



A division of Christian Brothers Services

Volume XLI, No. 4 / June 2020

Mary J. Foley  
*Managing Director*

Maria J. Ribera  
*Senior Executive Consultant*

Greg Dhuyvetter  
*Lead Consultant*

Richard J. Burke  
*Senior Executive Consultant*

Jacqueline Abrahams

Robert A. Bailey

Edward J. Barrett

Norah Boucher

Joseph W. Bracco

Michael C. Burke

Susan A. Castagna

Frank J. Cawley

Sr. Carol Cimino, SSJ, Ed.D.

Austin L. Conley, III, Ed.D.

Julie C. Delaney, Ph.D.

Michael M. Denison

Lois K. Draina, Ph.D.

Donald L. Edwards, Ed.D.

Rachel L. Ellingson

Henry Fiore, Jr.

Susana A. Garcia

Gary J. Gelo

Frank A. Glowaty

Richard M. Gray, Ph.D.

Stephen J. Hammond

Susan R. Hoffman

Joseph D. Hollowell

David J. Holquin

Jennifer C. Kensel

Kelly M. Lazzara

Deborah L. Papa

G. Joseph Peters

Thomas H. Posnanski

Mary Beth Riley

Mary Lou Schoone

Barbara F. Simmons

Robert S. Webb

Nicholas M. Wolsonovich, Ph.D.

Frederick Zilian, Ph.D.

## Guiding Them Through the Storm: *High School Guidance Counseling During Times of Remote Instruction*



**“You never know how strong you are until being strong  
is the only choice you have.” ~Cayla Mills**

Only a few months ago, schools across the country were faced with the daunting challenge of transforming themselves from site-based instructional facilities to remote learning distributors. This pivot represents the greatest educational shift in the past century. The tireless work of teachers, school leaders, parents and students has admirably continued instruction enhanced by Catholic identity and the strong spirit of community – long-standing hallmarks of Catholic schools.

During this abrupt transition, the focus, of course, has been primarily on classroom instruction and faith formation. Since instruction and assessment are indeed keys to the secondary school experience, guidance and counseling programs in some schools may not have been implemented in this new form with the same priority. Yet, the role of the guidance counselor has never been more important than in these times of uncertainty and change in the lives of students and in the broader world. A well-coordinated, effective secondary school guidance office can play a pivotal role for students and parents in this shifting environment.

### **None of Us Were Ready for This**

All schools have plans for emergencies, for fire, earthquake, and (sadly) different types of threats of violence. Virtually no school had a plan for the events of spring 2020. As the school year draws to a close, and with the understanding that remote instruction is likely to return, **the role of guidance and counseling – now, through the summer, and next year – grows increasingly important for not only student well-being but also retention.**

During the initial reaction to COVID-19, many counselors were used as part of the overall school communication plan and as liaisons between families and the school, two areas for which counselors are very well prepared. However, as it has become clear that the restructuring would not be a matter of days or weeks but through the end of the year (and even into the following year), the role of guidance counselor is being redefined in recognition that **the guidance and counseling program is a significant part of a student’s school experience and critical to current and future success.**

## Many New Hats

In addition to the many hats guidance counselors already sport, the current pandemic has expanded these critical roles to include the following:

- ◆ Providing emotional support for isolated students, in general, and especially in high-risk settings.
- ◆ Helping students adjust to new instructional methodologies.
- ◆ Being an “Ambassador” for the school during the period of remote instruction.
- ◆ Communicating plans for resuming traditional school programs.
- ◆ Tracking and reporting the evolving realities of colleges.
- ◆ Gathering health data about families to pass on to school administration.
- ◆ Staying alert to shifts in students’ circumstances (family structure, employment, finance, security, housing, hunger, domestic violence, etc.).

**The guidance counselor plays many key roles and these intensify substantially during periods of remote learning.** This is more critical than ever during times of crisis, and particularly now given the nature of shelter-in-place separation when the understandings built by regular contact can be strained in isolation.

## Communication

Even in the best of circumstances, a guidance counselor is able to directly contact a limited number of students in a week, yet the need to disseminate information is greater than ever during a time of changing realities. An effective guidance and counseling office will have a tiered communication plan for the different groups it serves.

