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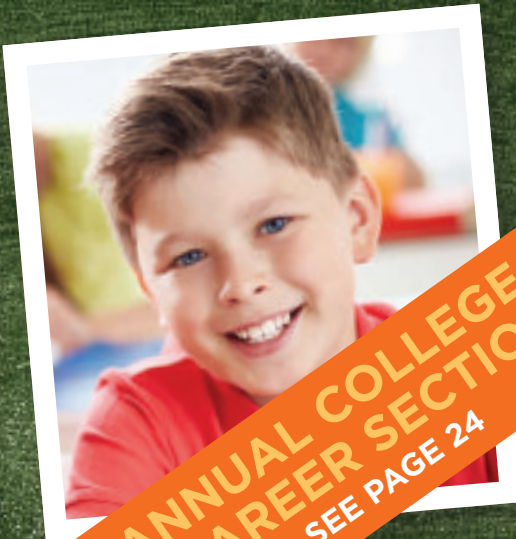
THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE ILLINOIS SCHOOL COUNSELOR ASSOCIATION

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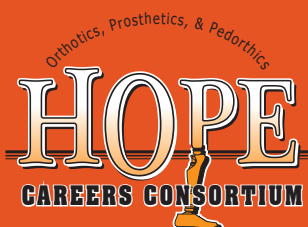
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RAISING OUR TORCH

BY SHERRI McLAUGHLIN



The Illinois School Counseling Association is on fire! ISCA has a record high membership of 954 and growing. The ISCA board and executive director Dan Stasi have been working hard to meet the needs and wishes of Illinois school counselors.

In June, Sherri McLaughlin, president; Barbara Karpouzian, president-elect; and Dan Stasi attended the LDA and ASCA conference in Phoenix. Nancy Penk, past president, and the ISCA board put together very successful workshops. Trish Hatch, Ph.D., presented on “Use of Data in School Counseling” to a capacity crowd on September 11 at Universal Tech Institute in Lisle, Ill. On December 2, Dr. Marc Brackett presented another sold-out event, “Creating Emotionally Intelligent Schools—Evidence Based Approach to SEL” at Northern Illinois University. And on December 4, Dr. Brett Zyromski presented “Evidence Based School Counseling” in Springfield, providing professional development to counselors in central Illinois.

ISCA received valuable feedback via our survey about what members want ISCA to do for them. We learned that our members value and want professional development at affordable costs. They want the opportunity to network and share common practices. They want support and advocacy at the legislative level. They want to grow our profession with RAMP, manageable student-to-school-counselor ratios, high percentages of counseling verses non-counseling duties, and a voice in the state legislation.

ISCA is working to deliver. We will host spring conferences in both Rosemont and Springfield, with the theme “Student Centered—Data Informed.” The keynote speaker for both locations is Mawi Asgedom, a refugee, Harvard graduate, and author.

ISCA recognized each of our members during National School Counseling Week with a postcard of thanks and appreciation. We hosted a link with “Recipes for Success” to share with fellow counselors. We sent a letter to the Illinois Principal’s Association, and ISCA president Sherri McLaughlin spoke on the radio and to newspapers about the important role of school counselors.

Our members and board members are actively involved in efforts to move our profession forward. They are working with the Reacher Higher Initiative, Advocacy Day on the Hill, CTE Career Curriculum, Illinois State Board of Education Initiatives, and Great Kindness Challenge, to name just a few.

ISCA is offering spirit wear to promote our profession. We gave window clings and pins to our members at the Illinois Counseling Association conference and will distribute them at the ISCA conferences.

On April 13, ISCA (in partnership with IMHCA and IACAC) will attend a Day on the Hill in Springfield at the State Capitol, led by our lobbyist, Dan Stasi and hosted by Representative C.D. Davidsmeyer. Our work does not end at the capitol. We will continue to plan and provide events for our members. ISCA will review our ethical standards and seek to align them with ASCA ethical standards and mindsets. RAMP will continue to be an initiative throughout the state. The torch will continue to burn! ■■■

Contact Sherri McLaughlin, Illinois School Counseling Association president and JHS school counselor, at smclaughlin@jsd117.org.

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DIVERSIFIED COUNSELING WITH ELL STUDENTS IN ILLINOIS

BY SHERRI McLAUGHLIN

The State of Illinois mandates that all certified educators employed in the state public school system participate in two English language learners trainings per school year. Having just completed our second mandated training, I realize how limited we are in working with our ELL students. The suggestions on how to teach and reach our ELL students were helpful, yet only touched the surface of what needs to be accomplished in order to successfully educate students who are learning English as a second language.

English language learners obviously face the everyday difficulty of not only learning the academic required subject areas, but also the language in which they are taught. Some of the students enrolling in our schools have studied English as a second language in their countries; however, many of them come to the United States only knowing and having exposure to their native language. Their parents rely on them to learn the new country's language and culture and in turn teach it to them. These students are under a great deal of pressure to catch up to their English-speaking peers and many teachers are not given adequate training and supports to meet the needs and demands of the ELL students.

Budgets are tight, especially in the state of Illinois, where they have not settled on a state budget to date and resources are limited. In my school district, Jacksonville School District 117, we are geographically located near the Cargill Meat Packaging plant. Cargill actively recruits employees from other countries to come to Illinois with a green card and work at their packaging plant. We have students from a number of different



As we become a world-wide society, it is our job and professional obligation to learn about how to best serve students from all backgrounds and corners of the world.

countries including Cuba, Mexico, Puerto Rico, and the Congo.

As school counselors, we are responsible for getting transcripts and records and setting a schedule for these ELL students. Sometimes they leave their country without any records and come to us as undocumented students. Other times they come with records in their native language. In that case, we often need an interpreter in order to sort through the information and interpret it correctly into our system.

Many of the Congolese students were French-speaking students. French was their second language

following their native tribal language. We needed to learn about their culture, their language, and a new way of operating in our school counseling and educational programs.

Today we are working with the following populations: deaf students, Hispanic/Latino students, and Congolese immigrant students. We are also working with our native-born students from various cultures, races, and ethnicities. So what does this all mean for educators and counselors?

