academic services.

Form 1 (for grades 6 - 8) has 58 items, and Form II (for grades 9-12) has 68 items. Previews are available at <http://www.capenetwork.org>. Students usually require 10-20 minutes online to complete their assessments.

Upon data submission by students, online reports are immediately available for access by the authorized guidance professional at the school or education support program. The program generates four types of reports. **Group reports** summarize student responses for the school or program, providing guidance professionals with group summaries that inform and provide rationale for guidance interventions, program development, and advocacy. **Individual reports** summarize a student's assessment responses. **Parent/guardian reports** foster informed parental involvement by providing a copy of the individual report to parent/guardian(s), when requested by the student. **Advanced reports** provide disaggregated data reports and comparisons between different groups of students. Factor-based reports generate lists of students underprepared for high school, at risk of dropping out, and at risk of not pursuing postsecondary education. Another factor-based report, the student involvement preferences report summarizes student interest in taking part in a variety of academic and career activities and services.

Built in to the factor-based reporting system is a communications tool that enables sending email to target groups of students (e.g., the group of students in your school or program who expect difficulty in paying for college). The tool also enables communication with the group's parent/guardians.

To register, schools and education support programs must complete a brief online registration form at <http://www.capenetwork.org> and agree to terms and conditions of use. In registering, users join the Career and Postsecondary Encouragement (CAPE) Network, an online community of users of the assessment system. CAPE members guide further development and refinement of the assessment system.

Membership in the CAPE Network and use of the Universal Encouragement Program are available at no cost for schools and education support programs.

### References

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