

Shared Leadership Model for 21st Century Schools: Principal and Counselor Collaborative Leadership

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Abstract

Educational leadership teams that offer a wide range of skills capable of addressing multi-dimensional issues combine the strengths of the principal and the counselor to create a synergistic approach that enhances and supports student development. With shared responsibilities in a team approach, the principal and counselor can impact educational environments and create alliances that strengthen skills contributing to the success of students. This article examines the roles of the principal and counselor, issues faced by educational leadership teams, and offers suggestions for creating alliances and merging themes in order to align professionals who are capable of dynamically changing the educational atmosphere and opportunities at schools where they work.

Keywords: Principals, Counselors, Collaboration, Administration, Collegiality, Leadership, Team, 21st Century

The complex issue of meeting the wide range of student needs in today's educational settings calls for strong leadership skills. Recognizing the trend toward a range of leadership models that reflect "reframing leadership" (Bolman & Deal, p. 348), "leadership continuum behaviors" (Reinhartz & Beach, p. 13), and the call to build capacities of social justice leaders (Marshall & Oliva, 2010) mandate fresh approaches to school leadership. Multidimensional leadership teams that merge effective skills and abilities can best meet the goal of achieving academic success for all students by working together to strengthen roles and alliances to create a culture of shared leadership (Siccone, 2012; Bolman & Deal, 2003; Reinhartz & Beach, 2004). Fullan stated,

...School-wide success, especially with respect to establishing the conditions for continuous improvement, depends on the leadership of the principal – leadership that focuses on the improvement of teaching...and also leadership that fosters the development of leadership in others who form part of the critical mass of leaders who can carry on improvement into the future. (2006, p. 7)

There is a dynamic synergy which can occur when "leadership interactions" between principal and counselor permit dialogue to examine and reevaluate their roles and redesign their traditional functions to combine efforts in order to increase student learning (Siccone, p. 130).

Leadership, in general, relates to securing the support of others toward meeting organizational goals (Shillingford & Lambie, 2010). According to Lazandou & Iordanides,

Leadership involves the art and the process of influencing individuals so that they collaborate willingly to achieve common objectives. It entails four basic abilities: to respond to how individuals are motivated in different situations by different factors, to inspire and guide the members of the organization, to create a suitable climate, and to articulate and support clear objectives. (2011, p. 5)

In educational leadership, the ability to rethink the organizational flow and responsibilities of key personnel in a school setting can strengthen the ability to accomplish educational goals. School leaders have shifted to identifying and synchronizing key personnel who can address student needs in order to maximize student success (Adelman & Taylor, 2006). Matching school leadership skills that focus on the factors that are pivotal to academic success entails collaboration (SREB, 2004). With attention to the leadership skills of the principal and counselor, school leaders can successfully extend their own professional learning and develop solutions by allowing the merging of principal and counselor abilities, philosophies, and techniques to strengthen the overall educational team (Lewis & Murphy, 2008).

Evaluating the configuration of school leadership teams and the ability of such teams to develop programs that prepare students for the 21st Century and support the issues of today's society are factors in considering the principal and counselor as key contributors. With the rapid changes facing education and increasing accountability standards covering all components of student development, the areas of social and emotional learning, cultural diversity, and academic pursuits must be addressed. These complex dimensions facing the educational system are reason enough for the principal and counselor to form site educational alliances that can effectively meet the needs of students academically, emotionally, and socially. Learning the fine art of

combining leadership professionals is the key to developing a team that is capable of creating conditions that scaffold and optimize the learning environment. “The time has come to recognize the value of a range of models and metaphors for effective leadership which has to be exercised in so many varied circumstances” (Lewis & Murphy, 2008, p. 4). School principals and counselors have the opportunity to examine and reevaluate their roles and redesign their traditional functions so that a comprehensive, combined effort can provide interventions that meet the spectrum of student needs in schools today. The first step is to acknowledge the professional standards and expectations for each position

Role of the Principal

Principals inherently have the position of power on school campuses and must work to actively promote joined leadership among staff members if maximum student development is the goal. “Principals are undeniably school leaders and in most schools, they have the power to initiate change” (Dollarhide, Smith, & Lemberger, 2007, p. 360). From developing the school vision outlined in ISLLC Standard One (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2007), the principal seeks to share the vision, collaborate, and empower others on the leadership team to spread the motivation of implementing avenues of support towards learning. Leadership encourages high quality, academic education, including the support services that produce students ready to fully assimilate into society in an active and productive manner. According to ISLLC Standard Four (NPBEA, 2007) leaders of education must be able to promote the success of every student through faculty collaboration and must be able to respond to diverse interests and needs within the community along with mobilizing resources. Such a vast demand for supportive responses requires a principal to build a leadership team capable of gleaned from a wide range of expertise and strategies with effective interventions geared toward student success. ISLLC Standard Five (NPBEA, 2007) calls for the principal’s role to monitor the correct use of systems and procedures so that the rights of all involved are protected. Ensuring a system of accountability for all students’ academic and social success requires close and trusted leadership camaraderie. In addition, promoting social fairness to ensure that all students’ needs are represented at every aspect of the schooling process is another demand within the scope of the role of principal. As noted in ISLLC Standard Six (NPBEA, 2007), the principal is mandated to advocate for children and families by influencing all decisions affecting student learning. The principal is the educational leader that seeks to promote the success of every student by facilitating vision, sustaining a culture of learning and teaching, managing efficient and effective educational environments, building relationships with all stakeholders, maintaining ethical integrity, while understanding and influencing contexts of culture, political, legal, social, and economical elements (NPBEA, 2007).

