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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

HIGHLIGHTING OUR VALUE

BY NANCY PENK



The theme of this year's spring newsletter, "The Active Advocate - Connecting with Stakeholders," fits perfectly with what ISCA has been focused on thus far in 2015. With a new governor (Governor Rauner) in place, we are working hard at getting ISCA's name and mission known to the new administration and the education committees. We want to become a contributing member of the new administration's teams for education and Task Force for Violence Prevention. We have

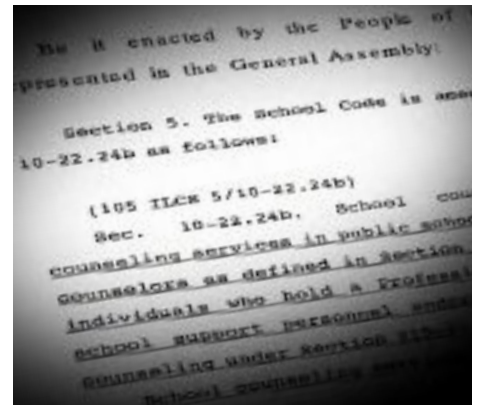
offered our assistance and expertise to these committees and initiatives.

The responsibility of our association is to advocate for our profession. One way to do this is to contribute our knowledge and skills to those who make the crucial decisions that affect our profession and our students. Another way to do this is through listening to the needs of our members.

Recently, we listened to the needs of our members within Chicago Public Schools. In 2014, a new bill was passed, HB5288, regarding the definition of a school counselor. Since that time, ISCA has worked closely with Chicago Public Schools to modify this definition to include language that will accommodate CPS as well as the rest of the state. The change is one that will benefit all school counselors. We continue to advocate for even the small changes to help all counselors across the state of Illinois.

Illinois has not fully funded education for several years now. Advocating for school counselors is especially crucial at this time. In down-state Illinois, several schools are struggling to keep their doors open. Many have made numerous cuts, including reducing the number of school counselors they may have in their district, while others are reducing to part-time only school counselors. We must advocate for funding and for the need for school counselors. It is imperative to keep the legislature informed as to the importance of our role within the schools along with the many tasks we are qualified and capable of performing. This is why the definition change in 2014 was so important and beneficial to our profession.

Thus far, 2015 has had an eventful start for Illinois School Counselor Association. With the new administration in place, we have high hopes that ISCA may be included in their goals and missions. ISCA wants to be instrumental in making positive changes across the state of Illinois when it comes to prevention and school counseling. We continue to offer our support, knowledge and expertise to make positive change for our state, our profession, and most important, our students. ■■■



Contact Nancy Penk, ISCA president, at npenk@rivertonschools.org.

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REPRESENTING ILLINOIS ON THE NATIONAL STAGE



The SCOY semifinalists, finalists, winner, and First Lady Michelle Obama at the White House.

The Illinois School Counselor Association is very pleased and proud to announce that our 2014 nominee, Dustin Seemann, was chosen as a semifinalist for ASCA's School Counselor of the Year! Dustin had the opportunity to represent ISCA at the White House and ASCA gala on January 30, 2015. During his trip to DC, Dustin had the opportunity to meet and network with many counselors from across the U.S. while also meeting the First Lady. This was the first year that the ASCA School Counselor of the Year was hosted at the White House. In Dustin's own words, "This truly was a trip of a lifetime. Words cannot express how emotional and exciting it was. The White House and ASCA were truly accommodating. Everyone shared great ideas and networked."

Dustin was also ISCA's 2012 School Counselor of the Year. He

serves currently as the vice president of Secondary Schools for ISCA, and as the District Coordinator of Student Services in District 214, he works with counselors in eight high school programs: Buffalo Grove, Elk Grove, The Academy at Forest View, John Hersey, Newcomer School, Prospect, Rolling Meadows, Vanguard School, and Wheeling. He was a high school counselor for six years and a teacher prior to that. ■

ASCA executive director Richard Wong (L) recognizes Dustin Seemann as a 2015 School Counselor of the Year semifinalist.

