Turning Barriers into Opportunities

By Shari Sevier and Janice Speck

Are you frustrated by being assigned duties and responsibilities that become barriers to delivering your program? With advocacy and collaboration, these obstacles can often be turned into opportunities that enhance our programs.

Some schools have traditionally established a pattern of using school counselors to complete tasks outside their area of expertise or code of ethics, such as: supervisor, disciplinarian, clerical/IT administrative assistant, testing/assessment coordinator, special education/504 coordinator/case manager, and therapist. All these tasks must be covered for the school to run smoothly. So how can we transform these barriers into opportunities?

Supervision is necessary in all schools so that students are safe. Here are some suggestions:

- When covering a classroom, use the time to deliver the school counseling curriculum.
- If supervising just a few students, turn it into a focus group to gather information about students' needs or evaluation of the program, giving students a voice.
- If assigned to a hallway, lunchroom, recess or morning entryway duty, consider this your "satellite office," providing an opportunity to answer questions and do check-ins to eliminate the need for students to miss class time. These are also great times to get to know students, greet them, and observe social behaviors.

Being involved in discipline situations puts school counselors in an unethical, dual-relationship situation. This might have legal implications because the counselor is not a certified administrator and can affect professional relationships with faculty and staff. Possible solutions for discipline situations include:

- With your administrator, determine a set of expectations that allows you to work with students on problem solving, conflict resolution, and better decision making.

- Take notes and gather background information on a situation so the administrator knows what the it entails and can deal with it when they return.
- Clarify expectations ahead of time regarding discipline hearings. School counselors are the students' advocate – you can easily talk with the student about making good choices and better problem solving, but it is not your place to determine punitive consequences. Plus, doing so is detrimental to your relationship with students.

For staff or parent issues, school counselors could implement problem-solving strategies such as:

- Listening to show empathy and understand the issue from all perspectives, including how it is impacting the person raising the issue.
- Asking probing/open-ended questions, including what their idea of a good resolution might be.
- Negotiating a solution or compromise.
- Documenting the meeting by taking copious notes and letting the person know these will be shared with the administrator.
- Showing gratitude and thanking them for their collaboration.

School counselors may find themselves being asked to fill in for clerical staff in writing passes, registering new students, or entering data. This assistance might be necessary in the case of an emergency, but it should not be the standard practice. Suggestions include:

- Share the pass-writing duty amongst everyone in the office and create preprinted passes.
- For registering new students, create packets that parents can complete before meeting with the school counselor.
- Advocate for one consistent person (not the school counselor) to enter all data into the student information system. Track your time on task data to show the negative effect this responsibility will have on fully implementing the school counseling program.

Test coordination can take away the services of a school counselor from students, staff and parents from March/April to May/June, leaving no one to serve social/emotional or postsecondary planning needs at the end of the school year. If you are assigned this responsibility it is time to communicate, compromise, and advocate in the following ways:

- Request clerical assistance for counting and sorting test booklets, answer sheets, pencils/erasers.
- Request IT help to set up electronic testing materials.
- Ask administrators to make sure that the faculty knows that the school counselor has the administrator's support and may delegate responsibilities.
- Request help from department leads or grade-level teachers to assist with test facilitation of their subject areas.
- Suggest hiring of retired teachers/counselors to take over make-up exams.
- Using time on task data, present the issue to your school board to provide a part-time test coordinator (possibly a retired counselor or teacher).

School counselors are often asked to be the 504 coordinators. However, a team approach may be the best way to address this process. By collaborating as a 504 team, each member's work can be done more efficiently, effectively and fairly. For example, nurses coordinate medical 504s; administrators coordinate behavioral 504s; school counselors coordinate social/emotional 504s; and a teacher representative can coordinate academic 504s. Administrator involvement is critical because only they can assign school/district funds, facilities and/or personnel for accommodations.

Although school counselors are the mental health professionals in a school setting, they are not available to provide long term therapy. Ideas in this area include:

- If school counselors are included for counseling minutes in an IEP, suggest the following language: "The student may seek the assistance of the school counselor on an as-needed basis."
- When meeting with parents of students who may need Tier 3 services, provide a list of therapists and/or community resources for them to contact that clearly states that the district does not endorse any specific therapist.

