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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

THE POWER OF PURPOSE

BY STEVE MURRAY

No one expected Russell Wilson, a 25-year-old, under-sized quarterback taken in the third round of the NFL draft by the Seattle Seahawks, to become a Super Bowl champion in his second season in the league—no one except Wilson and his current and former teammates and coaches. Wilson, known for his exceptional work ethic, says, “My father taught me the formula for success is the Three Ps: perseverance, purpose, and perspective.” Wilson is able to have faith in himself and inspire faith in others because he takes every opportunity to improve so that he is prepared to face any challenge.

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RECENT ISCA EVENTS



ISCA's event in conjunction with Universal Technical Institute took place March 5, 2014, in Lisle, IL and featured a presentation from Dr. Carolyn Stone, “Navigating the Legal and Ethical Landscape of Schools.” Shown L to R: Dr. Carolyn Stone, Jan Tkaczyk (UTI), Steve Murray (ISCA president), Jack Royhl (ISCA Board member), and Vince Walsh-Rock (ISCA Board member).



At Counselor Advocacy Day on February 26, 2014, in Springfield, IL, school counselors talked “around the rail” with an Illinois state representative.



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ETHICS QUESTIONS ASKED AND ANSWERED

These frequently asked legal and ethical questions can help guide you in your daily work.

BY CAROLYN STONE, ED.D.; MARY A. HERMANN, J.D., PH.D.; AND RHONDA WILLIAMS, ED.D.

DUAL RELATIONSHIPS

Are there ethical issues with high school counselors who also maintain an independent college counseling business outside of school hours? What if they only work with students outside their home district?

Having a private college counseling business has the potential to create unethical dual relationships, yet the business can be maintained with careful consideration of ethical guidelines. The ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors state that school counselors provide students with opportunities to explore post-secondary opportunities and create post-secondary plans (A.3.c.). School counselors are also expected to avoid dual relationships that may impair objectivity (A.4.a.). Therefore, it would be unethical for a school counselor to refrain from providing services in the school setting but offer to provide those services to students for a fee in a private practice.

The American Counseling Association Code of Ethics provides some additional guidance. Section C.3.d. states that counselors do not use their work sites to recruit clients for their private practices. Accordingly, if school counselors provide ethically mandated services to students, avoid harmful dual relationships with students, and don't use their place of employment to recruit clients, a private practice won't violate ethical standards. Working with students in different school districts would seem to help the school counselor avoid ethical challenges.

I work as the only school counselor in a small middle school. Next year, my daughter will enter my school. How do I provide school counseling services to my own child?

Counseling your own family member creates an unethical dual relationship. However, the ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors state, "If a dual relationship is unavoidable, the school counselor is responsible for taking action to eliminate or reduce the potential for harm to the student through the use of safeguards, which might include informed consent, consultation, supervision and documentation" (A.4.a.).

Say, for example, you provide your daughter information on career development and academic issues. In those cases, you might want to explain what you would say as a school counselor as well as your opinion as a parent. You will want to avoid personal counseling. If your daughter would benefit from personal counseling, you'll need to find an outside source. Consultation will be necessary as you navigate the next few years.

REPORTING SUSPECTED ABUSE/NEGLECT

A student's mother called me and told me her son had shared with her that one of his friends was being physically abused. When I met with the boy in question, however, he denied being abused. Am I required to pursue this situation further? If something happens in the future, will I held liable because I did not report to the authorities?

The action you must take related to reporting suspected child abuse is governed by state law. Most state laws require school personnel to report the suspicion of child abuse. It is not your job to investigate the suspected abuse. If you've been told of potential child abuse and don't report the alleged abuse, even if the child denies the

abuse, you can be fined or even sent to jail in some states. The safest course of action is to call the local child protection service and report the information (including the other child's parent's concerns and the child's denial).

School counselors also need to be aware of ASCA's 2003 position statement on child abuse prevention. ASCA takes the position that school counselors have a "legal, ethical, and moral responsibility to report suspected cases of child abuse/neglect to proper authorities." School counselors are also expected to provide appropriate services to abused or neglected children. Continuing education and consultation will be helpful for school counselors as they work with students who may be being abused or neglected.

What do I do with families that resist getting much-needed mental health care for their children? At what point does it become a neglect issue?

What constitutes neglect is governed by state child abuse laws. For example, Virginia law defines neglect as the "willful act or omission in the care of such child [that] was so gross, wanton and culpable as to show a reckless disregard for human life." Louisiana law defines neglect as "the refusal or unreasonable failure of a parent or caretaker to supply the child with necessary food, clothing, shelter, care, treatment or counseling for any injury, illness or condition of the child, as a result of which the child's physical, mental or emotional health and safety are substantially threatened or impaired." Although these laws seem to define neglect differently, consulting the local child protection office for its interpretation of state law is your wisest move in these situations.

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PREGNANT STUDENTS

What do I do when a student who is a minor tells me she thinks she is pregnant?

There are many issues to consider when dealing with this difficult situation. Most important is knowing your state laws around this topic (i.e., what is the age of consent, issues around pregnancy decision making, etc.) and your school board policies regarding this issue and community norms. Find out how or if the student has confirmed her pregnancy. Other issues to consider include whether the sex was consensual and the age difference of both parties. Understanding the student's relationship with her parents will help you initiate how to approach having the student tell the parents.

If a minor student tells me she's pregnant, hasn't told her parents, and plans to have an abortion, do I have a legal obligation to share the information with her parents and/or administration?

Every state has different laws and legal age ranges regarding teenage pregnancy. Knowing this information and school board policy will answer a lot of your questions. It is also important to understand the legal issues on parental rights vs. student's right to confidentiality before proceeding any further. It is imperative to monitor your own biases while at the same time helping the student process how to best disclose to the parents if at all possible.