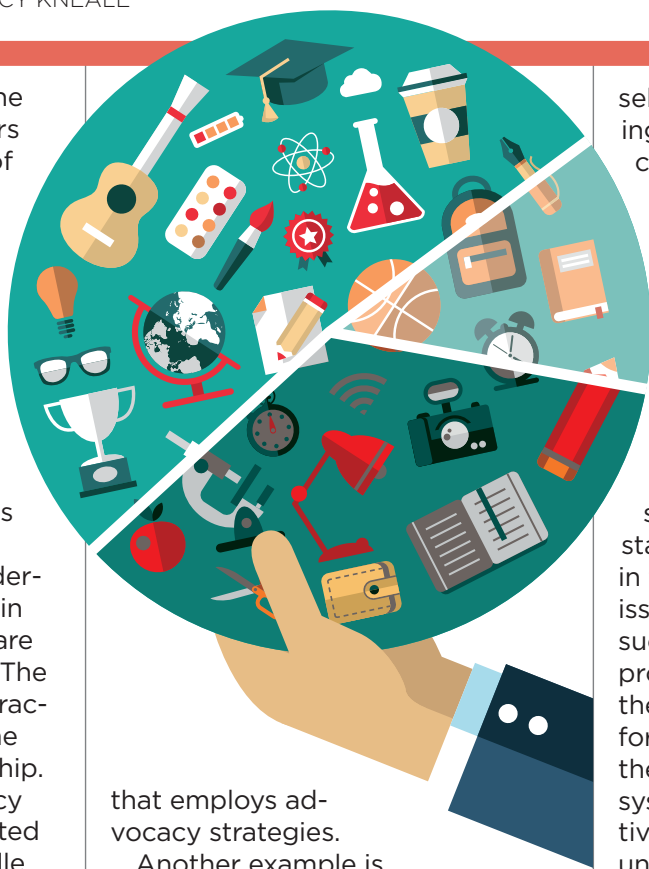


ADVOCACY STRATEGIES FOR SCHOOL COUNSELING LEADERS

BY ANITA YOUNG, PH.D., AND MARCY KNEALE

School counselors know the value of supporting others and speaking on behalf of those who cannot or may not do so, and how to promote the rights of all. Believing that all students can succeed is at the core of advocacy, and for many school counselors, it was a contributing factor in their choice of profession. Today, advocacy is a critical skill for effective school counselor leadership and places school counselors at the forefront of education reform. Leadership and advocacy are themes in the ASCA National Model and are important to systemic change. The literature, best practices, and practitioners themselves support the need for advocacy and leadership.

When and how does advocacy occur? Advocacy is demonstrated across levels (elementary, middle, high) and therefore, school counselors can function as student, program, and policy advocates. Several advocacy strategies that focus on using data enhance effective school counselor leadership. For example, when school counselors use data to initiate needed programs that promote equity and access for individual students and marginalized groups, they are advocating. Think about a time or situation that you recognized a social justice inequity and responded by initiating a needed program or service. You may have eliminated barriers that impeded academic success or ensured access to rigorous course selections. Or, perhaps you created an equitable social/emotional solution or increased college attainment for a particular student or parent. Your advocacy may have expanded to various groups (first generation, ELL, LGBT, or students with IEPs or 504 plans). Recognizing and responding to inequity demonstrates leadership



that employs advocacy strategies.

Another example is advocating for a school counseling program that supports all students in accessing the information, resources, and support to be college and career ready. When advocating for a school counseling program, counselors generally concentrate their efforts on time and resources. To implement a comprehensive program, school counselors need direct service time with students and indirect time to perform the work associated with the program. School counselors can use data to show the impact of their programs and interventions by advocating for more time with students. Another strategy is to advocate for access to financial or curricular resources to implement a program. For example, you may have identified a gap in the percentage of traditionally underrepresented students taking Algebra 1 in eighth grade. You and the Algebra 1 teacher have researched a readiness program that includes study skills, self-advocacy skills,

self-regulated behaviors, and learning strategies with advanced math concepts. You can use data to advocate for funding for the materials and supplies for a summer Algebra 1 readiness program for targeted students.

Schools and divisions are governed by local and state policies and laws that impact the resources, programs, and supports available to students and their families. Effective school counseling leaders understand the importance of engaging in the political process to address issues that are barriers for student success. Although student and program advocacy are essential, if the system creates a disadvantage for certain groups of students, then the policies and laws governing the system must be changed. Effective policy advocacy requires an understanding of where to engage and when laws or policies should be amended. Such advocacy also requires a clear understanding of which policies and rules are set at the local school, district, and state levels.

At the local school level, school counselors can ensure that the principal and other key decision makers have access to the information they need to make well-informed school policy decisions. School counselors should include these key decision makers and advocates on their advisory council and provide them with data to understand the impact of policy decisions. Understanding the principal's goals and the values of the community allows counselors to connect their advocacy efforts to the principal's priorities and to create a win-win for students, families, and their administration. School improvement plans and annual school goals provide insight into these values. For example, a principal may share with the staff the goal to

reduce the percentage of students failing one or more classes. As a counselor, you have observed that most of the failures are coming from one department, which has a no-retake policy, unlike other departments that allow students to retake tests one time for a better grade. By sharing the data with the principal, you are able to effectively advocate for a retake policy to improve student achievement.

