

Collecting Data to Better Understand Guidance Counselor-Student Interactions

A brief introduction on the importance of tracking guidance counselor-student interactions and how that data can be leveraged to improve adolescent health outcomes.

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The Need for a Web-based Ticket System to Better Understand Guidance Counselor-Student Interactions

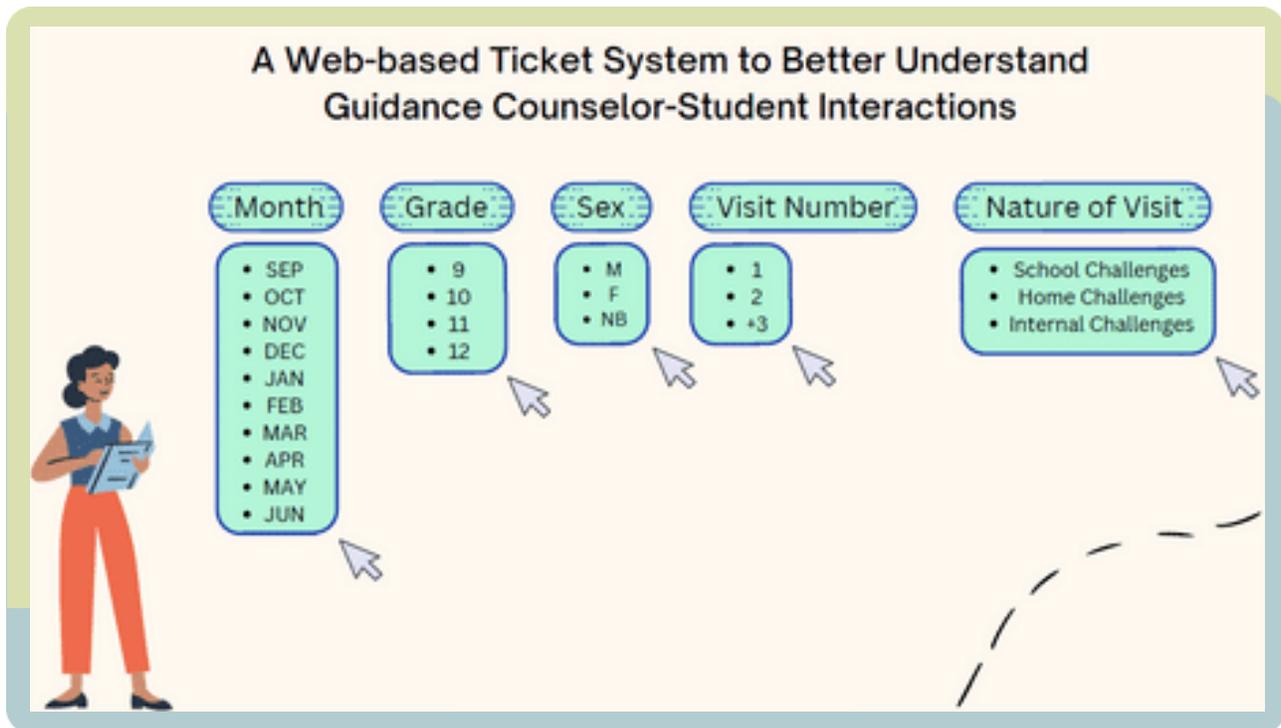
As it stands, there is no significant data that is collected in relation to guidance counselor-student interactions. When I say “significant”, I am referring to data that helps us get a better understanding of the health and wellness challenges that adolescents are struggling with. Although there are many reasons as to why students seek out appointments with their guidance counselors (course scheduling, university advice, etc), we need to get a better understanding of the interactions that take place as a result of health and wellness challenges because this is what guidance counselors are saying is the hardest part of their job, not having the resources or tools to always do something tangible for the students.

The way some students are interacting with guidance counselors can be best described as a replacement for “**talk therapy**”, because they do not have access to therapists who are best suited to address their health and wellness needs. I have bolded “**talk therapy**” because the term contributes to the systemic explanation as to why OHIP does not cover the costs for adolescents to see psychotherapists, psychologists, and other “talk therapists”. The use of this term further obfuscates the services that psychotherapists, psychologists, and other therapists provide, as something that is non-tangible.

If adolescents are provided with adequate access to “talk therapists” then they are more likely to have a healthier transition into adulthood and to live more fulfilling lives as adults. There are economic benefits to ensuring that adolescents go on to become positively functioning adults. However, in the absence of health supports, young adults are likely to experience negative health outcomes that follow them for the duration of their adult lives including outcomes like self-medication, addiction, crime, recidivism, violence, and more.

In my opinion, the biggest challenge to overcoming the systemic excuse of “**talk therapy**” is the absence of key data. Although we can pull up data from other sources including hospitals and other health support clinics, very little data originates from within our schools. And, that lack of data is something we can change with a ticket-system that collects anonymous data about the guidance counselor-student interactions that occur which have to do health and wellness.

Conceptual design for a web-based ticket tracking system



After clicking on the specific category (month, grade, etc), a drop-down list appears with the corresponding options. A ticket can only be submitted if every category has been answered.

There are many advantages to having a web-based ticket system including that it is inexpensive to build, it allows us to gather anonymous health and wellness data on student-specific categories, and that data can be leveraged to improve both new and existing legislation as well as helping further research at the post-secondary level and beyond.

Based on the current categories: "month" data allows us to identify patterns that may be related to the start and end of the school year, "grade" data allows us to identify patterns that may be grade-related like starting grade 9 or finishing grade 12, "sex" data allows us to identify patterns that may be related to gender-specific needs, "visit number" data allows us to track repeat interactions, "nature of visit" data allows us to understand whether the challenges originate at home, at school, with a sense of self, or if it is a combination of challenges. Most importantly, all of the data is completely anonymous.

Evidence-based policy making

For those of us that operate within healthcare and/or education ecosystems, we know just how hard it can be for health and education workers, who are often ill-equipped, when they try helping adolescents. If we have meaningful health and wellness data that comes directly out of schools, it has the potential to allow us to expand existing health supports so that they account for evolving health and wellness needs. In addition to better understanding adolescent health and wellness challenges and how they may have evolved over time, the data can also be used to measure and improve both new and existing legislation.

One hypothetical scenario for the collected data may show that there is a need for more gender-affirming supports for students who identify as non-binary (NB), at each grade level, for challenges that are occurring at home and internally. Another hypothetical scenario of the data may show that there is a need for more before- and after-school programs for students struggling with school challenges as well as home challenges, where there may be food insecurity and a lack of learning support.

Evidence-based funding

Extracurricular activities as well as before- and after-school programs, for learners whose families lack the financial resources to adequately support their children, are extremely important. When students have access to extracurricular activities it can contribute to an improved sense of self, create a sense social belonging, and help students to realize their full potential. Whereas the organized activities that take place during before- and after-school programs are especially significant for students that struggle with difficult at-home situations like food insecurity and the lack of learning supports.

I am old enough to remember when extracurricular sporting and learning activities as well as before- and after-school programs first started getting cut. Since then, education budgets for programs like these have been further reduced and stretched to a point where all of it has had a negative impact on the minds of tomorrow. The only way these situations can get improved is if we have data that comes directly out of our schools, making the case for evidence-based funding for certain extracurricular activities as well as before- and after-school programs.

"What gets measured gets improved."
- Peter Drucker

