

MARCH 2021: PARTNERSHIPS AND PARENTS

Maximizing Your Impact: Building School–Family–Community Partnerships

By Julia Bryan, Ph.D., and Lynette M. Henry, Ph.D.



How can you maximize your impact to reach the needs of the majority, if not all, of your students? So many children have critical needs such as poverty, food insecurity, trauma, bullying and racism, and face academic, college and career and mental health challenges. One solution that school counselors often overlook to meet the needs for greater resources in their school is school–family–community partnerships.

A partnership team of diverse stakeholders from the school, family and community can work with school counselors to provide programs, services, activities, resources and other supports that counselors and schools cannot provide alone. Partnerships might include student volunteers and interns from colleges, mentors and tutors, community and faith-based volunteers, and programs and services such as mental health counseling, counseling groups and restorative circles, school-based mentoring programs, and many other resources for students and families.

Where do you begin building a partnership? How do you get partners and bring them together? How you know what types of partnership programs to build? School counselors can follow a seven-step partnership model to help provide programs that focus on protective factors for low-income children, children of color, children with disabilities, English language learners and other children who need extra support (see further reading list at the end of this article).

Here are the seven steps we use to build these partnerships.

Process Stage	Guiding Question	Main Tasks
1. Preparing to Partner	<i>Where do I begin?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Become familiar with school's cultural groups ✓ Challenge beliefs and stereotypes about diverse families and students ✓ Align partnership vision with school's vision ✓ Examine inequities in student outcomes ✓ Get principal and teacher buy-in using rationale based on research about partnership benefits and school data on student outcomes
2. Assessing Needs and Strengths	<i>How do I identify the goals of the partnerships?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Conduct needs and strengths assessment (interviews, surveys, focus groups) ✓ Meet cultural brokers/persons of influence ✓ Identify existing partnerships ✓ Identify potential partners in school and community ✓ Create community assets map (people, services, resources, organizations, spaces)
3. Coming Together	<i>How do I bring partners together?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Create a Partnership Leadership Team ✓ Outreach and invitations to potential partners, cultural brokers and persons of influence ✓ Share data and identified needs and strengths to get partners' buy-in ✓ Solicit feedback from PLT ✓ Discuss partner commitments & contributions ✓ Determine roles of each partner on PLT
4. Creating Shared Vision and Plan	<i>How do I get all partners on board and on the same page?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Create consensus and shared partnership plan ✓ Build on existing partnerships or start new partnership) ✓ Brainstorm non-traditional ways to partner with diverse families ✓ Create goals & outcomes ✓ Develop logic model to help with planning (inputs, outputs, short-term, intermediate, & long-term goals) ✓ Create timeline ✓ Determine how will evaluate each partnership ✓ Identify instruments, surveys for measuring outcomes ✓ Share plan with stakeholders (school staff, families, community members)
5. Taking Action	<i>What will we do and how?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Delegate leadership & responsibilities for each event ✓ Delegate based on each team member's strengths (skills, resources) ✓ Start small ✓ Plan for barriers & challenges, implement anyway ✓ Implement activities according to timeline
6. Evaluating and Celebrating Progress	<i>How will I measure our success?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Conduct evaluation (before & after events, at identified points in school year) ✓ Analyze outcome data & create user-friendly presentation of data ✓ Share outcomes & accomplishments with all stakeholders (administration, teachers, other staff, students, families, & community) ✓ Celebrate all partners and partnership accomplishments
7. Maintaining Momentum	<i>How will I sustain this partnership?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Discuss evaluation results ✓ Improve & make revisions to the plan ✓ Share new plan ✓ Contact partners prior to & early in the school year (retreat). ✓ Consider extensions of existing partnerships ✓ Identify possible new PLT members & partners ✓ Repeat steps in partnership building process

School-Family-Community Partnerships Process Model Note. Adapted from Bryan & Henry, 2012.

Preparing to Partner: Where do I begin?