At the district level, key decision makers may include the superintendent, members of an elected or appointed school board, staff members or community stakeholders appointed to serve on district advisory councils, and leadership within teacher or employee organizations. Understanding the various

perspectives, goals, and challenges of these groups is critical in order to effectively partner with them to enhance outcomes for students. In some cases, school counselors will be able to connect directly with these key district decision makers to advocate for changes in policy or practice. In other cases, school counselors will need to secure the support of their principal (or district leader) in advance. Advocacy at this level can include speaking about a critical issue at a school board meeting, serving as a member of a district advisory council, or meeting with key staff members to share information about an issue impacting students in the district. For example, as a school counselor, you may have noticed that

the district's fees for music and art classes are preventing students who receive free or reduced lunch from accessing these courses. One of the school board goals is to increase the percentage of students participating in the arts. Sharing data with the superintendent or key district leaders would allow you to advocate for a policy to waive the music or art fees for those students receiving free or reduced lunch to support equitable access to these courses.

At the state level, laws are developed by elected officials that govern policies made by members of the state board of education or state departments of education. Many state school counseling

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associations host legislative days to connect school counselors with elected officials to discuss the impact of laws on students. School counselors can also contact their elected officials outside of legislative days. But before engaging with state or elected officials, be aware of any division policies that govern this type of contact, such as use of school e-mail accounts. It is important to know up front if you are able to represent the school or division's perspective on an issue or if you are presenting to state officials as a public citizen. Finally, as a school counselor and public citizen, exercising your right to vote for the candidates who will best represent

the interests of your students is policy advocacy.

Advocating as an effective school counselor leader is comprehensive, yet broad. It occurs often and in many ways, but it should occur. Think advocacy: Whom do you serve? What do you do? When do you advocate? How do you do it? ■■■

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SEVEN SOLUTIONS FOR WORKING WITH PARENTS

BY JOHN SOMMERS-FLANAGAN, PH.D., AND MEGAN LAPALM

Imagine the following scene: You're near the end of a day of managing and delivering your comprehensive school counseling program. This included a dozen advising appointments, three large-group guidance lessons, and collaboration with the school psychologist on disability issues. Then, as you're crunching some accountability numbers and getting ready to run an afterschool social-skills group, a parent suddenly appears at your door. Of course, the timing is bad, but you realize part of your school counseling role and responsibility includes collaboration and consultation with parents. How do you react to and approach this added stress, this spontaneous professional duty?

Many school counselors consider working with parents a daunting task. Parents often call or drop by with impossible questions. They interrupt your day and need your support. They ask your advice, ignore you, question your competence, are unsupportive of your programming and criticize when you were hoping for—and needing—a warm and fuzzy compliment. All this and more may make you dread working with parents.

Fortunately, just like the Scarecrow, Tin Man, and Cowardly Lion from “The Wizard of Oz,” you already have all the skills you need to work effectively with parents. You may simply need a few concrete tips on how to apply your counseling and consulting skills to parents and parenting. Following are several easy-to-implement solutions for working effectively with parents.

CONSISTENTLY WELCOME PARENTS AND THEIR FEEDBACK.

Research shows parent involvement in school is associated with student academic and social



Maintaining genuinely positive feelings about parent involvement instead of sometimes feeling dread is challenging.

success. However, as in the opening example, sometimes parents show up at inconvenient times and behave in ways that are difficult to appreciate. Nevertheless, it's your job to adopt, cultivate, and embrace parent involvement. This means, no matter how difficult or unplanned the parent interaction may feel, it's good practice to actively, enthusiastically, and genuinely welcome the parent into your school counseling world.

Maintaining genuinely positive feelings about parent involvement

instead of sometimes feeling dread is challenging. We've found that it's helpful to plan for interruptions and to fiercely tell yourself, “I want parent involvement.” Then, if you practice saying the following welcoming words, your attitude may swing around to better match your behavior.

- “Thank you so much for coming to see me.”
- “I'm very glad you dropped by.”
- “I wish more parents were concerned about their children like you.”
- “I'm glad to see you.”

Obviously you shouldn't behave in ways parents might interpret as phony; parents will see right through that and respond negatively. Instead, we believe practice is essential to convincing ourselves that difficult situations are, in fact, excellent opportunities for growth, development and connection.

In the preceding situation, use

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your skills to combine a welcoming attitude with respect/empathy and limit setting. This might sound like, "I'm glad to see you here in my office. I wish I could talk right now, but I'm due in a social skills group in five minutes. Could we quickly schedule a different time to meet so I can give you the attention you deserve?"

LEAD WITH EMPATHY, NOT EDUCATION.