As we become a world-wide society, it is our job and professional obligation to learn about how to best serve students from all backgrounds and corners of the world. It is important to attend workshops and conferences that will provide us with the skills, knowledge, and best practices to serve every student that walks through our doors. We have learned the hard way that waiting until a student arrives is not the best way to serve and educate our students. We must continue to learn about all of our diverse populations and how to best communicate with and educate all students.

We have learned that diverse populations bring rich cultural differences, yet deeper understanding and appreciation of our world. Jacksonville High School and the community of Jacksonville has grown. We have all benefitted from our immigrant students and citizens. My first Congolese graduates are now enrolled in Illinois colleges and universities. Their accomplishments and hard work have made us all proud and thankful to all who have assisted in our efforts to provide resources and a good, solid educational foundation for them to move on to the collegiate level. We still have much work to do in this area, and so much more to learn as counselors and educators. ■

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A NETWORK FOR NEWCOMERS

BY LUCY LEWIS PURGASON, PH.D., & JOSE VILLALBA, PH.D

As a teen, remember how crushed you were when your friends didn't have the same lunch period as you? Remember how challenging just walking through the hallways could be if you weren't part of the in crowd? The social interactions in the lunchroom, the hallways, or at the Friday football game in many ways define the adolescent experience and serve as a map of the social hierarchies within school. Developmental theorists have highlighted that the establishment of friendships is one of the most significant tasks during this period of life.

Now, imagine for a moment navigating these spaces when every face belongs to a stranger, or the voices are not in the language you grew up speaking. Imagine if you didn't know any of the unwritten codes and social cues that define high school life.

This is the experience many newly arrived immigrant and refugee students face when they transition to life in the United States. As the numbers of immigrant and refugee families continues to rise, so does the realization for students and educators alike that establishing a school community that values the strengths of all members is more nuanced and complex than ever.

Newcomer immigrant and refugee students are often challenged to navigate the routine struggles of adolescence in the United States without the benefit of a group of peers that they have known for a long time. In fact, many newcomer students have been separated, often abruptly, from close friends and family members who remain in their home country or in refugee camps. Distanced from their support systems and sometimes arriving in the United States without one or both parents, newcomer



students often experience feelings of depression, anxiety, and loneliness.

Friendships help not only with the myriad emotional challenges of high school life but also with navigating the academic experiences of high school such as registering for the SATs, applying to colleges or considering postsecondary options, helping with homework, or completing financial aid applications. In addition to these stressors, many newcomer adolescents also must adjust to a new school and culture, learn to speak English, help with family finances, and fear deportation. Newcomer students often prefer to get help from friends when dealing with these stressors,

yet they often have difficulty forming friendships at school and feel isolated within the school environment.

FACE-TO-FACE CONNECTIONS

During my time as a school counselor, I learned from newcomer students about the role social media played in their lives both prior to and upon arrival in the United States. Facebook helped them maintain relationships with friends back in their home country or in refugee camps, and Facebook also served as a way to connect with new friends, especially friends shar-

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ing the same ethnicity or cultural background. One student from a Southeast Asian country joined a Facebook group for individuals from her home city who had relocated to the United States. Through this group she was able to talk with peers who shared similar transition experiences. Newcomer students are also using Facebook to post pictures and videos, archiving memories of the past and capturing new experiences of life in the U.S. One newcomer student created a Facebook page around his ethnic identity, using it as way to remember life in his home country and share information about current events and political happenings back home.

Social media use may be tied to important benefits for newcomers; however, researchers find that it does not replace face-to-face friendships. Furthermore, the extended use of social media may have negative impacts on emotional well-being and academics. School counselors can help newcomers intentionally use social media to their advantage while mitigating some of the consequences associated with its use.

In many ways, school counselors are the social network builders within our schools, interacting with large numbers of students daily through classroom guidance, counseling interventions, and other responsive services. This affords us knowledge of our students that can help us build connections between students. Outlined below are examples of interventions we can implement to help these newcomer students.

RESPONSIVE SERVICES

Given our access to and familiarity with data, school counselors can help monitor enrollment trends and note countries from which students are arriving and what languages are spoken. Collaborations with



Talking with students about their former educational experiences is important to develop a complete understanding of the academic curriculum in their home country or in the refugee camps.

English-as-a-second-language teachers may illuminate specific learning and language needs and assist in establishing mentoring programs between students who have recently arrived and those who have been in the U.S. longer.

Although matching students based on home country or language can be helpful, you can also partner newcomer students with peer mentors born in the U.S. who can serve as cultural brokers, providing homework support, in-class assistance, or an opportunity to practice English.

Group counseling can be an appropriate intervention for newcomer immigrant and refugee students, particularly for sharing pre- and post-arrival experiences in the U.S. To this end, connecting with

other students may help normalize the transition experience and provide opportunities to interact closely with peers. Although the experiences prior to resettlement vary greatly for students within and across immigrant and refugee groups, commonalities may exist around the multiple transitions experienced, loss of friends and family, and stressors encountered upon arrival. Group counseling interventions, therefore, could include a focus on relaxation techniques, stress management strategies, and social skills development. Career counseling interventions also are an important need.

Individual counseling may be an important consideration for newcomer students, too. There is an increased likelihood that newcomer students experience some type of trauma prior to arrival in the U.S. Narrative and creative arts interventions can help students process these experiences. Consider using a strengths-based approach with newcomer students to identify potential areas of interest that could be matched with clubs, sports, and other extracurricular activities. If a multicultural club doesn't already exist at your school, get advice on starting one from *Race Bridges*.

Another idea is to partner with ethnic student clubs at local colleges and universities. College students, who may also be new to the U.S., could serve as mentors or co-sponsors for an inaugural high school chapter. Connecting students to these experiences extends social circles available offline and may increase students' self-confidence.