With clear communication, compromise and strong advocacy, school counselors can turn projected barriers into important opportunities. This creates a win for administrators, for counselors and, most important, for the students.

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Program Growth Through Grant Writing

By Cass Poncelow

Now, perhaps more than ever, with declining budgets and lack of state funding, school counselors may find themselves in the lurch with program development filed under the category "There's just no money." It is discouraging to have a great idea to create an opportunity for students or your school and not be able to actualize it due to a lack of funding. Grant writing is a unique opportunity for school counselors to advocate for their students and for our profession.

Many school counselors might be intimidated by the process of grant writing, but it uniquely aligns with the ASCA National Model and offers an opportunity use data to identify needs and create SMART goals that help meet those needs. For example, our ninth-grade needs assessment showed that many students were struggling with the transition to high school and felt unprepared to identify their strengths and interests and choose relevant courses or a pathway. In partnership with our feeder middle schools, we developed a SMART goal that focused on making sure eighth graders had at least three "transition experiences" prior to coming to

high school. We applied for a grant to fund additional counselors who could help us facilitate these experiences. This funded work led to the development of a strength-finding tool, and provided funds for transportation for high school visits and opportunities for parent engagement. Researchers have highlighted the importance of this transition and by using several studies combined with our data, we were able to make a strong case for additional support for transitioning ninth graders. In another effort, a Needs Gap Assessment helped us recognize that female students and students of color were not enrolling in our Engineering and Design Pathway. Using this assessment, we designed outreach and events for these specific populations and were able to designate grant funding to make sure that the STEM fields were accessible to all students.

Grant writing offers unique and vital opportunities for school counselors to collaborate with a variety of stakeholders. Many grants are partnerships between different departments in a building, or between different schools and often include community partners. Prior to becoming a school counselor, I worked in the media center of a high school. I partnered with the school counselors to do some bibliocounseling work, which led to a grant creating book sets and resource guides focused on teen issues such as eating disorders, mental health and substance abuse. This unique partnership allowed us to use books to invite discussion in small groups with students who might not normally be willing to discuss these topics, facilitated by me and a school counselor.

Grant funders are eager to support timely topics and many want to be part of cutting-edge work in the field of education. Topics such as social/emotional learning, bullying prevention, suicide prevention and restorative practices can be priorities for funders. Consider the current pandemic and racial justice issues in our country: numerous grants have already emerged looking for applicants with ideas to address these. Grants come from many different sources including federal and state grants. These are typically more competitive and might include potential funding for positions for school counselors. Many of these grants are cyclical, meaning that funding might be available for three to four years. Grants also come from corporations or businesses. For example, WalMart offers grant funding regularly and can be a great source for small projects costing several hundred dollars. If you have local corporations and businesses in your community, check and see if they fund schools. Finally, grants are available from private, philanthropic or community foundations. Foundations are required to give a certain percentage of their income away yearly. These organizations are often a great source of funding because they have local connections with schools and are invested in the community and its youth. To find these sources, get on mailing lists from foundations or your state's Department of Education to make sure you are seeing when new grant funding might be released. If you know of others who have received grants, be sure to ask them about their funder and then do regular "site checks" for potential funding. As you seek out funding sources, remember that the more local it is, the better, especially as state and federal funding are being cut. Local donors are eager to see their communities thrive and are often the best source for money.

Once you have identified a potential grant, it is important to go back to your needs assessment and data collection. Be sure you have the data that can support your ask and clarity around what it is that you are asking for. Well-written grant proposals present a need, but also clearly articulate how that need will be met with the work you will be doing. As you convey your "why," include any unique factors that are in play or specific challenges for your school site. Also essential is having the right people on board – make sure your principal is aware of your application and consider whether your application requires partnership with other district departments.

Most grants require a few common elements, such as your need and project description, and goals and objectives. These are easily likened to the ASCA Mindsets and Behaviors and critical in terms of being clear and attainable. Most grants will also ask for a budget. As with all applications, be sure to have someone look over your budget and proofread your application. Deadlines are non-negotiables in the grant world and most grant applications are online, so it is important to allow yourself time to deal with any potential technical

difficulties. Grants can be a significant way to impact your program and create opportunities for your students. The time required for writing them is miniscule compared to the impact additional funding can make.

