
Since the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act, the emphasis on accountability in education has become intense and pervasive—so much so that it has now permeated the school counseling profession. To assist counselors in understanding and designing assessments to guide and evaluate their service delivery, author Madelyn Isaacs provides an account of the accountability movement, an argument for the adoption of accountability measures by resistant school counselors, and a plan for gathering and interpreting data to use in crafting and assessing a school’s counseling program and personnel. Although the article is well-structured and supported by sound logic and some practical strategies, the author’s failure to be concise and to adequately address counselors’ concerns about data-driven counseling combine to diminish the article’s power to a degree.

Isaacs’ overview of the movement towards more data-driven school counseling programs is thorough, as it addresses developments within the profession such as the introduction of the ASCA National Model and standards as well as within education as a whole such as high-stakes standardized testing. Her overview is also persuasive, as it identifies the negative impact on the roles and responsibilities of counselors who fail to embrace the accountability movement. Less effective is Isaacs’ explanation of accountability as it applies to the school counseling profession. This is primarily the result of her repetition of previously stated information and focusing too much on the meaning of accountability before addressing how to attain it. Also problematic, is that while Isaacs articulates the reasons for counselors’ resistance to becoming data-driven, she ultimately fails to adequately address those concerns when she simply tell counselors to start with something small and easy without allaying fears about how to confront data issues that are more complex and time consuming.

Yet, overall, Isaacs’ article is effective. No where is this more apparent than when she not only cites prior research regarding the inability of “one-dimensional standardized tests” to adequately assess
“student growth,” but when she also provides a detailed seven step process for identifying goals, developing assessments relevant to those goals, collecting and analyzing the data from those assessments, and reporting those results in a process she calls “action research” (p. 292). Hence, Madelyn Isaacs offers a strong and well-supported rationale for the necessity of accountability in school counseling and a useful framework for integrating data into one’s counseling program. Perhaps if she had been slightly less verbose in regards to the meaning of accountability and more elucidatory in regards to counselors’ concerns about embracing accountability and data in the practice of their professions, this article would be even more successful.