Perhaps more than any stakeholder group, parents are simultaneously defensive and vulnerable. If we act like experts ready to bestow our profound insights onto all the ill-informed parents out there, they are likely to become defensive; they're also more likely to attack our ideas. Even leading with a basic educational message instead of an empathic and respectful attitude can cause parents to view us as judgmental and critical. Granted, this is somewhat paradoxical, because parents usually want educational advice and you have excellent knowledge to share.

Consider the following example of a mother meeting with a school counselor to consult about her problems getting her nine-year-old son to do his homework.

Parent: My son is so stubborn. The other day I asked him to go to his room and do his homework, and he just stood there and said, "No way!"

School Counselor: I know you meant well, but nine year olds often need more structure and support for doing their homework. In fact, I know 18 year olds who have trouble getting their homework organized on their own. [The school counselor is correct, but the premature educational information elicits resistance.]

Parent: I don't buy that. If you coddle kids then they'll never develop personal responsibility. [The mom shows natural resistance because the school counselor hasn't

connected with her values. She's now playing defense.]

Counselor: Um. No. I'm not suggesting you coddle your son, but there are some developmental realities that we should talk about later. So, what happened next? [The school counselor tries to move on.]

Parent: I hauled him to his room and spanked his butt.


Counselor: Ooh. One concern I have is that often spanking or physical punishment doesn't teach children much about what they should be doing. [The school counselor provides additional "good" information, without empathy. Without first accepting and exploring the anger the mom felt toward her son, the school counselor's comment is seen as disapproving.]

Parent: What do you know about raising kids in the real world? [After feeling disapproval, Mom begins attacking.]

Counselor: I have two boys of my own. [The school counselor is now on defense.]

Parent: And how are they turning out? Are you having trouble getting them to do their homework? [Mom is now being sarcastic and attacking the school counselor. It's difficult to imagine how this school counselor-parent consultation can get back on track and result in a positive outcome.]

This example illustrates why em-



Collaborative behavior will help parents see themselves as relatively equal partners in the therapeutic or educational consultation process.

pathy and acceptance initially take precedence over directive educational interventions. In this case, instead of accessing the parent's vulnerability, the school counselor activates defensiveness and antagonism. Within minutes, the parent and school counselor become rivals instead of collaborators.

PRACTICE RADICAL ACCEPTANCE.

Radical acceptance is both an attitude and an intervention derived from dialectical behavior therapy. As an attitude, radical acceptance enables you to approach each parent with an overarching, pervasive dialectic belief that we translate as, "I completely accept you just as you are and I am committed to helping you change for the better." On the surface, these attitudes may seem contradictory, thus the term dialectic. At a deeper level, in a helping relationship, each attitude is necessary to complete the other.

Radical acceptance is also a skill. For example, a radical acceptance response to a parent who states, "I don't believe in homosexuality, so you'd better not let me catch you teaching that homosexual agenda in the schools" is something like, "Thanks for sharing that. Lots of parents have strong beliefs but never tell me about them. I appreci-

ate your honesty.” As a skill, radical acceptance allows school counselors to affirm parents’ openness, no matter how extreme or obnoxious their beliefs may be, and this openness is worth affirming because if parents never tell you their beliefs, you have no chance of helping them change.

EMBODY A COLLABORATIVE SPIRIT.

Similar to radical acceptance, collaboration is also both an attitude and an intervention.

As an attitude, collaboration requires school counselors, at least to some extent, to come from a position of “not knowing.” Not knowing requires you to resist the ubiquitous impulse to be an all-knowing expert.

As a technique, collaboration involves you actively respecting

parents’ knowledge and experience. From the solution-focused perspective, this involves honoring parents as the best experts on their children and home situation. This collaborative behavior will help parents see themselves as relatively equal partners in the therapeutic or educational consultation process. As implied earlier, resisting the impulse to emphasize your expertise is especially important when initially meeting with and working with parents.

FOCUS ON PARENT STRENGTHS USING VALIDATION AND COMPLIMENTS.

Often, parents approach school counselors with trepidation. They may have had negative experiences with schools or school counselors

in the past and are therefore expecting criticism and possibly even humiliation. They rarely expect to talk with a school counselor who actively compliments them for their parenting efforts and school involvement. Validating parents’ feelings of uncertainty and complimenting their willingness to get help with an issue can create an environment that feels safe and collaborative, while lowering the parents’ defenses.

Compliments and validation should always be genuine. Although it may feel like a stretch, you should always make a point of watching closely for positive attitudes or behaviors and then noticing them:

- You care very much about your child’s success here.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14

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- You're obviously working very hard to come up with a strategy to help your daughter get her homework turned in to her teacher.
- I notice you seem very sensitive to your child's needs.

