

By embracing a new vision for their work, school counselors can help close the achievement gap separating low-income students and students of color from their white and more affluent peers. School counselors can ensure that every student graduates from high school ready for success in both college and a career.

LEADERSHIP

Connecting the school counseling program to the academic mission of schools.

ADVOCACY

Advocating to remove systemic barriers that hinder student success. Advocating for policies and practices that promote academic success for all students.

COUNSELING

Using counseling skills to assist students in overcoming social, personal, and academic barriers. Brokering community resources to support students.

TEAMING AND COLLABORATION

Using counseling skills with all stakeholders to mobilize human and financial resources to support high standards for all students.

USING DATA TO SPUR CHANGE

Using a wide range of data to assess student needs, establish measurable goals, and measure the results of initiatives designed to improve students' academic success. Using data is a proven way of ensuring accountability for school counseling programs and shedding light on policies and practices that hinder student achievement.

“Results are not about what counselors do. Results are about what students do.”

- C.D. Johnson

MetLife Foundation

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The Education Trust

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The Education Trust promotes high academic achievement for all students at all levels—pre-kindergarten through college. We work alongside educators, parents, policymakers, and community and business leaders across the country to help transform schools and colleges into institutions that serve all students well. Lessons learned in these efforts, together with unflinching data analyses, shape our state and national policy agendas. Our goal is to close the gaps in opportunity and achievement that consign far too many young people—especially those who are black, Latino, American Indian, or from low-income families—to lives on the margins of the American mainstream.



Challenging the Myths

Rethinking the Role of School Counselors



Redefining School Counseling

A transformed school counselor is an educator who ensures college and career readiness and success for all students. A transformed school counselor focuses on the relations between students and the school to reduce the environmental and institutional barriers impeding student academic success.

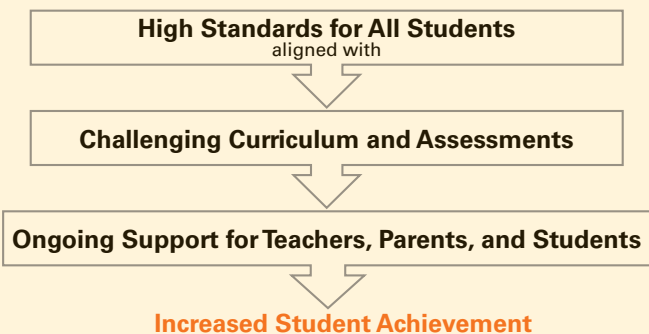
—The Education Trust

In the new vision of school counseling, school counselors advocate on behalf of all students for educational equity, access to a rigorous college and career-readiness curriculum, and academic success for all students.

The central mission of schools today is closing the gaps in opportunity and achievement for low-income students and students of color.

School counselors can help close these gaps by ensuring all students have access to a rigorous course of study that will provide them with options and by supporting teachers to make sure that all students can succeed.

Connecting School Counseling to Standards-Based Reform



MYTHS

Prevailing Beliefs That Influence Counselors

Myth 1: All students don't need to be prepared for college.

All students need the same rigorous preparation, whether for college or a career. The divisions between “college ready” and “career ready” are increasingly irrelevant and immaterial.

Myth 2: Schools can't overcome the effects of poverty and race on achievement.

When educators, counselors, and policymakers believe “those kids can't succeed,” schools expect less from “those students,” set low performance standards, and provide a watered-down curriculum.

Myth 3: Students choose what courses they take; school counselors don't decide for them.

When school counselors allow some students to enroll in “easy” courses or do not provide useful college and career-path information, the counselor has effectively decided for the students.

Myth 4: School counselors should work primarily with individuals to address personal and social problems

School counselors who believe their primary role is to help solve individuals' problems often work in isolation—and their work is seen as peripheral to the academic purpose of schools.

FACTS

Challenging Beliefs, Changing Minds

Fact 1: Increasing numbers of students are enrolling in college.

Currently, 75 percent of all high school graduates enroll in postsecondary education within two years—and even more students enroll later. A rigorous, high-level curriculum will help them develop essential knowledge, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. Even jobs once thought of as “nonacademic” demand a rigorous academic foundation.

Fact 2: In many schools with high numbers of low-income students and students of color, students achieve at high levels.

When schools are appropriately organized they can help virtually all students master the knowledge and skills they need to succeed. “Gaining Traction, Gaining Ground,” a report by The Education Trust, found that school counselors in successful high schools ensure that low-income and minority students receive the support they need to succeed in a rigorous curriculum.

Fact 3: Adults in the system make many decisions about who takes which courses.

Data indicate that student placement in courses is determined by early tracking, sorting, and selecting of students into prerequisite courses. Students often do not have the information and knowledge necessary to make appropriate course selections.

Fact 4: School counselors must be part of a team of educators that provides rigorous academic preparation for all students.

School counselors who are a part of the school's leadership team can influence policies and practices that directly affect student success.

Examples of School Counselors Taking Action

Problem 1

The district passed a new promotion policy that calls for retaining third-grade students who do not meet proficient reading and math levels.

- Teachers are concerned because they are being held accountable for students who are far behind their peers.
- Parents are angry because they feel students are being penalized because of the school's shortcomings.
- Principals and administrators support the policy because they know that students who are not able to read by the end of third grade may be in academic jeopardy for their entire school careers.

Problem 2

- The school board adopted a policy that would enroll all ninth-graders in Algebra I. This required adding several algebra sections to the master schedule.
- While reviewing achievement data, the counselor noticed a consistent pattern of failure in one teacher's Algebra I class. In fact, students and parents had been complaining about the number of students that had failed this teacher's class.

Counselor Actions 1

- The counselor works with the school review committee to show teachers data on schools with similar populations where students are reading on grade level. The counselor facilitates a discussion on ways these schools are successful. The counselor organizes visits to some successful schools, then helps teachers develop a plan to address the reading problem.
- The counselor works with community groups to educate parents about the policy, what assessments will be used, and shows the data on schools like theirs where students are reading on grade level. Encouraged by the counselor, the group plans to support activities such as community read-ins, tutoring, and Saturday classes to help students catch up.

Counselor Actions 2

- To reduce the failure rates, the counselor reviews the performance data for all algebra classes, noticing that some teachers are extremely successful. However, overall failure rates are too high.
- The counselor talks with the principal about providing professional development for all math teachers.
- The counselor advocates early warning interventions and support services for students who are falling behind and collaborates with the principal to develop a mentoring program for struggling teachers.
- The counselor monitors data on each of these support activities to ensure they are effective.