

Counselors as Leaders in Schools

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There has been longstanding concern about school counselor because their roles have changed rapidly and significantly in response to societal trends. This has resulted in varying conceptions and misunderstandings of their roles. The present paper describes the emergence of school counseling as a profession, outlines the developmental history of school counseling models (e.g. vocational guidance, mental health movement, and developmental guidance), argues that school counselors should be promoted into leadership roles, and provides recommendations to school counselors seeking leadership status. Furthermore, the authors explain that tactical advocacy for marginalized students and purposeful partnerships with principals are integral to bolstering school counselors' efficacy. Recommendations for the ways in which school counselors can hone important leadership skills, particularly through professional development (e.g. in-services, distance learning, continuing education courses) are offered. How these efforts might promote student achievement, empower stakeholders, and improve school culture is discussed.

Key words: school counseling, leadership, advocacy, partnership, professional development

School counseling emerged, and continues to evolve, in response to social, educational, political and economic trends (Paisley & Borders, 1995). Although each shift may be viewed as an inevitable reaction to societal demands, nonetheless, each shift has brought about increased ambiguity regarding their purpose within schools. Even during periods in which societal factors have remained relatively constant, the work of school counselors is often characterized by variety and fragmentation (Coll & Freeman, 1997; Lambie & Williamson, 2004; Martin, 2002). Consequently, school counselors have often been marginalized in schools. Further, despite training in child development and multiculturalism, school counselors are often overlooked as leaders or cultural brokers in school communities (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007). The literature on leadership, regardless of tradition, has focused primarily on those in formal leadership positions, such as in the case of schools, the principal (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004). Research on schools has suggested that leadership is not the sole purview of the school principal; other professionals play vital roles in leading instructional innovation (Spillane et al.; Smylie & Denny, 1990; Heller & Firestone, 1995). This article offers valuable information to K-12 counselors, counseling supervisors, counselor educators, principals, teachers, and other school staff regarding the leadership capacity inherent in school counselors by virtue of their training, theoretical orientation, and mission. The authors describe the evolution of school counseling by outlining its developmental history (e.g. vocational guidance, mental health movement, and developmental guidance). A description of each era points to the current direction of school counselors as leaders, and suggests recommendations to school counselors seeking leadership status.

Table 1

Models of School Counseling, Era, Roles, and Training

Major Models of School Counseling	Vocational Guidance	Mental Health Movement in School Counseling	Developmental Guidance	Comprehensive Competency Based School Counseling Guidance Programs
Period	1900-1940's	1950's-1960's	1960's-1980's	1990's-2000's
Role	Match a student's personal characteristics with an occupation <u>Goals include:</u> assist students in finding a career	Provide remedial services. <u>Goals include:</u> help close achievement gaps, especially culturally diverse, low-income, English language learners, and differing ability children	Primary prevention focus. Integrate guidance and counseling program within the larger educational program <u>Goals include:</u> increase student achievement, provide more equitable services to students, broader impact on student development and career decision-making, student satisfaction, & safe, orderly, connected school climate	Integral to students' daily educational environment. <u>Goals Include:</u> partner and leader in student achievement with school stakeholders, providing vocational, remedial, and developmental interventions based on student data
Training	Training in assessment of occupational selection and placement for all students	Training in prevention & intervention skills to close achievement gaps	Training focuses on identifying the developmental needs of students to meet the diverse needs of students	Multicultural training that encourages school counselors to advocate for the academic achievement of all students

Timeline of the School Counseling Movement. The ASCA (2005) National Model incorporates these various roles into its framework and culminates these roles into one of leadership.

School Counseling Models

In this section, a brief overview of the major roles school counselors have exhibited in the past 100 years, and how these roles have addressed underachieving students during each era is provided. Each era has contributed its own characteristics to a position of community leadership that the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) (2005) *National Model* promotes in the 21st century (See Table 1). The vocational era shaped the notion that school counselors assisted students in finding career avenues relevant to their interests and passions. The mental health movement expanded the career focus of the school counselor to responding to the personal/social aspects of students and their families in the form of remedial services. This movement encouraged school counselors to consider the unique developmental circumstances their diverse students face in reaching quality education. Finally, the Comprehensive Competency Based School Counseling Guidance Programs (CCBSCGP) movement focuses more on how school counselors can serve as leaders to meet the academic, vocational, and personal/social needs of students while collaborating with school stakeholders. These eras are discussed below.

