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50 YEARS AND GROWING

BY STEVE MURRAY

At the 2013 ASCA Conference in Philadelphia, I accepted an award recognizing ISCA for 50 years of service to Illinois School Counseling. The award acknowledges the positive impact that Illinois school counselors have made assisting students with everyday issues, advancing and promoting student achievement, and preparing students for post secondary life. ISCA is a mission-based organization supporting school counseling professionals. With our many talented, innovative, and solution-seeking ISCA members, we can look forward to the next 50 years with confidence.

As we plan for 2013-2014, we are aware of the volatility in education. A clear priority is to serve our members and we will keep you informed of political storms in Springfield, Chicago, and Washington, D.C., and how they impact school counseling professionals. We are positioning ISCA to face this uncertainty through a focused advocacy plan that profiles our work with students, parents, and other educational professionals. The goal of the advocacy plan is to reach 100% of the principals in the state.

We are building ISCA through partnerships with IACAC and ISAC. These partnerships will create new professional development programs for our members. The ISCA Board aspires to deliver comprehensive school counseling professional development programs for its members. I hope you will join us at one of our annual conferences in Springfield on April 11 or Skokie on April 25. The conference committee will be accepting presentation proposals in the future. Please consider sharing with your colleagues.

On a personal note, I thank Erin Mason for her innovative work as ISCA president. ISCA is here to assist; please contact me if we can be of service to you. ■■■

Contact Steve Murray, 2013-2014 ISCA president, at smurray@nddons.org.



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ISCA ANNUAL CONFERENCE

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COLLEGE APPLICATION MONTH 2013

As part of the American Council on Education's national effort to increase the number of first-generation and low-income students pursuing a postsecondary credential, Illinois joined 23 other states and the District of Columbia in the American College Application Campaign. *Learn more about the initiative*

The campaign's intent is to encourage students who typically apply to college late in the process, or who don't apply at all, to apply in a timely manner. As a result of the successful pilot program led by the Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC) in 2012, October 2013 has been designated College Application Month in Illinois.

To register your high school for an Illinois College Application Month 2013 event and review the Application Month Tool Kit, please visit www.collegechangeeverything.org/appmonth/.



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CAREGIVER RESILIENCY

Learn to hold up under pressure and be a role model of resiliency.

BY AL SIEBERT, PH.D.

As a school counselor, a big part of your job is that of caregiver. You provide people in need with a shoulder to cry on, someone to listen to their concerns, and advice on how to deal with adversity. However, it can be a fine line to walk between helping others with their problems and letting others' problems have a negative impact on your own mental health. You not only owe it to yourself but to your students to be a role model for resiliency.

Some caregivers are more resilient, hardy, and stress-resistant than others. They hold up well under pressure and even gain strength from the difficulties and strains. The inner nature of people made stronger by adversity has fascinated me for many years. A common factor I find in highly resilient people transformed by extreme difficulties is that they fully embrace the challenge. Instead of complaining, they immerse themselves in the circumstance to be dealt with and let it change their lives.

Champion distance runner and urban planner Nancy Linday converted being a caregiver for her mother into a valuable, satisfying, transforming experience. Nancy's mother, Sarah Linday, was a wonderful role model—she passed the New York bar exam in 1930, rare for a woman and even more rare for someone with only a high school diploma. Sarah worked as an executive legal secretary and practiced law on the side for many years. In 1989, she developed memory problems and was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease two years later. Nancy and her mother were devastated. "My mother's brain was her life," Nancy said. "Analyzing, critiquing, challenging, writing, advocating—this was what she lived for." Not willing to put her mother in a nursing home, Nancy quit her job to care for Sarah at home. Nancy decided she would find a way to slow down Sarah's mental deterioration by engaging her mother's mind and motivation.

During her running career, Nancy had never found a headgear that met all of her needs as an athlete. She invented a unique design that she knew could be patented, trademarked, and licensed



A common factor I find in highly resilient people transformed by extreme difficulties is that they fully embrace the challenge.

to a manufacturer. Nancy and Sarah focused their combined energy on what they called the Vicap™.

