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Counselors and Principals: Collaborating to Improve Instructional Equity

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INTRODUCTION

Since the 1990s in individual states and 2001 nationally, school districts have been held accountable for the performance of all students on standardized tests. This accountability is enforced in at least four ways (*No Child Left Behind*, 2001):

1. Student test data is disaggregated by sub-groups of historically low achieving students in order to highlight their proficiency and growth or lack thereof on annually administered standardized tests.

2. Aggregate student performance data is reported publicly through a School Report Card, and parents receive a copy of their own student's test results.

3. Schools are classified according to their aggregate performance on standardized tests, and states are required to have systems that intervene in the most poorly performing schools.

4. In some states, teachers' and principals' personnel evaluations are based at least in part on the test scores of their students.

Although *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) was replaced by the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) in 2016, these provisions remain in place to some degree in federal law and in most states. The provisions are intended to illuminate the academic inequities that exist in American public schools. Educators and researchers have known for many years that students from such sub-groups as African-American, Hispanic, economically disadvantaged, students with disabilities, and second language learners do not perform as well on aggregate as their White and/or more economically advantaged peers (Jennings & Rentner, 2006; Spellings, 2007; Jennings, 2015). This phenomenon has become known as the achievement gap, and school reform has been oriented around programs and strategies intended to close the achievement gap.

Current thinking indicates that closing the achievement gap should include collection and analysis of student performance data by principals, teachers, and other school personnel and

subsequent planning and instruction should be based on the findings from the analyses (Guskey, 2003; Hamilton, Halverson, Jackson, Mandinach, Supovitz, & Wayman, 2009; Rigby, 2014). From these data, principals and teachers can determine the strengths and weaknesses of individual students and plan instructional interventions that will remediate the difficulties the student is having. They can also identify trends and performance hotspots in the school's programs that need attention so they can change instructional programs and strategies to respond more effectively to their students' needs. Because of the availability of large data sets about student performance from the standardized testing process, principals and teachers have a lot of data with which to work. Whether they are well prepared to use those data effectively and subsequently match their findings from the data to improve instruction is less clearly known.

An often under-utilized, yet key educator, who could play a strategic role in utilizing data to close the achievement gap, is the counselor. School counselors are positioned to play a unique and essential role in instructional leadership within the schools. Along with the growing promotion and implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs, the expectations of school counselors have shifted to demonstrate more leadership skills and proactive work. School counselors have traditionally operated reactively, but they are now expected to work from a more developmental and comprehensive approach (Protheroe, 2010), as they are expected to become proactive leaders in the education system. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) has consistently advocated for the proactive role of school counselors in closing the achievement gap through promotion of a comprehensive data-driven program, created to be closely aligned with the school's academic mission (ASCA, 2012). The ASCA national model outlines a framework for school counseling programs that is based on leadership, advocacy, and collaboration to promote systemic change and enhance student success (ASCA, 2012). Leadership skills are also key standards that are outlined in the ASCA School Counselor Competencies (e.g., I-B-2, I-B-2a, I-B-2b, I-B-2c) (ASCA, 2012). Furthermore,

school counselors are expected to maintain leadership, integrity, and professionalism to the highest standard as outlined in the ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors (2010).

School counselors are expected to demonstrate personal and professional leadership skills in every aspect of the school setting. As a result, school counselors who are enabled to work from the ASCA framework are empowered to be leaders who are strategically positioned to become integral members of the education team. Unfortunately, school counselors are not always viewed as leaders who can play an important role in promoting the school's mission and vision. As Lapan, Gysbers, and Kayson (2007, p. 8) state, "it appears that a more fully implemented comprehensive school guidance program is a largely unrecognized and under-utilized vehicle through which achievement gaps . . . could be significantly reduced" (as cited in Protheroe, 2010). School counselors have the skills and knowledge necessary to play an essential role in school improvement.