Newcomer families may have difficulty accessing mental health services due to language and transportation barriers. This is another opportunity for you to connect families with community counseling

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resources to provide school-based counseling interventions. Refugee and immigrant students resettling in rural areas may be distanced from the support of resettlement organizations or separated from a larger ethnic community. School family nights are a way to share information with caregivers and provide an opportunity for families to connect. What resources might be available to assist newcomers in your community? One school district in a rural area of Washington partnered with a local church and provided transportation and lunches for migrant students attending a summer educational camp housed at the church.

INDIVIDUAL PLANNING

Newcomer students may have specific needs related to academic and career development. For example, immigrant and refugee students may be older than their same-grade peers because of differences in schooling or interrupted schooling in their home country. Therefore, talking with students about their former educational experiences is important to develop a complete understanding of the academic curriculum in their home country or in the refugee camps.

Unfortunately, these conversations can often be difficult and even frustrating due to the obstacles in obtaining accurate copies of transcripts or completing transcript audits because of differences in language, grading scales, or course identification, further complicating course placement for students. This may involve working with school district personnel familiar with the student's native language or collaborating with community-based partners, cultural liaisons, and advocates within the community to ensure classes are matched to the student's appropriate academic level. It may be helpful to have newcomer students identify peers

Cyberbullying policies should specifically address bullying related to cultural and racial differences.

who could offer academic support. For example, newcomer students report using Facebook to create homework groups, practice English, get assistance with assignments, and even offer encouragement to continue with schooling.

SCHOOL COUNSELING CORE CURRICULUM

Newcomer students may be using social media for five or more hours a day. The frequency and openness with which students disclose on Facebook can come at a cost to their privacy and open them up to cyberbullying. Recent research suggests that the time newcomer

students spend on Facebook may actually be taking away from schoolwork or the development of friendships offline, which complicates how school counselors and students find balance between too much dependence on social media and failing to use an effective tool in the school adjustment process.

In 2012, ASCA and the Internet Keep Safe Coalition (iKeepSafe) published "*Facebook for School Counselors*," a guide to promote students' safe use of Facebook. The guide suggests ways school counselors can become more familiar with Facebook so we are knowledgeable about how to confront and address incidents on Facebook that affect students at school.

These questions may be helpful to ask newcomer students regarding their social media use:

- What are examples of positive and negative experiences you have had on social media?

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RESOURCE LINKS FOR WORKING WITH IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE STUDENTS

Center for Health and Health Care in Schools

- *Immigrant and Refugee Children*

National Association of School Psychologists

- *Understanding the plight of immigrant and refugee students*
- *School-based services for traumatized refugee children*
- *Immigrant Families: Strategies for School Support*

UCLA

- *Immigrant Children and Youth: Enabling Their Success at School*

Department of Education

- *Fact Sheet: Educational Services for Immigrant Children and Those Recently Arrived to the U.S.*
- *Fact Sheet II: Additional Questions & Answers on Enrolling New Immigrant Students*

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- How would your life be different if you were not on social media?
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- How do you decide what to share?
- What would you do if you if you were threatened or bullied?

Also include information about pro-social media use in classroom guidance lessons, and incorporate it into school policies related to digital citizenship.

Many newcomer students face discrimination and are targeted for harassment at school. Consequently, cyberbullying policies should specifically address bullying related to cultural and racial differences. For a resource on how to address bullying of newcomer students and a toolkit for information on

conducting newcomer orientations and developing community partnerships, visit the *Bridging Refugee Youth and Children's website*.

All students should feel that school is a safe, welcoming environment and experience it as a place where they belong. Friendships contribute to a sense of belonging and aid in the successful academic adjustment of newcomer students. Connection to heritage culture also is a protective factor for newcomer students. As advocates, we can work to ensure that the diversity of the student body is reflected within the larger school culture. This may require us to think creatively about ways to build upon our own professional and social networks to create connections for newcomer students and

families. The next time you walk the hallways of your building, think for a moment of the students who fill those hallways and the diverse backgrounds they represent. If you were a newcomer student, would you see yourself reflected in what you see around you? ■■■

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THE DUTY TO ADDRESS PERSONAL BIAS

BY RHONDA WILLIAMS

Scenario: My school counseling colleague and I were recently having lunch together when she began to tell me about a 15-year-old student she was working with who identified as gay. She described how strongly her religious beliefs went against everything this boy was talking about. She said that based on her religious beliefs, she felt compelled to counsel the boy “out of being gay.” She shared that normally she keeps her religious beliefs out of the school counseling office, but in this case, she sees her efforts worth saving this boy. To me this seems unethical. How should I approach this?

First and foremost, our mission as school counselors is to advocate for all students, not just those with whom our personal values agree. Our professional mission based on the ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors clearly identifies advocacy, leadership, collaboration, and consultations as a means to provide equity in access and educational success. Given that 64 percent of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ) youth report feeling unsafe at school on any given day, how might they feel when the school counselor confirms that lack of safety and support?

Research states that four out of five LGBTQ students report they can't name one supportive adult in their school. These students suffer from lower self-esteem, struggle with academics, and often exhibit depression. They are more likely to run away from home and have a higher rate of substance abuse than the general population of students. The *Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN)* reports that students hear anti-gay epithets 25 times a day,



and 97 percent of the time teachers do or say nothing about this type of harassment. This marginalized group of students, who represent 5-10 percent of any given student body, is two to three times more likely to attempt suicide. Almost 30 percent of completed suicides among youth are related to sexual identity.

The first tenant of the ASCA Ethical Standards preamble states, "Each person has the right to be respected, be treated with dignity and have access to a comprehensive school counseling program that advocates for and affirms all students from diverse populations including: ethnic/racial identity, age, economic status, abilities/disabilities, language, immigration status, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity/expression, family type, religious/spiritual identity, and appearance."

The Ethical Standards are clear regarding the school counselor's role in providing equity, social justice, and self-determination. The preamble also states that students be affirmed in the groups with

which they identify, "with special care being given to students who have historically not received adequate educational services."

Other research indicates that LGBTQ students are four and a half times more likely to skip school because of safety concerns; they also have a higher dropout rate than their heterosexual counterparts.

You are in a position to support these marginalized students and help them persevere through any discrimination they might encounter. However, as in the scenario above, it's important to consider your own biases and influences. As indicated in section E.2. of the Ethical Standards, school counselors must strive for cultural competence, ensuring that they do not impose their personal beliefs on the students.