"The Vicap became our occupational therapy," Nancy said. "I sewed pre-production samples while sitting in hospital rooms waiting for doctors or while my mother was asleep." Sarah led Nancy through the legal maze of affidavits, nondisclosure agreements, and working with patent and trademark attorneys. This involvement delighted Sarah and kept her mind sharp for a long time. Through the project, "my mother and I always stayed connected," Nancy said. "The Vicap became a central part of all our conversations."

Sarah died in 1993. Nancy has returned to work and is an active vol-

unteer for athletic and outdoor fundraising events for disabling diseases. "I've had excellent responses from the New York City Alzheimer's Association about using the Vicap in conjunction with their Memory Walks," she said. "I think my mother would be absolutely satisfied."

STRENGTH FROM ADVERSITY

Decades of research into the inner nature of life's best survivors has led to an understanding of emotional resiliency and how it develops. Do you accept and embrace what life has handed you? Do you allow the experience to transform you? People best at coping with rough challenges are the ones who fully accept what has happened. People who don't want to do what they are doing are more likely to become psychologically drained and exhausted.

The mother of a friend of mine developed Alzheimer's disease, and the family's experience differed significantly from that of Nancy Linday. My friend moved his mother into the basement of his home because she refused to be placed in a care facility. He then accepted a contract to work for a year in a

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

foreign country, leaving his wife to care for his mother. His wife felt forced into an unwanted caretaker's role but accepted it. His mother died shortly after his return home. His wife feels drained and is emotionally distant from him—not a good situation for either of them. In contrast, Nancy fully embraced her mother's illness and made it an enriching, loving experience for them both.

To be a model of resiliency, maintain a playful, curious spirit. Play with new developments. Enjoy things as children do. Have a good time almost anywhere. Be curious. Experiment, make mistakes, get hurt, laugh. Ask, "What is different now? What if I did this? What is funny about this?" Constantly learn from experience. Ask, "What is the lesson here? What can I learn from this? What meaning does this have for me?" Adapt easily. Be nonjudgmental and emo-

To be a model of resiliency, maintain a playful, curious spirit. Play with new developments. Enjoy things as children do.

tionally flexible. Be both strong and gentle, sensitive and tough, logical and intuitive, calm and emotional, serious and playful. The more counter-balanced inner qualities you develop, the better.

STEPS TOWARD RESILIENCY

Following are some tips to help improve your caregiver resiliency.

Enjoy solid self-esteem and self-confidence. Self-esteem is how you feel about yourself. It allows you to enjoy praise and compliments. It acts as a buffer against hurtful statements. Critical care nurses, for example, must handle extreme verbal abuse from some patients and families of patients. Self-confidence is your reputation with yourself. You expect to handle difficult situations well because of your past success.

Talk with friends. People are more strain-resistant and less likely to get sick when they have good friendships and a loving family. Lonely people are more vulnerable to distressing conditions. Express feelings honestly. Resilient people express anger, love, dislike, appreciation, grief—the entire range of human emotions—honestly and openly, while also being able to choose to



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suppress feelings when they believe it would be best to do so. These are signs of emotional intelligence.

Expect things to work out well.

Research by psychologists shows that optimistic people have better health, are more stress-resistant, resist longer, and achieve more personal success.

Develop open-minded empathy.

See things through the perspectives of others, even antagonists. Ask, "What do others think and feel? What is it like to be them? How do they experience me? What is legitimate about what they feel, say and do?"

Trust intuition. Accept intuition and hunches as valid, useful sources of information. Ask, "What is my body telling me? Did that daydream mean anything?"

Question authority. Ask questions. Resist manipulations that others at-

Learning lessons in the school of life lets you convert a situation that is emotionally toxic for others into something emotionally nutritious for you.

tempt. Avoid the games so many people play. Defend yourself against attacks, and fight back when you must.

Develop a talent for serendipity.

Learning lessons in the school of life lets you convert a situation that is emotionally toxic for others into something emotionally nutritious for you. A good

indicator of deep resiliency is when a caregiver says of a difficult situation, "I would never willingly go through anything like that again, but it was one of the best things that ever happened to me." Ask, "Why is it good that this happened? What is the gift?"