Data utilization is a key component of school improvement as data can be used to enhance student achievement both systematically and on an individual student level. The promotion of educational equity is a complex issue, and research has shown the importance of school based learning especially for diverse and low-income students (Skrla, Bell, & Scheurich, 2009). Given the accountability era of high-stakes testing and the expectation to demonstrate achievement for all students, data utilization has become a focal point of school improvement measures. Data can be obtained from multiple sources including student achievement measures (i.e., standardized test scores, SAT scores, drop-out rates), achievement related data (i.e. suspension rates, discipline referrals, attendance rates), and disaggregated data (i.e. gender, socio-economic status, ethnicity). Given the many sources of data, collection of multiple sources is important to help improve various aspects of the school environment including achievement, behavior, attendance rates, and post-secondary preparation of students. Through systemically analyzing multiple sources of data, educators can make informed and knowledgeable school improvement decisions. In order to effectively make data-drive decisions

that enhance student success, a promising strategy is the partnership, collaboration, and shared decision making between the school counselor and principal (Finkelstein, 2009). This relationship can help advance the effective utilization of data for school improvement, as both professionals utilize leadership skills in order to foster student growth and performance.

In this paper, we will address aspects of the partnership principals and school counselors could form to develop the school's data utilization practices and thus enhance the capacity of teachers and other school personnel to improve the performance of students in the classroom and on standardized tests. We will begin with a discussion of the current interest in principal instructional leadership as a factor in school improvement. We will then turn to the capabilities of school counselors and the roles they might play in collecting, analyzing, and interpreting student data as well as more effectively utilizing their knowledge and skills to work with teachers, other school personnel, students, parents, and community members. Next, we will offer recommendations for creating a collaborative working relationship between principals and counselors to use data more effectively to improve classroom planning, instruction, and assessment; motivation and classroom management; and school climate and behavior management. To begin, we turn to principals' responsibilities for instructional leadership and data utilization.

DATA UTILIZATION AND PRINCIPALS

Principals are encouraged to be instructional leaders in their schools. This notion extends back to the Effective Schools Research of the 1970s and 1980s wherein strong instructional leadership from principals was shown to be a correlate of effective schools—schools that did well on standardized tests in spite of the low socioeconomic status of their students (Edmonds, 1979). Subsequently, the principal as instructional leader has become foundational to our understanding of the school principalship, to the preparation of prospective school leaders, and to the professional learning (Glickman, 2002; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; DuFour, 2002; Mendels, 2012).

The emphasis on instructional leadership continues today in the standards that support principal preparation and principal evaluation. The National Policy Boards for Education Administration (NCPBEA) 2015 Professional Standards for Educational Leaders include:

Standard 4 Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment: Effective educational leaders develop and support intellectually rigorous and coherent systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to promote *each* student's academic success and well-being.

g) Use assessment data appropriately and within technical limitations to monitor student progress and improve instruction. (NPBEA, 2015, p. 12)

Standard 9 Operations and Management: Effective educational leaders manage school operations and resources to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

g) Develop and maintain data and communication systems to deliver actionable information for classroom and school improvement.

Standard 10: Effective educational leaders act as agents of continuous improvement to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

d) Engage others in an ongoing process of evidence-based inquiry, learning, strategic goal setting, planning, implementation, and evaluation for continuous school and classroom improvement.

g) Develop technically appropriate systems of data collection, management, analysis, and use, connecting as needed to the district office and external partners for support in planning, implementation, monitoring, feedback, and evaluation.

In addition, the Standards for School Executives in our state of North Carolina include a complete standard and indicators that emphasize principal instructional leadership as well as a standard that emphasizes the growth students exhibit on annual statewide assessments:

Standard 2 Instructional Leadership: School executives will set high standards for the professional practice of 21st century instruction and assessment that result in a no-nonsense, accountable environment. The school executive must be knowledgeable of best instructional and school practices and must use this knowledge to cause the creation of collaborative structures within the school for the design of highly engaging schoolwork for students, the on-going peer review of this work and the sharing of this work throughout the professional community.

- Demonstrates knowledge of 21st century curriculum, instruction, and assessment by leading or participating in meetings with teachers and parents where these topics are discussed, and/or holding frequent formal or informal conversations with students, staff and parents around these topics;
- Creates processes for collecting and using student test data and other formative data from other sources for the improvement of instruction.

Standard 8 Academic Achievement Leadership: School executives will contribute to the academic success of students. The work of the school executive will result in acceptable, measurable progress for students based on established performance expectations and using appropriate data to demonstrate growth.

An executive's rating on the eighth standard is determined by a school-wide student growth value as calculated by the statewide growth model for educator effectiveness. For the purposes of determining the eighth standard rating, the school-wide growth value includes data from End-of-Course assessments, End-of-Grade assessments, Career and Technical Education Post-Assessments, and the Measures of Student Learning. The student growth value places an executive into one of three rating categories:

- student growth value is lower than what was expected per the statewide growth model.