Vocational Guidance

Researchers have suggested that the school counseling profession began in the era of vocational guidance, in response to social reform when there was a public outcry against child labor and the industrial boom in the late 1800's (Krumboltz & Kolpin, 2003). Before vocational guidance found its way into schools, the field was dedicated to helping people find occupations that would allow them to become contributing members of society. Frank Parsons, considered the father of vocational guidance, is credited with advocating for trained professionals to perform vocational guidance in public schools during the first decade of the 20th century (Gysbers & Henderson, 2000, p. 4). Later, World Wars I and II compounded the need for widespread vocational assessment (Myrick, 2003). When the U.S. military needed to effectively and quickly determine the skills and competencies of soldiers to create a cohesive and dominant force, school counselors addressed this need using assessment. Assessment took the guesswork out of determining the roles millions of soldiers would play in the wars. Moreover it allowed the military to focus its efforts on how these roles would be carried out. Academic achievement issues in the vocational guidance movement also emphasized character development and problem behavior prevention, elements promoted in most of today's school counseling programs (Schmidt, 1999). Professionally trained guidance personnel were able to reach large numbers of students with vocational guidance but the mental health needs of students were not directly confronted until the middle of the 20th century (Krumboltz & Kolpin).

Mental Health Movement

While the vocational movement focused on the career needs of students, it did not take into account how academic achievement and job choice might be affected by the personal/social needs of students. Carl Rogers' nondirective approach to counseling encouraged many school

counselors to concentrate more on the mental health needs of students (a remedial approach) rather than the earlier direct assessment approaches (Schmidt, 1999). Little attention had been given to diversity issues in the literature prior to the 1950's. In the 1950's mental health workers responded to diverse students who faced rising tensions and difficult circumstances associated with civil rights issues, changes in family structure (e.g., divorce), and increases in crime (Myrick, 2003). With these societal changes and given the increased attention and training on remedial counseling, school counselors began focusing on ways to reach students with individualized problems and concerns (Wrenn, 1962). As such, school counselors were encouraged to: (a) assume leadership roles in schools, (b) provide consultative services for school stakeholders, and (c) offer small group and individual counseling with students. As educational stakeholders began to criticize the remedial approach school counselors were encouraged to play a greater role in curriculum development and mental health service delivery (Dollarhide & Saginak, 2008; Myrick, 2003). Opponents to incorporating mental health in school counseling argued that too few students were reached by remedial services.

The U.S.S. R.'s launching of Sputnik in 1957 and passing the National Defense Education Act of 1958 promoted nationwide academic achievement in mathematics and science. As a result, more school counselors were trained and hired to encourage all students to pursue mathematics and science, once again placing a greater emphasis on assessment and vocational guidance (Baker, 2000). The push for nationwide academic achievement challenged school counselors to design school counseling programs that met the developmental needs of all students that to maximize their academic achievement. This approach to school counseling became known as developmental guidance.

Developmental Guidance

Prior to the 1960's, school counseling was limited to high schools (Myrick, 2003). With the renewal of the National Defense Education Act in the mid-60's, funds were provided to train elementary and middle school counselors (Myrick; Wittmer, 2000). Developmental guidance at all levels began focusing on preventative and proactive approaches to school counseling that could reach all students, rather than focusing on remedial approaches that reached a minimal number of students. School counselors began practicing by the "law of parsimony" (Myrick, 2003, p. 125), a goal for school counseling services to reach as many students as possible.

Furthermore, the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950's and 60's led to desegregation of United States schools. Many thought that school integration would increase the academic achievement of ethnic minority students. However, the abundance of research that has evaluated desegregation's effects has shown that integration has had minimal (if any) effect on promoting academic achievement among ethnic minority students (Armor, 1995; Ascik, 1984; Jencks & Mayer, 1999; St. John, 1975). In addition, by the late 1960's intense evaluation of school counseling programs began to take shape (Gysbers, 2004). The Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975, the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990, and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (and others) have had profound impacts on the school counseling profession. These legislated mandates required school counselors to deliver evidence-based and accountable school counseling services to address closing the achievement gap. Passing these laws placed immense pressure on educators to promote the academic achievement of all students. If schools are unable

to promote achievement, they risk losing their students, their teachers, and their funding. Realizing that such legislation may have similar impacts on the future of the school counseling profession, ASCA developed the *National Standards for Students* (2004) and the *ASCA National Model* (2005) to better meet the needs of all students.