ALIGN YOUR GOALS WITH THE PARENTS' GOALS.

Most parents want good things for their children. Although exceptions to this general rule do occur, it's best to assume the positive side, that most parents want their children to experience academic success, stay out of jail, develop healthy relationships, and live happily ever after.

Many parents are picky consumers of professional guidance.

During conversation and through reflections, common goals should be stated clearly. Family systems therapists would call this "joining." Being on the same side as the parents will make your educational interventions more palatable. For example, if a parent is angry and verbally attacks his child for repeated truancy, you can join with the parent's goal of eliminating truancy while guiding the parent toward more positive strategies for influencing the child's truancy.

GIVE ONLY THE MOST EXCELLENT AND CONCRETE TIPS AND ADVICE BUT DO SO HUMBLY AND WITH GREAT RESPECT.

Many parents are picky consumers of professional guidance. What this means is that while you have to be careful not to activate parental defensiveness, you also have to strive to only provide the most excellent guidance or advice in ways that parents are likely to accept. This is a tricky process. Several guiding principles can help:

- Before providing advice, ask parents what they've tried and how it worked.
- Ask for the parents' best "guess" as to what's contrib-

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uting to the problem. Most parents have unspoken fears or hypotheses about their children's problems.

- Be especially sensitive to cultural and religious values.
- Before providing advice ask, "Is it okay if I offer you some ideas for how to deal with this situation?"
- Educate yourself on evidence-based strategies, but use the parent's language for describing these rather than professional terminology

Although they're picky consumers, parents typically want information on exactly what they should do with their children. This is one reason why it's important to have clear and concrete recommenda-

tions for parents. But no matter how confident you are in the recommendations, giving the parent a chance to disagree is essential. In fact, one set of recommendations won't fit all parents. You must use your humility and flexibility to honor the parent's perspective, even if the parent is disagreeing with solid and scientifically supported parenting advice. The bottom line is that there's no point arguing with parents about whether a particular suggestion will be helpful or acceptable to them. This is where having parenting resources at your fingertips is essential.

In the end, dealing effectively with parents involves using skills you already have to: develop a positive attitude, emphasize em-

pathy before education, radically accept whatever parents throw at you, collaborate, focus on parent strengths, align with parent goals, and respectfully and humbly offer excellent and concrete parenting information. ■

John Sommers-Flanagan, Ph.D., is a professor in Counselor Education at the University of Montana and co-author of "How to Talk So Parents Will Listen and Listen So Parents Will Talk" and "Tough Kids, Cool Counseling." He can be reached at john.sommers-flanagan@umontana.edu. Megan LaPalm is the elementary school counselor at Florence-Carlton School in Florence, MT. Contact her at megan.lapalm@gmail.com.

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What steps can you take to strengthen your relationship with your administration?

BY EMILY GOODMAN-SCOTT

Principals staff, manage and lead schools, including distributing resources and assigning staff duties. Although school counselors typically report to a district-level supervisor, we also report to our school principal, who can be highly influential in our day-to-day activities. As a result, it is imperative that principals understand and support school counselors so we can best perform our jobs. Principals' support may ensure that a greater majority of our time is focused on school counseling tasks rather than ancillary activities. Principals are also gatekeepers to school resources and stakeholders; principal-school counselor partnerships may increase our access to school resources and help us build relationships with other stakeholders, such as staff and parents.

The principal-school counselor relationship is absolutely crucial to the school counselor, but the relationship can be complex. Here are five strategies recommended by school counselors and principals related to creating successful principal-school counselor partnerships.

HOLD A FALL PLANNING MEETING

"At the beginning of the year we complete a principal agreement... we list all the programs we have planned for parents, staff, and kids for the year. We sit with the principal to discuss it so we're all on the same page." – Middle School Counselor

At the start of the school year, schedule a planning session with the school administrators and the school counseling department to discuss strengths and challenges from the previous year, and propose changes for the upcoming year. Cre-



Proactive conversation decreases future miscommunications, such as clarifying the school counselors' role in standardized testing prior to the spring testing season.

ate an agenda of topics to cover, and discuss the school counseling program's calendar for the year. The American School Counselor Association's ASCA National Model offers a variety of tools that can also help facilitate this meeting: the Management Agreement, the Use of Time description, and the list of appropriate and inappropriate counseling activities. Access these documents at www.ascanationalmodel.org. These tools help you educate the principal on your role, describe your

school counseling programs and responsibilities, and outline how you spend your time. This proactive conversation decreases future miscommunications, such as clarifying the school counselors' role in standardized testing prior to the spring testing season.