Deeply resilient people let themselves be transformed by their experiences. When life hands you a challenge that you didn't want or ask for, you will never be the same again. You will either emerge exhausted and bitter, or you will emerge strengthened and better. You have it in you to determine which way it will be. ■

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BUILDING TRUST AND RESPECT

School counselors wishing to work more collaboratively can start by nurturing an atmosphere of trust and respect with their colleagues, including appreciating them as both individuals and professionals.

BY SANDRA CONRAD

When working to improve students' lives, school counselors find teaming with other student services personnel can make a dramatic difference. Whether addressing students' career goals, academic issues or personal/social issues, it's easy to see how the school nurse, the school psychologist and a school social worker can lend a helping hand.

"It often does take a team to address the various issues of student's needs and concerns," said Alan W. Burkard, Ph.D., Marquette University, Milwaukee, Wis., and former ASCA president. "It requires collaboration to make sure students' needs are being met."

"It works best if we work together," said Steve Schneider, NBCT, school counselor, Sheboygan South High School, Sheboygan, Wis. Schneider knows first-hand what a collaborative environment can mean for a school. "There's a culture here. If you're going to work in our building, you have to come ready to play together."

A collaborative environment doesn't automatically happen, however. A solid foundation of trust and respect has to be in place first. According to the "Enhancing the Principal-School Counselor Relationship Toolkit," developed by ASCA, the College Board, and the National Association of Secondary Principals (NASSP), "Trust and respect are fundamental components of an effective working relationship. Few people can work well with someone they do not respect or with someone they do not believe respects them."

"I wish I had a magic formula for how trust and respect happens," Schneider said. "A lot of it has to do with a healthy understanding and respect for what each other does."

"Communication is vitally, vitally important to trust and respect," said Tammi Mackeben, coordinator of guidance and counseling, Socorro Independent School District, El Paso, Texas, and 2008 ASCA School Counselor of the Year.



School counselors wishing to work more collaboratively can start by nurturing an atmosphere of trust and respect with their colleagues, including appreciating them as both individuals and professionals.

RESPECT: FIND OUT WHAT IT MEANS TO OTHERS

Mackeben learned a lot about building trust and respect when she worked with ASCA, the College Board, and NASSP on the Finding a Way project, which focused on school counselor/principal relationships. "It was interesting that both school counselors and principals came up with trust as the most important thing in any relationship and respect as number two."

What surprised Mackeben even more was realizing the variety of ways people defined "respect."

"Everyone sees respect as something different," Mackeben said. This was especially true with her school principal, Ricardo Damian. "I saw respect as respect for me as a person; whereas for him as an administrator, it was respect

for his position," Mackeben said. "He said to me, 'Respect to me means you respect my vision of the school.' When I understood that, I knew how to approach him on everything."

Mackeben encourages school counselors to find that kind of clarity and rapport with colleagues. "It's so important to build a relationship with a person and ask them, 'What does respect mean to you?'"

When describing his definition of trust and respect, Damian gave Mackeben an example of what those concepts meant to him. Mackeben said, "He told me, 'When you say you're going to do something and you follow through with it, first of all, that's when I begin to trust you. Once I trust you, I can respect you. But I can't respect you until I trust you.' I started thinking about that, and I realized that's really the same for me. I can't really respect someone unless I trust them. Trust comes first."

Mackeben suggests getting to know people as individuals as an important first step in building trust. That

means finding out about their likes, dislikes, strengths, and weaknesses. It also means including them in school counseling activities. "I think the best way to build trust with other people is to invite them to the table," Mackeben said. "When you're having activities and functions, when you're going in doing your classroom lessons, invite other people like the school nurse or the school psychologist. Ask for their expertise on topics they can help with. Ask for resources."

In building trust, Mackeben also stresses the importance of doing what you say you're going to do. "If you set new goals, follow through with them, and make sure you accomplish those goals. Then people will begin to trust that you're a vital person on that campus."

"I don't think it's any different building trust on a campus as a school counselor than it is building trust with anyone, with your family, with your kids, with anyone. You build it by being consistent and following through on things," Mackeben said.

SPEAK THE PRINCIPAL'S LANGUAGE

When starting to build trust and respect, school counselors should look no further than the principal's office. "The person you have to start with is the principal," Burkard said. "If you can begin to align yourself with the leadership of the school, I think that garners you some power within the school in a positive way. You gain some credibility, you gain some respect, you gain some expertise, and perhaps you're allowed to use your expertise in ways that will benefit the school district."