- growth value is what was expected per the statewide growth model. ⬜⬜

- growth value exceeds what was expected per the statewide growth model.

All local school boards shall use student growth values generated through a method approved by the State Board of Education. (NC School Executive Standards, 2006)

As we can see, principals are expected to use data, particularly student performance data, to plan for and execute school improvement. The advent of state-wide assessment systems and easily accessible technology have made data about schools readily available. The challenge before many principals is knowing how to understand, analyze, and interpret school data and have the ability to communicate it to teachers and other school constituents. It is in the process that data becomes information that can be shared and used to change individual and organizational practices. However, many teachers and principals have not been well-prepared to be effective at data utilization. As such, they need to be able to enlist the help of school-based professionals, such as counselors, who understand using data for planning and improvement.

DATA UTILIZATION AND COUNSELORS

With the growing emphasis and implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs, as well as federal, state, and local education policy expectations, school counselors are expected to have the knowledge and skills to effectively utilize data. Accountability has become a driving force that has shaped the school counseling profession and has reframed the work of the school counselor (Dahir & Stone, 2009). As a result, school counselors who operate within a comprehensive school counselor program are tasked with the responsibility of demonstrating how students are different as a result of what counselors do and school counselors are required to be proficient in accessing, analyzing, interpreting, and presenting data (Protheroe, 2010; NCDPI, n.d.). In fact, data utilization is a key component that is integrated throughout the ASCA National Model. The ASCA National Model (2012) is based on data-driven decision making and includes four components:

- Foundation: School counselors create comprehensive programs focused on student outcomes, student competencies, and professional competencies. This includes creating a mission and vision statement that is directly aligned with the school's mission, and includes observable program goals to define how they will be measured.

- Management: Organizational assessments are incorporated that are concrete and reflect the school's needs. A key aspect of the management component is the use of data to "measure the results of the program as well as to promote systemic change within the school system so every student graduates college and career-ready" (p. 2). Management also includes action plans (curriculum, small-group, and closing-the-gap plans) that outline the prevention and intervention strategies and activities, based on data, that will impact student achievement, behavior, and attendance.

- Delivery: Services that are provided to students, parents, staff, and community members to impact outcomes. These include direct student services (school counseling core curriculum, individual student planning, and responsive services) and indirect student services that are provided on students' behalf but may be conducted with other individuals (i.e. referrals, consultations, collaborations).

- Accountability: School counselors are expected "to demonstrate the effectiveness of the school counseling program in measurable terms, school counselors analyze school and school counseling program data…school counselors use data to show the impact of the school counseling program on student achievement, attendance, and behavior" (p. 4).

The basic components of the ASCA National Model are integral with accountability as counselors are expected to create and implement a counseling program that is data-driven and

clearly aligned with the needs and goals of the school. Organized around the components of the National Model, professional school counseling competencies outline the expectation of school counselors to have the skills, abilities, knowledge, and attitudes necessary to effectively use data in order to drive decision-making and implement program components (ASCA, 2012). For example, school counselors should demonstrate an understanding of "barriers to student learning and use of advocacy and data-driven school counseling practices to close the achievement/opportunity gap" (I-A-3), and demonstrate "data-driven decision-making" (III-A-5). In addition, separate and specific professional competencies directly concerning data utilization can be found in III-B-3a through III-B-3g. These competencies discuss the use, review, knowledge, and disaggregation of student achievement, attendance, and behavior data in order to inform decisions and implement interventions. Furthermore, competency V-B-1 states that counselors should "analyze data from school data profile and results reports to evaluate student outcomes and program effectiveness and to determine program needs". For additional competencies that address the knowledge and skills of data utilization for school counselors, consult the ASCA School Counselor Competencies (e.g. II-C-5, III-B-2d, II-B-6a, II-B-6g, V-A-3, V-B-1d, V-B-1k, V-C-3). These competencies play a key role in professional counselor development. It is evident that professional school counselors have the potential to play an essential role in school reform and data utilization, to help close the achievement gap and promote equity as social justice advocates for every student (Dahir & Stone, 2009; House & Hayes, 2002).