Developmental guidance programs have transformed into Comprehensive Competency Based School Counseling Guidance Programs (CCBSCGP) based on the *National Standards for Students* (2004) and the *ASCA National Model* (2005). CCBSCGP addresses the academic, career, and personal/social needs of students, student standards that should be met by the school counseling program.

Why Focus on Leadership?

Researchers has stated that the role of the 21st century school counselor should be one of leader throughout the school (ASCA, 2005; Stone & Clark, 2001), working to assist in building a climate of diversity appreciation and maintaining strong home-school collaborations (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007; House & Martin, 1998; Martin, 2002). This idea seems especially relevant in light of the changes that have occurred in public education that emphasizes academic achievement (Bemak, 2000) and the need for all students to have access to rigorous academic preparation and support (House & Martin). School counselors are uniquely trained to assume leadership in schools due to their knowledge, awareness, and skills that other school professionals may lack in a number of applied areas. For instance, school counselors are taught to consider how one's ethnic identity impacts development. Holcomb-McCoy (2005) recommends that school counselors develop and implement ethnic exploration groups in which students research their ethnic heritage, dialogue with others about their ethnic background, and learn new information about other cultures and ethnic groups.

In addition to ethnicity awareness, school counselors bring special skills to the effort of educating low-income children (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007). Hence, they may be best suited as the professionals who can influence the beliefs and attitudes of teachers and administrators regarding as they seek to ensure that all students achieve high standards (Stone & Clark, 2001). School counselors exercise leadership through increased collaboration and consultation interventions with those individuals who essential to the health and welfare of students; teachers, administrators, family members, and people in the community (Stone & Clark; Cooper & Sheffield, 1994). Unfortunately, developing rapport with stakeholders may not always be possible, due in large part to time constraints. Indeed, an ongoing concern within the school counseling profession is the discrepancy between the actual practice of school counselors and what is advocated as best practice (Brott & Myers, 1999; Burnham & Jackson, 2000; Scarborough & Culbreth, 2008). Consequently, what schools counselors actually do in schools (e.g. student scheduling, hallway monitoring, administering tests) may prevent them from engaging in other activities (e.g. rapport building, consultation, leadership) that can better address the needs of the students they intend to serve (Scarborough & Culbreth, 2008). It is important to acknowledge that even when time permits school counselors will not always be able to develop rapport with school stakeholders. For example, some school leaders may not want to associate with or acknowledge school counselors as valuable commodities in schools. Therefore, it is important for school counselors to focus on developing relationships with as many stakeholders as possible utilizing their interpersonal skills and training to form bonds within the

school and the community at large that may later lead to leadership opportunities. In addition, school counselors may encounter barriers to assuming a leadership role due to misperceptions or ignorance. For example, school leaders may not be informed of the *ASCA National Model* (2005), which delineates how school counselors can be leaders in their schools. Thus, it is important for school counselors to educate and inform others of their leadership potential.

Amatea and West-Olatunji (2007) assert that school counselors bring special skills to the mission of working with students in high-poverty schools for the following reasons. First, school counselors can help other staff become more aware of their privileged position as middle-class educators and how differences in class privilege affects poor families' involvement in their children's lives. Second, school counselors can utilize their training in alternative-perspective-taking to consult with teachers and offer alternative perspectives on low-income student and family behavior, and help teachers design more effective learning experiences. Third, school counselors understand the potential strengths and resources of the low-income parent, family, and child -- valuable information for identifying feasible solutions. Lastly, school counselors are able to manage group-problem solving efforts which are important for leading collaboration projects between staff and low-income parents throughout the decision making process.

A number of scholars have identified the need for school counselors to lead program design and advocacy (Dollarhide, 2003; Hatch & Bowers, 2002; Herr, 2001), to engage in school reform (Dollarhide; Adelman & Taylor, 2002; Bemak, 2000), and to embrace certain organizational roles in the school (Dollarhide). School counselors are especially well situated to play proactive, catalytic roles in defining the future for programs that augment the education of all students (Adelman & Taylor, 2002). Galassi and Akos (2004) propose a developmental advocate role for the school counselor of the twenty-first century. In developmental advocacy, the school counselor's main duty is to promote the optimal development of all students.