A proactive approach is particularly important when building trust and respect with busy school principals, Mackeben said. "They don't have the time to go to you because they've got so much on their plate. Go in and make an appointment with your principal and

talk to them about what their goals are."

"I can't imagine a building administrator who would not be willing to engage in conversation about big issues," Schneider said. "They'll want to be involved, which is what you want."

Burkard also stresses the importance of understanding the language of school principals. "I think it's really incumbent upon school counselors to understand that frame of reference," Burkard said. Asking questions such as "How is the principal looking at the school world? What pressures is the principal under? What concerns does the principal have? What are the principal's ultimate goals?" helps school counselors better align their goals with the principal's goals.

For many school counselors, that means brushing up on the school mission. "Any school counselor who doesn't know the school mission or doesn't know the school improvement goals isn't in line with the school principal," Burkard said.

At a recent state conference, Burkard asked a group of more than 300 school counselors whether they knew their school mission and school improvement goals. "Not even a quarter of the room raised their hands," he said. "So there's some work we have to do in that area."

Burkard also encourages school counselors to figure out how to model their programs to better fit with the school's overall goals. "I think that's really essential, because that's what the principal's interested in."

COMMUNICATE, EDUCATE, ADVOCATE

Another important aspect in building trust and respect is to educate people, including the principal and other administrators, on your role as a school counselor. "I think it's really difficult for people to trust you if they don't understand what your role is and what you're supposed to be doing," Mackeben said.

"Once you start educating people, they begin to trust you because then they understand why you're doing what you're doing."

"Principals don't really receive a lot of training about what school counselors do," Burkard said. "A lot of what they know is based on what they have seen in their own school systems, the quality of the school counselor they're working with, and the advocacy that person does."

Educating others is an ongoing process. "I don't think it ever stops," Mackeben said. "Every year it's an ongoing process to explain more and more about what the role of the school counselor is."

Although advocating for the profession is essential, it's equally important for school counselors to find out about others' roles. "You need to go find other people on your campus and find out what they do as well. What is the principal's role? What is the nurse's role? What is the psychologist's role?" Mackeben said.

"If we're the role models by asking what's important to them, they will reciprocate and ask what's important to us," Mackeben said. "It's happened every time with me. We all want somebody to ask what's important to us."

Mackeben is sensitive to the possibility that people aren't always comfortable initially with that level of sharing and may view it as if the school counselor is questioning what they're doing. "It's not that we're questioning, it's that we're trying to find out if we can be more of a team for the best interests of the students," Mackeben said. "Once they understand why you're trying to learn about their role, they're very open to sharing."

"I think it is important that school counselors reach out and understand other roles and talk about those roles," Burkard said. "It does take some good collaboration to figure out how they're

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14

going to work together. So, having good communication among those groups is essential."

PLAY TO EACH OTHER'S STRENGTHS

Talking about roles can help teams figure out who's going to do what when responsibilities seem to overlap. "We just haven't taken the time to talk about what we expect of each other in those situations," Burkard said.

"There's room for multiple roles and still working toward a common goal," Schneider said. He points to his school's suicide prevention coalition as an example of that collaborative spirit and trusting each other's expertise. "There were so many things that needed to

get done, no one group that was going to say, 'This is our turf.' We were all working together on a common project. That really seemed to help with that issue of understanding each other's roles and gaining respect for each other as professionals. I think that sense of collaboration just perpetuated from that point."

Schneider suggests picking a large education issue that requires collaboration, such as response to intervention or positive behavioral intervention to improve collaboration. "It has to be a big goal that the pupil services team can work toward together," Schneider said. "That does two things. One, it puts pupil services in a leadership role in how a building or district's going to go

toward a certain goal, and two, it forces you to have conversations with each other."

Mackeben agrees, saying that after working together on a big project, collaboration across departments comes naturally.

"I would find it incredibly frustrating to work in a place that didn't have collaboration," Schneider said. "A lot of this stuff is really hard to do on your own." ■

Sandra Conrad is a freelance writer based in Dallas, Texas, who writes regularly for ASCA School Counselor. This article was previously published in that magazine, volume 49, number 3.

