

New England Association for College Admission Counseling

Ad Hoc Committee on Secondary School Counselor Membership

Final Report

May 2009

Introduction

This ad hoc committee was created in February, 2008, to examine issues concerning secondary school counselor membership, and to make recommendations to the Governing Board.

Specifically:

While the overall NEACAC secondary school counselor membership is quite healthy, many of those members come from independent schools and many of the public school counselors are not actively engaged in the organization. The purpose of this ad hoc committee is to look at ways that NEACAC can generate more secondary school counseling members as well as increase the participation level from those schools/individuals who are currently members. (Committee Proposal)

The chair of this committee is Anne Richardson, Director of College Counseling, Kents Hill School, Maine. The other committee members are:

Cheryl Ryan, Branford High School, CT
Mark Danaher, Manchester High School, CT
Donna Lyons, Longmeadow High School, MA
Matthew Baione, Lawrence High School, MA
Jacquie Serafino, Dana Hall School, MA
Beth Doane, Yarmouth High School, ME - also President MECA
Greg Henderson, Hall-Dale High School, ME – resigned in Dec, 2008
Brenda Poznanski, Hollis-Brookline High School, NH
Kathleen Skiff, Providence Country Day School, RI
Melissa Michaud, Burr and Burton Academy, VT

Our work was focused on three areas, agreed to in our first conference call:

- How visible is NEACAC for high school counselors?
- What are the advantages of membership for high school counselors?
- What are the barriers to membership in NEACAC for high school counselors?

Methods

We conducted our business through three conference calls and one full meeting. In addition there were sub-committee conference calls, phone calls and emails in the interim.

We spent individual time looking at the NEACAC website and reading NEACAC publications, as well as gathering membership information from Executive Administrator, Lynne O'Shaughnessy. (see Appendix A)

One subcommittee also examined other ACAC websites and conducted an informal survey of secondary school counselors. (see Appendices B & C)

Findings

School counselors are extraordinarily busy people. With large caseloads students and college counseling delegated often to a minor role, school counselors are overwhelmed with myriad in-house tasks: counseling, testing, scheduling, administrative work, meetings, special education and more. 87.7% of the counselors surveyed had caseloads of 150+ students. Furthermore, with the economy in tatters and budgets being frozen for this year and reduced in the coming years, it seems logical that school counselors are going to find it harder to leave their buildings to travel to conferences and workshops.

Visibility

Members of NEACAC seated on this committee agreed that NEACAC has been a very useful and rewarding professional experience. Most joined NEACAC as a result of knowing other members, and all felt that what NEACAC does is tremendous. However, visibility of NEACAC for non-members is a problem, and the non-member on the committee did not feel that NEACAC membership was an immediate asset. It is clear from the membership data provided that our public school counselor membership is extremely low.

Our discussions and the survey revealed that NEACAC is widely known for college fairs and its Annual Conference, both of which are open to non-members. Less well-known are its one-day regional workshops, newsletters and networking opportunities, and hardly known are its job listings. The newsletter is useful, but few items of information seem relevant to the lives of secondary school counselors. Other publications are also useful, but very few, if any, are seen by non-members.

The website is good, albeit a little plain and dated, and it is not immediately clear how secondary school counselors are served well by it. It is also not clear how a school counselor looking for professional information would be quickly directed to the NEACAC website.

All in all, while NEACAC seems like a nice organization, fairly well-known to the counseling membership, not enough is publicly known, visible or useful to make this a "must join" organization for secondary school counselors.

Advantages to Membership

It quickly became clear from our discussions and research that school counselors do not readily see advantages to membership in NEACAC. The resources provided are not seen as unique to NEACAC, and NEACAC does not spring to mind as a place for resources that state counseling associations do not provide.