SCHEDULE REGULAR MEETINGS

"The one thing that helps our school tremendously is that the school counselors and I have a standing Tuesday morning meeting every week for 30 minutes to an hour to discuss the week ahead and any situations we need to be aware of. It really keeps our communication going." – Elementary School Principal

In the fall, set up a regular meeting with your principal and administrative team (weekly or bimonthly). Use this meeting to discuss school-wide and student-specific issues and share news. School counselors also can advocate for their program by sharing success stories: "Let me tell you about our

parenting workshop, it was a huge success..." or "Look at the post-test results from our bullying-prevention lessons."

School counselors can learn about programs run by administration and gain their perspective on the school. These meetings can build rapport between the administrators and school counselors. As school counselors, we know the importance of building trust with our students before effectively working with them. The same is true with our principals. Build a professionally friendly relationship with your principal before a crisis hits and before you need a favor.

LEARN ABOUT THE PRINCIPAL'S PRIORITIES

"My principal was pleased that I took an interest in what her goals were for the school. I helped her implement and carry out ideas she had." – Elementary School Counselor

What does your principal prioritize most in the school? Literacy? Community involvement? Standardized test scores? Learn what your principal values, and let her know how your comprehensive school counseling program can help support her school goals, and then follow through by supporting your principal and her programs.

ASSESS THE PRINCIPAL'S LEADERSHIP STYLE

"Different principals run the school in different ways. I had to adapt to the way my principal ran her school." – Elementary School Counselor

Every principal has a unique leadership style; some principals prefer to work collaboratively with staff, others delegate, and other principals manage authoritatively. Research shows that although principals and school counselors have different roles in the school, they typically have the same long-term goal: student success. Even if you

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and your principal have different professional work styles, focus on what you have in common and the mutual goals you share. And if your principal's leadership style isn't a good fit for you, you may need to find a setting that is a better fit. Different school counselors have different professional needs, and recognizing this is healthy and necessary.

INFORM PRINCIPALS OF SCHOOL COUNSELORS' ROLE AND SKILLS

"School counselors are so used to advocating for others, they need to advocate for themselves and let their principal know what they can do...let them know what they are

capable of." - Elementary School Principal

"My principal talks to the PTA on our behalf and requests money to support our programs." - Elementary School Counselor

Believe it or not, principals are not always aware of school counselors' training and skills. As school counselors, we have the responsibility to educate our principals and advocate for ourselves and our profession. Inform your principal about the ASCA National Model, tell him or her about groups you run and show the data-driven decisions you make. Once principals know our capabilities, they are better able to utilize

and support us to best perform our job in the schools.

Principal-school counselor collaboration is a crucial part of implementing a successful school counseling program and meeting the needs of our students. Remember, a journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step. What single step can you take to strengthen your principal-school counselor relationship? ■■■

Dr. Emily Goodman-Scott is an assistant professor at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, VA, and a former school counselor and special education teacher. Contact her at egscott@odu.edu.

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MOTIVATING AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALE STUDENTS: 5 BEST PRACTICES

BY PATRICIA TAYLOR

Last summer, I attended a Summer Symposium about motivating African-American male students. The two-day symposium included speakers from across the nation followed by a town hall meeting at my school with discussions of more in-depth information about our own experiences and biases. I learned five best practices that are simple enough to implement.

1 Build a relationship that is genuine with your African-American male students.

Talk to them at the beginning of the school year about their interests, goals, and likes. Taking the time to build a real relationship with all your students will help you to build mutual trust and respect.

2 Engage the students in learning activities that connect to their interests.

Be open to connecting lessons to music lyrics, art, sports, etc. I learned the importance of thinking outside of the box to reach our African-American males. If we as educators can capture their attention and make learning fun, the students will in turn want to be successful in their academics.

3 Be culturally aware and have a general understanding of the students' background.

Consider supporting community activities that students participate in, such as athletics and band competitions. I learned that simply driving through the neighborhoods where students live can give you a better awareness of how they exist

outside of school. Another suggestion was that the school host functions in the local community where the majority of the students live. The staff at my school has hosted events in our local community such as a health fair and PTA meeting. We have also walked through the neighborhood where most of our students live to pass out parent invitations to our Open House and give freezer pops to the students. This practice has been done several times and has been very successful because the families were able to connect with the staff outside of the school.