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Tech Tools to Support Your Data-Informed Decisions

By Nicohl Shelton Webb

Throughout our careers, school counselors champion students and are caring, knowledgeable leaders. While aligning our programs to the ASCA National Model, using data is crucial to narrowing the program's focus and direction based on student needs. Understanding and using data are also essential to ensuring that every student receives the benefits of the school counseling program. One way to manage this data is by using specific technology tools to support data-informed decisions. This article shares highlights of these free (yes, FREE) tools.

Quizizz vs. Kahoot

Quizizz and Kahoot are both game-based learning platforms from which counselors can get real-time, formative assessment data as students answer the questions. You can either choose from a bank of questions or create your own. If you decide to use a previously created game from either platform, you can modify the questions. Quizizz is often used as an alternative to Kahoot because you can play "live" or assign the quiz for homework. The live feature is great when you are presenting in front of students and the "assign for homework" feature is helpful when you need to get data from students who are not with you or who need time to answer at their own pace. One difference between Kahoot and Quizizz is what is shown on the student screen. Kahoot does not show any answers, just a symbol, and students must look at your projected screen for the answers to choose from. Quizizz shows both the questions and answers on the student screen. Both tools can be used for pre and post tests for classroom lessons, groups and much more. The features in Quizizz and

Kahoot also allow you to view reports from your questions and could be used to assess the effectiveness of the school counseling program. See www.quizizz.com and www.kahoot.com.

Plickers

This tech tool may seem like magic when you see it work in person, but it is a simple tool that allows you to collect real-time formative assessment data without the need for a student device. To get started, you need an account from www.plickers.com and the Plickers App from Google Play or the Apple Store. Plickers can be a little cumbersome to set up initially, but once it is set up, it is very easy to use. It does not have a question bank, as Quizizz and Kahoot do, so you have to create all of the questions yourself and load your students into classes. If you have a learning management system (LMS), such as PowerSchool or Infinite Campus, you can easily export a class into Plickers. Once exported, you assign students a card. You display the question on a whiteboard from the Plickers account, and to answer, the students rotate their cards so that their answer choice (A, B, C or D) is at the top. You then open your mobile device and scan the answers using the Plickers app. You can see the answers on your screen and because you assigned the cards, you can also see who answered which question and what they answered. When using Plickers for pre/post tests, you can click on the reports tab to get a report of the student answers. You can also drill down into these reports to get to the specific question data. Plickers is beta testing an e-learning tool that would allow you to use their site for virtual learning. It seems like a little bit of magic! View the video https://bit.ly/plickersvideo to see this tool in action.

Nearpod

I love to tell people that Nearpod is definitely not your grandmother's PowerPoint. Nearpod is an interactive presentation tool that contains quizzes, polls, videos, images, drawing boards, web content and so much more. Nearpod is another free tool that allows you to create your own presentations or search within the Nearpod library that offers more than 7,000 K-12 standards-aligned lessons. Creating your own lessons lets you put any of the content mentioned above within your presentation. If you select a presentation from the Nearpod library, you can modify it and share it with your students. Nearpod presentations can be given live or be student paced. I found the student-paced option great during virtual learning. Once you create a lesson or modify an existing presentation, you can share it with your students by having them log in to www.nearpod.com and giving them a unique code. You can also add your presentation to Google Classroom, send it through Remind, send a link or email it to your desired audience. Reports are also available to help you gauge understanding of concepts.

Flipgrid

Flipgrid (www.flipgrid.com) allows you to create grids to facilitate video discussions among students. I have often used Flipgrid after a lesson for students to feel amplified in giving their voice about a particular subject. Once you set up your account, you can create a grid with specific topics. The beauty of Flipgrid is that students don't have to create an account to use the platform. Students are given the grid link by URL or by a QR code and then can add their own video. You set the video length but the options are anywhere from 15 seconds to 10 minutes. During virtual learning this past spring, I used Flipgrid for virtual career day – my career day speakers were able to upload videos about their careers and I could show those to my students.

The tools mentioned above are by no means a comprehensive list of all of the technology tools that can help you make data-informed decisions. You can view a copy of my 2019 ASCA presentation on this topic (www.bit.ly/webbasca19) for more information.