Begin with yourself. Start small. You cannot help everyone immediately. Ask yourself which students need the most support. Examine the data, disaggregating it by such factors as race, gender, disability and income to determine where there are disparities and inequities. Is it low-income fourth-graders who are struggling with reading? Is it first-generation college students for whom you want to increase access to college? The data will help you get buy-in from administrators and teachers. Your research on partnerships can help you build your rationale for the partnership program. Be sure to align your vision for this program with the school improvement goals to help get principal support. It's also important to get to know the families of your students, especially the students experiencing inequities and disparities.

Assessing Needs and Strengths: How do I identify the goals of the partnership?

Next, talk to and survey parents and family members, students and teachers and ask them about the needs of and barriers for students for whom you will create programs. Also ask them about the strengths of the school, families, and community.

- Where do students go for help in the schools?
- Where and who are the sources of support?
- Who within the school has high expectations for students?

Knowing the needs will help you and the partners identify goals for the partnership program, and knowing the strengths will help you locate resources, supports and people who may be valuable in forming your partnership. Ask who the cultural brokers in the community are who can help you gain families' trust.

Coming Together: How do I bring partners together?

Your conversations during the strengths assessment will help you to identify teachers, family members, volunteers and organizations in the community who would be potential partners. Again, start small. Bring the potential partners together and share the data and needs of the students you want to help. Make sure you include family and community members representative of these students. Also make sure you include students and families of color – don't bring together only a group of middle class and affluent parents when you want to help students from a low-income community. Form a partnership leadership team (PLT) of school, family, and community volunteers who commit to helping to create the program or project. Family members from the students' community are assets and experts who can really help the team understand the issues and create solutions that work for their children and community. Family members should be treated as mutual and equal partners.

Creating a Shared Vision and Plan: How do we get everyone on board and on the same page?

Once you have identified partners and formed a PLT, you all can now work together to develop a plan for the partnership. Discuss the best ways to support the students and meet their needs – do not assume you know what's best. For example, if you are creating a program for students of color, check the research to see what works best for students from the racial/ethnic groups you want to support. And listen to their parents and people from their community. Discuss who are the best people to help you all implement the partnerships. Create goals for the partnership program (e.g., mentoring program), where you will find other volunteers/partners (e.g., mentors), your plan to implement the program, your timeline, and how you will evaluate the partnership program. Remember, it is very important to explore how to build antiracist and equity-focused partnerships, which would be more successful in helping students of color and low-income students.

Taking Action: What will we do and how?

This is time to get the program or event implemented. Delegate, delegate, delegate. School counselors cannot do everything and should make sure the PLT and other volunteers are actively involved in implementing the program. Team members and volunteers bring many skills to the table. Accept that some barriers and challenges will always crop up. For example, only a few parents may show up to a parent support group or education workshop. That's OK – those parents can become partners who can help you reach other parents! Do not let barriers or challenges stop you from implementing your program.

Evaluating and Celebrating Progress: How will we measure success?

Evaluate, evaluate, evaluate! The PLT should create an evaluation program from the start. A group of partners including parents, community members and students can work with the school counselor and educators to evaluate the program. Evaluation can help you to understand the outcomes, satisfactions, experiences and recommendations for improvement of programs. Share the results and accomplishments with all stakeholders. Celebrate! Have celebrations to honor the teachers and other educators, family and community members, and partners.

Maintaining Momentum: How do we sustain the partnership?

Celebrations and sharing evaluation results help partners have a sense of shared ownership in keeping the partnership going. Consistently reaching out to family and community members, inviting them to events to learn about students' needs and the partnership, will help in recruiting new partners. On a daily basis, whether at the grocery store or church or a community event, school counselors and other PLT members should be sharing about the partnership program. This is a great way of recruiting partners to help maintain the partnership. Communities have a lot of people who want to help schools support students, and you can show them how they can contribute to breaking down barriers and meeting students' needs.

