Lunch Bunch: Addressing Psychological Barriers by Means of Mental Health Counseling Groups in Middle Schools

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Texas A&M University (TAMU)
Bryan Independent School District (BISD)
Objectives

• Describe need for counseling groups in schools
• Define Lunch Bunch
• Discuss program design and implementation
• Report on student and counselor experiences
• Lessons learned
• Q&A
Barriers for Success

Real
• Financial barriers
• Language barriers
• Inequitable college preparatory opportunities
• Misunderstanding about college from students, parents, and teachers

Perceived
• Do not see education as a realistic goal (minorities, low SES)
• Coherent curriculum (what they are taught vs. what is needed)
• Racial discrimination
• Minorities anticipate more barriers to their academic pursuits
• Difficulty finding a mentor
• Lack of study skills
Psychologically “Checking Out”

- Students psychologically “check out” before they physically check out
  - Multi-dimensional process:
    - Transition process from middle school to high school
    - Change in environment
    - Student engagement (affective)
    - Belonging, feeling cared for, feeling connected to the school and people within
  - Consequences → high school dropout
BISD GEAR UP Objective

• BISD GEAR UP Goal:
  – To remove psychological and institutional barriers regarding high school graduation and higher education

• Selected cohort students will participate in personal or group counseling each year
Development of Lunch Bunch

• What is Lunch Bunch?
  – 30 minute group counseling program
  – 2-6 participants
  – 2 counselors

• Identification of areas to address:
  – bullying
  – healthy peer relationships
  – conflict resolution
  – goal setting
  – transitioning to high school
Implementation Process

**TAMU**
- Counselor recruitment
  - Background checks
- Counselor supervision
- Curriculum development
- Protocol development
  - Info sheet, data collection, APR reporting

**BISD**
- Collaboration with parent liaisons
- Recruiting student participants (permission slips)
- Informing the staff about GEAR UP Lunch Bunch group
- Feedback from students
Transiting to High School Psychoeducational Group

- **Topic:** Transitioning to High School
- **Population:** 8th grade middle school students (n=2-8)
- **Group duration:** about 30 minutes; once a week for 7 weeks, ending April 19th
- **Start date:** Tuesday, February 16th, Wednesday, February 17th, and Thursday, February 18th
- **Time commitment/expectations:** prepare materials for each session, facilitate group, meet for an hour of supervision weekly/bi-weekly, maintain practicum log, background check
- **Curriculum:** Developed by GEAR UP staff, with flexibility for counselors to modify activities, as long as the lesson and group objective is met.
- **Facilitated by 2 counselors (1 advanced student per group)**
  - Advanced students (i.e. counseling experience, taken group class) may facilitate group alone if needed
- **Time and location:**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Day/Time</th>
<th>Room</th>
<th>Start Date</th>
<th>Counselors</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Tuesday/11:45-12:15pm</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Thursday/12:34-1:04pm</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Wednesday/12:42-1:12pm</td>
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If you have any questions, contact Project Specialist at:
email or phone number
GEAR UP Practicum Contact Sheet – Spring 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Texas A&amp;M</th>
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<th>Bryan ISD</th>
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<td>School</td>
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2/15/2010
GEAR UP Practicum Procedures

1. When you go to the school, identify yourself as a “GEAR UP Counselor” and you will be asked to turn in your driver’s license to the front desk where they will scan your ID and provide you with a sticker ID that you must wear during your stay at the school. When you are ready to leave, make sure to pick up your ID from the front office.

2. If they do not know or recognize the name “GEAR UP Counselor” (most likely to happen), ask to speak to the GEAR UP Parent Liaison at your campus. The following are the parent liaisons and you can see their contact information in the dropbox folder (Name–School 1, Name-School 2, Name-School 3, Name-School 4). They will most likely know what room you will be in and the students that will be in your class. If you encounter any problems, contact Program Coordinator at school next and then the counselors.

3. You will need to check out a “GEAR UP Toolbox” from the counselors. The toolbox includes supplies you will need for the workshops (e.g. note cards, pens, pencils, markers, paper, etc). You will have to return the toolbox with all remaining materials no later than one week after your last session. This is to ensure that the next group will be able to use materials in the next set of workshops. Also, please make sure that you only take the box corresponding to your campus and that it is one box per campus (shared between the two facilitators).

4. The dropbox folder contains a school folder with each campus having its own file. In your school’s respective file, you will find the forms that need to be filled out and updated after your session. Forms include an Activity Log, a Participant Sign-in Sheet, and an excel sheet where you will have to input the students initials and ID # and mark whether they attended the session (see sample in spreadsheet). Please be sure to update this as soon as possible since this information is important for reporting purposes. Your timely data entry is greatly appreciated. The Forms folder contains templates of all forms along with a sample Activity Log.

5. You will not be required to maintain progress notes. However, at the end of the semester, you may be asked to provide a synopsis of your experience and activities and ask students to provide feedback on their experience in the group.

6. You will meet with your counselor for a one hour, weekly group supervision.

7. Don’t forget to fill out your practicum log that will be signed at the end of the semester by licensed practitioner.

8. Confidentiality – explain limits of confidentiality at beginning of group (same as with counseling). If something happens and student mentions something (i.e. harm to self or others, abuse, etc), after the group, pull aside the student, and assess for immediate danger. If immediate danger, speak to school counselor and the supervising licensed practitioner on cell phone.