SOCIAL MEDIA

I have set up a Facebook page for the school counseling department for my students. Although I am careful not to friend any of my students on my personal Facebook account,

sometimes I see things via this department page that make me worry for my students, such as underage drinking or other risky behaviors. If these activities happen off school grounds, what is my role as the school counselor?

The prime directive of a school counselor is to advocate for our students. You can best address it in this situation by clarifying the boundaries of the school counseling department Facebook page. Put an informed consent statement on the front page. Avoiding the slippery slope of a dual relationship with a student on Facebook is a wise idea; however, cyber education is a proactive way to help students understand the impact and consequences of their posts online. React we must.

Cyber education is a proactive way to help students understand the impact and consequences of their posts online.

I have heard reports of a particular student being cyberbullied. I haven't seen any of the bullying myself as it's done via students' individual Facebook accounts and/or e-mail accounts. Additionally, the student being cyberbullied hasn't come to me for help. What's my role in this instance?

If you heard about a student being bullied in a school setting, you would most likely talk with the student even if the student hadn't approached you. Simply because the bullying happens in cyberspace doesn't mean you wouldn't offer

the same type of support. Cyber-antics will indubitably leak into the school setting; therefore, every school district should develop a policy regarding cyber-bullying. As a pre-emptive approach, school counselors can educate students and parents about cyber-safety and cyber-bullying. From an ethical standpoint, educators cannot be unresponsive to this potentially deadly form of bullying.

CASE NOTES AND SUBPOENAS

What detail is necessary for case notes? Is it necessary to have notes on every conversation we have with students? What do we have to disclose to parents from these notes?

School counselors typically keep only minimal notes, containing student name, time, and a few details as a memory aid. However, when we do write detailed notes, for example in the case of a child-abuse situation, you must write with great care as others can view your notes. In most states, your case notes can be subpoenaed, and parents can access them if they record other than your observations and professional opinion.

According to the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), case notes are "sole-possession records" and not educational records, which parents are entitled to see, if they meet specific criteria. Case notes must: serve as a memory aid, not be accessible or shared in either verbal or written form, be a private note created solely by the individual possessing it and include only observations and professional opinions.

Avoid being paralyzed by the fact that your notes may be subpoenaed. Filter what you write through the lens that it can be read in a court of law (if your students do not have privileged communication). Write down what you need to advocate for your students especially if it is a child sexual abuse case.

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Are case notes truly my own or do I have to share them if ever lawyers get involved? Do I have to testify?

The sharing of case notes depends on your state statutes and often your ability to advocate using the legal muscle your ethical codes provide you. In some states, the conversations between school counselors and students are considered privileged communication. In most states, however, school counselors are required to testify in court proceedings. Visit www.schoolcounselor.org/ethics to see your state's statutes. Even when your state statute grants privilege for the school counselor/student relationship, the statute often contains exceptions and caveats allowing a judge to determine when the needs of the state outweigh the privilege. If the case is tried in federal court then the state statute may or may not extend.

If you deem it important to avoid testifying, then inform the attorney that you do not have any information to help the case (if this is true).

If you deem it important to avoid testifying, then inform the attorney that you do not have any information to help the case (if this is true). Explain that your obligations are to your student and cite your ethical codes, which support you in safeguarding the student's confidences. Explain that the state will gain no new knowledge should you testify but on the flip side your student may be harmed and cite your reasons. If all else fails, you must testify unless your student has privilege under state statute.

Never respond to a subpoena until you have consulted with the legal representative for your school district, who may be able to get a motion to

quash the subpoena. Try to keep your records and opinions out of court unless in a case of abuse. Our loyalty is to our students and the confidentiality we owe them. We want to protect their privacy to the extent possible. However, if all attempts to avoid relinquishing your records to the court fail, you must submit them for the court.

When you get a subpoena, what information do you give?

The first step is to try to get the legal counsel for your school district, the attorney who issued the subpoena, or the opposing attorney to issue a motion to quash a subpoena. Generally speaking, you do not want your records or your testimony in court. Your loyalty is to your students and the confidentiality you owe them. Advocate to protect your case notes and to be excused from testifying.

There are occasions, such as child abuse situations, in which you will want to testify and share your records, but exercise caution before entering the legal arena on behalf of students.

CONFIDENTIALITY/ NEED TO KNOW

Who needs to know what? How do I balance the issues of confidentiality with need to know for students, teachers, parents, and administration, especially with what could be considered at-risk issues?

The need-to-know rule requires that school counselors reveal sensitive information only when the recipient of the information has a need to know and is in a position to benefit the student if they have the shared information. Without the assurance of confidentiality, many students would not seek our help. Breaching student confidentiality with teachers, parents, and administrators requires continuously balancing the

rights of students and parents against the criteria of need to know.

School counselors practice confidentiality through the following concepts: 1) in loco parentis, 2) substantial interest/need to know, and 3) qualified privilege.

In loco parentis is a legal doctrine meaning educators assume custody of students in school because students are deprived of protection from their parents or guardians. The school counselor owes a special duty to exercise reasonable care to protect students from harm, and this includes protecting their right to privacy and respecting their confidences. *Substantial interest* requires that school counselors only reveal sensitive information to educators who are in a position to benefit the student if they have the shared information. *Qualified privilege* protects educators when sharing unflattering information about a student to fulfill our obligations to educate and care for the student. Professionalism requires us to choose our words judiciously in an effort to maintain optimal communication with parents and students. Failure to recognize the power of words in conveying difficult information diminishes opportunities for growth and moves people away from rather than toward good resolutions.