The ASCA Model and Leadership

While aspects of CCBSCGP's have been present within the profession since their roots in vocational guidance, the recent *ASCA National Model* (2005) addresses academic achievement through each developmental phase of the profession. School counselors can help to maximize the educational attainment of all students by providing each student with vocational information and experiences, mental health services, and developmental guidance that takes a proactive approach in helping students set and reach academic goals.

The *ASCA National Model* (2005) sets precedence for school counselors to serve as school community leaders through student advocacy, collaboration, and promoting systemic change that will maximize the academic, career, and personal/social outcomes for all students. Until the first publication of the *ASCA National Model* in 2003, school counselors had not been expected by the profession to serve as school community leaders. Instead, the school counseling role has experienced several shifts since the profession's origins in the late 1800's, including vocational guidance, a mental health movement, developmental guidance, and a transition into what are currently known as CCBSCGP (Dollarhide & Saginak, 2008). However, advocating and collaborating with others on sensitive issues to influence systemic change that affects academic achievement can be difficult for many school counselors to accomplish. Where does

one start? We believe that school counselors can advocate, consult, and collaborate with school stakeholders to effectively serve as leaders within schools.

Taking Steps toward Becoming a Leader

Advocacy: Educating the school community about social context for achievement of some students. Educating stakeholders about the contextual factors that affect student achievement can be a daunting task for school counselors as they may worry about offending stakeholders and jeopardizing previously established rapport. Nice counselor syndrome (NCS; Bemak & Chung, 2008) is a common condition that underlies the resistance demonstrated by some school counselors in making the professional transformations recommended by multicultural school counseling advocates. Individuals exhibiting NCS place excessive value on being viewed as nice people at the expense of promoting educational equity for all students. This is detrimental because ignoring environmental, historical, sociopolitical, socio-cultural, and institutional factors that infringe upon the academic achievement of students of color prevents counselors from fulfilling the advocacy role described by the ASCA (2005) *National Model*. Consequently, counselors with NCS often reinforce the inequities that contribute to the academic achievement gap. To overcome these pitfalls, school counselors should cultivate and maintain constructive relationships with school stakeholders by developing several habits.

First and foremost, school counselors can get to know the most important stakeholders of all: their students. School counselors who know their student population well are better able to advocate for their students' needs and provide students with self-advocacy skills, such as self-determinism, empowerment, and social justice (Astramovich & Harris, 2007). To be effective, school counselors need to be willing to talk about and ask questions that relate to socioeconomic status (SES), racism, disability, bullying, and substance abuse. When addressing these issues, school counselors should put into practice consultation, staff development, family outreach, organizational change, and community organizing interventions from a social justice advocacy perspective to assess students' needs and help them reach their potential (Lewis, Lewis, Daniels, & D'Andrea, 2003). In the same vein, school counselors should feel comfortable to respectfully challenging administrators, teachers, and students so that they may consider how they might unintentionally help perpetuate educational injustices that contribute to the academic achievement gap (Bemak & Chung, 2008). These efforts will likely enhance student and staff awareness and help create expectations for accountability throughout the school environment. School counselors can further address inequalities by identifying and removing "cultural contradictions" that exist in some school settings (Butler, 2003). Cultural contradictions may be found in academic situations in which independent and competitive forms of learning and achievement are emphasized. Such formats may clash with the cooperative and collaborative learning styles preferred by some minority youths, who are more comfortable with approaches that encourage teamwork and cooperation (Butler, 2003).

Advocacy can be extended to the entire school community, including principals, and parents. School counselors are uniquely trained to facilitate introspection; therefore, school counselors can encourage all stakeholders to take part in the school's community praxis. Through in-service trainings and getting to know faculty, school counselors can empower school community members to develop culturally sensitive educational practices that maximize the

academic achievement of all students. Mitcham-Smith (2007) wisely cautions school counselors who value empowerment approaches within schools consider that not all school stakeholders will value maximizing the academic achievement of marginalized populations. Nonetheless, school counselors should do everything they can to empower all stakeholders who are willing to listen and take action, including marginalized populations, to self-advocate for themselves so that their voices can be heard.