Because the ASCA Ethical Standards express the right for each person to feel safe in the school environment "free of abuse, bullying, neglect, harassment and other forms of violence," your task is to promote and provide that type of supportive environment. It is not your role to focus on a child's sexuality or orientation or impose your personal values. Rather, your duty is to take the initiative to provide a safe environment in which these students can succeed.

Litigation is another consequence of the actions of the school counselor in the scenario. According to Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, more and more schools are being held liable for the hostile climate of a school. The *Henkle vs. Gregory* case imposed monetary sanctions on schools that do not provide protection from discrimination for LGBTQ students. Discrimination of any type has been against the law since Title VII in 1964 and was reinforced by Title IX in 1972. Through the increasing number of

court cases over the past couple of decades, the judicial system holds that discrimination, be it racial, religious, or sexual, is against the law. Schools, and professionals in the schools, will be held accountable if they don't uphold a student's right to an education without discrimination.

Even if the school counselor involved in this scenario is well-trained in the hotly contested conversion therapy, this would still be outside the role of a school counselor and unethical to perform in a school setting. The school counselor who wrote this concern, although uncomfortable with her peer's reaction to the gay student, must also consider her ethical ob-

ligations. Should you find yourself in this situation, one of your obligations is to express your concern to your peer about the unethical approach to counseling this student "out of being gay."

There are other obligations to consider. School counselors are in a position to provide prevention and intervention education and support. Researchers have found that teacher and school counselor interventions, both individual and school wide, create change in the school climate. Intentionally teaching inclusive language to staff and students is one way to intervene. And schools with a strong non-discrimination policy have fewer incidents of homophobic remarks.

The scenario demonstrates many ethical concerns considering all the implications to the individual student and to the school climate is important. The school counselor's position is about developing and enhancing positive relationships. Judging and proselytizing one's own beliefs has no place ethically in the role of the school counselor.

Rhonda Williams, Ed.D., LPC, NCC, is an associate professor at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs and is a past chair of ASCA's Ethics Committee. Contact her at rwilliam@uccs.edu for references to this article. This column was previously published in ASCA School Counselor, Vol. 49, Number 5.

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CULTIVATE RESPECT

BY MEKINA MORGAN

Are elementary school students too young to worry about addressing issues surrounding gay and lesbian students? No, experts say. It's never too early to begin teaching children about respecting differences. When an elementary school student has questions related to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) issues, school counselors must be prepared to answer these questions in a way that fosters healthy dialogue, critical thinking, and inclusiveness. With that in mind, your conversations should include all students and perspectives to create a safe and supportive school climate. Several strategies will help you and your school community have positive conversations with elementary school students around LGBTQ issues.

PLANT THE SEEDS

Prepare yourself for the important conversations around LGBTQ issues within your elementary school community. Before your first conversation, do the following to establish a foundation for future conversations.

Do your homework: You play the leading role in fostering safe and affirming conversations about LGBTQ perspectives with elementary school students. It is crucial that your dialogue with students be based on facts, not stereotypes, misconceptions, or a limited knowledge of relevant issues. By expanding your own knowledge on LGBTQ perspectives, you will empower yourself to creatively engage in meaningful conversations with your students.

Find support: After you've done your homework, find local support. With more than 200,000 members and affiliates, PFLAG National provides grassroots-based assistance and outreach to communities



all over the country. Developing a partnership with your local PFLAG chapter is a great first step to provide your school with current and accurate information geared toward students, families, teachers, and school counselors.

Know your community: Don't assume that your school community doesn't have LGBTQ families or students. Making this false assumption will limit positive dialogue and behaviors and could isolate members of your school community. Remember that creating a supportive space for everyone to be valued in your school community is vital to healthy growth and development for young students. Your main goal is to support and nurture your students, and the first step toward that goal is to know and understand everyone in your community.

Consider your students: Before starting a conversation about LGBTQ matters with your students, you must be in touch with their cognitive development to help

frame the dialogue. Since many young students are grappling with their understanding of the world around them as it relates to their personal growth and experiences, they may start asking more questions and challenging your reasoning. Students will start to see connections between how they use language and how language affects behavior. For example, elementary students will become aware of the school's negative view of the word "gay" if they are reprimanded for using the word when asking questions. As a result, students often internalize what they see and hear and will make connections with how it makes them feel and behave.

WATCH THEM TAKE ROOT

In developing a welcoming school environment, the next step toward meaningful conversations around LGBTQ perspectives with elementary school students is to become active within your school community, providing support and elevat-

ing your role and presence as a resource.

Don't assume your students are too young: Elementary school is an appropriate time to begin discussing LGBTQ issues. In fact, elementary school is the best time to lay the foundation of respect for all people and acknowledge the school's acceptance of all families and students. Remember to be mindful of the ages and maturity levels of your students, but the message of respect for all should be consistent and maintained.

Be an accessible ally: You want to encourage your students to come to you by making your space welcoming. Consider having LGBTQ-positive posters, Safe Zone stickers, books, and other welcoming materials that symbolize your ally status. Your school community needs to know that you are an LGBTQ ally, especially when trying to develop a spirit of inclusion for all school community members.

Listen carefully: It's important to understand thoroughly what your students are asking so you can formulate a solid response to their questions. You may want to ask them why they are asking the question, what do they already know about being LGBTQ, where have they heard the language, how do they feel about the word "gay," etc. You want to create an atmosphere where discussing LGBTQ issues is encouraged and part of the culture of your school. Also remember that if one student has questions, other students also may have questions or will in the future. Taking careful notes may help you formulate a lesson, activity, or school event to educate everyone. Never judge or promote fear; your students are looking to you for guidance and support.

Connect to real life: Always use concrete examples instead of

abstract concepts, and always do your best to relate the example to something that could happen in the students' immediate future. It is crucial for students to see how their voices, experiences, questions, and behaviors fit into their current lives. For example, if a student used respectful words to manage a difficult situation, praise and ask the student to think of another situation in which those words could help. If students are using the word "gay" to hurt or tease another student, ask them to think of a time when someone used a word that hurt their feelings. Also, remind them that although being gay is nothing to be ashamed of, any word used in a combative or derogatory way can result in hurt feelings.