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DO YOU NEED A DOCTOR IN THE HOUSE?

If you don't ever plan on teaching at the college level is there any reason to pursue a doctoral degree?

BY JILL MUETH, ED.D.

What do you want to be when you grow up? We ask this question so often of our students, but do we really know our own answers? Do we keep an eye out for retirement? What do we think would make us better practicing school counselors until then? Do we want or need more schooling?

In these economically strained times, how does a school counselor decide to spend precious personal funds and limited time on higher education? Is it wise to pursue a doctoral degree? Would our time be better spent on stand-alone professional development opportunities such as workshops or short courses? What should drive us to embark upon a degree program that will surely stretch ourselves and our families beyond what might be reasonably recouped?

These questions aren't easy to answer, and for each school counselor who wrestles them, the answers are extremely personal. However, I submit that now, more than ever, obtaining an Ed.D. or Ph.D. in professional counseling is critical to keeping public education moving forward in an ever-more-divergent and rapidly changing world.

WHAT'S TO GAIN?

The short answers include money, respect, opportunities following retirement, leadership, self-improvement, and contribution to greater societal and academic good. You could, of course, argue that you can obtain these same benefits with intensive post-master's-level work and finishing a doctorate still isn't necessary to meet these goals. Of this list, probably the least convincing is money since public school educators, even at the far reaches of the salary schedules, still aren't paid in keeping with other occupations requiring as much schooling. That being said, there is usually a salary step or two beyond the master's level for completing a doctoral degree, and if your retirement payouts are calculated on a combination of highest years of salary, as they



are in my state, your retirement salary with a doctorate will be higher than it will be with a master's degree.

But is it enough to offset the cost of your degree? Probably not. And after the first 6,000 times somebody calls you "doctor," that allure wears off as well. Earning a degree past the master's level is difficult, extremely time-consuming, and lonely. So why would practicing school counselors want to pursue doctoral degrees?

PERSONAL BENEFITS

Self-improvement: You will probably never do anything as academically difficult or as ultimately rewarding. With each step of the class work and dissertation process, you will become a better writer, a better thinker, a better evaluator, and a better school counselor. In my degree program, nothing

I had done previously could possibly have contributed more to my ability to take my untapped skills and turn them into something that has changed me forever. Self-improvement is a small word that might be used for what I have gained, but it does not begin to describe the depth of respect I have for my own evolution as a school counselor and watching that in others.

Leadership skills: You will be a leader in education, both in your district and state and to others who are working to complete advanced degrees. Because you will have worked hard and achieved your doctorate, it is your responsibility to encourage and help others do the same if asked. Since finishing my degree, I have never, and will never in the future, turned down a fellow researcher

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seeking information to complete a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation. I owe this time and effort to anyone who seeks answers as I did. Each of us as professional school counselors has a responsibility to mentor, but those who have completed higher education degrees have the greatest of that responsibility.

Knowledge: "The having of wonderful thoughts." This quote is a distillation attributed to an unnamed philosopher in a doctoral seminar class where my class was discussing the very topic of this article, "Why are you here?" At the time, we were all harried, exhausted, and scared, and having wonderful thoughts was pretty far off the mark. However, there was then and still is now something infinitely rewarding about engaging in thought or dialogue or brainstorming or problem solving that will never be the same—stretching

and growing in ways that will forever reinvent how you stretch and grow.

HOW STUDENTS BENEFIT

You're not the only one to gain something from earning a doctoral degree. Your students benefit as well.

They will gain a better school counselor. You will feel more comfortable researching what you will do with your students and how to do it better, and the changes you take on will make you still better. You will feel a greater trust in yourself to know how to proceed when you are confused, but you will also grow in wisdom to say the ever-necessary "I don't know" and model for your students how to grow from there.

Your students will know you will never stop working for them, and perseverance will never be far from the discussion at hand. Like I do, I'm sure you expect that your students will all reach

far and wide to become their best. Your doctoral journey will allow you to model for them what to do when obstacles loom. Your colleagues will no doubt be a pretty diverse bunch, but watching them and being with them through it all will show you that working together helps everybody. That, in turn, will help your students do the same.

