

10.6 How can Pre-kindergarten Counselors Prepare Students for College and Career?

Preparing students for college and careers means not only preparing their minds, but supporting all areas of their growth and development. So how do we do this? By implementing a comprehensive PreK through 12 guidance & counseling program. A comprehensive program ensures all areas of the school are intentionally designed and coordinated to help young people develop the knowledge and skills they need to succeed after graduation.

In Texas, guidance counseling refers to multiple types of services: guidance curriculum, individual planning, responsive services and system support. All four of these components are highly relevant to college and career planning. Even in the early grades, counseling programs that deliberately focus on post-secondary success can help contribute to a college-going school culture.

That's why high-quality guidance & counseling programs aren't just comprehensive, they're developmental. Students need different types of information and support at different stages of cognitive and emotional maturity. Their developmental needs will also vary depending on their individual and community circumstances, and the guidance curriculum, individual planning, responsive services and system support should all reflect that.

Let's look at a developmental approach for college and career readiness. We know that, as early as elementary school, kids begin to develop their awareness of careers and the connection between an individual's skills, talents and interests and choosing a career. At the PreK through fifth grade, a comprehensive guidance & counseling program should focus on college and career awareness.

Counselor introducing a veterinarian to a 2nd grade class: *"Hello class, we have a very special guest today. You know how your families take you to the doctor when you're sick? Well, Dr. Kwan is a doctor who takes care of farm animals when they get sick or hurt. She's here today and excited to talk to you. So, let's meet her!"*

Dr. Kwan: *"Thanks for having me here today. Being a veterinarian is very fun and interesting. I get to help animals, travel to different farms, and work outside a lot. I went to school for many years and studied a lot of science to become a veterinarian."*

Another recommendation is to try to bring speakers to your school that students feel a connection. Maybe the speaker attended the same school, live in the neighborhood, or may possess other characteristics that connect with the students.

By middle school, students' identities are more developed and they are ready to explore and think concretely about a variety of possible career interests. During grades 6-8, a comprehensive guidance & counseling program should focus on college and career investigation.

Counselor talking to an 8th-grade student: *"Let's take a look at your interest inventory. It will help you make decisions about what classes to take when you begin high school next year. It looks here like you really like writing and I know you get very good grades in English. You may*

want to think about programs of study of that will allow you to try lots of different types of writing and begin thinking about possible careers that require that skill. Can you think of any right now?"

By the time a student enters high school, he or she should have already been exposed to a variety of possible programs of study and coached about how each can help move the student toward a desired occupational path. In high school, a comprehensive guidance & counseling program should focus on college and career concentration.

Counselor talking to a 10th-grade student: *"Hi Marie, and thanks for coming in. You've done very well in the courses specific to your finance program of study. I'd like to talk to you about a couple of internship possibilities, one at a local credit union and one with a stockbroker here in town. I think it would help you see how people working in this field apply the material you've been learning, and it will help you make a good choice about what type of program you want to pursue after graduation."*

So, let's hear it for our counselors! It's a big job, but the more students hear consistent, developmentally appropriate messaging about college and careers from caring adults in every area of the school, the better equipped they will be to make future choices and create success after graduation.