Do something: Intervene immediately when you experience students engaging in bullying behavior. Allowing negative behaviors or language to go unnoticed or unaddressed opens the door to an unsafe learning environment. Intervening is the first step toward changing the school climate.

Use established character education programs: Many elementary schools are required to have character education programs aimed at building students' social development. Adapt your current program to support discussions around LGBTQ issues. Using familiar language, tools, and will make the dialogue easier and more accessible to students and teachers.

Share positive perspectives: Provide your school community with opportunities to see positive LGBTQ perspectives by providing educational resources such as books, videos, and other publications that address LGBTQ issues.

WATCH THEM GROW

To work with students and their families effectively, you must work

with the administration and teachers in your school to create a safe and inclusive environment for even the youngest children. Educate yourself about the issues, learn the appropriate terms to use in conversation around those issues, and put into place comprehensive strategies to begin and sustain a meaningful dialogue with your students and the broader school community.

One way to sustain a welcoming school climate is to participate in national school events promoting inclusive climates, such as Mix It Up Day, which encourages schools to intentionally work toward dismantling stereotypes and creating inclusive environments for all students. Always make sure your resources are current and are available to the school community. PFLAG National offers many publications, some in Spanish, that can be used to support parents, families, and caregivers. Family support is vital in having positive LGBTQ-related discussions at home.

Remember that a respect-for-all approach is the best way to talk about LGBTQ issues with elementary school-age children. When students' physical and emotional needs are properly addressed, when they are given guidance to build positive interactions, and when they are able to bring their true selves and identities to school, they are likely to demonstrate supportive behavior toward their peers, all of which leads to academic and social success. ■■■

Mekina Morgan was the safe schools and diversity outreach coordinator for PFLAG National at the time this article was written, and is a former elementary school teacher. This article was previously published in ASCA School Counselor, Vol. 49, Number 5.

LIVING UP TO EXPECTATIONS

BY AMY MILSOM

Gifted and talented students can be found in every school district and school counselors are important in meeting these students' academic, career, and personal/social needs. Implementing guidance curriculum, responsive services, individual planning, and system support requires first understanding these students' unique needs. Each student possesses unique characteristics and challenges resulting from personal, cultural, and environmental factors.

Academically gifted students may be high achievers and leaders in their classes. Some may focus solely on academics and have few or no interests outside school. Others become involved in a wide variety of school and extracurricular activities.

Parents and teachers often have high expectations for academically gifted students, and little tolerance for students who appear to not live up to their potential. When academically gifted students aren't adequately challenged, they may become bored in class, which sometimes results in disruptive behaviors. Many of these students fear academic failure. Perfectionism is not uncommon, and frustration may lead to underachievement. Teachers and parents may interpret underachievement in gifted students as a sign that the student has little regard for school, but in reality, rather than risk failure, academically gifted students may sabotage themselves. They may intentionally turn in assignments late, procrastinate, and continually revise their work. Underachievement may also occur because the academically gifted student has a learning disability; an estimated 2 to 10 percent of gifted students have learning disabilities. These twice-exceptional students have their own unique sets of needs, which are often not



Teachers and parents may interpret underachievement in gifted students as a sign that the student has little regard for school.

met because school personnel overlook the possibility of a co-existing learning disability.

Academically gifted students also may lack study skills. Because academics come naturally to them, these students may reach high school or college without ever having to really study. As a result, they may become overwhelmed the first time they encounter a subject that requires extra effort.

ADDRESSING NEEDS

School counselors owe it to all students, regardless of their academic

skills, to meet their career, personal/social, and academic needs, and gifted and talented students are no different in this arena.

Career concerns: Gifted and talented students have the same basic career development needs as all students. They can benefit from opportunities to explore their strengths and interests, match those strengths and interests to careers, and learn more about various careers. Because they tend to do well academically in a wide variety of subject areas, gifted and talented students may feel as if they have too many choices. In reality, they might possess the ability to succeed in a number of careers, making the process of narrowing down potential future careers difficult. Gifted and talented students may also feel pressured to enter high-profile careers or to pursue post-secondary education at prominent colleges and universities.

Personal/social concerns: Although not all gifted and talented students exhibit poor social skills, it's common for them to have trouble connecting with peers. They may feel comfortable with only a few close friends, and feelings of isolation are also common among this population. Gifted and talented students may be socially awkward and may struggle to fit in with age-level peers, yet they often have little difficulty interacting with adults.

Many gifted and talented students do not believe that their peers, teachers, or parents view giftedness positively. Those students may struggle to fit in with their own cultural or norm group. In some circles, academics are not

as highly valued as other qualities, and students who excel academically may choose to hide or downplay their abilities in an attempt to be accepted by peers and family members. This is particularly true for girls and for some ethnic minority students.

Low self-esteem and failure to succeed can be extremely problematic for many gifted and talented students. Internal or external pressure to excel may result in feelings of stress and burnout for these students. These students are often extremely sensitive to the opinions and expectations of others. Without support and coping strategies, these feelings may lead to depression and suicide.

Academic concerns: As mentioned above, gifted and talented students may suffer from perfectionism on one end of the spectrum or boredom on the other, both of which can require special attention.

RECOMMENDATIONS

School counselors can meet gifted and talented students' academic, career, and personal/social needs through a variety of direct and indirect services as part of a comprehensive, developmental school counseling program.

Guidance curriculum: School counselors can facilitate classroom

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guidance and psycho-educational group activities to address a variety of skill and knowledge deficit areas common to all students, including those who are gifted and talented. Large-group guidance activities could be used to teach study skills and stress management and coping techniques to all students. Small-group sessions could then be used to provide additional skill-building practice in those areas for gifted and talented students. Small groups also can help gifted and talented students develop social skills and practice those skills while receiving feedback and support from peers.