You will be a cheerleader for kids and their families. My own degree program was heavily saturated with marriage and family curriculum, and by my own design, I look at everything from a developmental framework. This is invaluable to me and to my students because I am constantly inviting parents, teachers, administrators, and community members to celebrate the tremendous growth through systemic and developmental stages of who we are as a school and human family. Your own studies will no doubt lead you in

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directions that will bind you as strongly to your students.

You get to share with your students a personal journey of character education as they struggle with their own journeys. What will respect mean to you after you have completed your degree? What does it take to complete something that big when at times it seems so impossibly difficult? Why should they listen to you when you encourage them to be risk takers for all things big and positive but terribly scary? You will be able to relate to them in a way you never could before, and you will gain so much from helping them move beyond their comfort zone.

THE SCHOOL'S SIDE

Your individual school and district also gain a wealth of benefits should you choose to obtain a doctoral degree.

You will feel greater accountability for your professional school counseling program. The ASCA National Model, at the very minimum, asks us to answer the question, "How are students different as a result of what you do?" Because of your degree, you will have an increased ability to evaluate goal-directed lessons and data-driven curriculum so you don't waste time on things that don't work. You will also be more aware of the needs in your building and your district because you can think globally about where you are now and where you want to go, perhaps even as a direct by-product of your dissertation research. And, just as when you were working on your dissertation, you will have a greater appreciation for what to do when things don't work and greater respect for moving slower in the general, but perseverant, direction of measurable goals.

Having staff members with doctoral degrees is valuable to your district. It does good things for state and district school improvement plans. It tells patrons and taxpayers that we care enough about educating all children that pursuing the highest educational degree is a worthy endeavor and that we are committed to continual evaluative research into what works best. Conversely, school districts have the responsibility of nurturing and supporting faculty members

Having staff members with doctoral degrees is valuable to your district. It does good things for state and district school improvement plans.

who are pursuing advanced degrees. What shows higher commitment to public education than having superintendents, school board members, teachers, administrators, and school counselors all working in the same direction and with the same level of commitment toward our children's education?

You will be a leader in your school. Teachers, parents, students, and administrators will look to you to have good ideas and be a problem-solver, not just because of your doctorate but also because of what you have gained in its completion. Your degree will teach you to look at things in myriad ways, to collaborate, to be positive, to continually strive for better things and to see good things just around the corner.

BENEFITS FOR EDUCATION

And, from a big-picture perspective, the world of education also benefits when school counselors pursue advanced degrees.

All societies need highly educated and committed people to teach the next generation. School counselors are in a unique position to guide others toward reaching their true potential as learners and productive citizens. Through work in the classrooms, the conference rooms, the technical schools, and the college guidance offices, students hear us asking them "why not?" in going beyond what they think they might be able to achieve. If we ourselves have asked and answered that question in the form of higher education, we become a more credible source of strength in that tenuous bond between student and the world.

School counselors with doctoral degrees can serve the call of higher

education without leaving their schools. Partnership between universities and public schools for dissertation research is something that should be occurring with more regularity. The sheer number of important questions to be answered about educating children is astonishingly large. If you already have achieved that doctoral degree, you can provide not only questions for others to research but also mentoring partnerships with young school counselors pursuing doctoral degrees. Universities would do well to seek out school counselors in public education who want to continue their interest in post-doctoral research so future dissertations are written to solve real school problems, thus moving public education forward by great leaps. School counselors with doctoral degrees would do well to ask to help colleges and universities with counseling research. Everybody wins, especially children.

Completion of a doctoral program gives increased credibility and prestige to the education of children. Many educators feel a pull toward university teaching as they near retirement. It is heartening to think that after decades of service to youngsters, a veteran school counselor is still pulled toward sharing knowledge and guiding younger teachers toward excellence. However, children need to see their instructors dedicated to reaching the highest level for no other purpose than being the best practicing school counselor they can be. We need the best, the brightest and the most committed to look for the answers in school reform and human development that we will all need in our globally expanding world.

When administrators and superintendents are the only staff with doctoral degrees, children do not get to see the very real need for the pursuit of excellence within the walls of their classroom. We can't predict which student will want to become an Ed.D. school counselor dedicated to wiping out school violence or a Ph.D. in biology who will find a food source for the entire world simply because they saw a teacher or school counselor with the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 18

skills, the degree, and the fortitude to reach further.

