

School Attendance and Student Records

Fred C. Lunenburg
Sam Houston State University

ABSTRACT

The cumulative record has value for teachers, principals, and other personnel-service professionals. Such data provide a better understanding of the student – his/her needs, aspirations, interests, and potentialities. The cumulative record can help with the child’s adjustment in school, in the transition from one school level to another, and in the selection of postsecondary education and vocational plans. In this paper, I discuss the contents of the student’s cumulative record and the use of assessment data to improve learning.

Keywords: assessment data, cumulative record, learning, school attendance, student records

Student accounting is the oldest area of the student services department of elementary and secondary schools. Its beginnings can be traced to enforcement of compulsory attendance in the Massachusetts law of 1642, and finally, in 1853 when Massachusetts enacted the first compulsory attendance law in the United States (Alexander & Alexander, 2009). From the beginning, this service was primarily an administrative one aimed at keeping students in school (Coleman, 2009).

Student accounting has gradually enlarged its administrative emphasis to one of understanding child behavior. In recent years, attendance officers have brought about a separation of enforcement and correction so that truancy is being treated as a symptom of some underlying difficulty. Counselors and principals are working together to determine the cause of nonattendance (Lunenburg & Irby, 2006). Routine aspects of truancy are handled by school clerks, and special cases are referred to personnel workers who have time to deal with them as guidance rather than as administrative problems. Thus, nonattendance is becoming an essential part of personnel work and is viewed as opportunities to discover students who need special help (Kampwirth, 2006).

It is the aim of the compulsory-attendance laws that have been passed by each of the fifty states that all children shall receive certain minimum essentials as their educational preparation for life. Teachers, administrators, and counselors share

responsibility for helping all children to secure these essentials. To assist in this process, careful records must be kept.

The Cumulative Record

What are some of the recorded data that are needed to develop a better educational program for each child? The following information is recommended for inclusion in a student's cumulative record (Cheung, Clemente, & Pechman, 2000; Coleman, 2009; National Research Council, 2009):

Personal Data Sheet

Such a form will provide pertinent and up-to-date information about the child. This information, most of which can be utilized by the teacher, should include family history (parents, siblings, home conditions), health history (diseases, illnesses, injuries), and child's history (courses, grades, excused and unexcused absences, failures, activities).

Parent's Report

The record should contain a brief report from the parents. This report might include a bit more information about the child's background, including what her problems in school might be, what sort of person she is at home, and any information that might help the teacher do a better job.

Child's Self-Concept

This information may be in the form of answers to standardized tests, such as interests and personality tests. The folder should also contain an autobiographical sketch. The following can be solicited from English teachers as part of a writing assignment: free writing or a discussion of specific areas, such as ideas about life at home, life at school, outside activities, and other things of importance to the students.

Sociogram

The record should contain a sociogram to show the degree of acceptance of the student by his peers. This provides valuable information to the teacher regarding peer group acceptance or rejection.

Behavior Reports

The student's record folder should contain periodic objective reports of his behavior. In the elementary school most of these reports would come from one teacher, whereas in the secondary school they would be compiled by many teachers. These reports should never be used against the child, but instead should always be used for the benefit of the child.

Standardized Test Data

A major part of the cumulative record is data collected as part of the school testing program—intelligence, personality and adjustment, interests, aptitude, achievement, and the like, and interpretation of test results and recommendations for adjustments and remedial work (Coleman, 2009). Such information may help the teacher to better understand each of his students, and it may warn him in advance of some of the difficulties students may experience in the future.

The Use of Assessment Data to Improve Learning

Many schools have increased the value of their cumulative record through providing careful instructions as to their maintenance and use. What outcomes may be reasonably expected from the use of these records? The following five are suggested (Benson, 2009; Blanchard, 2010; Bulach, Lunenburg, & Potter (2008); Kallick, 2009; Stronge, 2010):

- A clearer understanding that the master teacher is a teacher of students not merely of subject matter.
- A more systematic focusing of attention on the needs of individual students in order to help them to become more self-sufficient and independent.
- A better adjustment of the school and the curriculum to the needs and capacities of every student.
- A practical use of the appraisal of children and their needs that may result in the solution of some of their problems in school.
- A better intellectual and social development of each child so that she may maximize her potential.

Conclusion

The student's cumulative record contains information beneficial to the following school officials: administrators, counselors, school psychologists, social workers, diagnosticians, and teachers. The cumulative record should include the following information: a student's data sheet, parent's report, child's self-concept appraisal, sociogram, behavior reports, and standardized test data.

The cumulative record can also be used as assessment data to improve learning. Such data provide a better understanding of the child—his needs, aspirations, interests, and potentialities. It can help with the child's adjustment in school, in the transition from one school level to another, and in the selection of postsecondary education and vocational plans.

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