

Job title

School Counsellor

General overview

School counsellors also known as guidance counsellors, student counsellors, or educational counsellors can work at both the elementary and secondary school level. Secondary school counsellors assist students in making decisions in areas pertaining to their future education, vocation, or career (National Center for O*NET Development, 2012). This may include exploring with students, learning their likes and dislikes, and guiding them towards appropriate career choices or connecting students to information about university information sessions, job requirements, or scholarship availability (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). Elementary school counsellors are less focused on career counselling and more focused on dealing with individual child needs and helping students succeed in their early education. Elementary school counsellors are also important in supporting a safe school environment and preparing students for their transition into secondary school (Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, 2010).

Job duties and responsibilities

Some specific tasks for secondary school counsellors will include:

- Keeping up to date with different programs colleges and universities offer, admissions requirements, internships available and their requirements, specific educational requirements for different jobs, scholarships, and job opportunities for those students who may not wish to continue education after high school.
- Writing many emails to students, parents, colleagues, and institutions that provide information or answer questions.
- Creating brochures, letters, or pamphlets to provide information to parents, colleagues, students, or the community.
- Keeping up to date files on students they meet with and being able to problem solve to provide optimum guidance.
- Meetings with students, parents and colleagues.
- Giving presentations on career and education related topics.

Some specific tasks for elementary school counsellors will include:

- Meeting with students and parents to discuss the needs of a child and possibly develop strategies to deal with any issues.
- Interacting with children to build positive and supportive relationships
- Supporting children dealing with any problematic behaviours.
- Developing pamphlets, letters or brochures for children or parents.
- Giving presentations on such issues as aggression or transitions into secondary school.
- Administering medication for children on a daily or when needed basis.

(Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014)

(National Center for O*NET Development, 2012)

Typical workday

For both elementary and secondary school counsellors their work day generally starts before school allowing time for preparation of the day. Their day ends sometime after the last bell. How long a school counsellor spends at work depends on their work load and can vary day to day. A typical day would start out by organizing their day, which could involve replying to any emails from students, parents and co-workers and dealing with any urgent developments. The counsellor must then attend any meetings and other obligations they may have planned for that day. After that the counsellor must prioritize what work needs to be done to fulfill near future obligations or meet approaching deadlines and plan their work day around it (Starr, 2014).

Educational requirements and other qualifications

To acquire a job as either an elementary or secondary school counsellor in Ontario a person must first graduate with a minimum three-year bachelor's degree from an accredited university. The next step is to acquire teaching certification, which in Ontario is a two-year program. After receiving a teaching certificate, the next step is to become member of the Ontario College of Teachers. This provides the opportunity to apply to jobs in schools that are publically funded (Ontario School Counsellors' Association, n.d.).

After becoming a certified teacher there are two different processes to becoming a school counsellor. First, is to acquire a job as a teacher in a secondary or elementary school, receive additional qualifications and apply to open positions (Ontario School Counsellors' Association, n.d.). Although not necessary, it is suggested to acquire a teacher's certificate at the same level the teacher is planning to work as a school counsellor (Ontario College of Teachers, n.d.).

To acquire a secondary school level teaching certificate courses within an undergraduate degree must be taken that are considered teachable at the secondary school level. There must be two teachable subjects. These subjects can be: computer studies, English, dramatic arts, French as a second language, geography, health and physical education, history, mathematics, music (instrumental), biology, chemistry, physics, or visual arts. For the first subject a person wishes to teach they must take ten, one-term university credits in that subject and for the second subject they wish to teach they must take six, one-term university credits in that subject. Prerequisites to earn an elementary school level teaching certification are a minimum three-year university degree in any subject (University of Ottawa, n.d.).

After obtaining a job as a teacher and working for a period of time, a teacher should show interest in school counselling to the principal and gain additional qualifications in guidance and career counselling. The additional qualification guidance and career education has three parts, part I, part II, and specialist (Ontario College of Teachers, 2014). Part II and specialist are reserved for those who want to extra qualifications to possibly become a team lead (Ontario School Counsellors' Association, n.d.). After receiving additional qualifications the teacher can then move to a counsellor position. A school counsellor must be registered with the Ontario School Counsellors' Association.

The other process for becoming a school counsellor is to receive a master's degree in counselling psychology, educational psychology, educational counselling, developmental psychology, or social work. Although, if working within a publically funded institution is the goal a person must obtain a valid teacher's certificate (Employment Ontario, 2013).

Related skills, interests, and abilities

There are many skills that are necessary for a school counsellor to do their job effectively such as:

- Strong reading and writing skills.
- Very strong oral communication skills.
- Active listening.
- Critical thinking and problem solving.
- Computer skills.
- Researching skills (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014).

School counsellors are expected to write letters, memos, and emails daily. They must also be able to converse professionally with students, coworkers and superiors. Counsellors must be able to identify student's strengths and weaknesses to develop solutions and action plans to promote student success. They will need to keep up to date electronic files and notes on individual students and be able to save relevant links, articles, and other helpful information resources in an organized fashion (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). School counsellors must have a genuine interest in helping people as most of their job as requires them to guide and care for students so that they may achieve greater success in school and their future (National Center for O*NET Development, 2012).

Relevance of Psychology undergraduate degree

Almost all elements of Psychology are relevant to this job. Areas such as industrial/organizational psychology are relevant to secondary school counsellors as the job deals with students who in the near future will be entering the job market (National Center for O*NET Development, 2012). Also when dealing with students that may have emotional or behavioural issues areas of psychology such as such as abnormal psychology, social psychology, neuropsychology, and personality psychology are relevant because knowledge of personality traits, personality disorders, psychiatric disorders, and how they affect a specific child as well as the child's peers allows for a strong foundation for the job. A background in these areas will help day to day understanding of students and issues and also help with developing strategies to further assist students. Some elementary school counsellors may be required to administer medication to children who need it. In this case neuroscience courses such as pharmacology would be good background knowledge to have (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014).

Salary potential

The average income of a school counsellor according the statistic from the *Service Canada* is \$52,380 annually. 37.1% of the population of school counsellors receive between the range of \$20,000 to \$49,999 annually and 59.9% of school counsellors receive \$50,000 and above annually. Only 3% of school counsellors make below \$20,000 annually (Service Canada, 2013). The reason why there is such a wide range in the annual salary for school counsellors is due to the different areas they can be employed, although most are employed in the public school system and post-secondary education system (Service Canada, 2013) they can also be employed in private institutions and other companies that provide outsourced educational counselling.

Job outlook

The employment prospect rating for school counsellors in Ontario according to *Employment Canada* is average. The salary for school counsellors was reported as average, as well. Data collected from *Canadian Occupational Project System* and *Employment and Social Development Canada* shows that projected job openings for educational counsellors from 2013-2017 are going to become available more through attrition when compared to all other occupations and less through new jobs when compared to all other occupations (Employment Ontario, 2013). According to data in 2011 by the *Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario* elementary school counsellors are funded at 0.2 counsellors for every 1000 students (Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, 2010). This makes it more competitive to become an elementary school counsellor than a secondary school counsellor.

To apply

Some job ads are posted on typical forums such as Wowjobs.ca, Indeed.ca or Ontario Job bank. Opportunities can also become available after a teacher who has been working at a school expresses interest to the principal and receives the necessary qualifications to be in that position. Job postings for jobs in education can also be found at jobsineducation.com, educationcanada.com, and applytoeducation.ca.

To know more

Visit: <https://www.osca.ca/>

http://www.servicecanada.gc.ca/eng/qc/job_futures/statistics/4143.shtml

Resources

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