A quick perusal of recent school counselor dissertation topics revealed an amazing array of single-focused research destined to create change. Among the more intriguing were: parenting and family practices of new English learners affecting school performance, poverty and violence as it relates to drop-out rates, interventions for social-emotional aggressive behaviors in elementary schools, linguistic diversity and achievement, testing policies for children of all abilities, teaching flexibility in learning multiple ways to problem-solve, and promotion of resiliency in children. How could any of these topics fail to improve the lives of children in all educational settings?

Earning an Ed.D. or Ph.D. does not mean that one stops learning or doing. Quite the contrary, in fact. It means that

research and gaining of expertise is just beginning. Once the single-minded focus of a dissertation has ended, many school counselors focus on other interest areas they couldn't spend time on during their studies. Still others use their dissertation as a jumping-off point for more research within their own schools. For some that might mean action research in the classroom or dedication to interventions for key problem populations identified through needs-based surveys. Others may build into their existing programs some research for starting and continuing important programs such as anti-bullying, diversity, or family issues. Presenting these best practices at conferences is of utmost importance as others pose new questions and reach for new answers. Of course, being a member of local, state, and national organizations and committees to further the impact

of professional school counselors is a minimal return for all that others have given.

In the end, what benefits children benefits everyone, and we will only be as good as the children we raise and educate. For all of our children, school counselors have the obligation to model an expansive thirst for knowledge, a quest for answers that help people, an unflagging work ethic, and an ability to inspire others to greatness.

How can we afford not to have leaders of education on our counseling staff? What are we waiting for? ■■■

Jill Mueth, Ed.D., is a retired school counselor from St. Louis, Mo., and a 2008 School Counselor of the Year finalist.

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1 Connect with others.

2 Stay positive.

3 Get physically active.

- Put it in your calendar, and keep that appointment.
- Work out with a friend.
- Really run your errands—try walking faster or further when you stop for groceries.

4 Help others.

5 Get enough rest.

- De-caffeinate yourself--stop about six to eight hours before bed.
- Turn off daytime worries by finishing any next-day preparations an hour before bed.
- If you can't fall asleep after 15 minutes, get up until you feel more tired.

6 Create joy and satisfaction.

- Take note of the high points in your day and try to do those activities more.
- Pop in a humor CD. Keep one in the car and steer clear of traffic frustration.
- Do something you loved as a kid. Run through the sprinklers or play with finger paints.

7 Eat well.

- Eat regularly. Skipping meals can make your blood sugar drop, leaving you nervous or irritable.
- Snack well. Sustain your energy—and your ability to resist junk food—by packing healthy snacks.

8 Take care of your spirit.

9 Deal better with hard times.

- Tackle problem—make a list of possible solutions, then pick one and break it into manageable chunks.
- Get support from others who've gone through similar situations.
- Write about an upsetting event—it organizes your thoughts and helps you file the problem away.

10 Get professional help if you need it.

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FINDING THE POWER OF SCHOOL COUNSELING AT THE GROCERY STORE

Encountering a former student taught this educator five important lessons about the power of school counseling.

BY BARB RAMOS

I grew up in what I call a fairytale family. My parents have been married for more than 50 years. As a child, I had everything I needed and many things I wanted, and I always felt safe and loved. During my first two years as an elementary teacher, I quickly realized that many of my students didn't have the love and safety that I felt in my fairytale family. A hungry child, a scared child, an abused child, a bullied child—each finds it difficult to focus on learning. This inspired me to pursue a career as an elementary school counselor. I hoped to help students and their families with issues standing in the way of learning. However, I didn't understand the power of what I was doing until a few weeks ago, when I went to the grocery store.

As I was about to enter the store, I heard someone call my name. I turned and recognized Joe immediately. I had been his counselor from kindergarten through fifth grade, and he was now in his mid-20s. I couldn't begin to count the number of times I had called the Department of Human Services about my concerns for his safety. During my first call, the social worker said that she was very familiar with the family, which was in a cycle of abuse and neglect. Joe and his brother were the third generation to be investigated by the department. Seeing Joe again, I was flooded with memories.

