PREPARING YOUR STUDENTS FOR LIFE BEYOND HIGH SCHOOL

DESCRIPTION

The goal of most counseling programs is not to prepare students for life in high school, although there is some aspect of that involved, but rather to prepare students for life after high school. Regardless if they are going on to college or entering the workforce, all students must be prepared to face the world in a way they never have before.

It is important for you to assist them in career development and skill building without making decisions for them. Instead, position yourself as a facilitator and take an active role in encouraging and guiding them through the decision making process. Help them set goals and develop an action plan for reaching those goals. In addition, it is essential that you not be critical or judgmental concerning their decisions. Be supportive of their choices and make sure they know you are there to assist them when they need your help.

Here are some tips to help you help them with the decision-making process:

*Help students determine their skills, identify their interests, and set career and personal goals.*
Students cannot plan for success if they have not defined what success really means to them. Once they define success, they can set career and personal goals designed to help them achieve it. Make sure your students are aware that setting general goals such as finding a job that will provide financial security or reaching a management level in the field of their choice is very reasonable.

Once students set their sights on a realistic level of success, it is important for them to identify their interests. Have them make a list of the things they are strongly interested in and work related tasks that they enjoy.

The next step is for you to help students assess their skills. Again, cataloging their existing skills and thinking about future needs can provide a good snapshot of skill requirements. This is also a good point to have them gauge their work related strengths and weaknesses. Professional help might be required at this point because many students have a hard time assessing their own skills. Be sure that any outside help you bring in is credible and that their testing processes are valid before introducing them to your students.

*Guide your students to opportunities in which they can research and explore occupations matching their skills, interests, and goals.*

Help your students explore how to mesh their goals with their interests; there are many resources to help. Students can see how their interests match with certain careers.
Once your students are comfortable with the information they have gathered regarding careers of interest to them, encourage them to talk with other people about possible career choices. You may want to help them set up some time for job shadowing or a mentoring program so they can gather real-life information about their selections. In addition, there may be job fairs hosted in the community or at one of the local colleges or universities where they can gather additional data. It would also be an excellent idea to encourage them to get hands-on experience through an internship or other part-time job. Depending on the choice, it might also be possible for students to volunteer their services to get some experience.

After your students have thoroughly investigated occupations of interest, have them look for similarities in education and training, skills, and other requirements. This will give them an idea of where they should focus as they prepare themselves to work toward those careers. Help them choose the correct courses, extra-curricular activities or jobs needed to enter and thrive in the careers of their choice.

*Provide skill-building opportunities for your students.*

Now that your students have evaluated their existing skill levels and targeted skills that will be necessary for them to succeed in their career of choice, be sure to make them aware of opportunities to acquire new skills or hone existing ones.
Make sure to stress with parents the importance of helping their children do well in basic math and reading skills. If necessary, send additional study materials home with students that their parents can use in working with them. If there are individuals who are struggling in a particular academic area, suggest, but do not force, a tutor, or provide additional study aides such as workbooks, computer software, or other materials. Hopefully, your students will tell you if there is anything you can provide them that will aid in their academic success so be open to their suggestions and let them decide what works best for them.

Regardless of your students' career goals, they will be using computer technology on a daily basis. Try to have computers available for your students whenever possible and encourage parents to purchase computers for their children. Most computer companies and retailers will offer special pricing for educational institutions, and groups of parents may be able to take advantage of these discounts. Encourage your staff to use technology in the classroom as a teaching tool to stress to students the proliferation of computers into daily activities. If your school does not offer computer classes, set aside some time to be able to work with students on basic keyboarding skills and the use of common applications, such as word processing programs. For those students who show an interest and proficiency with computers, provide them with additional information on training opportunities in the area.