For further reading:

[A model for building school–family–community partnerships: Principles and process](#), by J. Bryan and L. Henry (2012)

[Fostering educational resilience and opportunities in urban schools through equity-focused school-family-community partnerships](#), by J. Bryan, J. M. Williams and D. Griffin (2020)

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Collaborate to Improve Postsecondary Outcomes

By Erinn Murphy

In our efforts to support students to and through their postsecondary options, collaboration is key. As we consider professional goals and collaborative opportunities related to this topic, three key ideas come to mind to consider to best serve our students.



The author (left) and Carbondale Community High School counselors presenting at IACAC 2019 with college reps from Illinois State University and Southern Illinois University. Other photos show college visits at CCHS in 2019–2020.

Identify Your Partners

Who are your valued partners in your school, district or professional community? I am a college counselor, and my relationships with each of our four class counselors who loop with their class freshman through senior year are crucial to the success of my programming efforts. The five of us set departmental goals annually, and each year the junior and senior class counselor and I adjust past practice to match student interests, student goals and professional competencies.

Two collaborative efforts that assist our work each year are classroom visit schedules and student survey data collection. In our school, class counselors visit English classrooms quarterly, while I visit junior and senior social studies classrooms quarterly. This classroom visit plan, which also highlights our healthy collaboration plan with many of our teaching colleagues, allows us to layer our lesson plans and visits so that counseling messaging during the critical junior and senior years is efficient, comprehensive and supportive. Class counselors are also able to focus more on academic and social/emotional topics knowing that postsecondary planning content is covered in my lessons.

Student survey information can also be a valuable shared tool between school counselors, faculty and administration. Within the first three weeks of school, I complete Minute Meetings with juniors. I visit U.S. history classes, explain the meeting process, and the teacher proceeds with class as students rotate individually to the hallway to answer my postsecondary-centered questions. I value the face time with each junior, the questions engage their planning and thinking related to life after high school, and by the end of the week of visits, the junior class counselor and I have a comprehensive data set illustrating career interests, college plans, hobbies and more. We refer to the minute meeting data through the year to encourage attendance at college or career info meetings, connect students with military and trade school contacts, note college and career trends within the class and more.

Who is the colleague that you collaborate with most, or most effectively? How can you expand your collaborative efforts with school colleagues to more broadly meet your programming goals? What are your most valuable data collection methods and topics? When you collect data, how is it reviewed, used and/or shared?

Expand Your Partnerships

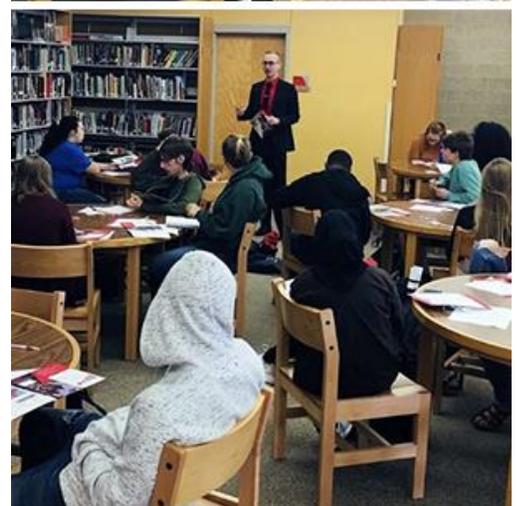
Have you noticed added collaboration opportunities within your community or college visit schedule? Do you have parents or community members who are willing to visit with students to talk about their career pathway? Have you built relationships with college representatives who are willing to present on financial aid or the admissions process? Refer back to the minute meeting data and invite speakers based on the trending career interests. Students love to learn about real-life career pathways and hear advice from folks in the field, and they appreciate efforts to enhance their career exploration. These collaborative efforts grow your database of career contacts and may even lay the foundation for your students to realize opportunities and options available in their hometown through a new perspective. For relationships to thrive between college reps, career speakers and other visitors and counseling offices, it is vital that students are present for meetings, guests are welcomed warmly and appropriate space and time is allowed for each meeting.