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Grow Your Program With Diplomatic Advocacy

By Wendy Rock, Ph.D., and Edward Reed

"Diplomacy is the art of letting someone else have your way." - David Frost

The ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors call on school counselors to be advocates. As leaders, school counselors advocate for all students to have access to a free and appropriate education that supports optimal learning, promotes equity for all students from diverse populations, provides a safe learning environment and secures opportunities for students from all backgrounds. School counselors are responsible for safeguarding the confidentiality and security of student information to prevent students from harm. For example, when a student confides in the counselor as they navigate questions around their sexuality, they must be able to trust that their information remains private. School counselor advocacy in college and career awareness supports students' access to information that helps them to choose from myriad postsecondary options. School counselors also advocate for students to receive appropriate accommodations for their learning and technological needs. According to the ASCA Ethical Standards, "School counselors advocate to close the information, opportunity, intervention and attainment gaps for all students."

Our ethical standards also challenge us to advocate for the profession. School counselors are called on to advocate for a school counseling program free of non-counseling duties, and for qualified and trained professionals to serve in school counseling positions. Therefore, school counselors must understand that when advocating for their role, they are simultaneously advocating for students who benefit from the services of a comprehensive school counseling program. School counselor advocacy is not only emphasized in the ethical standards, but also identified in the ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards and Competencies and seamlessly woven into the ASCA National Model.

Advocacy work requires school counselors to take risks and can be uncomfortable. Concerns about putting one's career in jeopardy or getting a reputation as an agitator, or a simple desire to avoid conflict may make school counselors hesitate to use their advocacy skills. Practicing diplomacy when you advocate can help you take the necessary risks while reducing negative consequences.

Diplomatic advocacy should always be student centered and altruistic. Our counseling skills serve us well in helping us to be diplomatic advocates. These critical skills include

- communication (listening and empathy)
- collaboration (open-mindedness, considering alternative perspectives, relationship-building)
- problem assessment (choosing your battles)
- problem solving
- organization (planning, information gathering, data collection and analysis, presentation, action, follow-up)

The combination of these skills learned in the counseling graduate program equips us to listen, learn, share our ideas and assert our concerns without damaging the relationship.

Furthermore, the skills of tact and diplomacy emanate from a sensitivity to the opinions, beliefs, ideas and feelings of those whom we are addressing. It is critical to listen to other perspectives, pay attention to non-verbal communication (including body language and tone of voice) and seek to understand another's position. Hold off on expressing your views until you are sure you understand their perspective. Ultimately, a diplomatic approach can build relationships and develop trust and mutual respect, which in turn leads to more successful outcomes.

School counselors are encouraged to use data to identify opportunity gaps, inform interventions and evaluate their school counseling program. Although utilizing data in advocacy work is necessary, successful advocacy appeals to both the head and the heart. Data can help demonstrate the magnitude of a problem, but including a personal story gives it a human face. By skillfully using storytelling, we help our audience connect with the situation, increase empathy, identify opportunities and nudge them toward action.

When conflicts arise in advocacy work, school counselors use their conflict resolution and mediation skills to work toward a positive outcome. Remaining objective, focusing on the facts and staying professional are essential. When our advocacy efforts produce conflict – and we can't shift the other person's view – we seek to reach a compromise and may have to make a sacrifice that will lead to mutual gains. One strategy to try: rather than asserting your idea directly, turn it into a question for the other person to consider. This strategy can allow for more exploration of options and make room for a solution that may benefit both parties. For example, rather than asserting that being the test coordinator is time-consuming and taking you away from implementing a comprehensive school counseling program, you might explore with your administrator ideas on how you can help students improve test scores. As you brainstorm ideas around data disaggregation and analysis, student engagement, interventions for test-taking strategies, test anxiety reduction or other academic interventions, it may become evident that you are more valuable to the school's mission and goals when students receive these services through the school counseling program.

Successful diplomatic advocacy must include self-care. Not every position we take will receive support, and not every fight will be won. At times, our advocacy work will land on deaf ears or will not be accepted, which can be challenging and frustrating but it should never prevent us from continuing to be strong advocates. We understand that focusing on self-care, forgiving ourselves and others, and using healthy coping strategies empowers us to be resilient for future advocacy opportunities.