Although research is still developing, positive impacts of data-driven school counseling programs have been found on student achievement (Protheroe, 2010). For example, a study conducted by Lapan, Gysbers, and Kayson (as cited in Protheroe, 2010) found that in schools that fully implemented a comprehensive counseling program, compared to schools with limited implementation, students had higher graduation rates, higher ACT scores, better attendance, and fewer discipline problems. In addition, researchers in a study conducted by the Education

Trust (2005) examined high impact versus average impact schools (or schools that promote growth). Researchers found that counselors in high impact schools were active members of the academic teams responsible for monitoring student performance and they also met one on one with students to discuss student goals and course placement. Thus, school counselors, who are able to effectively and appropriately use data and monitor student performance, show evidence of enhancing school improvement and promoting success for all students. The effective use of data, expected in comprehensive school counseling programs, is an important component of reducing the achievement gap and promoting equity on a systemic and individual student level. However, while effective data utilization is an expectation of current professional practice, school counselors often do not systemically use data, which may be a result of lack of effective training or self-efficacy (Holcomb-McCoy, Gonzales, & Johnston, 2009; Young & Kaffenberger, 2011). Consequently, enhancing the principal-counselor relationship may be an effective strategy to empower both school counselors and principals to increase their use of effective data utilization.

In summary, it is evident that professional school counselors are expected to have the skills and knowledge to effectively use data to improve student outcomes. The school counseling profession has responded to the accountability movement by promoting, encouraging, and expecting counselors to actively and effectively utilize data in order to advocate for the success of every student. The ASCA National Model provides the framework for a comprehensive school counseling program, which is built on data driven decision making and accountability. With the current emphasis on the implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs, professional school counselors are ideally positioned to effectively partner with principals and other school personnel in order to utilize data and collaborate for effective school improvements.

PRINCIPALS AND COUNSELORS: FORMING THE COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIP

A collaborative relationship between the principal and school counselor has the potential to greatly enhance the effective use of data, and is an important component in fostering the success of every student. While principals and school counselors often share the common goals of student success and achievement, they may approach the process from different philosophies, as principals tend to look at the school as an organizational whole, while school counselors may tend to focus on students as individuals (Roberts & Bouknight, 2015; Kimber & Campbell, 2014). However, creating a positive and collaborative relationship between the building leader and school counselor is an essential component of reaching a common goal. In fact, the imperative need of school counselors and principals to work effectively together was recognized by the College Board, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, and the American School Counselor Association who believed that fostering this collaborative relationship would lead to more effective practice and improved educational outcomes for students (Finkelstein, 2009). As a result, they conducted a nationwide survey to assess both the components and barriers of effective principal-counselor relationships. They found that communication, mutual trust, and respect were imperative aspects of a positive principal-counselor relationship (Finkelstein, 2009). Time was cited as the biggest barrier in forming a truly collaborative relationship between principals and counselors. This finding is not surprising given that both principals and school counselors are often pulled in multiple directions throughout the day, with unscheduled responsibilities that constantly demand their attention. Counselors and principals have distinct roles, responsibilities, and tasks that continually require their attention. However, it takes time and intentionality to develop mutual trust and communication, necessary factors in developing this positive relationship.

Another study conducted by Janson, et al. (2009), examined the perspectives of school counselors and principals regarding their relationship and found four distinct viewpoints, which shared common features related to the importance of collaboration and a synergistic

relationship. Thus, collaboration and partnership is an important characteristics of the principal/counselor relationship. Intentional collaborative relationship between school counselors and principals has the potential to foster systemic and sustained change for school improvement (Janson, Militello, & Kosine, 2008). Thus, collaboration between the school counselor and principal can play a critical role in impacting both the school as a whole and students individually. However, this collaboration may not come naturally or even easily given the time constraints and demands embedded within each role on a daily basis. Therefore, both counselors and principals must play a part in fostering and developing this type of collaborative relationship. Communication and intentionality are key components of promoting this type of working relationship. School counselors can initiate discussion with principals regarding the knowledge and skills they have along with the unique role they are able to play in working towards the mission and vision of the school (Janson, et al., 2008). Through effectively utilizing data and advocating not only for students, but for the role they can play in school improvement, school counselors can help initiate their position as an integral component of the school improvement process. Principals can also proactively foster a collaborative relationship through seeking out the counselor's perspective and encouraging them to actively utilize their skills. Principals can also invite and position counselors to play a central role in the school improvement process and data driven decisions that are made in school improvement plans. Overall, both the principal and school counselor play an important part in fostering and actively initiating a collaborative and mutually respectful synergistic relationship.