Recruit students to meetings by, again, referring to collected data. Who has expressed interest in college X or career Y? Add them to the attendee list, while also considering students who may have an interest in a career or campus *similar* to the visiting guest, and be sure to recruit invitees by talking to counseling or teaching colleagues who have insights about student interests. These extra steps go a long way to productive meetings, providing a reason for your guest to return and showing your students that you are paying attention to their interests and goals. Show your appreciation for the visit by also attending, taking notes, providing a bottle of water or small token of appreciation and noting student attendance. It also helps to be sure that the meeting space is welcoming and comfortable for guests and attendees.

Who coordinates college and career visits at your school? What works? What or how could our visits be more productive or more student oriented?

Reflect on Partnerships

A last consideration related to collaborative efforts is to give yourself time to reflect on what is working well and what might need tweaking within your collaborative efforts. During the mostly remote year we have experienced, our senior counselor has repeatedly made adjustments to how FAFSA completion is tracked, reported and supported. Our ongoing—and very effective—partnership with the Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC) has remained a powerful tool in supporting students and families with FAFSA completions, but this year is also the first year that FAFSA completion is a graduation requirement in our state. In response to this, our senior class counselor added layers of communication with administration and support personnel to create a streamlined approach to tracking completions. This ongoing partnership is one example of how working relationships and collaborative programming can remain in place but also evolve to meet the needs of each unique school year and each unique cohort of students.



What are your most effective partnerships? How has that working relationship evolved, or how might it evolve, to best serve your students and your professional goals?

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Book Groups: Not Just for Kids

By Nicole Scott



As a school counselor who works in two schools, I am always looking for new ways to support my students, their parents and the community. I believe building relationships with parents is essential and I want parents to know I am also a resource for them.

During a monthly idea swap of local school counselors, I learned about the idea of hosting parent book clubs. I had belonged to book clubs and enjoy reading, and I believed we could select books that would help guide parents and prevent issues from becoming problems in the classroom. I learned a lot from having the courage to step into the world of parents.

Step one in this new adventure was getting both my principals on board. I planned to do the book club during my regular working hour and I wasn't sure they would see the benefits of taking time away from the kids to work with parents. But both were excited and felt it served an important need at both schools. Our current parent education program consists of one-night events. A book club would give us and the parents a chance to delve deeper into various topics.

Book Selection

Picking the book was both fun and hard, with so many great books out there. The first year I picked "Raising Happiness," by Christine Carter. The 10 steps outlined in the book meshed perfectly with our planned five meetings, allowing us to discuss two steps per meeting. And, serendipitously, the school district foundation selected the author to speak at a donor event that year and included all the book club participants on the guest

list.

Times and Locations

One of the biggest hurdles was figuring out when and where to have the meetings. I wanted parents from both of my schools to be able to attend, and I wanted to attract as many parents as possible. Selfishly, I did not want to do it at night. I'm a working mom and did not want to take that time away from my family. The first year I held a morning book club meeting at one school and an afternoon meeting at the other, and invited parents to come to whichever meeting worked best for them. The morning time slot had much larger and more consistent attendance – about 10 parents at each meeting with a core of seven who came every time. The afternoon meeting had about 10 parents who came to at least one meeting, but we averaged only five at each meeting.

The second year, we partnered with a local bookstore and held the meeting there in the morning. It was a win-win. The bookstore had an increase in traffic, and I had a big room for the meeting. Some bookstores will let book groups register as an official group with them and then offer discounts on the books purchased for the group. Public libraries are another location option for the meetings.

To advertising the club, I placed event notices on the school district website and in the newsletters, but I did most of my marketing via email. I emailed invitations to parents with whom I already had a working relationship. Other parents heard about it through the grapevine or via the district website or newsletter would email me for more information. Once I had parents on my list, I continued to email them each week regardless of whether or not they attended the meetings. I used these follow-up mailings to recap the meetings and share additional articles and resources that meshed with that week's meeting topic.

