

Elementary Guidance Counselors Facilitating Health in Polk
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The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in their 'Blueprint for Youth' states:

Today's young people are living in an exciting time...To help ensure that they are prepared to become the next generation of parents, workers, leaders and citizens, every student needs support, guidance and opportunities during childhood, a time of rapid growth and change.

Understanding the developmental needs of children, Polk County Guidance Counselors infuse skills into their classroom guidance and group counseling sessions that not only address cognitive growth but **good health-practices**. Research studies show that elementary guidance activities have a positive influence on elementary students' academic achievement and directly impact time on task in the classroom

An excellent example of programs in action comes from **Kathleen Elementary School. A National Board Certified School Counselor, Tommy Pollock**, who often serves as a mentor to new Polk County School Counselors, implemented a school-wide classroom program this year that he feels is 'making a difference.' Mr. Pollock provides guidance lessons for each class in the school and uses the Student Success Skills curriculum™. A strong component of his developmental guidance model is goal setting.

*Tommy says, "Students are encouraged to set goals for school which include their health. Children explore an area of fitness entitled, 'Looking Good/Feeling Good.' Each week students monitor improvements they have made in the life skills of **nutrition, fun, exercise, social support and rest**. We then discuss how these life skills impact a student's energy and mood. Also in each lesson I use a brain gym concept—the notion of taking breaks & moving to help boost concentration and improve health. I play positive music and demonstrate some basic kinesthetic movements. Although the brain gym is part of the evidenced based SSS curriculum, I often adapt it for younger students. It keeps kindergarteners engaged during a 40 minute lesson. Throughout all of my lessons I bring in cultural awareness materials from other countries. Often I use music from a particular country as background for the brain gym. For all age groups I modify the brain gym at times to include ball throwing or other aerobic movements."*

The Polk County Developmental Guidance plan is School Board approved and impacts study skills, personal development, career development as well as their health and energy.

Please remember to consult your school's guidance counselor for ideas as a parent and classroom teacher for building good life skills.

1. "Toward a Blueprint for Youth: Making Positive Youth Development a National Priority," U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
2. Sink., C. A. & Stroh, H.R. (2003). Raising achievement test scores of early elementary school students through comprehensive school counseling programs. *Professional School Counseling*, 6(5), 350-364.
3. Mullis, F. & Otwell, P. (1997). Counselor accountability: A study of counselor effects on academic achievement and student behaviors