However, there are clear advantages to membership in NEACAC

- Cost – the cost for school counselors is low.
- Networking – school counselors do not yet see benefit to this, nor how they can manage time for this.
- Professional Activities
 - College fairs
 - Annual Conference
 - One-day workshops
 - Resource directory
 - Newsletter
 - Job postings

It is clear from the survey and from current membership that counselors do see the benefits of these programs, though some are more well known than others. College fairs and Annual Conference are the most well-known; job listings the least.

- Newsletter and Website
 - While these are the most available and visible of our resources, they are not immediately attractive or informative for school counselors.

Barriers to Membership

We were heartened by the survey in which almost 50% of respondents reported no barriers to membership. Nevertheless, around 50% of respondents were not members.

While the survey cited only 8.2% of the respondents' lack of knowledge of NEACAC, we believe that the most important barrier to membership in NEACAC for school counselors is a lack of knowledge about the benefits of joining NEACAC, compounded by misperceptions about NEACAC, such as the cost to join and the resources it provides. School counselors are focused most immediately on their institutions, followed by local resources, followed by state resources. NEACAC comes at the end of the line.

In addition, we determined that the following were also barriers to school counselor membership in NEACAC.

- **Administrative Support**
 - While the survey cited only 5.7% of respondents concerned about this, we believe that educating school administrations about the benefits of NEACAC will increase the visibility of NEACAC within public schools and will help to promote the benefits of membership
- **Funding**

- If it hasn't happened already, school budgets are being frozen and then slashed. Realistically, it has been and will become increasingly a challenge for school counselors to find the financial resources for workshops and conferences.
- School counselor membership costs are very reasonable. However, counselors do not seem to know this; 42.6% cite cost of membership as an issue.

I just came 'back' to this page after reading at the end that it is only \$25 for our whole office to join. This info needs to get out."
(quote from survey)

- **School bound counselors**
 - 16.4% of respondents said that they were unable to leave the building for workshops, but we suspect that this number is actually much higher and will continue to increase in the current economy
 - School bound counselors are turning more to the internet for resources – and prefer “one-stop shopping” sites for college admissions answers. The NEACAC website is not perceived as offering this kind of resource for school counselors.
- **Timing & Location of meetings**
 - Several respondents cited the timing and locations of Annual Conference and other professional development workshops as barriers to active NEACAC membership. The positioning of Annual Conference towards the end of May and at the beginning for June continues to be problematic for school counselors due to graduations and snow day make-ups.

Recommendations

We cannot take whole days out of our other duties to learn about what is a relatively small % of our responsibilities. We need help ON SITE with direct student contact ... We also need NEACAC to understand that they HEAR most from the schools where they have college advisors and/or smaller caseloads, but the bulk of students going to college come from regular public high schools with guidance counselors who are increasingly responsible for testing, Special Education, and largely clerical and administrative tasks. We need help. (Survey response)

Through our discussions and our research, it became increasingly clear to this committee that the combination of overwhelming case-loads and scarce resources – particularly time and money – are principal factors in NEACAC's low school counselor membership. This is particularly exacerbated by the current economy, with severe budget cuts, travel restrictions and layoffs afflicting this profession.

School counselors are overloaded and cannot/will not find the time to go looking for NEACAC. Because of this, there is a lack of understanding of the tangible benefits, professional development resources and ease of NEACAC membership.

At the same time, it is clear that NEACAC has real and significant advantages for school counselors, and has the assets and energy to refocus and develop some of its resources and programs to be of more direct, immediate and substantial benefit for school counselors.

NEACAC cannot and should not wait to be found by school counselors.

Main recommendations:

1. NEACAC use its considerable resources to reach out, seek out and actively include school counselors.
2. NEACAC should aim to become the #1 resource for school counselors in college admissions.
3. NEACAC should seek to implement immediate and accessible on-line resources for school counselors that do not depend on money or travel.
4. NEACAC should implement a mentor program for school counselors.

NEACAC should be THE place for school counselors to go to find all the resources they need for college counseling.