9. BISD Dress Code

Please remember that you are a guest of the schools and are representing the University, our program, and our profession. You must abide by the school's dress code as well as be professional dressed when conducting the group. This includes (but not limited to):

- Hair shall be a natural color, clean, well groomed, and worn in a manner and style that is not distracting in the learning environment. Hair shall not be:
  - Distracting to the learning environment
  - Students shall not have curlers or pin curls in hair
  - Dyed an unnatural color

Earrings, hair jewelry, watches, bracelets, rings and necklaces that are not a safety hazard or a material or substantial disruption may be worn. Students shall not wear:

- Jewelry that may be identified as gang related
- Chains, pocket chains, or chains attached to wallets, footwear, pants, or backpacks
- Body piercings, other than earrings, including, but not limited to nose rings and studs, eyebrow loops and studs, lip rings and studs, tongue piercings and the like

The above statement was taken directly from the School District Student Code of Conduct handbook found at:

http://www.schooldistrict.edu

If you are unable or unwilling to abide by the school's dress code, please notify any staff asap.
Curriculum Goals

Healthy Peer Relationships
• Identifying healthy and unhealthy relationships
• Calming strategies
• Conflict resolution with teachers and peers
• Emotional expression and regulation
• Problem-solving skills

Transitioning into High School
• Goal-setting and action toward meeting goals
• Self awareness
• Tips for high school and college
Sample Lesson Plan – Transitioning Into High School
**GEAR UP Transitioning to High School—Session #4**

**Development of Activities:**

1. **Introduction of GPA of success**
   - How do you go about achieving the goals you set for yourself for the end of this semester?
   - Counselors will use this as a segue into goal setting.
     - Why is goal setting important? Discuss the difference for the hypothetical student if she/he set goals versus if she/he just went with the flow without making plans/goals.
     - How do you go about achieving a goal? Discuss.
     - Counselors can use the goal setting PDF documents to guide activities or use the “Goal Setting Outline.”

2. **Counselors will facilitate a discussion about the GPA of success (see goal setting PDF document)**
   - On chart paper list the following:
     - GOAL—what you want to accomplish
     - PLAN—the path you will take to reach your goal
     - ACTION—the outline of actual steps you will take to make your plan a reality
     - Consider the hypothetical student: Counselors make up a goal—have student’s use the GPA to help her/him through the process of obtaining that goal.
       - Sample considerations: What am I going to do, when will I start, how will I measure my progress, what are some barriers I may face, how can I overcome these barriers, who will help me achieve my goals, what benefits will I obtain?
     - Reference to handout SELF CARE PLAN

3. **Goal setting activity**
   - Based on what you have learned today, set a goal for this week. Use the GPA to outline what you’ll do to accomplish this goal. See GOAL SETTING OUTLINE handout in the PDF document.
     - Keep it simple!
# Goal-Setting Outline

**Directions:** Use the form below to complete the GPA (Goal, Plan, Action) outline.

| G | Use the space below to describe your goal. | □ short-range  
□ mid-range  
□ long-range |
|---|---|---|

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<tr>
<th>P</th>
<th>Use the space below to briefly explain your plan.</th>
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<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>Use the space below to list the action steps needed to achieve your goal.</th>
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Hypothetical Student
# Self-Care Plan

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<tr>
<th>What am I going to do?</th>
<th>When will I start?</th>
<th>How will I track my progress?</th>
<th>What are some barriers that I might face?</th>
<th>How will I avoid these barriers?</th>
<th>Who/what will help me reach my goals?</th>
<th>What benefits will I gain from reaching my goals?</th>
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<td>EXAMPLE:</td>
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| •I will get an “A” in my math class | Today, February 24, 2010 | •I will write down my homework assignments in my planner | •I won't want to do it  
•I'd rather go out and hang out with my friends |                               | •Myself  
•My friends  
•Classmates | •I will get a top grade in the class  
•I will feel good about myself because I got a good grade  
•I can help other students because I understand the material  
•My family will be happy for me |
Students’ Self-Reported Experiences

Positive

• Having someone to talk to
• Felt listened to
• Rapport built with counselors
• Gained skills to use in and out of school
• Overall positive experience

Future Requests

• Have a different time
• More time needed for sessions
• Notebook
• More participants
• Visit to a high school
Success Stories

• Probation group
• Home-schooled student (fitting in)
• “Acting out” student
• College-bound
• 9th grade letters to Lunch Bunch students
Lessons Learned

Program Structure
• Communication between GEAR UP, schools, and parent liaisons
• Clarify Lunch Bunch goals to students, staff, and parents
• Time and duration considerations
• Counselor supervision (i.e. ethical considerations)

Group Dynamics
• Selection methods (i.e. balanced groups)
• Voluntary participation (i.e. taking ownership)
• Group size
• Interactive activities
Questions?

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• Neeta Ramkumar, M.S. (neeta.ramkumar@gmail.com)
• Brandy Watson, M.S. (brandy_michelle_watson@hotmail.com)