4 Have high expectations for African-American male students.

Many of these students are bright but it may not show up in tra-

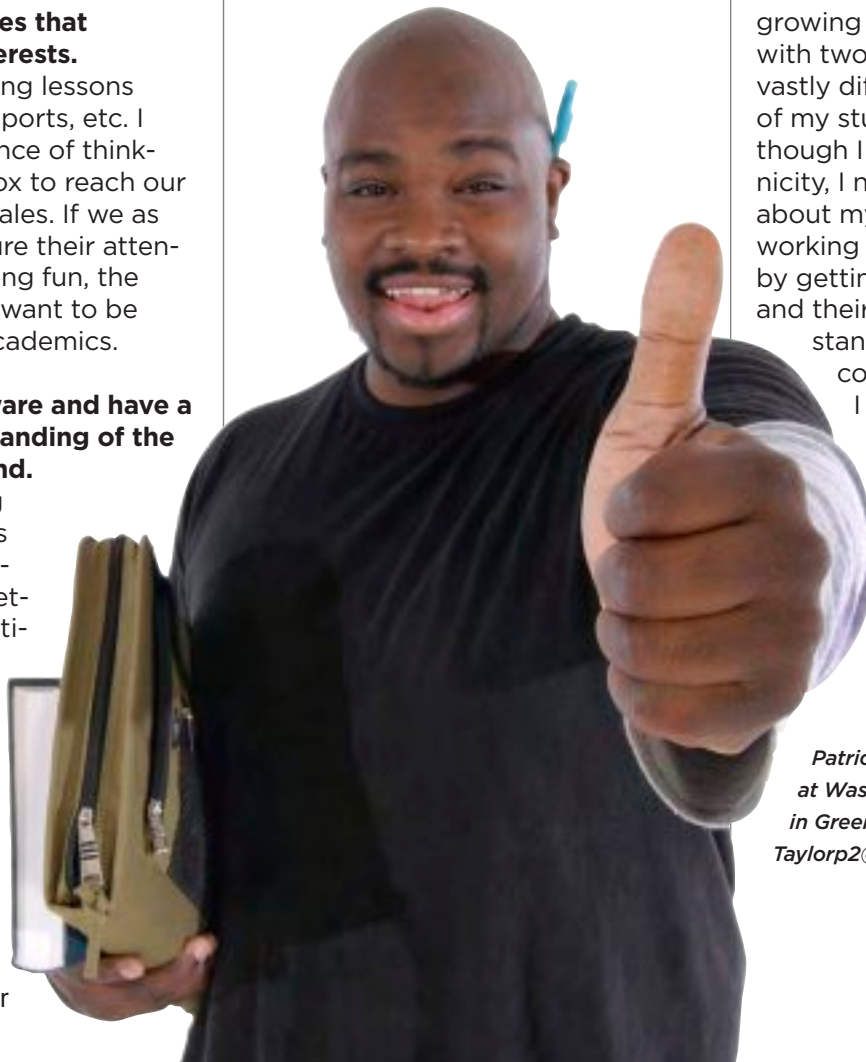
ditional academics. Look at the student's abilities in others areas in which they excel, such as music, art, communication, leadership, or peacemaking. Many of our African-American males are underachievers who don't excel because they do not want to be made fun of by their peers. Motivating these students may take some individual encouragement away from their peers. Often, they may rise to the challenge if their pursuits are kept private. Many of these students want to succeed but they also want to fit in and relate to kids from their community.

5 Be honest about your own biases.

As an African-American woman, I thought I knew enough about my students' culture just because I shared the same skin color. But, I had to recognize that my lifestyle growing up (lower middle class with two parents at home) was vastly different from that of many of my students. I learned that even though I may share the same ethnicity, I need to be open to learn about my students' lifestyles. I am working to reduce my own biases by getting to know my students and their families better. I understand that most prejudices come from ignorance and I have set a goal to learn more so that I can challenge those biases in others as well as myself.

I am looking forward to using these strategies to reach all of my students and help motivate them to be extraordinary in academics and life. ■

Patricia Taylor is a school counselor at Washington Montessori School in Greensboro, NC. Contact her at Taylorp2@gcsnc.com.



THE MAGIC FORMULA

When administrator-school counselor collaboration is a priority, success spreads throughout a school.

BY LINDA H. BRANNAN

Of course, both school counselors and principals want students to learn, achieve, and graduate career- and college-ready. But how do we collaborate to accomplish this goal?

At Cary High School, in Cary, NC, the principals and school counselors realized there was significant overlap in how we both work with our students.

Often, both the administrative staff and the school counselor would see a student about similar issues either the same day or within a few days. The principal might see the student for discipline issues and then make a recommendation to

see the school counselor to address some of the root causes of the behaviors related to the discipline problem. And, with the communication grapevine at our school, a teacher or parent might have also contacted the school counselor for help with the same student.

As we reflected on our practices, we decided to partner our efforts through a collaborative model in which a school counselor and an administrator would share the same group of students and meet regularly to discuss relevant issues and solutions to assist the students. At first, some of the challenges were finding time in our schedules to

meet each week and understanding the nature of our roles with the students. A big challenge for the school counselors was determining what was appropriate to share with an administrator yet remain true to our school counseling ethics and protect student confidentiality.