Irun a small group in my school for students whose parents are divorcing. I was just asked to testify in a divorce/custody case for the parents of one of my group members. How much can I (or should I) divulge about things the student said in the group meetings?

First, be cautious about what you allow students to discuss in a divorce group. Avoid having children talk about the messiness of the divorce in a group setting, instead encouraging safer topics for a divorce group such as dealing with change or resiliency. We have to safeguard our students since we cannot guarantee confidentiality in groups. Minors often change friends and loyal-

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ties and this presents the danger of a student gaining attention, seeking revenge, or just thoughtlessly revealing another student's personal pain. We must remember that confidentiality will be breached. If you have followed this approach with the divorce group, when called to testify you will have mainly facts to share, such as dates, lesson topics, number of students attending (not names), and a general summary of the student's engagement, not inflammatory details that cast a parent in a bad light.

School counselors are often asked to endorse one parent over another in custody battles. Ask yourself if you really have a clear picture as to which parent is a better fit for a student. Try to get a motion to have the subpoena quashed. We will continue to enter the legal arena as our judgment dictates, but a sobering dose of caution may help us re-evaluate some of our involvement.

Sometimes when I share need-to-know confidential information with a teacher or administrator, they then share the information with others in the school who don't have a need to know. How do I address these issues?

We owe our students a trusting relationship and have a primary obligation and loyalty to them. Yet we also have an obligation to teachers, administrators, and the school district. Step one is to ensure that faculty and administration understand your ethical guidelines to protect student confidentiality. If your efforts continue to fall on deaf ears, then as often as possible speak in general terms and avoid giving confidential information to an administrator or teacher who

mishandles it. When the reality requires that information be shared with administrators for health, safety, and/or educational reasons, transmittal should be made in the proper channels. Let those you're sharing the information with know that careless talk may be shown to be malicious in the courts and not be protected by qualified privilege. ■■■

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This article previously appeared in ASCA School Counselor, Vol. 49, No. 5.

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THE STEPS MODEL FOR SCHOOL SETTINGS

Use this process to come to the best possible decision in challenging ethical situations.

BY CAROLYN STONE, ED.D.

To help school counselors negotiate the nuances of ethical dilemmas in schools, the nine-step STEPS model addresses the unique influences on counselors working in a setting designed for academic instruction. STEPS, an acronym for Solutions To Ethical Problems in Schools (Stone, 2001), adapts the seven steps of “A Practitioner’s Guide to Ethical Decision Making,” also known as the American Counseling Association (ACA) model.

The ACA model is the result of work by Forester-Miller and Davis (1996), who incorporated elements from authors Van Hoose and Paradise (1979), Kitchener (1984), Stadler (1986), Haas and Malouf (1989), Forester-Miller and Rubenstein (1992), and Sileo and Kopala (1993). STEPS expands the ACA model to include areas such as students’ chronological and developmental levels and parental rights to be the guiding voice in their children’s lives. Although presented here sequentially, the steps seldom occur sequentially in tackling an actual ethical problem.

1 | DEFINE THE PROBLEM EMOTIONALLY AND INTELLECTUALLY

- How do your emotions define this problem (your initial reaction)?
- What does your heart tell you should happen in this case? File this initial reaction away for later reference.
- How does your intellect define the problem unemotionally, objectively?
- What are the facts? Separate the hearsay, but remember that rumors often inform.

When a student comes through the door crying and in pain, our initial reaction generally is, “What can I do to help?” Our emotional response and supportive instincts help us protect our students’ confidences. We don’t want to discard emotional reactions, but use them to guide us—with a healthy combination of reason and judgment.

In defining the problem, be careful not to act on emotion without consid-



We don’t want to discard emotional reactions, but use them to guide us—with a healthy combination of reason and judgment.

ering the other ethical decision-making steps. Make the necessary effort to gather the facts while weeding out innuendo, rumors, hearsay, and hypotheses. However, hearsay or rumors can provide a source for school counselors to discover the truth about students’ situations.

2 | APPLY THE ASCA AND ACA ETHICAL CODES AND THE LAW

Can your code of ethics or the law offer a possible solution to the problem? Ethical dilemmas are often complex and we rarely find a definitive answer in the codes or laws. The very nature of an ethical dilemma means more than one answer can be acceptable, so we must apply good judgment by

proceeding with all steps of the ethical decision-making model, with attention to steps 6 and 8, which emphasize consultation and supervision.

3 | CONSIDER THE STUDENT’S CHRONOLOGICAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL LEVELS

How does the student’s developmental level impact the dilemma and how you will approach it? A child’s age, and the ability to show that he or she can make informed decisions, matters. Also, the younger and more immature the child, the greater our responsibility to the parents or guardians.

4 | CONSIDER THE SETTING, PARENTAL RIGHTS, AND MINORS’ RIGHTS

You must consider parents/guardians’ rights to be the guiding voice in their children’s lives, especially in value-laden decisions. You also must honor parents/guardians’ rights to be informed and involved when their children are in harm’s way. Clear and imminent danger can take many forms. Consider the dilemma in the context of the school setting. Students come to school for academic

instruction, and when they enter the personal or emotional arena, this carries obligations to other educators and to parents/guardians.

5 | APPLY THE MORAL PRINCIPLES

Apply the basic moral principles of autonomy, beneficence, nonmaleficence, justice, and loyalty (Kitchener, 1984) to the situation. It may help to prioritize these principles and think through ways in which they can support a resolution. Decide which principles apply and which takes priority when two or more conflict. Review relevant professional literature to be sure you are using the most current professional thinking in reaching a decision.