Should school counselors take on the empowerment role, they will be more visible to students and other stakeholders. This visibility may expedite the process of developing vital relationships with school stakeholders. To initiate visibility, some school counselors have developed newsletters at the beginning of the year describing to stakeholders who they are, what they do, and how they could maximize student achievement through praxis (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007). In these newsletters, school counselors should clearly describe how they can utilize their training to impact the academic achievement of students, including self-advocacy (and informal) trainings. Research suggests that informal communications such as newsletters can positively affect school climate (Weiss & Edwards, 1992). Informational meetings that educate school stakeholders about the factors affecting academic achievement, including culturally sensitive pedagogy, sends the message to stakeholders that school counselors are invested in promoting self-advocacy in their school counseling programs. At these meetings school counselors can dispel myths people may believe regarding low SES families and cite recent literature that explains best practices for working with diverse groups.

Caution. Developing rapport with all school stakeholders may not always be possible. However, school counselors should take advantage of the support and buy-in obtained from stakeholders they are familiar with to help spread the word about the benefits of their school counseling services. It is important to remember that issues pertaining to marginalized populations can be controversial among educators. Accordingly, school counselors should not expect other stakeholders to automatically buy-in to a school counseling program that advocates for its marginalized students, as Mitcham-Smith (2007) has warned. Instead, school counselors must clarify their role and describe how their program can benefit all students through self and community advocacy. School counselors should proceed with care when leading teachers and other school staff through in-service trainings exploring deeply rooted values that may affect academic achievement. They must be careful not to come across as judging, but instead that they too are learning about the issues students bring to school with them each day. School counselors should be tactful when discussing issues related to academic achievement by first providing praise for what stakeholders have done well. For example, by selecting a particular student that a teacher has made improvements with, school counselors can then transition to the issue(s) of concern. This approach may reduce negativity and embarrassment for the teacher and lead to productive feedback.

Collaboration: Partnering with Principals

Leadership in schools must not be the sole responsibility of principals; it is best if it is distributed among other professionals in schools (Janson, Stone, & Clark, 2009; Spillane et al., 2004). The idea of school counselors and principals partnering is hardly new and can be traced as far back as the early 1990's (Worzbyt & Zook, 1992). Research suggests that many school

counselors already engage in leadership roles because their principals invited them to do so or because they advocated for those types of roles (Clemens, Milsom, & Cashwell, 2009). Yet many principals may have trouble viewing school counselors as leaders because traditionally school counselors have not been expected to be leaders in schools (McMahon, Mason, & Paisely, 2009). This conventional attitude is disadvantageous for school counselors given that principals have considerable influence on shaping the role of school counselors with whom they work (Clemens et al, 2009; Amatea & Clark, 2005; Dollarhide, Smith, & Lemberger, 2007; Ponec & Brock, 2000). Research further indicates that the support of the school principal in the implementation and maintenance of a school counseling program is critical (Lambie & Williamson, 2004; Beale, 1995; Coll & Freeman, 1997; Ribak-Rosenthal, 1994). Niebuhr, Nieubuhr, and Cleveland (1999) found that many tasks that principals sometimes ask school counselors to perform, although related to the operation of schools, take school counselors away from the tasks and roles for which they were trained. In order to move beyond merely citing the lack of leadership observed in schools, school counselors must take an active approach in attaining the leadership status that is well needed and deserved.