Detailed recommendations:

- **Visibility**
 - Cost
 - Publicize low-cost of membership for school counselors
 - Publicity
 - Mailing
 - Letters to superintendents, principals and school counselors every August promoting low cost/high benefits to joining NEACAC
 - Welcome package/New Counselor Tool Kit for counselors new to the profession
 - Website
 - Strong, vibrant welcome message
 - Welcoming school counselors of all ages
 - Touting benefits to school counselors
 - Testimonials from school counselors
 - “Become a Member” bar on every page
 - Reciprocal links to state counseling associations
 - Resources
 - NEACAC website center of online resources and tools for school-bound professionals that include financial aid, athletics, applications, parent programs, scholarships and more

- Accessible current membership list
- Promote and develop more Best Practices focused around and for school counselors, e.g. Top Ten
- Job postings
- Reciprocal arrangements with state associations w.r.t. links on websites
- More printable resources to share with parents
- More resources for parent/student programs
- Link to NACAC Knowledge Center and other good resources, e.g. Education Conservancy
- Newsletter archive
- Newsletter & E-Blast
 - Synthesis of admissions current trends and college counseling issues geared to school counselors that helps them to be knowledgeable in front of their peers, their parent population and school administrators
 - More articles and resources directly geared to educating school counselors about admissions issues
 - Resources/information from admissions professionals for counselors to share with parents
 - E-Blast – “great links” resource for school counselors
 - Maintain hard copy newsletter for school counselors
- **Outreach**
 - Administrators
 - Reach out to administrators and superintendents touting benefits of NEACAC to their schools/districts
 - Low-cost and resource rich
 - Networking opportunities
 - In-house resources
 - Recognize school counselors involved in NEACAC with letters to directors, principals and superintendents.
 - School Counselors
 - College Fairs
 - Pre-fair postcards to counselors, sponsored by area colleges, inviting them to join NEACAC at fair
 - Provide NEACAC information/booth at every college fair
 - Sponsor refreshments, give-aways for counselors
 - NEACAC members on hand to talk about NEACAC
 - Provide workshops for counselors sponsored by NEACAC at college fairs
 - Professional Meetings
 - Joint program and/or booth with other ACAC’s about benefits of membership at NACAC
 - NEACAC reception at the New England College Board
 - NEACAC reception at state counseling conferences
 - High School visits

- Ask colleges to promote NEACAC to guidance counselors
 - Promote networking opportunities
- Scholarships for Annual Conference
 - Available for all counselors – not just low-income schools
- Colleges & Universities
 - All university counseling courses in New England should mention NEACAC as a resource
- **Programs**
 - Membership
 - Programs should be at a reduced cost for members, with membership being offered as part of each program registration.
 - More regional/state meetings
 - One day workshops
 - Reverse college fairs
 - Smaller, more local programs – e.g., breakfasts
 - Professional Development Resources
 - Summer Institutes
 - College courses
 - Mentor program
 - Team up local veteran NEACAC counselors with counselors new to the profession to provide advice & resources
- **In-House Resources & Education**
 - Develop more resources for school-bound counselors
 School counselors need language and resources to use in their student handbooks, letters to parents and discussions with administrators. They need new, innovative resources for parent programs, teacher education, and student development.
 - Online professional development, such as webinars, video conferencing
 - Local and in-state low-cost programs, breakfasts, short seminars, etc.
 - A Mentor program that teams veteran NEACAC members with new counselors/members
 - NEACAC website – the #1 resource for college admissions for school counselors in a “one stop” shopping format

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In closing, I want to thank the committee for all of their hard work amidst a crumbling economy with all its residual effects. We reduced the number of meetings, and some of the committee had to resign because of work pressures.

We believe strongly that NEACAC has the chance to step in and step up to help secondary school counselors be the best college counselors that they can be. We look forward to the day

when secondary school counselors rely on NEACAC as their number one resource for college admissions counseling.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anne K.W. Richardson', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Anne K.W. Richardson
Chair, Secondary School Ad Hoc Committee
NEACAC
May 2009