6 | DETERMINE YOUR POTENTIAL COURSES OF ACTION AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES

Brainstorm as many potential solutions as possible. Be creative and try to enlist assistance from at least one colleague. Consider possible and probable courses of action, write down the options, and discuss them with a colleague if you can. Examine the consequences of various decisions for the student, for others who might be affected, and for you. List the good and bad consequences of each decision.

7 | EVALUATE THE SELECTED ACTION

Considering the information you have

gathered and the priorities you have set, evaluate each option, and assess the potential consequences for all parties involved. Eliminate options that will not give desired results or will cause more problematic consequences. Then decide which combination of options best fits the situation and addresses the priorities you have identified.

Does the selected course of action present new ethical considerations? Stadler (1986) suggests three simple tests to ensure the decision is appropriate (Forester-Miller & Davis, 1996, as cited by ACA, 2012), Justice: assess your own sense of fairness; would you treat others in this situation the

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same way? Publicity: would you want your behavior reported in the press? Universality: could you recommend this course of action to another counselor in the same situation?

If this course of action seems to present new ethical issues, you will need to go back to the beginning and re-evaluate each step. Perhaps you have chosen the wrong option or identified the problem incorrectly (Forester-Miller & Davis, 1996, as cited by ACA, 2012).

If you can answer in the affirmative to the tests of justice, publicity, and universality and you are satisfied you have selected an appropriate course of action, then you are ready to move on to implementation (Forester-Miller & Davis, 1996, as cited by ACA, 2012).

8 CONSULT

Discuss your case with an experienced fellow professional, preferably a supervisor, to help you illuminate the issues. As your colleague reviews the information with you, he or she may see other relevant issues, offer a new perspective, or identify aspects of the dilemma you are not viewing objectively. Consult your state or national

When caught in an ethical dilemma, seeing all the issues clearly can be difficult. School counselors must often do their ethical problem solving on the run.

professional associations to see if they can help.

When caught in an ethical dilemma, seeing all the issues clearly can be difficult. School counselors must often do their ethical problem solving on the run; it is not always feasible for school counselors to close their office doors, sit with paper and pencil, and follow the ethical decision-making model. Consultation is one step that you should never skip (Stone, 2001).

In fact, consulting is such a critical part of ethical behavior that you should routinely and confidentially consult with a network of professionals when difficult situations arise. School counselors need to be constant consumers of legal and ethical information by seeking the counsel of colleagues, administrators, supervisors, and school attorneys. When you routinely consult



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with other professionals, you will find the complexity of the legal and ethical world less daunting. More important, consultation can help counselors provide increased safety and security for students.

9 | IMPLEMENT THE COURSE OF ACTION

Go forward with your decision after you have considered the previous steps. Risk will exist regardless of your decision, but you will have made the best decision based on the available advice and information. School counselors cannot practice risk free, but we can reduce our risk and raise our support for students by using ethical reasoning.

You may find taking this final step disconcerting. In a real-life ethical dilemma, the final step never will be easy, but by strengthening your confidence

through continuous professional development, you will find it easier to carry out your decision. After implementing your course of action, it is good practice to follow up on the situation to assess whether your actions had the anticipated effect.

To provide a foundation from which to respond and to reduce the stresses of legal and ethical dilemmas:

- keep up-to-date with ethical codes and state and federal laws
- maintain a network of colleagues to consult
- educate parents/guardians and other stakeholders about their responsibilities regarding issues such as student confidentiality
- establish, in advance, procedures and alternatives for responding to delicate situations

Ethics and laws are not clear cut regarding issues of confidentiality. School counselors have the ethical obligation to respect the privacy of minor clients and maintain confidentiality. This obligation is often in conflict with laws related to minors because parents/guardians have the right to know and to decide what is in their children's best interest. School counselors also must consider codes of ethics, applicable statutes, and policies of their local education agencies and their individual schools (Mitchell, Disque, & Robertson, 2002).

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RAISING RED FLAGS IN DATA COLLECTION

When proving that school counselors matter, don't lose sight of student privacy, parental consent, and other important issues.

BY RHONDA WILLIAMS, ED.D., LPC, NCC

Today's uncertain academic climate makes it necessary for professional school counselors to demonstrate the impact school counseling curriculum has on students. However, in the fervor to prove the validity of counseling programs, we must not overlook the ethical mine fields surrounding the collection of sensitive information about our students.

Many school districts across the country have established protocols for gathering data about students' personal information. However, an ethical chasm exists between districts that are sensitive to students' privacy and schools that overlook the importance of young people's personal data.

Although schools generally have the best of intentions when collecting student information, we must consider the ethical ramifications of how this data might be used or even misused. An example of abusing data would be using test scores that were disaggregated by race to claim some ethnic groups aren't as intelligent as other groups of students. Another case of possible data misuse would include sensitive questions such as asking female students if they had begun menstruating. Although the question may be viable to the research, if parents and guardians haven't given permission or received any explanation about how that information would be used or interpreted, asking it in data collection would be inappropriate.

The worthy cause of accountability and the demand for data collection must not supersede sound ethical research practice surrounding data collection, usage, and interpretation. As ethical practitioners, school counselors must become aware of what constitutes ethical research and what raises the proverbial red flags.

Prince George's County (Maryland) Public Schools Office of Research and Evaluation has identified several research issues that raised red flags in their district. These items are a good

guideline for those collecting data within any school.

Undue burden: Does your research place an unnecessary burden on participants, schools, programs, students/teachers, or the system?

Sensitive topics: Before beginning data collection, address how you will handle those issues in a sensitive and caring manner.