Caution. School counselors are likely to face barriers when assuming a leadership role. Mason and McMahon (2009) found that, in general, older school counselors with more experience, and longer terms in their schools, self-report higher on leadership practices than do their younger, less experienced peers. This may occur because the development of leadership skills is a continuous and evolving process (Janson, et al., 2009; Stone & Dahir, 2006). This finding suggests that principals may be more receptive to partnering with and promoting older school counselors into leadership roles. This phenomenon may exist since older employees often appear more experienced and adept even if they are not. Many economists, for example, expect older workers to be more productive than their younger counterparts (McEvoy & Cascio, 1989). Interestingly, there have been mixed results in research regarding the relationship of years of experience as a school counselor and performance as a school counselor. While a numbers of studies reveal that years of experience has a positive impact on practice (Brott & Myers, 1999; Sink & Yillik-Downer, 2001), others suggests that years of experience was not a significant variable related to actual activities performed by school counselors (Carter, 1993, Mustaine, et al. 1996; and Scarborough & Culbreth, 2008). Not surprisingly, in addition to age, true experience may be another factor that influences the degree to which principals are willing to partner with school counselors in leadership tasks as co-equals. Thus, if one can provide evidence that he or she has experience serving in a leadership capacity the principal may be more inclined to partner with him or her regardless of age. Therefore, younger school counselors should not be deterred from seeking partnership and leadership with principals. However, they should be aware of the challenges and reframe the age factor in a positive way. For example, younger school counselors should acknowledge that they are indeed newer to the profession, but on the other hand, possess advantages in other areas. A younger school counselor, for instance, could express the upsides of being a recent graduate such as greater awareness of newer models taught in training programs and perhaps greater skill with integrating technology into counseling and instruction. This is not to say that all older school counselors have deficits in these areas; however, a school counselor who has more recent involvement with a university may have the upper hand in these areas due to increased access and exposure that training programs may offer.

One notable flaw and impediment to building strong professional relationships with principals is the popular practice of principals completing job performance evaluations on school counselors who work in their buildings. This practice is problematic because it reinforces the power dynamic that elevates principals and minimizes school counselors. When school counselors are minimized it is not possible for them to also be viewed as legitimate leaders. Second, when principals are required to evaluate school counselors, this places pressure on school counselors to conform to the ideas of the principal, even when the ideas are not optimal for students, teachers, or families. In other words, school counselors might be less willing to practice as experts when their expert opinions could be devalued and poorly rated on evaluation forms. One way to resolve this predicament is to adopt an evaluation model frequently applied in the field of school psychology in which the director of psychological services, not the principal, completes a mid and end-of-the-year evaluation on school counselors with less than three years of experience in the district. The evaluation usually entails a review of the school counselor's service log, an observation of the school counselor during a formal school team meeting, and a private meeting with the school counselor to discuss any issues. Following the third year, only a review of the service log and an end-of-the-year meeting is mandatory. This approach is recommended because it may help prevent school counselors from being ineffective when assisting students and families in situations that are divisive. For example, school counselors evaluated by the principal may choose to do things the principal's way even if the choice conflicts with the mission of school counseling. Placing school counselors in this catch-22 is simply unfair. It is naïve to believe that legitimate partnerships between school counselors and principals can occur when one professional has the power to determine the employment status of the other. In a true partnership, one person should not have the power to influence the other's employment status through this one-sided form of evaluation. Because this action is common practice, school counselors must be prepared to respond to disagreements that may emerge. If a school counselor feels that a principal will submit a poor annual evaluation of their work based on unfair judgment, the school counselor must provide evidence stating the contraire in order to remain in good standing in the school district where he or she works. School counselors have the right to attach a rebuttal and supporting documents to any evaluation that a principal has written that they believe is inaccurate or biased. School counselors can significantly decrease the likelihood of experiencing this type of problem by maintaining copious notes and data on the students they work with. This idea is consistent with Brigman & Campbell's (2003) recommendation that school counselors always measure and report the impact of their services. As Whiston (2002) warned, school counselors who fail to provide evidence that the work they do helps students succeed are at risk for losing support. This evidence can protect school counselors against partial and potentially damaging opinions recorded in job evaluations that are completed by the principal.

How to Make Leadership a Reality

According to Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2004), leadership involves mobilizing school personnel and clients to notice, face, and take on the tasks of changing instruction as well as harnessing and mobilizing the resources needed to support the transformation of teaching and learning. Enhancement and acceleration of learning will occur when school counselors' leadership capacity is legitimized through natural elevation of their professional role, rather

than artificial and inconsequential campaigns that are forcibly mandated and are likely to incite resistance. Schools that are interested in helping school counselors elevate into leadership positions should be aware that leadership practice is constituted in the interactions of school leaders, followers, and the situation (Spillane et al, 2004). Thus, it is more likely that followers (e.g. teachers, parents, students) will acclimatize to being led by school counselors when they observe other leaders (e.g. principals, vice principals) interact with school counselors in ways that endorse and affirm school counselors' leadership position.