The Meetings

The actual meetings were pretty easy. The first year I brought coffee to the morning meetings and sometimes a parent might bring a snack. At the bookstore location, most people brought their own beverages. I would write down important phrases or topics I found interesting that might spark a good discussion. I started off each meeting by asking the parents what part of that week's reading selection they liked. This gave everyone a chance to share opinions and be heard. But it is important for you to share and give the parents your insight as well. The parents are coming because they view you as the expert; they want to know what you think. Finding the right balance of allowing the parents to talk and sharing your thoughts was probably the hardest part of running the meetings.

From the beginning, the book club made connections with people in the community. I felt like it was paying off before I even started. My superintendent then asked me to do an in-service on happiness for our instructional aides. Then I was asked to do a class as part of a staff development with teachers. I had no idea doing a book club was going to lead to so many opportunities to work with my district as a whole.

The book I chose for the second year was "Mindset" by Carol Dweck. The book's theme had come up in the classrooms, in parent discussions, at staff meetings and was becoming part of our daily dialogue. I really believed in the message – that we can all learn anything if we're willing to work hard – and thought the parents would, too. One of the school psychologists in our district really had a passion for the topic and asked if she could co-facilitate the book club. This was great news – she was a long-time district employee and had many parent connections. Once again, book club participants were able to hear the author in person when she came to speak at a local library.

The best part of the book club was the sense of community it created for those who attended. They felt more connected to other parents, learning from each other and gaining some new skills. I also enjoyed that they got to know me so if they had any needs in the future, I was an easy phone call or email away. All in all, a

communitywide parent book group proved to be a win-win situation, and one I heartily recommend other school counselors try.

Nicole Scott is a school counselor with Menlo Park City School District, Calif., whose favorite book is “Where the Red Fern Grows” by Wilson Rawls.

School Counselor Partnering with Parents of Color

By M. Ann Shillingford, Ph.D.



In 2018, I led a qualitative study to investigate school counselors’ leadership roles and communication with students and parents of color related to STEM-focused career decisions.

We heard school counselors say:

- “I was not trained in STEM.”
- “I remember as an elementary counselor going into the classroom and doing career education; those opportunities do not exist.”
- “In our profession, they’ve added so many things that we need to do that it’s hard to do the things that we want to do.”
- “Demands placed on our time has narrowed our scope.”

Such is the reality of school counseling today. School counselors have so much to do that there’s not enough time to do it all. But are school counselors so entwined with daily demands that they are unavailable to guide students toward success beyond K–12?

Regarding support received from school counselors about STEM career information for their children, we heard from parents of color:

- “I do not recall receiving any.”

- “They didn’t have much influence.”
- “I did not have any information from school counselors. I had some information from school district.”

Although we see a disconnect between school counselor engagement and parents’ expression of limited school counselor support, both parties echo similar thoughts. They recognize the importance of promoting STEM education and career trajectory but also realize that various barriers hinder promotion. The reality is that school counselors want to support their students and parents, but they are limited in time, resources and access to students. Parents of color, in turn, want the best for their children and look to schools for resources and information to make informed decisions for and with their children. How do we move past these barriers—and can we? As long as systemic issues and a top-down approach remain intact, I believe school counselors will continue to struggle.

So, what do we do now?

First, recognize that you are a leader. You were trained as such and if you don’t think so, someone owes you a tuition refund. A leader is a risk taker, an advocate, a change agent, a collaborator. The quotes above demonstrate the need for school counselors to serve as collaborators in building effective partnerships with parents and other stakeholders. Here are a few practical strategies for supporting partnerships.