Duplication of effort: Consider whether the topics being studied overlap with other assessments on the same topic. This might cause duplication of efforts or confound the results.

Physical contact: Another red flag for some schools is research that requires touching or physical measurements of some type. Certainly you'll need to define appropriate cautions if physical contact is part of the data collection.

Too much time: Considering how much time the data collection process requires is also important—and whether it requires out-of-school time with the students.

These indicators can be used as guidelines for evaluating the data collection proposals.

THE ACTION PLAN

You should consider four major areas when creating a data collection action plan: informed consent, confidentiality for the individuals and for the data collected, respect for the individuals being assessed, and responsible data management and reporting.

Informed consent: When collecting data and assessing a school counseling program's impact, be sure you provide informed consent. You must inform parents and participants about how you'll handle the data and what efforts you'll use to maintain confidentiality. Most schools will not recognize passive consent but require parents and participants to actually give consent rather than just assuming they are consenting.

Informed consent must also include the opportunity for the participants to refuse involvement without coercion

or threat of penalty. Students shouldn't be forced to participate in a study, nor should they be unknowing participants. The informed consent should also include what risks might exist for the participants. The Family Rights and Education Act (1974) expects that minimum informed consent include a description of the data being collected, names and positions of those collecting it, and to whom the data will be released. A signature of the parent or guardian must be included as confirmation of the informed consent. Informed consent must also include how you'll maintain the privacy and confidentiality of the collected information.

Confidentiality: In the data collection process, it is important to verify to the participants and parents or guardians how you'll keep the collected information confidential, what procedures are in place to obtain a release of the information to view the data, and how individual participants' confidentiality will be protected over a long period of time. Protecting participants' anonymity is a paramount consideration in any data collection project.

Respect: As professional school counselors, we all know about the importance of respect for the individual. In data collection, respect is likewise an important factor. Respect includes being aware of sensitive issues and the impact the research might have on the individual. Evidence of respect for those involved would include explaining the process and reason for the data collection in a way the participants understand. Explaining both the participants' role in the data collection and the researcher's role is helpful in maintaining respect. Make the participants aware of any potential emotional or physical risk from participating in the research.

Respect to participants also involves being sensitive to and aware of culture and gender bias in the assessment instrument and in reporting the results.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 20

Assessing the cultural and developmental appropriateness of the instrument should be given ethical consideration when selecting the instruments. Being culturally responsive to the impact that reporting ethnicity and gender has on participants is not only respectful but also responsible data reporting.

Responsible management: Responsible management includes the methods used to obtain and report the data results. It must also encompass accurate reporting and data interpretation and safeguarding and confidentiality of the records. Responsibility must also include minimizing the possibility of misleading results or misinterpretation of the results and protecting participants from any adverse reactions to the results. Other aspects of responsible management include doing no harm to participants or community and making sure the data collection is culturally relevant and con-

tributes to the knowledge base. Responsible data management is a reflection on the respect given to the participants and a necessary component in the data collection, analysis and interpretation process. This consideration is not a hurdle that impedes the research but an element that reflects ethics.

Granted, many school counselors already view data collection and analysis as a major hurdle, and adding in potential red flags could scare off some would-be researchers. However, a school counselor can reframe the issue by considering ethical awareness as a way to pave the road for program effectiveness and an opportunity to model intentional and responsible research.

In the long run, the necessity and value of that type of professional accountability is without question. The focus question for this profession is, "How are students different because of

what school counselors do?" Although this may be a paradigm shift for many, it is the most poignant question ever asked of this profession. But in the rush to prove the effectiveness of school counseling interventions and strategies, be sure to err on the side of respect for the ethical standards that empower the integrity of the school counseling profession. School counseling was created to help, support, and empower young people. No one can afford to lose sight of the very lesson that school counselors so often teach to students: integrity. ■

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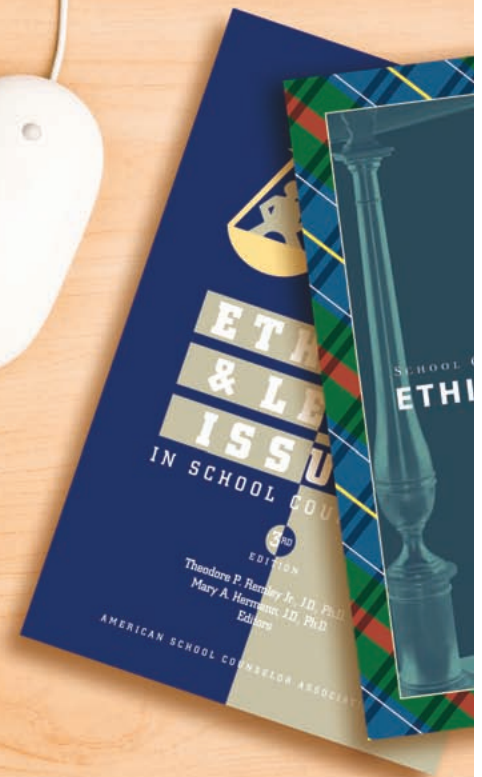
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PERSONALITY-MAJOR MATCH AND COLLEGE SUCCESS

BY LAWRENCE K. JONES, PH.D., NCC, AND JULIET WEHR JONES, GCDF, J.D.

Choosing a major and a college are life-changing decisions. But new knowledge and tools make those choices easier and clearer, and they open new opportunities for middle and high school counselors.

Studies show that the closer the match between students' Holland personality/interest type and their college major, the more likely they are to succeed and graduate on time. When school counselors help students learn the basic concepts of Holland's theory, relate their interests to programs of study/majors, consider choosing a major *before* deciding on a college, and make a good decision, students are much more likely to succeed.