To implant, refine, and maintain leadership skills, school counselors should take part in activities such as professional conferences, on site in-service training, collaborative projects with counseling education faculty as interns or investigative researchers, and continuing education courses and seminars. Advancements in the quality, availability, and accessibility of distance learning approaches make it possible for individuals to decide whether they prefer face-to-face or online training. Research indicates that online environments support learning outcomes that are generally equivalent to those resulting from traditional, face-to-face instruction (Swan, 2003).

Counselor education faculty can also offer professional development opportunities by creating leadership academies. Leadership academies provide a structured opportunity for school counselors to receive year-round training that can be offered during evening or weekend seminars. Summer institutes conducted at the local, regional, or national level may augment specific areas of professionalism. The national level may be the most dynamic because of the opportunities that will be provided for optimal networking with those across the country. Online training has received increased utilization and acceptance and can be provided through systems such as Blackboard and Elluminate. Other support may be provided through podcasts, website resources, and electronic newsletters and listservs.

Regardless of the type of format in which training is offered, it is important that leadership preparation programs are not too theoretical or completely unrelated to the daily demands on contemporary schools counselors that these efforts become futile. This has been one significant criticism of leadership preparation programs for principals (see Hale & Moorman, 2003). To obviate this undesired outcome, it is important that students have quality mentored opportunities to develop practical understanding or real-world job competence. It also is important for professional development to be attuned to educational policy and broader changes that are occurring in the United States so that school counselors are well prepared to respond effectively. For example, the U.S. is experiencing tremendous demographic shifts due to record-high immigration. These demographic shifts are occurring alongside implementation of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, the landmark 2002 federal law that holds schools accountable for the academic performance of limited English speaking children and other groups that include children of immigrants (Capps, Fix, et al, 2005). Critical provisions affecting immigrant and limited English proficient (LEP) students are set out in Title I of NCLB. Title I requires schools to improve the performance of LEP students on assessments of mathematics and reading beginning in 3rd grade (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Schools that do not sufficiently improve the performance of at-risk students could face consequences, including school restructuring, school closure, and allowing parents to enroll their children in another school (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). School counselors have essential roles in working with immigrant students and their families. School-family-community partnerships have been effective in helping immigrant students adjust to the school system, cope with acculturative

stress, and thrive academically (Mitchell & Bryan, 2007). School counselors can lead the way by teaming with other school personnel, families, and immigrant communities to implement culturally appropriate school-family-community partnership programs (Mitchell & Bryan).

Conclusion

In sum, the authors have outlined the developmental history of school counseling programs, highlighted specific areas where school counselors can make meaningful contributions as leaders, and offer practical insight explaining the barriers one might encounter on the road to obtaining leadership status. While this article does not claim to be exhaustive, it does provide valuable information and recommendations to improve the effectiveness of school counselors as leaders and advocates. Specifically, school counselor are reminded of their leadership capacity, offered strategies to overcome barriers to leadership, and given examples of how to make leadership a reality while relating efforts to the ASCA (2005) National Model. For the purposes of this article, leadership status is best viewed as an extension of the final school counseling movement as leadership places emphasis on control, autonomy, partnership, and recognition of school counselors' expertise while maintaining existing objectives described in the latest movement. It seems reasonable to believe that leadership status should make it less difficult for school counselors to deliver quality services that are already established and described in previous work (ASCA, 2005; National Standards for Students, 2004). When school counselors are recognized as leaders and experts of interpreting the social context of achievement to colleagues, it becomes much easier for them to advocate for marginalized students, voice their professional opinion in formal meetings, and propose and implement germane interventions for students in need. When appropriate attention is paid to social context, this will spawn other positive changes such as the empowerment of stakeholders (e.g. families, community members, students).

Second, when school counselors are provided the autonomy to engage in activities that they have been well trained to perform, they will enhance the educational experience of all students. By partnering with principals, school counselors can seize the voice and agency required to impact more students with greater significance. Accordingly, development of a professional identity contributes to defining the role of school counselors that in turn shapes the counseling programs and services provided to students (Brott & Myers, 1999). Finally, engagement in high quality professional development opportunities will help school counselors hone their leadership skills. Professional conferences, on site in-services, continuing education courses, and distance learning opportunities are just a few options available for receiving leadership training. Failure to promote school counselors into leadership will only perpetuate the achievement disparities that exist between at-risk students and their more advantaged peers. Thus, the time for change is now.

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