1. **Know the needs of your students/families/school.** This is school counselor 101, needs assessments. These links provide needs assessment resources, or you may already have ones you prefer.
 - [Article from the American School Counselor Association](#)
 - [Teachers Pay Teachers](#)
 - [The Responsive Counselor](#)
2. **Examine your leadership self-efficacy.** It takes leadership to challenge the status quo, motivate others to change, challenge culturally insensitive practices, etc. In fact, it takes a strong leader to dispel the “[nice counselor syndrome](#).” How confident are you that you can evoke change and bring minds together?
3. **Be multiculturally competent.** Developing partnerships includes working with diverse populations. As we found in the study, parents of color did not feel that school counselors helped them or their children. The multiculturally competent counselor is aware of their marginalization and privileges. They possess and seek further knowledge and skills to understand the experiences and worldviews of those around them. They learn to take culturally-relevant action. [Read about multicultural and social justice counseling competencies.](#)
4. **Create a school community asset map:** Know the professionals within your school and their training and expertise. This knowledge is helpful in determining key players in building partnerships. Also create an asset map within the community, where often many resources are already available. [Access a brief overview of asset mapping.](#)
5. **Bring It All Together.** Now that you have analyzed yourself and your environment, use [a business mindset](#) to organize your partnerships.
 - Know what is on the table and what is beyond the table. What resources are available and what are the expected outcomes when these resources are pulled together? The goal of your partnership will help determine who the key players should be. Do not exhaust your resources.
 - Clarify your why. Why do you need this partnership? Why can’t you as the school counselor do it all yourself? What do you expect to gain from these partnerships?
 - Have partners clarify their why. Why have they agreed to join this partnership with you? What do they hope to get from this? Connections with students? Strategies to support their children?

- Have a shared vision. Knowing your why and theirs, develop a shared vision for success. Keep in mind that it's more powerful to align your vision with the mission of your school.
 - Know that change takes time. Whatever your mission with these partnerships, don't rush the process. In fact, trust the process.
 - Anticipate discomfort. (Ha! You weren't expecting that one.) [Author Jason Reynolds said](#), "Be not afraid of discomfort. If you can't put yourself in a situation where you are uncomfortable, then you will never grow. You will never change. You'll never learn."
 - Evaluate progress. Understand your outcomes. Know what worked and what didn't work. Know who worked and who didn't. Capture the thoughts of your collaborators. Learn what to do differently the next time.
6. **Remember, be true to yourself.** Know your limitations. Know that as a school counselor, you cannot and should not be expected to do it all—even in serving as a collaborative partner. Yes, I said that: School counselors can take a seat at the table, but they should not always be expected to be the voice or visionary. That's just too exhausting.

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Journey to Collaboration: A University–District Partnership

By Rebecca Schumacher, Ed.D., Nan Worsowicz, Joni Shook and Carolyn Stone, Ed.D.

For Duval County Public Schools (DCPS) and the University of North Florida (UNF) school counselor preparation program in Jacksonville, Fla., collaboration is integral to our work. Over two decades, the school district and university preparation program partnership has matured into a culture of collaboration.

DCPS is the 22nd largest school district in the nation, serving almost 124,000 students, and is committed to ensuring students are academically successful and prepared for college, a career and successful lives. For example, the 30-year-old BEACON (Bringing Economic and Career Opportunities Nearer) program places each senior in a small-group session for FAFSA and other state financial aid forms. The groups are run by one of more than 100 trained volunteer community members and UNF school counseling students.

The UNF preparation program established college access and equity as the program's central focus and recognized the importance of a school counseling preparation including: a strong partnership with the school district; field experiences in which faculty and students work together in the district's pre-K–12 urban, low-income schools; the use of data to inform decision-making for service delivery; and most critical, emphasis on school counselors prepared as academic advisors to provide college- and career-readiness counseling to eradicate injustice and inequity.

UNF faculty and DCPS school counselors collaborated on the curriculum plan and developed what has become a strong, 20-year relationship of collaboration and partnering. The shared beliefs of equity and access for urban students, the importance of building a college-going culture and the use of data bind us together.



Action and Impact

DCPS and UNF faculty work together in various ways. For example, the DCPS district-level school counseling supervisors and practicing DCPS school counselors participate in the admissions interviews and selection for students applying to the UNF school counseling preparation program. Voices of the district's school counselors have been invaluable in the selection process. From this entrance point into the program, incoming UNF students experience the high regard the preparation program places on collaboration and the importance of connection to our school district. This annual event has further strengthened the DCPS-UNF collaboration.