Joe's mother abused drugs and alcohol. She came to parent-teacher conferences under the influence and could barely stay upright. Once, Joe missed two weeks of school when his mother took him to a motel in the city known for drugs and prostitution. He matured very quickly, caring for his younger brother—getting him up for school, preparing meals, and helping him with homework. One night, after Joe's mom was beaten by his uncle, Joe rode his bike across town to get help. The family had no phone and no car. I remembered attending Joe's grandmother's funeral. She had been beaten by her son and



died of complications. No charges were filed because police believed that age contributed to her death.

Placed in special education classes, neither Joe nor his brother could focus on learning, and I believed their special needs were caused by their unstable home environment. The two boys were eventually placed in foster care and adopted by their foster family. I had heard that both boys were dismissed from special education programs within a year of entering foster care. But I hadn't seen Joe in years.

Joe told me that he had been thinking of me a lot lately. He said, "You know, you saved my life and my brother's life. You need to know that. I know now how hard you worked for us and how much you cared." Now living in a nearby town with his family, Joe owns his own lawn-care business. He wanted me to meet his wife and stepdaughter, who were having breakfast in the deli. Joe's stepdaughter waved shyly at me, but his wife had a lot to say. Joe had told her about me and she immediately knew who I was. She said, "I am so grateful to you. You helped make Joe the man he is today, the man I love. I

don't know how to thank you for all that you did for Joe and his brother."

Joe and his family were in town that morning for an appointment with the Department of Human Services. He had learned just days before that his daughter from a previous relationship was being neglected by her mother. The department representative had interviewed Joe and looked into his background, and he would be given custody of his daughter in a few hours. Joe was breaking the cycle. He said he knew what life was like living with an addicted, neglectful mother, and he didn't want that for his daughter. He was "doing things right now," he said. Although he'd had ups and downs over the years, now he owned a business, he was married, and he was taking responsibility for his children.

His mother is still a drug addict. Joe bought her a mobile home near his house. He told me that she was still his mother and he was committed to making sure that she had a roof over her head.

After our conversation, I almost couldn't shop for my groceries. I took a few minutes to compose myself. I had just learned that I had made not a small difference, but a life-changing difference. A student of mine had broken the cycle of neglect and abuse and was living a happy, healthy, and productive life.

I was a school counselor for 14 years but I left the profession to become a college professor of education. I left because I was frustrated—so many students had so many issues and needed so much help, yet resources for children in need were being cut. I felt like I wasn't making a difference. Instead, if I worked to put highly qualified, caring teachers in the classroom, that would impact more students. But that day, I learned that there is great power in school counseling. This experience taught me several crucial lessons.

Lesson #1: The cycle can be broken.

The fourth generation of Joe's family will live in safety and love. Don't

assume that a child living in dysfunction will always live that way. Believe in each child.

Lesson #2: Be persistent. I can't count the number of reports and phone calls I made on behalf of Joe and his brother. At times, making one more call or completing one more written report felt pointless. But that call or report may be the tipping point. Don't give up.

Lesson #3: Acknowledge small changes that are moving children and their families in the right direction. Change doesn't happen quickly or easily. Be sure to set achievable, short-term goals, as well as long-term goals. Take time to reflect on the progress of each child and family.

Lesson #4: Don't discount your successes. You can't "save" every child. One of my former students was "most wanted" in the local crime report. Another died of a drug overdose. However, to provide the support and empowerment to allow even one student to thrive makes a life-changing difference.

Lesson #5: Be proud. What you do is important. Don't allow others to diminish your profession. Once, a high school teacher told me that what I did was a waste. How could I justify my position when all I did was hold the hand of kids when their crayons broke? I quickly explained that I provided classroom guidance, small group and individual counseling, and consultation with

educators, families, and mental health professionals. We must educate others so that they understand what we do.

If you have been a school counselor for even a few years, I believe that you have a "Joe" of your own and I hope you have the opportunity to reconnect with that student. If not, remember that although you may never fully know the impact you have had, there is power in school counseling. ■■■

Dr. Barb Ramos is the Education department chair and an associate professor of Education at Simpson College in Indianola, Iowa. Contact her at barb.ramos@simpson.edu.

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