One of the key communication needs, though, is within the office itself. It is amazing how much insight about students is exchanged informally when all staff are in the office. **The subtle flow of information that often guides decisions and actions through the day is one of the casualties of work-from-home programs.**

A good practice for multi-counselor offices is to have a daily check-in meeting via call or video conferencing at the beginning of the work day. Though generally informal, these meetings can follow a simple agenda such as the following to maximize effectiveness:

- ◆ Information received from students, parents, teachers and other daily contacts by each counselor, as well as reporting on daily challenges and successes of the current service system.

- ◆ School information and announcements regarding the events of the current year and the coming year. Throughout the past months all schools have needed to develop plans and then alter them based on changing circumstances. **As one of the first lines of parental communication, it is important that guidance counselors are aware of the most up-to-date information.**
- ◆ College information regarding status of admissions, registrations and plans for the coming fall. Like all schools, there is a great deal of fluidity in when and in what form most colleges plan to open in the fall, both critical to family decisions. The duty for preparing this report would ordinarily fall to the college counselor, but if college counseling duties are shared among the staff, duty for the college report could either be assigned to one person or circulated.
- ◆ Information regarding testing and support for students with special needs as well as support for students with socio-emotional needs.

Most counselors have been using many of the tools of remote communication for some time. Whether through email, learning management systems, video-conferencing applications, or even the telephone, remote guidance counseling is nothing new. What does need to be made clear is how and when students and parents are contacted and how and when students and parents (and teachers) can contact guidance counselors.

## A Word about Summer

Student well-being is not the only challenge facing Catholic schools right now. Enrollment, funding, fundraising, planning, to name a few, are top of mind for most administrators. And while there is delighted anticipation that the school year’s end is fast approaching, it is more than clear that summer outreach may be the most important. **Without the structure of classes, assignments and forced community, albeit virtual, students may suffer greatly. A plan for ongoing communication, outreach and connection will be vital in June, July and August.**

## Guidance Experiences

Just as guidance counselors meet with students for different reasons and in different configurations at the school site, so digital guidance meetings will take several forms for different purposes.

CSM SERVICES	Strategy		Planning		Leadership	
	School Assessments	Advancement	Enrollment	Communication	Governance	Workshops and Webinars
	Program Audits	Alumni	Technology	Social Media Plans	Administrative Structure	Retreat Facilitation
	Enrollment	Capital Campaigns	Annual Fund	Strategic Planning	Search	Keynote Presentations
	Marketing	Feasibility Studies	Development	Financial	Board Training/Development	Individual Seminars and Series
	Mission Clarification		Marketing		Professional Mentoring	

### Single Student Check-In Calls

Brief wellness checks with students have likely been taking place since the crisis began and must continue. With some student stress coming from within the home, encouraging a call during a walk outside can prove helpful. **This is an area where counselors can quickly prep other faculty and staff with a few open-ended questions and a simple report form to ensure any issues are flagged for necessary follow-up.** Some students will open up more to faculty than counselors and so must be given this option.



### Single Student Guidance Sessions

Just as students meet individually with guidance counselors each year, students should be scheduled for an individual session by phone or videoconference. Though these will vary by student grade level and need, these are the key elements of a student session:

- ◆ Acknowledge the current experience and ask if the student or family is suffering any health or other related issues. Here the counselor has the opportunity to act as the human face of the school more than any other function.
- ◆ Query how the student is coping with issues of separation and isolation. Students whose families are observing social distancing protocols may be having more difficulty, which may be affecting all aspects of work. In serious cases this may require referral to school socio-emotional counselors or external supports.
- ◆ Inquire how the student has managed the shift to remote instruction. The counselor can gather not only information about individual students but also trends that can be reported to teachers individually or as a group. Often this is where the silver linings of remote learning emerge and can be used in ongoing marketing efforts.
- ◆ Address class performance data from the most recent progress report.
- ◆ Reference issues relating to the student including special learning needs, summer school, sports participation or other activities.
- ◆ Determine the level to which the student participates in the prayer experiences, Masses and other Catholic traditions the school is providing and the role they can play in making the situation at hand more acceptable.

- ◆ Review class scheduling for the coming fall. The counselor should also be listening for information about families that are considering leaving the school, which should then be reported to the appropriate office for intervention.
- ◆ Discuss college plans (grade appropriate):
  - Provide most recent information on testing, requirements and admission policies for desired schools.
  - Review senior plans for fall 2020. Depending on whether a selected college is planning to begin the fall semester online, many seniors and their families are considering other options for the fall semester or the next year. Counselors should be prepared to discuss these options.
- ◆ Ensure they are staying in touch with classmates, teammates, club sponsors and participants, etc.
- ◆ Infuse all aspects of these encounters with faith formation as appropriate.