School counseling students complete field experiences every semester. First, students and UNF faculty work together in one defined school. With faculty present, students get live supervision and learn how to collaborate with school personnel and contribute to urban students' academic successes and a school's college-going culture. School personnel provide valuable input to the program curriculum and feedback to the UNF students and faculty. In the students' second-year internship, each school counseling student is assigned a different school, where they are supervised by practicing school counselors.

The Early Days

One pivotal event shaped this partnership. In 1999, DCPS invited partners including the UNF school counseling program to join on an application for a Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Program (GEAR UP) grant. Under the grant, UNF would deliver academic advising and postsecondary planning programs to the poorest urban school the grant would serve. The district received the GEAR UP grant, and for the 1999–2000 school year, 15 UNF students and program faculty worked with seventh-grade students alongside the school's counselors, teachers, parents and administrators, exploring how best to build academic success and introduce exploratory career and college activities. We were charting new waters and an innovative approach to preparation. The most powerful take-away was the importance of relationships and communication.

To date, 307 UNF students have delivered approximately 120,500 hours of supervised advising focused on career and college planning in the schools. In more than 40 schools across all levels, UNF students assist and/or deliver events such as eighth-grade transition programs, financial aid nights for 12th-grade students, college tours and career fairs, college signing days, individual career planning, classroom lessons on careers

and/or college planning and summer-melt prevention. UNF students also have been invited to community events to deliver workshops and small-group sessions on college and career advisement. UNF students have served on the planning committee and presented workshops for Success by Design, a conference designed by the DCPS school counseling department on evidence-based practices and programs.

Benefits in All Directions

Weekly mentoring of middle and high school students has been a major component of the students' first-year field experience. They reinforce college and career preparation on topics including goal setting, course selection, time management, test-taking strategies, organizational skills, self-regulation skills, college searches, financial aid searches, essay writing, college application process, financial literacy skills, college life and FAFSA.

Another project not possible without this strong collaboration is Instant Decision Day. On this day, college admission representatives meet with high school seniors, review their college application materials and admit students on the spot. In the program's first year, 50 students participated and 18 were admitted to a school, with more than \$60,000 in scholarships awarded. By the third year, 184 students were admitted, some to multiple colleges, with more than \$500,000 in scholarships awarded. High school seniors participating in Instant Decision Day benefit from face-to-face communication with an admissions counselor and receive immediate evaluation and feedback about their application, practice interviewing, and may walk away with a college acceptance and potentially a scholarship. This program has had a ripple effect as younger students hear about seniors being admitted to college. Instant Decision Day contributes to the college-going culture of schools, and plans are underway to expand this model throughout the district.

Each semester, district-level school counseling supervisors teach some classes at UNF. These classes underscore expectations that all district school counselors use data, translate the reality of a practicing school counselor and define future expectations for students' professional work. Following the district-level supervisors' presentations, practicing school counselors are invited to talk about their data-driven comprehensive program and what is done for college and career readiness in their schools. And, when possible, prior to first-year UNF students mentoring in the schools, a panel of undergraduate students who were mentees while in high school speak about what mentoring meant to them, how it helped them and what characteristics of a mentor were most beneficial.

Both pre-K–12 students and UNF students benefit from this collaboration. The university preparation program benefits greatly by better preparing school counseling candidates who hone their skills and learn to love, appreciate and respect urban schools and students. The majority of DCPS principals in urban settings insist on hiring only UNF school counseling graduates, knowing the training and experience these future school counselors receive will help transition easily into urban schools with the necessary skills to create college-going cultures.

The journey of creating a culture of collaboration has resulted in myriad benefits. We've found that a collaborative partnership is built on a mutual philosophy about students and their education, use of data, relationships and communication. And in the end, it's the DCPS students who benefit most of all.

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