Most school counselors are familiar with Holland's Theory of Careers and personality-career match and understand that a "congruent" match is associated with career success and satisfaction. This match also applies to academic success. Personality-major match is the degree to which students' interests and personality match both the demands and opportunities posed by a major or program of study and the personality of the students and faculty they work with in the major.

Numerous studies show that the closer the match between college students' Holland personality type and their choice of major, the more likely they are to get better grades, persist in their major, and graduate on time.

Of students in four-year colleges, only 38 percent of students graduate in four years, and just 59 percent in six years. About 40 percent drop out (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). It is tempting to consider this a problem best solved by college advisors and career centers, not school counselors. But many colleges require students to specify a major when they apply for admission. And the cost of switching majors for students and their families is high. Those working toward a bachelor's degree lose in earnings, on average, \$50,000 (in 2013 dollars) for each additional year they take to finish their degree.



Numerous studies show that the closer the match between college students' Holland personality type and their choice of major, the more likely they are to get better grades, persist in their major, and graduate on time.

Only about one in three high school students (36%) taking the ACT in 2013 chose a major that fit their interests and Holland personality type (ACT College Choice Report).

Major longitudinal studies have found that students' Holland RIASEC interests are fairly stable from 8th through 12th grade, across gender and ethnicity. In other words, most students are ready by senior year to narrow down their choices and choose a major. For many students, this is a necessary and smart step to take. Choosing a major *before* deciding on a college enables students to:

- have an unlimited number of majors from which to choose
- choose among colleges that offer majors that interest them
- time when to begin taking courses in their majors
- decide on how many courses outside the major to take

MAKING THE MATCH WORK

To help students make a sound match, school counselors must use a scientifically valid measure of Holland's personality types. A valid measure is supported by peer-reviewed, scientific studies that show it truly measures what is claimed. Also vital is having a list of majors and programs of study classified according to the Holland theory.

A few online measures meet these criteria: the Strong Interest Inventory®, Self-Directed Search®, ACT® UNIACT, and The Career Key®. Scientific validity ensures that students are most likely to be accurately assessed and matched to appropriate careers and majors. Otherwise, students may be mismatched and potentially harmed. Consequently, this is an ethical issue.

To support students in the decision step, school counselors should provide a sound procedure to follow in making a decision. We recommend the ACIP

Decision Making Model. It is simple, practical, scientifically sound, and widely used. ■

RESOURCES

- *Choosing a College Major Based on Your Personality, What does the research say?* White paper with information and advice for students, parents, and counselors.
- *Personality-College Major Match and Student Success: A Guide for Professionals.* White paper summarizes the research and recommends ways school counselors can use the findings.

Self-help articles (free; no ads or personal information requests)

- *Decision Making Process.* Leads students through the four steps of the ACIP Decision Making Model.
- *How to Choose a College Major or Training Program*
- *Learn about College Majors or Training Programs*
- *The Holland College Major Environments*

Lawrence K. Jones, Ph.D., NCC, is professor emeritus at North Carolina State University, a counselor educator and former school counselor. He is the author of several career

measures and books, served on the editorial boards of the CDQ and JCD, and received ACA's Professional Development Award in 2001. He is president of The Career Key

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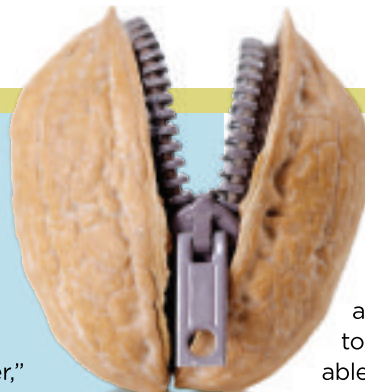


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COLLEGE ADMISSIONS IN A NUTSHELL

If you're a new high school counselor overwhelmed by your new job, new school, and helping students with college admissions, here are some basics about the admission process.

BY DON FRASER, JR.



Starting your first school counseling job can be a time of great euphoria and, unfortunately, great stress, especially if you're in a high school with a caseload full of seniors. As you're busy getting your bearings as a school counselor, learning the ins and outs of your particular school, meeting all the students and faculty, you also need to get up to speed as quickly as possible on the college admissions process.

If you work in a school where the college-going culture is lackluster, your challenges might have to do with finding time in your day to reach your students, developing strategies to disseminate timely information related to the college application process, or involving families in the process.

If you work in a school where the prevailing conversation is about where students will go to college rather than if they will go, you may find yourself inundated with meeting requests and questions from anxious students and families.

Although either situation may sound overwhelming, you can do a number of things to hit the ground running.

Don't feel you have to know it all: You may feel like you have to immediately answer all of the questions that come your way. But you don't have to know everything. Even seasoned school counselors encounter questions that give them pause, so take your time. It's okay to say, "That's a great question. Let me do a little research and get back to you."

Help can be found: In your office. Your immediate supervisor and veteran colleagues can provide a wealth of information. Or, if you're on your own, call a college's admissions office. By going directly to the source, you'll be guaranteed accurate information, and you can build your network at the same time.

Get to know your students as quickly as possible: Try to meet your students as soon as possible either individually or in groups, depending on what your school's schedule permits. Also observe their behavior in the cafeteria, on the

Download "Guiding the Way to Higher Education: Step-by-Step to College Workshops for Students" and "Families, Counselors and Communities Together," both free from the *National Association of College Admissions Counselors (NACAC)*.

If you haven't heard of a website or source a student is using, then you should find time to learn about it.

playing field, during assemblies, etc., to enrich your perspective.