Large-group guidance activities can also be used to implement career development activities. Topics such as exploring interests and values, learning about careers, and goal setting can help these students gain basic knowledge about themselves and the world of work along with other students. Additional time in individual planning sessions with gifted and talented students can build on this basic information.

Responsive services: School counselors can use individual and small-group counseling sessions to provide support for gifted and talented students. Individual counseling can help these students work through feelings of low self-esteem, loneliness, and depression. Sessions can also help students cope with anxiety and frustration associated with academics or areas of their life in which they do not feel successful. Relationships with peers and family members are other areas for discussion with gifted and talented students. Creative counseling interventions involving journaling, art, and bibliotherapy can be particularly effective.

Small-group activities can help these students express feelings and recognize that other students have similar experiences. Discus-



Advocating for quality gifted and talented education programs, particularly in districts where there are no formal programs, is another important school counselor role.

sions addressing peer relationships, pressure to succeed, perfectionism, stress, and other topics can help students cope with daily stressors often common to gifted and talented students.

Individual planning: As they would for all students, school counselors can meet gifted and talented students' academic and career needs through individual planning sessions. These meetings can help gifted and talented students select challenging courses discuss careers, and explore post-secondary options. Formal career development activities can include interest and values inventories, job shadowing, and world-of-work exploration. Experiential activities where gifted and talented students can gain first-hand knowledge of various careers can help them narrow down future choices based on interests and training rather than solely on abilities. By emphasizing

the importance of a well-rounded education and leadership activities, counselors can help these students prepare for post-secondary education and use of career and academic portfolios to track individual planning activities.

System support: School counselors can advocate for gifted and talented students through leadership and consultative roles in their school. Advocating for assessment procedures that consider cultural and environmental factors in determining eligibility for gifted and talented programs is a good starting point. Developing screening procedures that decrease the likelihood of overlooking the possibility that underachieving students might meet eligibility criteria is also important. School counselors can collaborate with school psychologists and child study teams in these endeavors.

Advocating for quality gifted and talented education programs, particularly in districts where there are no formal programs, is another important school counselor role. Advocacy is also important for educational opportunities such as advanced placement courses, independent study programs, and other enrichment programs that challenge gifted and talented students. School counselors must become able to recognize gifts and talents in a variety of domains (e.g., art, leadership, academics) and work with school personnel to provide enrichment activities to foster those talents. For example, encourage faculty to serve as mentors for gifted and talented students who have specific interests and talents in their particular areas of study.

School counselors can promote an environment where gifted and talented students feel support and encouragement. By serving as a resource to parents and teachers regarding gifted and talented

students' unique needs, school counselors can help communicate knowledge about the stressors many of those students face. Encourage parents and teachers not to make assumptions about student behavior and not to put too much pressure on gifted and talented students. School counselors can also provide parents with ideas for meeting the needs of these students at home. For example, encourage parents to take their children/adolescents to the library, expose them to cultural events, and support participation in extracurricular events, while at the same time not forcing this participation on their children/adolescents.

The most important thing to remember when working with

gifted and talented students is to not make assumptions. All students have their own unique sets of needs. By proactively addressing the needs of all students through classroom guidance lessons, you can make sure gifted and talented students develop basic skills that can help them cope and solve problems throughout their school years. Meeting gifted and talented students' unique needs through individual and small-group work can communicate support and understanding while also encouraging the formation of a peer support system.

School counselors have a responsibility to try to meet the needs of all students. To truly understand the needs of gifted and talented

students, explore training related to this population and multicultural considerations in working with those students. Workshops and conferences are convenient ways to obtain information, but you can also advocate for in-service trainings provided by the school district to all school personnel.

By addressing gifted and talented students' unique needs, school counselors can help ensure the students work to the best of their abilities and build on a strong base. ■■■

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THE SECRET OF MANUFACTURING

BY STEVE SCHNEIDER, SCHOOL COUNSELOR, SHEBOYGAN SOUTH HS

My oldest daughter came home for the summer after her first year in college and took a summer job at a local manufacturing facility, working hard (50+ hours/week) to help pay for her education. When I mentioned this to people, I would often hear, “Oh, that experience should keep her motivated to stay in school now that she knows the alternative.” I heard it so often that I decided to visit some manufacturing facilities to experience firsthand these dens of discontent where my own child was working.

I put out the call through *Inspire Sheboygan County*. “High school counselor with some summer time on his hands, willing to come into your facility to learn what it is you do.” Soon I had some takers: *Kohler Company* and *Rockline Industries* contacted me with a message of welcome. They put together a multi-day itinerary for me to get an in-depth look into how they produce their products.

I wasn't sure what to expect from these ventures of discovery. Were people right that a job in manufacturing is so awful that it's the measurement against which a person would rather do anything else? Is it so bad that, in a panic, high school graduates will go to college, whether or not they have a considered plan, just to avoid working in a factory?

After spending hours watching and talking to reliability engineers, machinists, electrical engineers, planners and schedulers, pattern makers, team leads, mechanical engineers, technical writers, quality engineers, logistics specialists, process improvement engineers, training specialists, human resource specialists, product line operators, HVAC specialists, and plant managers, a few themes became abundantly clear.



PRIDE

Every time I asked anyone about their job and role in Kohler Company or Rockline Industries, the pride in their posture and voice came through with such conviction, I found myself thinking over and over, “Wow! I would like to do this job.” Each person I spoke with, regardless of their role, understood the value of their position to the manufacturing process as a whole.

At Kohler Company, I was captivated by the stories from one of the pattern makers who had been with the company for many, many years. He reminisced about how he did his job years ago and shared all the process improvements through the years that continue to make his job enjoyable and enriching. There wasn't a trace of bitterness or regret as he talked about working hard each day to contribute to the company.

Almost every conversation I had at both companies was similar. These workers are all so proud of what they do. It made me wonder, “Does our community share that same sense of pride in our manufacturers? If not, why not?”

INDEPENDENT, YET INTRICATELY INTERDEPENDENT

If you've ever purchased a canister of disinfectant wipes or taken a shower in a hotel, there's a good chance you used a product that was manufactured at Rockline Industries (wipes) or Kohler Company (shower head). Like most of you, I never thought much about what it takes to make products like that.