Collaborative strategies for school improvement

We have seen that school principals and professional school counselors have several responsibilities they can build on to work together for school improvement. Acting on these responsibilities requires communication, trust, and a shared vision. Because school principals and school counselors have high demand positions, they must work closely to capitalize on the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they bring from their professional practice. An important

consideration in their work together, is that to some degree they come from different perspectives when it comes to thinking about putting the best interest of students at the center of school practice.

School principals are responsible for the overall vision, instructional program, and safety of students. As such, they are likely to draw on perspectives from general education that focus on taking groups of students through the instructional process in a measured, systematic, step-by-step program. Principals as instructional leaders are concerned about students' access to content, the scope and sequence in which it is delivered, the school wide results of standardized assessments, and how teachers provide effective instruction to the groups of students in their classrooms. Principals are of course concerned about the instructional well-being of individual students, but their primary responsibility is the academic success of all students and the subgroups into which they are divided. Principals are accountable for school wide instruction and school wide results, and therefore their view of the school focuses on groups.

School counselors are called to leadership, advocacy, collaboration, and systemic change (ASCA, 2012). As such, counselors who promote a comprehensive school counseling program work at both the school and individual level to promote change and advocate for the success of every student. While this includes a school-wide core curriculum and direct services to *every* student, counselors also work closely with small groups of students and individuals for more intensive interventions. Counselors are able to work directly with students and with teachers to provide support for students whose academic and behavioral needs require intervention. Individual students are important aspects of their practice, as they provide the support and resources needed for the unique needs of each student's classroom success and well-being. As a result, counselors bring their ability to understand and interpret academic and behavioral data about individual students, their consultative capabilities to work with teachers on behalf of individual students, and their connections with parents as well as other student support services. Counselors facilitate conversation about individual students, and therefore they are

able to merge the needs of individual students with school-wide concerns about student achievement.

The differences in perspectives between school principals and school counselors can yield powerful strategies for school improvement. By collaborating, principals and counselors can provide instructional leadership that brings teachers and other school staff together to address educational excellence and equity at the school level. Three school improvement functions that will respond to principal and counselor leadership are the School Improvement Team, Equity Audits, and Job-Embedded Professional Development.

The school improvement team

Policymakers and school leaders have adopted the school improvement process as an important tool for addressing school growth (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). School improvement teams have become a standard planning strategy in schools. Nearly all schools have a school improvement team that prepares a school improvement plan annually for presentation to the district office. Since the implementation of NCLB, school improvement teams have been encouraged to rely on data to plan and make decisions and to conduct and adjust implementation. Counselors are regularly members of school improvement teams along with administrators, teachers, teacher assistance, parents, and other school staff. Improvement teams review the school's status and plan for changes in educational programs, staffing, school schedules, and other matters that might improve the school's performance, especially on the high-stakes accountability measures that have become prevalent under NCLB and its related policies.

School improvement teams may consider a variety of data sets as they consider school improvement opportunities. Standardized test results from statewide assessments often dominate these discussions, because of the current emphasis on testing using statewide assessments. However, there are many other data sources that school improvement teams might discuss. School climate surveys, anecdotal data on student successes, parent interviews

and surveys, teacher working conditions data, and artifacts connecting professional development to instructional improvement are just some examples.

Because of their perspectives, school principals are able to provide information for the improvement team that looks at the school in broad strokes. That is, the principal can focus on grade levels, subgroups, and curriculum to help the improvement team understand the educational context from which the data have been gathered. They take the "view from the balcony" (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). Because they are accomplished at reading and interpreting student data, school counselors can provide invaluable assistance to school improvement team members and to school improvement team planning. In addition, their familiarity with data utilization prepares counselors to develop and deliver data collection strategies, which can be used to address the concerns and strategies team members consider. In this way, counselors take the *view from the dance floor* by working with other team members to explain the data landscape that the team has available. School counselors are often on the front lines working with multiple stakeholders including teachers, parents, and students. As such, they are able to utilize their relationships with various groups in order to integrate the analysis of data and implementation of strategies. Furthermore, when school counselors can integrate their comprehensive school counseling program goals with the overarching school improvement strategies, it creates more streamlined and effective practice throughout the school, as everyone is working toward a common goal. This has the potential to greatly increase the impact of school improvement strategies.