### Group Sessions

An effective guidance and counseling office can provide limited group sessions using video-conferencing software for students with similar needs or challenges. This allows multiple students to receive the information yet individuals can still ask questions. These may include

- ◆ Information sessions for students focused on one college or university with a representative;
- ◆ Guidance on the course selection process;
- ◆ Incoming students (freshmen and transfers) virtual gatherings to ensure “first day” comfort;
- ◆ Parent information on tuition assistance for college.

### Surveys

Short surveys every few weeks, with incentives if necessary to prompt participation, provide additional touchpoints wherein students can report, privately, on their needs, their status, etc.

### Drop-In Times

Each counselor, or other faculty/staff providing support to students, must have clearly stated drop-in times that assure parents and students of their availability and willingness to be of service.

### CSML Live

A webinar to accompany this CSML and expand on these concepts can be accessed on demand. [Click here.](#)



## Expanded Resources

### Videos

The guidance and counseling office, in coordination with faculty, staff and mental health experts, can create videos on various subjects of interest, which can be made accessible to students via the website. These videos can be watched by any students at any time, but also emailed to those who may particularly want or need them. In fact, intermittent distribution of resources will likely increase usage. These could include topics of academic interest and mental health during this time such as

- ◆ *Study habits for remote learning;*
- ◆ *Coping with isolation;*
- ◆ *The new normal in the world of education;*
- ◆ *Prayer and meditation practices;*
- ◆ *Fitness options and outdoor experiences that reduce stress;*
- ◆ *The college selection process in a post-COVID world.*

### Tips and Tools

A series of ongoing tips differentiated for parents, students and teachers, that are short and appealing, with links to more in-depth options, provides not only further resources but also demonstrates the caring community that exists within Catholic schools. Students can be encouraged to look out for their peers, which in turn may make them more aware of their own stressors and responses.

Digital tools, electronic calming rooms, simple games, mental health apps, and faculty reflections on individual student's special gifts and skills can all serve to meet the ever-changing needs of the teenage mind, heart and soul.

### Encounters

Organized encounters for students via video chats based on special interests, subject areas, etc., will foster and enhance the sense of togetherness while apart. **While some of this may occur with incoming students through admissions office activity, guidance brings a different perspective, and introduction to this aspect of school life may prompt newcomers to feel more comfortable seeking help if needed.** The new year will be new in many, many ways. Efforts now and through the summer to help them integrate successfully will make a significant difference.

Intermittent dissemination of the resources for self-help, school help, spiritual help and external help reinforces the Catholic school's key message that these are Children of God and our school faculty and staff are with them on this journey, no matter the road ahead. *"Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven."* Matthew 19:14

## A Differentiated Strength of the Catholic School

When schools went remote, students lost far more than instruction. Many of them lost the support system that has been part of their lives since childhood. An effective, engaged guidance and counseling department can be the voice of caring, compassion, encouragement, hope and faith that Catholic school students and families need, and deserve, now more than ever.



### About the author ...

#### Gregory Dhuyvetter Lead Consultant

Gregory Dhuyvetter joined Catholic School Management with more than 35 years of experience at all levels of Catholic school education. He has served as teacher and administrator and has seven years of service as a superintendent.

Greg presents regularly at the National Catholic Educational Association Convention, the Catholic Leadership Conference and has twice been the keynote speaker of NCEA's national conference on STREAM.

Greg has published articles in Momentum Magazine, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Journal of Educational Excellence and other journals. In 2016, he was a recipient of the Lead. Learn. Proclaim. Award from NCEA.

Greg received his BA and MA in English from Cal State University, Fullerton, where he taught for a number of years, and a master's degree in educational leadership from United States International University in Los Angeles.



A division of Christian Brothers Services

For more information about Catholic School Management, call 203.421.5169 or visit us at [cbservices.org/csm.html](http://cbservices.org/csm.html).

Sign up to receive the CSML at [cbservices.org/csml-sign-up.html](http://cbservices.org/csml-sign-up.html) or send an email to [csml@cbservices.org](mailto:csml@cbservices.org).

© Copyright 2020 Catholic School Management, a division of Christian Brothers Services. CSM and *Catholic School Management Letter* are registered trademarks of Catholic School Management.