My visits to the facilities that make the magic happen were truly awe inspiring. It didn't take long to realize so many different people with unique skill sets are required to make the manufacturing process happen efficiently, safely, and successfully. Whether it's knowing the ins and outs of a particular machine or the flow of raw materials, chemical reactions or federal regulations, packaging design or how to manage people, how to diagnose problems from the feedback of an infrared camera or how to properly connect all the electrical components of a new machine to make it run, the list goes on and on. Each of the individuals I met had a particular skill set and knowledge base.

In a very complex way, each of these independent functions was dependent on every other function operating with efficiency and accuracy. If one area breaks down, the impact on the entire manufacturing process is significant. It's the essence of teamwork. They need to trust that everyone is going to perform their duty and function in order to move the whole process forward.

I'm not sure my words can do justice to how astounding it is to look up and see hundreds of heavy, black, cast iron bathtubs hanging on hooks, lined up in perfect formation on a conveyor system, moving down the line to get enameled. Or how incredible it is to stand in a

warehouse the size of 17 football fields that is fully packed with towers of stacked pallets of disinfectant wipes ready for delivery. No wonder each individual who contributes to the intricate process to produce these final products has a sense of pride and accomplishment.

INVESTMENT IN PERSONAL GROWTH

"Each day brings something different." No matter whom I spoke with or what function they performed, this was a common response to my questions about a typical day. As hard as these companies work to tame and control the manufacturing process, it seems to remain illusively unpredictable. And be-

cause of this, every associate has to have the skills, understanding, and insight not just for the specific task he or she performs, but the process as a whole, in order to bring things back into alignment.

To insure that the company is getting the full benefit of each associate, there is an incredible commitment to continued growth. Many associates told of what they did for the company when they first started and how they moved into their current positions through company-sponsored trainings, or how they went back to school using the company's tuition reimbursement offer (also known as a

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scholarship). The majority of the people I spoke with said that their company encouraged them to gain new skills so they could continue to contribute in a meaningful way. These companies understand that their associates will feel good about the work they are doing when they know they do it well. So they invest heavily in education opportunities for the associates who desire to continue to learn. What an affirming culture to be part of!

This five-day experience had an unexpected impact on me. I went in seeking understanding. I came out not only with new insight into the complexity of the manufacturing process, but pleasantly surprised by a sense of pride in the She-

boygan community. I get excited sharing with people what I saw and heard. Not just about the cool things I saw being made, but also the cool people I met who make it possible to have the things.

Now I'm formulating my response to the attitude that the threat of working in manufacturing is an effective way to drive students to go to and stay in college. It's true that the four-year university pathway is appropriate for many students. Like many other young adults, my daughter went back to college in the fall. Not because of her summer experience in manufacturing, but because she wants to work in anthropology/archeology. But for many of our recent high school

grads and young adults, taking the four-year college route is an expensive, deflating venture in self-discovery.

For the 45% of Sheboygan South High School graduates who do not go on to post-secondary education the fall after they graduate, I can now converse with great pride about some of the terrific opportunities they could consider. Opportunities where they can gain a sense of pride in their work, become a valued member of an awesome process, and continue to grow as an individual. ■■■

Steve Schneider is a school counselor at South High School in Sheboygan, Wis. Contact him at sschneider@sasd.net.

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DREAMS INTO PLANS

Focus on college and careers in elementary school to help students along their path.

BY CRISTINA CAMPOS-KRUMHOLZ

In my first job as a school counselor, I met many high school students who were just starting to navigate the world of career and college. Many of them were graduating with no plan for the future at all, while others were headed off to college or the workforce without knowing what they wanted to do when they got there. No one had talked to them about their strengths or interests. What concerned me most were the kids who didn't succeed in college and came home defeated. Too often this was because they weren't truly prepared for life beyond high school and didn't have a clue about what they really wanted to do when they grew up.

So I moved to the middle school level and started college and career exploration with eighth-graders, which still wasn't early enough. Too many times students were already closing doors because they didn't know what was required of them to create opportunities for their future. I then moved to the elementary level, which I believe is the perfect place to start talking to students about college and career planning. I made it my mission to develop a college- and career-readiness program at my new elementary school. Kids were already dreaming about being professional dancers and football players. Others wanted to be teachers and doctors. I set out to help these young students find a way to make their dreams a reality.

STARTING EARLY

Elementary-school-age kids have big dreams and it's the perfect time to develop a plan to meet those dreams. Time is on their side. We can't wait to have these conversations until students are in high school and are picking colleges. Over the years, I have watched



older students still in that dreaming phase. One high school student talked about wanting to be an engineer even though he had failed every math class he attempted. One girl decided she wanted to get into nursing only to find out she did not prepare herself with the right courses in high school.

We not only need to expose students to career options but also help them develop an academic plan that will allow them to turn their dreams into a reality. The elementary school level is the first place where we can build students' foundation in every subject area, including what school counselors teach students.

For students to be transformational leaders, school counselors need to make them aware early of the knowledge and skills needed for future success. We can get them excited about their futures and the possibilities and teach them why it is so important to excel in school. Their "why do I have to learn this" questions can be

answered by talking about college and career readiness.

When I teach career exploration in the classroom, I explain that students need these skills to get ready for jobs or college. They learn how what they're learning now helps them pursue their dreams. If they want to become a police officer, they need to know how to write tickets and fill out reports. If they want to become an accountant, they need to know how to do math. If they want to become a chef, they need to know how to read a recipe and understand fractions when they measure the ingredients. They discover that the grades they earn today will affect them when colleges are deciding which students they want in their school. They also discover the importance of showing up to school on time and not missing too many days because employers aren't going to hire people with this kind of pattern.

START A PROGRAM

When I started working at the elementary school level, my goal was to create a college- and career-readiness culture with students, staff, and parents. I did extensive research and incorporated several ideas into my evolving philosophy. Pinterest is a great resource—I was amazed what great lessons school counselors were offering around the country.

