

What Do Harrison's School Counselors Do?

The full range of counseling duties and responsibilities are well documented within counseling national organizations, including the American School Counselor Association, the National Association for College Admission Counseling, and the Education Trust. Harrison's Guidance Department is committed to improving to meet the needs of students and with consideration to achieving national goals.

The school counselor is on constant call to confer with, listen to, coordinate, refer, and case manage a wide variety of student concerns that adolescents encounter in their development and growth. On occasion, these issues include:

- Bullying
- Substance abuse
- Poor self-esteem
- Self-destructive behavior
- Acting out
- Sexual orientation identity
- Stress due to pressures from family
- Parental neglect
- Financial difficulties
- Adjustment to school and transition issues
- And other generalized social adjustments that our students encounter

The Guidance Department does not handle these concerns alone, but school counselors frequently assist students and families with these issues in collaboration with our school leaders, school social workers, school psychologists, teachers, and other staff. Often the counselors are called upon to lead this work on behalf of their students. While school counselors have always worked with students and families with these matters, more modern societal influences have caused the work in these arenas to historically grow over time.

While some of the school counselors' work is quite dramatic and compelling, our counselors invest significant time working individually with students and families. This work differs across our middle and high schools with more emphasis on personal/social development at LMK Middle School in contrast to an emphasis on multi-year planning, academic advisement, course selection, and post-secondary planning at the high school. Regardless of location, counselors in each setting demonstrate effort in the full range of services across each school setting. This calls on our counselors to confer with teachers, curriculum directors, and other staff to ensure the best possible guidance and support at the individual level. Each of our students develops a plan for their education that is connected to personal goals, aspirations, and outcomes post-high school.

Increasingly, our counselors are more effectively involved in monitoring student academic achievement in order to assist in our growing work to intervene on behalf of students' needs on teams at LMK, in our newly formed ninth-grade teams at the high school, and certainly with regard to students in grades 10 through 12. Not only do our counselors strive to ensure that students are supported in graduating on time, but they assure students have the opportunity to be ready for, get in, and get through a personally fitting post-secondary college option.

The Guidance Department's work continues to grow in helping to support special education services, 504 case management, and the assurance of advocating on behalf of students at the Committee on Special Education.

The Guidance Department invests considerable effort into a range of transition activities for students and families both in the transition from elementary to middle and from middle to high school.

The number and range of evening activities and specialized programs for parents and families has grown significantly over a period of the past five years. Each program requires considerable planning and organization in collaboration with others. In addition, the Guidance Department is a continuous source of information to parents and students, especially in regard to college advisement and planning.

The Guidance Department plans and advises students in the college admissions process. This aspect of the work that counselors do requires more time and effort than ever before as a result of the increasing competition and growing number of applicants for a limited number of spaces. At the most selective, most competitive colleges and universities the number of spaces open to admission does not grow. Conversely, the percentage of students denied admission does grow.

Advising students and families in the college admissions process is arguably the high school counselors' most important work; their most challenging work. It is work that our counselors have passion for and place great attention to sustaining and improving. It is the Guidance Department's goal to assist each student in finding a match or as more commonly referred: a *fit*. This goal requires helping students to connect with colleges that match up well with the student's academic needs, learning styles and interests, in addition to also affording the student challenge where the student can best succeed. Often communities judge our success rate based on the number of students accepted to the *elite* colleges and universities. This is a valid reference point, however, it is not where all students desire to attend nor should they. Rather, where students aspire to attend based on their goals and *fits* is where the department works with students and families to meet their goals.