Working together as instructional leaders from different perspectives, principals and counselors can lead the school improvement team to become fully aware of the school's status according to evidence that has been formally validated. Relying on data to discuss the school and make decisions about improving it, grounds the school improvement team so it can consider both the regulatory and social-educational accountabilities that must be addressed if educational excellence is the goal. In addition, inquiring about the school through data analysis

can yield issues about equity that must be addressed if the school is to live up to its

responsibility to educate all students to high levels of proficiency. Schools that must address

equity might consider an Equity Audit, which is another strategy we have discovered wherein

counselors and principals can work collaboratively to use data for school improvement

Equity audits

Much of the attention NCLB has garnered has been about the frequency of standardized

testing that occurs in schools. However, another plank in the NCLB platform is that standardized

test data should be used to illuminate educational inequities among subgroups of students,

especially those who have historically been marginalized (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Ladsen-

Billings, 2009). From this perspective, NCLB is considered a tool for social justice, because it

brings equity to the attention of school personnel, policymakers, and the public. A strategy

school improvement teams could use to discover and address equity issues at the school level

is the *Equity Audit.*

Skrla, McKenzie, and Scheurich (2009) define equity audits as "a systematic way for

school leaders—principals, superintendents, curriculum directors, teacher leaders—to assess

the degree of equity or inequity present in three key areas of their schools or districts: programs,

teacher quality, and achievement" (p. 3). They utilize the definition of *educational equity* from

the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction*:*

> Education equity: the educational policies, practices and programs necessary to (a)
>
> eliminate educational barriers based on gender, race/ethnic city, national origin, color,
>
> disability, age, or other protected group status; and (b) provide equal educational
>
> opportunities and ensure that historically underserved or underrepresented populations
>
> meet the same rigorous standards for academic performance expected of all children
>
> and youth. Educational equity knowledge and practices in public school have evolved
>
> over time and require a comprehensive approach. Equity strategies are planned,
>
> systematic, and focus on the core of the teaching and learning process (curriculum,

instruction, and school environment/culture). Educational equity activities promote the

real possibility of the quality of educational results for each student and between diverse

groups of student.

Conducting an equity audit involves these seven steps:

Step 1: create a committee of relevant stakeholders.

Step 2: present the data to the committee and have everyone graph the data.

Step 3: discuss the meaning of the data; possibly use experts or a facilitator.

Step 4: discuss potential solutions, again possibly with outside assistance.

Step 5: implement solution(s).

Step 6: monitor and evaluate results.

Step 7: celebrate if successful; if not successful, return to step 3 and repeat the process.

(Skrla, et al., 2009, p. 26-27)

Skrla, et al. (2009) emphasize the importance of building a culture of equity, if a school is

to meet its equity goals. The principal and counselor serving collaboratively as what Skrla, et al.

(2009) call Equity-Oriented Change Agents (EOCA) allows them to bring their data utilization

knowledge and skills together to educate the school improvement team and other school

stakeholders. Gathering existing data and generating new data about programs, teacher

effectiveness, and achievement is facilitated through principal-counselor collaboration. The

principal and counselor can play different roles in the steps highlighted above as collaborative

leaders in the process. For example, counselors are trained in group facilitation skills, and could

utilize those skills to help the committee collaborate on discussions and come to consensus on

important indicators and strategic areas to target interventions. In addition, the principal may

play a key role in monitoring results, as data is often first distributed to them as the school

leader. It would be important to capitalize on the strengths and training of both the principal and

counselor when delineating roles and collaborating as leaders in the equity audit process.

Another important component of equity audits that is highlighted by Skrla, et al. (2009), is the need to reduce the large amounts and complexity of data that schools often have, into manageable and streamlined data sets. These data sets can then be systematically examined to identify key areas of inequities and gaps. Both the school counselor and principal can play different roles in this process through their differing perspectives. For example, school counselors operating within a comprehensive counseling program are expected to create closing the gap action plans, identifying target groups of students needing specialized interventions (ASCA, 2012). As a result, they should have the skills and knowledge necessary to examine the data and identify key areas of inequity. In kind, principals are also expected to identify systemic gaps and areas of inequity throughout the school. As a result, collaboration between the principal and counselor provides an ideal partnership in which they can combine their skills to help reduce the overwhelming and often under-utilized data that inundates schools, into smaller data sets. These targeted data sets, can then be presented to the stakeholder committee in order to identify strategic indicators and areas of inequity. Bringing their differing perspectives on students and instruction to bear on the data can yield new and interesting interpretations that may extend understanding and stimulate innovative thinking about problems of practice. The principal-counselor collaboration leading the school improvement team through an Equity Audit can yield important information about the school, focus the school on equity, and create opportunities for building an equity and excellence school culture.