There was a learning curve for both the administrators and the school counselors. We remained vigilant to our cause; we just knew this collaboration would serve students better and provide them with multiple layers of support at school. This collaborative approach gave the school counselors, principals, students, parents, and teachers a

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more complete view of a students' issues and concerns, not just the discipline side or the counseling side.

However, the school counselor-administrator pairs were conducting their meetings in isolation from the other team members. It became difficult to share best practices with each other. We added a monthly meeting of all the administrators and school counselors while continuing the weekly meetings with the micro-teams. The monthly meetings allowed us to share best practices, discuss trends in student behavior affect-

ing our school, review data about schoolwide issues, and, ultimately, make decisions about how to continuously improve our services to all of our students.

We truly felt we had the magic formula in working to positively affect our students.

Faculty, students, and parents all liked the collaborative model

because it allowed them to get information about an issue from either the school counselor or the administrator. Even though either of us could share

the information, we each have distinctive roles. The administrator deals with discipline issues, and the school counselor helps with decision making, results of behavior on academics, and meeting graduation requirements for future planning. Due to the elaborate system of exchanging information with each other, both the administrator

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and school counselor are able to stay abreast of each student's issues and problem-solving plans.

This model became so popular with our staff that our leadership team also adopted it for our school improvement plan.

As a school, we decided to address five major areas for successful high school students: transition in and out of high school, academics, attendance, relationships, and data/evaluation. Research and our school data indicated that if we could successfully address these five areas, our students would learn, achieve, feel connected to our school, and graduate with a viable post-secondary plan in place. The leadership team and school counselors led this initiative. We developed a school improvement plan subcommittee for each of the five areas. Every faculty member was a member of one of the subcommittees.

LEADING THE CHANGE

At the beginning, each subcommittee had a school counselor and an administrator serving as co-leaders. The subcommittees developed goals and objectives based on the needs evidenced by our school's data. Through this schoolwide initiative, school counselors came to be seen as leaders and advocates to increase course rigor, improve attendance, and improve the ninth-grade promotion rate leading to an improved graduation rate.

This initiative began in 2010. Today, teachers and administrators on the various subcommittees collaborate with school counselors to conduct information sessions to increase course rigor by helping students and parents understand not only the expectations of honors and advanced placement courses but also the benefits to future options after high school. Faculty members collaborate with school counselors to lead sessions through our College Bootcamp

In spite of challenges in creating time to meet and share, taking that time to meet is nonnegotiable for us.

Series for juniors and seniors to prepare for the college admissions process. Our Freshmen Orientation Camp is facilitated by one of our assistant principals in conjunction with school counselors, with many faculty volunteering for breakout sessions for parents and students. We have an assistant principal with a faculty representative leading the efforts to improve relationships in all areas of our school: student to student, faculty to faculty, faculty to student/parent, administrator to faculty, administrator to student/parent, school counselor to faculty, school counselor to administrator, school counselor to student/parent and school to the business community.

These are just a few of the schoolwide initiatives that started with the school counselor-principal collaboration. The key components to making this relationship strong are formal and informal communication, regular collaboration through scheduled meeting times, mutual respect for our various roles, and a shared vision.

Mutual respect was easy; we all enjoy working together. The challenge was finding a way to disagree with positive results/outcomes while keeping our relationship intact. Yes, we struggled to truly understand all the idiosyncrasies of our various roles and the changes that might occur due to this collaborative effort. Principals were becoming more like school counselors while being administrators who enforce the policies/rules.

In spite of challenges in creating time to meet and share, taking

that time to meet is nonnegotiable for us. We all agreed that we must honor the time designated to meet for this effort to continue to be successful.

Reviewing the data and reaching a consensus and shared vision on the most important goals for the school to address took us months. The early closing-the-gap results for our goals indicated that this model is working for our students. Two years after starting the program, the ninth-grade promotion rate exceeded 94 percent, up from 83 percent. Attendance rate for all subgroups is above 92 percent. Minority students enrolled in advanced placement classes rose from 11 percent in 2009-10 to 24 percent in 2011-2012.

Despite the challenges we faced, the key component to our success was the original school counselor-principal teams. We modeled to the rest of the faculty how to lead through collaboration, which in the end is best for our students. An effort that started as a small step for school counselors and administrators to communicate better and serve students more efficiently became the "Cary High School family" mode of operation for the entire school. Through the schoolwide initiatives developed by the school counselors, principals, and the school improvement team subcommittees, all of us are valuable components to create an environment where all of our students learn, achieve and graduate college- and career-ready. ■■■

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