Our profession requires us to be advocates to change conditions that lead to problems and inequities for our students, including access to a comprehensive school counseling program for all students. We are skilled and positioned to engage in advocacy when we identify compelling reasons and viable solutions. Successful advocates employ the skills of diplomacy, tact and professionalism.

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You're the School Counselor, Right? Boosting Your Impact

By Gretchen Rhodes

I worked in a high school of 560 students where I was the only school counselor. I introduced myself at the opening assembly as the school counselor. I stood in the hallway outside my counseling office during every passing period. I changed what felt like 734 schedules for 560 students. I dispensed advice and support along with tissue, hair ties, deodorant, lotion and feminine hygiene products. I met with parents, led professional development and organized school-wide events.

Still, about once a week I would get a student or parent (sometimes even a teacher!) who would ask me, "You're the counselor, right?"

And I wanted to scream.

How could they not know? Of course I'm the school counselor!

But I did as most of us do – we work in the background. We are the magic that makes it seem like all the work is done seamlessly. Well, I was ready to change that and so I began to think about how to make myself more visible.

Step 1: Creating a Brand

I worked in a school that loved acronyms so I began to think about an acronym that would encompass my work. What did I do? Who did I serve? And then I turned to our guiding organization, ASCA. We serve in three domains, **A**cademics, **C**ollege/Career, and Social/**E**motional, and it hit me: ACE. I was the students' ACE. I created a logo and plugged that logo in everywhere – every presentation I did, every handout I created, everywhere. I had my headshot taken at the ASCA conference and plugged my picture and my logo everywhere.
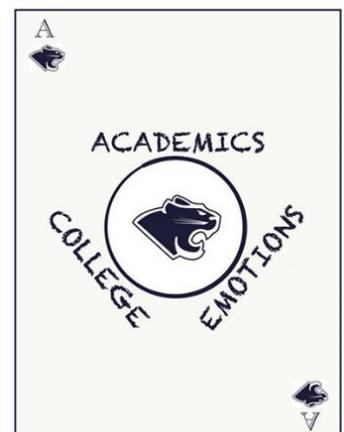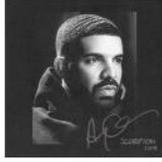
Step 2: Setting Up QR Codes

I created handouts but handouts get lost and thrown away. I had been to an ASCA presentation and they used QR codes. I loved it! So I created a QR code (https://www.qr-code-generator.com) and put it on everything I did. The QR code typically led back to an informational sheet about me with my contact information and what services I provided.

When they came to see me, students scanned a QR code that led to a Google form asking them to identify the ACE domain in which they needed service. I could later use this sign-in information as data to share with my administration.

Step 3: Publicizing My Work

I led professional development at my school. I presented at regional/state/national conferences. In the weekly newsletter from my principal, I created a counseling corner and provided ACE updates with lessons I was teaching or data from what I had taught, upcoming events, how many students I had seen, etc.

Step 4: Being Accessible and Available

My visibility had increased but as is typical with students, they would stop by my office once and then say that they can never find me. How to increase accessibility? Enter Calendly (https://calendly.com/). Calendly allows you to create appointment times for students. You can then share that link and students can schedule an appointment with you. Calendly populates your calendar and sends the student a reminder. I created a QR code for students to scan that would take them to my Calendly appointment page.

Step 5: Curriculum Planning

I created a calendar of my lessons for the year and shared it with the staff at the opening assembly. I rotated between core subjects and grade levels. I was in classrooms every week but each teacher only saw me two or three times over the year, minimizing the interruption of classroom time.

Step 6: Data, Data, Data

Through the use of google sheets, forms, QR codes and the time management tool SCUTA (www.myscuta.com), I had data at the ready if anyone asked – and even if they didn't ask. The more I shared my work, data and results, the more the mystery surrounding my role in helping to improve student learning outcomes was clarified and the less I was asked, "You're the counselor, right?" Now, I had kids and staff high-fiving me in the hallway and yelling out, "Hey, ACE!"

Taking these steps – while you're providing comprehensive school counseling services, changing schedules, teaching curriculum, leading activities, and dispensing tissues and deodorant – will increase your visibility amongst the stakeholders in your building. Build your brand, embrace technology to reach more students, and share your data and how your work impacts student learning outcomes.

You are the school counselor, right? Make sure to share the powerful impact you have in your building and for your students.

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