Job-embedded professional development

After school improvement teams do their work, which may include equity auditing, teachers must be prepared to adopt practices that will meet school improvement goals. Traditional modes of professional development have come under serious fire, in part because of the urgency of changing instructional practice to meet the needs of all students. A promising concept that has emerged is *job-embedded professional development*, in which teacher

learning, classroom practice, and student results are linked in an effort to increase the likelihood that the use of professional development resources will improve teaching and subsequent student learning.

Job-embedded professional development (JEPD) can come in many forms. Croft, Coggshall, Dolan, Powers, and Killion (2010) discuss a dozen modes of JEPD, including coaching, professional learning communities, and data teams/assessment development. School counselors could play important roles in supporting teachers as they work toward school improvement goals.

Coaching

Coaching generally consists of a professional with a prescribed area of expertise (e.g., the counselor who is knowledgeable in data utilization) who provides support and follow-up for a teacher who has recently learned a new approach (e.g., applying data utilization to lesson planning). The goal of coaching is to assure that teachers understand new approaches they have learned, apply them in the classroom, and then build on them to further improve their practice. The principal's role in coaching is to arrange schedules and job responsibilities to allow for time for coaching to occur. The principal and counselor stay in close touch to discuss aspects of teacher growth and student results that are occurring as a result of the implementation of data utilization.

Professional learning communities

Professional learning communities (PLCs) have become very prevalent in American schools. In PLCs, teachers come together regularly to discuss their practice and to support one another through the process of professional learning and problem solving. The PLC may be one vehicle for preparing teachers to understand data, interpret it, and make use of it for classroom practice. In such cases, the counselor could serve as the facilitator of learning for the members of the PLC, guiding them through a series of lessons/conversations intended to introduce new knowledge to their practice and carry them through using it effectively in classroom planning

and instruction. Working with the principal, the counselor can help assure that the entire school faculty has received similar preparation and that the strategies intended to be implemented, are in fact carried out with fidelity in the classroom.

Data teams/ assessment development

A variation on the PLC could be a data/assessment development team that is specifically charged with analyzing standardized test and other quantitative data as well as teacher-made tests and assessments. The data team would analyze the data and prescribe program, teacher, and student achievement adjustments oriented toward the school's improvement goals. Counselors and principals would need to work closely together to integrate the data team's work into the school improvement plan.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Principals and counselors share responsibility for the educational achievement and well-being of all students. Both are leaders in their own right and are called to use their skills to promote positive outcomes and educational success for every student. Although they may come from different perspectives, training, and professional backgrounds, they share a common mission and vision. Their perspective and roles may best be viewed as a metaphor representing how principals and counselors can work together, from their individual perspectives, to ensure every student is successful. Counselors have the unique perspective and training in utilizing a clinical approach to assess student needs and recommend interventions to improve student's educational performance. They are strategically positioned and called to a role of leadership, advocacy, and collaboration in order to promote change and enhance student success (ASCA, 2012). Counselors are often on the front lines of working with students, teachers, and parents in order to ensure success for every student, and as such, have *a view from the dance floor.* Principals are oriented toward the school's student body as a whole and to the large subgroups of students who attend the school. They use a group management and instructional leadership approach to assess school wide needs and recommend changes to school structures, human

resources, political influences, and symbolic interactions (Bolman and Deal, 2012). They have *a view from the balcony*. Together, they can utilize their different perspectives to see a broader picture of the school and students as a whole. Counselors and principals are both sources and repositories of extensive knowledge about the school system, not only in the form of data but also in the form of impressions, stories, perspectives, and vision. The intentional and collaborative relationship between the counselor and principal has the potential to target priorities and increase effectiveness for individual students and the school as a whole. Therefore, principals and counselors can be more successful at pursuing excellence and equity in schools by partnering and sharing their knowledge, resources, and effort on behalf of all students.

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