My next step was to gain buy-in from the administrators and faculty, and they readily saw the benefits of such a program. I then sought community partners, such as College in Colorado, a local program with a mission to instill in parents the belief that all children can go to college. I have had their representatives come to the school to do presentations with parents on career, college, and financial aid planning. We have a partnership with

University of Colorado in Colorado Springs Pre-Collegiate Program, which offers elementary school students a program designed to motivate and prepare first-generation college students.

I borrowed ideas from other school counselors and began hosting a college week when students dress in college gear or school colors of where they want to go to college. The second-grade students write letters to colleges requesting any college donations for our special week, and we have daily trivia questions related to college and careers—one student from every class wins a prize from a college.

The fifth-grade students complete a career interest inventory and then research their career of choice. They look up which colleges offer their program of interest, how much could they make, the outlook for

the profession, and skills they need to have to do the job. We create a career wax museum where they dress the part and display their information and talk about it to all of the classrooms, with an evening presentation for parents.

The sixth-grade students create a wall of fame by researching famous people and where they graduated from college, what degrees they earned, and the earning potential for their profession. I wanted students to relate to people they look up to and to realize higher education is important for everyone. Fifth- and sixth-graders also visit the local university.

Students in third grade and higher take home an educational journey handout to discuss with their family members. This helps strengthen our college- and career-readiness culture by having stu-

dents ask their parents questions about their experiences in school: What did you like? Were you encouraged to do well in school? What messages did adults (parents, teachers) give you? Did you go to college? Why or why not? If you had a chance to further your education, what would you study?

Then the tables are turned and parents ask their child a series of questions: What do you like the most about school? Why do you want to go to college? Where do you want to go to college? What job do you want to have when you grow up? They ask their children to explain why college is important and what it entails and develop a plan as a family how students can meet their goals.

The younger students take home a stuffed animal, which then travels with a parent to work. The student



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then interviews the parent who took the stuffed animal to work. The purpose is to gather information on different jobs and careers in our community. The student and parent answer the questions in a notebook that is provided, and most parents also include business cards, brochures, or other souvenirs associated with their job.

We post information about colleges and universities on a bulletin board for students to learn about colleges across the nation. We also take pictures of every student in their career wear and post their pictures under the year they will graduate. We hang these pictures up again at the beginning of each year to remind them to continue to work hard to get to where they want to be.

I also host a career café throughout the year. Based on

the results of students' career inventories, I invite community members in those fields to speak to the students during lunch. This gets the students excited, and they learn so much with the questions they ask.

Each classroom adopts a college so students can learn more about that school's programs and degrees. Students in each classroom learn their college's fight song and perform it at an assembly. They also decorate their classroom doors with everything they have learned about this college.

None of these activities would have been possible without the buy-in and support from the administration and staff. They have not only seen the benefit but have become enthusiastic. We post where our teachers and staff have gone to college, and they are

excited to talk about their experiences with students.

There are so many ways to create a college- and career-going culture in your building. Each fall, parents, staff, and students begin to ask what we're going to do this year for college week and beyond. I continue to look for new ideas to keep it fresh and fun. I love working with these young dreamers and helping them begin to turn their dreams into attainable plans. Who knows, the next Michael Jordan, Carrie Underwood, or Barack Obama may be sitting in our classrooms. ■

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COLLEGE AND CAREER AWARENESS WEEK

BY LAURA ROTELLA

We school counselors know that, although college is becoming more accessible, many obstacles may prevent a student from going to college. Beyond academic advising and writing college recommendation letters, we need to provide information and opportunities for students to help them on their journey through high school to a post-secondary path that addresses not only college but their future career options.

Through various lessons, class meetings, and parent programs, the Counseling Department at Fairfax High School in Fairfax, VA, addresses college and career readiness throughout the year, but we also devote a week to college and career awareness in conjunction with our feeder middle and elementary schools. This vertical approach starts the conversation about college and careers as early as kindergarten. The hope is that, for 13 years, students will be exposed to information that might open the doors to career and college exploration and provide access to the multitude of post-secondary opportunities that await them.

In January, the school counselors across levels in the pyramid meet to determine a schedule of events and activities for all the schools for the last week in April. The goal is to get everyone involved, from teachers to administrators to counselors; it becomes a school-wide focus for the week. We hope that students and faculty alike will have fun learning about colleges and careers and that students will gain not only exposure but facts about colleges and the different career paths staff have followed.

Our school is on a block schedule with classes on alternating days.



FHS school counselors welcome the Patriot, mascot of George Mason University.

On Monday and Tuesday of College and Career Awareness Week, teachers take a few minutes at the beginning of each class to share their post-secondary journey and career aspirations. Students learn that not everyone grew up knowing they wanted to become a teacher and that teaching was not the first career for many teachers. These stories are so important for students to hear, especially from a variety of sources. Every story is different and hearing how adults they know were able to reach career goals provides examples students can learn from.

Tuesday is a school-wide spirit day with the theme “Dress for Success.” All staff and students are encouraged to dress as if they were going to an important interview. This allows students to think about what might be appropriate attire and it opens up conversations between students

and teachers about the interview process, whether an on-campus interview with a college admissions officer, or one for an internship or a part-time job. These topics aren’t always discussed around students’ dinner tables and are important real-life pieces of information students need. On Wednesday, we focus on military options. We highlight staff that served in the military and bring attention to seniors who have already committed to a service academy, ROTC program, or enlisted in a military branch. Students and staff are encouraged to show their patriotism and dress in red, white and blue.

The spirit continues on Thursday, when students are encouraged to dress like their future profession. In the cafeteria, counselors are on hand to answer questions about possible career paths and options for students. They also encourage students to make a commitment to their goals by signing an “I Commit” banner. Last, on Friday, the week culminates with National College Decision Day, where we celebrate all of our seniors who committed to attending college in the fall by wearing college gear, and a local college mascot stops by to give out high fives as students leave for the weekend.

At the end of the week, we hope that students have made connections with adults in their lives, have learned about various post-secondary options, and have not only reflected on their goals, but made a commitment to their future. One week is a small step to opening a door to a world of opportunities to our students. ■■■

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