Talk to family members, teachers (past and present), coaches, mentors and others who've had contact with the students. Ask all of your students to complete a "brag sheet" focusing on their accomplishments and ways they've addressed challenges. These sheets can be useful when writing a recommendation.

Help can be found: On the *ASCA SCENE*. School counselors across the nation have posted hundreds of useful documents here.

Do your research: What is your school's history? What do students from your high school do when they graduate? Where do they go? There may be a number of colleges, both local and national, that have a great relationship with your high school and where a high percentage of your school's applicants are accepted and/or attend. If your school tracks applications and results from one year to the next, then become familiar with the data.

Help can be found: In your school. See if the school counseling department or the registrar's office has a database of

information. If your school uses ConnectEdu, Naviance, or some type of data tracking system, then you should be able to gather information about your school's alumni. Talk to veterans on staff, who may be able to provide some anecdotal data

Familiarize yourself with the tools your students are using: It's important

for school counselors to be current with trends as well as technology, so be sure to ask your students what tools they used to develop their college list. Did they use a website? A reference guide? If you have never heard of a particular website or source a student is using, then you should find time to learn about it.

In a growing industry of college search engines, there is always something new and hot that students get wind of. For example, many new websites allow students to do virtual campus tours or to hear and see the student perspective on campus life. Stay ahead of the curve and carve out some time to do your own learning. Which sites do you find most helpful? Students who are using only one tool will need some suggestions.

Remember, however, that not all websites are created equal. In fact, some give information that needs to be taken with a grain of salt. Make sure your students are using quality sources.

Help your students find the right fit:

Helping your students find the right fit has more to do with understanding your students than it does with being knowledgeable about the many post-secondary options that exist. Ask critical questions, and listen closely to their responses. What is really going on? Even when students come to you with a final list of postsecondary options, no matter how robust the list may look, it's a good idea to ask them how they developed it. Why did they choose these schools? What was their thought process? You will learn a lot from your students by asking the right questions. In fact, you might learn that their list is inappropriate

based upon their answers to your questions, or you might have ideas that they have not yet considered.

Most students cite location, size of school, area of study and cost as the most important factors when selecting a school. They may need your help to think about other important factors to consider such as graduation rates, services on campus, and school climate.

Help can be found: Online. Direct your students to websites such as The Education Trust's *College Results Online* or the National Center for Education Statistics' *College Navigator* to find helpful information on college graduation rates and other important data reported by the colleges themselves.

Get organized, and stay calm: With so many details and responsibilities, developing a system to keep yourself organized as soon as possible is crucial. One of the best things that you can do for your students is to be poised, especially during particularly stressful times. Be a calming influence, even if you are stressed. Your students will appreciate this and seek you out more readily, and that will ultimately help you to do your work. If you are feeling overwhelmed, the best thing that you can do is to identify resources that are available to help you.

Help can be found: In your community. There may be community-based organizations to assist you with your work or parents who are willing to volunteer

their time. And online, a wealth of information is available for school counselors who are shepherding their students and families through the college application process. Have fun exploring.

By focusing on these initial tasks and remaining calm, you'll be a veteran at the college admissions game before you know it. ■■■

Don Fraser, Jr., is the director of education and training for the National Association of College Admission Counseling. He can be reached at dfraser@nacacnet.org.

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THE LEGAL AND ETHICAL COMPLICATIONS IN LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

How can you handle letters for weak or problem students, and should you include confidential student information or notify admissions offices of changes?

BY CAROLYN STONE, ED.D.

Emily is applying to a competitive university and your letter of recommendation will be a critical part of her admission packet. Emily's freshman year was dismal academically. She confided in you that she was being physically abused by her boyfriend during her freshman year but ended the relationship after seven months. Emily has been a stellar student since her sophomore year and is not the same person who allowed herself to remain in an abusive relationship. You are considering explaining all this in your letter of recommendation in hopes that Emily will only be judged based on what she has done since leaving this abusive relationship. Legally and/or ethically can you include this information in a letter of recommendation?

School counselors conscientiously work to behave legally in writing letters of recommendation and find their guidance primarily in the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), the federal statute protecting parents' and students' rights regarding educational records. Ethical considerations involving letters of recommendation are far more complicated for school counselors. Ethics are the shared values, norms and practices of the membership of our profession. The ethical responses for this article come from ASCA members, and I thank those who shared their values, norms, and practices regarding 1) letters and confidential, sensitive information, 2) writing letters for problem students, 3) supporting weak students, and 4) notifying university admissions personnel when new information surfaces that would change a strong letter of recommendation.

Confidentiality and letters of recommendation. From an ethics standpoint, school counselors continually say they



It is best practice to leave out sensitive, confidential information. Or, if you believe including the information is important to benefit the student, then secure student and parental permission to relay what they may not want known.

would never put sensitive, confidential information in a letter of recommendation without student and parental permission. However, in Emily's case, counselors report they wouldn't include this information even with Emily's permission. Even when it comes to con-

fidential information that would benefit a student if known, counselors would rather get the student's permission to include an invitation in the letter to call the counselor to discuss the student's special circumstances.

Legally, school counselors can include anything in a letter that is common knowledge and observable such as, "Kennard has never let the fact that he is wheelchair-bound keep him from being an active and high-profile school leader, engaged in numerous school activities such as..." Again, counselors say they would still be reluctant to include this information in a letter without a student's consent. I concur. It is best practice to leave out sensitive, confidential information. Or, if you believe including the information is important to benefit the student, then secure student and parental permission to relay what they may not want known.

Writing letters for problem students: School counselors tell me that if they cannot write a strong letter of recommendation, then they prefer not to write a letter at all. Rather than write

a negative or derogatory letter, school counselors explain to the student, “I am not a good choice as you would get a stronger letter from someone who knows you better” and, in some cases, just bluntly explaining that their letter would hurt and not help the student. When school counselors are required by their schools to write letters, as is often the case in private schools, counselors tell me they stress the student’s assets and make little or no comment on the student’s deficits, as university admissions personnel are able to “read between the lines.”

Writing letters for weak students: School counselors are skilled at advocating for their weak students who deserve a chance. School counselors know how to focus on students’ assets without bending the truth, skirting the major issues, or in any way painting a false picture. As one school counselor said to an admissions representative, “Let me tell you what you can’t learn about David from his application and transcripts. David has been on this long cultural journey and has developed survival and problem-solving muscles that can never be measured by standardized tests or grades. David has demonstrated he is an astute and determined person who has aspirations and ambitions that will make your university proud to have admitted him. For example, David has taken care of three siblings...” School counselors often focus on life skills when a standard approach to recommendation letters will not help a student.

Notifying university admissions personnel about new information: What would you do if, at the close of a student’s senior year, it came to light that the student had cheated on a first-semester mathematics test about the same time that you were busy writing a glowing letter on this student’s behalf

to a prestigious university? Additionally, you sent the university a mid-year report with a grade of “A” for first-semester mathematics and “no infractions of rules” noted. The teacher dropped the grade to a “B” after the cheating incident was discovered, and the new grade will appear on the final transcript. Do you believe you have an obligation to call the university and report the incident? School counselors’ responses are mixed but most say they would not notify the university.

School counselors who believe the grade change or cheating incident should be reported to the university say they believe their own integrity will be called into question if they do not directly inform the university. Further, they said this student didn’t deserve the glowing letter and that it would be wrong to let the recommendation letter stand without adding the new information.

On the other side of the issue, school counselors said they want to develop honest, contributing members of society but as school counselors, they don’t believe it’s their responsibility to notify the university. These school counselors believe they wrote the letter in good faith based on the information they had at the time and, therefore, are under no obligation to report a different picture to the university. I concur with this opinion and this compilation of counselor responses that follows. Instead of calling the university, you could inform the student that if the university calls to inquire why the final transcript was different from the midyear report that an honest answer will be given. By informing the student of the real (but unlikely) possibility that the university would question the discrepancy in grades, the onus is then placed on the student to wrestle with the question of informing the university in advance of a possible

phone call to the school counselor.

To call the school to notify admissions there has been a grade change probably does not violate FERPA. However, in a 2002 Florida court case, it was agreed that states could enhance FERPA guidelines, so read your state statutes on educational records. Your state may have made the determination that limited information will be given to third parties.

According to Ski Harrison, an attorney for a California School District, once the school counselor completes the mid-year report, there is no obligation to call or contact the university about changes in students’ status. If the school were to contact the school counselor with questions, of course the counselor would report the truth. In an interview with Carol Lerman, district guidance specialist for Saddleback Valley Unified School District, Calif., Harrison said that if this had happened before the mid-year report came out, the school counselor could contact the student and let him or her know there are certain ethics/discipline questions on the high school report and that the school counselor will be completing it honestly. As advocates for the students, we just want to remind them of both our obligation to be honest, and theirs. If the grade is lowered because of the cheating incident, Harrison said the counselor should send the corrected transcript with no explanation. If the college calls for an explanation, the school counselor can tell the college about the incident. ■■■

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COUNSELOR EDUCATION FROM THE COLLEGE BOARD



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Wednesday, April 30, 2014
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CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL OF THE SEMI-FINALISTS FOR 2014 SCHOOL COUNSELOR OF THE YEAR!

Esmeralda Armendariz
El Paso, Texas

Bonnie Barlow
Layton, Utah

Michelle Brand
Pine Grove, Pa.

Michelle Bruty
Bettendorf, Iowa

Laura DeMoulin
Denver, Colo.

Marie DuFresne
Dayton, Nev.

Jamie Farber
Justin, Texas

Joanna Fletcher
Bountiful, Utah

Jill Goodman
Frederick, Md.

Pamela Green
Naples, Fla.

Theresa Henson
Omaha, Neb.

Judy Hillier
Valley City, N.D.

Robert Jeffords
West Haven, Conn.

Dee Anna Kelley
St. Joseph, Mo.

Christy Land
Marietta, Ga.

Lori LeBrun
Coventry, R.I.

William Marchione
Newberg, Md.

Megan McDonald
Superior, Colo.

Rosalie Munoz-Ledo Koba
San Clemente, Calif.

Tinisha Parker
Norcross, Ga.

Meg Riele
Mechanicsburg, Pa.

Dustin Seemann
Mt. Prospect, Ill.

Jennifer Tachell
Boise, Idaho

Matthew Tolliver
Berkley Springs, W.Va.

Colleen Tortorella
Monroeville, Pa.

Nicole VanDeMark
Pueblo, Colo.

Julie VanDenBerg
Cave Creek, Ariz.

Christina Welch
Zionville, N.C.

Mark Wells
Wilmington, Del.

Mindy Wells
Overland Park, Kan.

Deborah Wolin
Chantilly, Va.



L to R: (front) Wolin, Welch, McDonald, Munoz-Ledo Koba, Riele, and Hillier (back) Kelley, Wells, Parker, Tolliver, VanDenBerg, Brand, Farber, and Henson

ASCA's School Counselor of the Year award honors school counselors who are running a top-notch, comprehensive school counseling program. In January, the 14 semi-finalists shown here traveled to Washington, DC, for a black-tie gala that celebrated the semi-finalists, finalists, and winner of the 2014 School Counselor of the Year.