Aguilar, Goldwasser, and Tank-Crestetto (2009) address how effective principals embrace shared leadership and use the concept of leadership coaching to improve schools and raise student achievement. Principals who develop supporting leaders and build relationships based on trust encourage alliances that adhere to administrator standards. The role of a principal is based on the ability to communicate expectations grounded in vision and educational goals “using emotional intelligence skills necessary for hard conversations” (Aguilar et al., 2009, p. 73) which in turn can lead a team toward success using learning, support, and inspiration.

Under the guidance of the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (NPBEA, 2007), future educational leaders are trained using current Educational Leadership Constituent Council Standards according to the NPBEA (2011). Principals are trained to demonstrate effective team building skills as mandated in Standard Four to maximum collaboration among members of a school campus. Forming and leading teams that foster collaborating between members of the school community is one of the main goals for principals. Principals who consciously foster relationships that improve school climate more easily achieve the common objectives identified in the school's mission and find success in student engagement and performance.

Role of the Counselor

According to the ASCA model (2005), counselors are called to deliver services to support all students in the areas of academic, career, and personal/social development. The school counselor of the 21st Century is required to demonstrate four main competencies emphasizing advocacy, leadership, collaboration and systemic change (ASCA, 2005). According to Standard B in the School Counseling Standards, the importance of collaboration is mandated and stresses counselors have the ability to effectively communicate and listen (ASCA, 2005). Such communication skills assist them in serving as facilitators with the various stakeholders in a school setting. School counselors are highly trained to promote relationships between people even those in conflicts; therefore, they are able to intervene with parents, teachers, students, and community members. Advocacy is another competency for school counselors (ASCA, 2005). As student advocates, counselors can work with principals to design school wide programs to strengthen all areas of student development including academic, social, personal, emotional, and mental aspects.

Based on the requirement of current multicultural counseling courses in pre-service training programs counselors are prepared to lead the way to improve all relations within a school setting. Counselors have formal training in developmental levels, advocacy supports, multicultural behaviors and values, and community resource knowledge that enhance their ability for success with all stakeholders. Additionally, with a primary focus on helping students and their families, the school counselor serves as a bridge of access to the educational system that seeks to meet needs not clearly defined.

“Counselors must deftly intervene when the intricacies and insensitivities of the bureaucracy to become barriers for students and their families. Using their facilitative skills, counselors frequently bridge the gaps between educators, who knowingly and unknowingly impinge upon student success” (Walker, 2006, p. 119). The counselor provides a full complement of services to the learning community, with skills that can reach all stakeholders. “School counselors’ training and skill level in facilitation and communications are invaluable to the school principal” (Walker, 2006, p. 16).

Issues and Options in School Leadership

Major 21st Century school reform focuses on key issues such as “accountability for student performances” and the “unrelenting call for accountability for educating all students to

higher academic standards” (House & Sears, 2002, p. 154). Such demands do not allow for excuses relating to student issues. Reform is “driven by the awareness that the student population has become more diverse and now includes increased numbers of poor and minority children living in urban and rural communities” (House & Sears, 2002, p. 154). Gaps of achievement are the premise upon which current school reform is built.

Because of the emphasis in educational leadership on closing the achievement gap, it is important to address how to meet the needs of all students in the intellectual, physical, social and emotional areas. Students who are deficient in achievement are often recipients of injustices at no fault of their own making, including poverty, low social status, and crime infested neighborhoods (Walker, 2006; Payne, 2008; Jensen, 2009). Effective leaders must be able to address the ramification of these realities.

Recognizing that “the counselor-principal relationship is impacted by the tremendous number of mandates and school reform initiatives focusing on accountability, student achievement, and equity,” highly functional leadership teams are required, in spite of current conflicting expectations of both principal and counselor roles (Leuwerke, Walker, & Shi, 2009, p. 266). It is imperative to find solutions that strengthen and nurture a collaborative synergistic relationship with assets from both professions. While the complementary nature of skills that a counselor can offer to a leadership team cannot be denied, a research study from Shillingford and Lambie (2010) shows two areas among others that are impeding effective counseling services. The first is role inconsistencies (Lieberman, 2004) and the second is a lack of administrative support (Berry, 2006).

Wilkerson (2010) states that a possible solution might be “an enhanced understanding of principals, who so often dictate school counselor’s roles, might create added opportunities to initiate and sustain change” (p.419). Joining school leaders with mutually determined objectives and coordination of services would serve to reduce the conflict of role confusion and focus understanding of the principal’s concerns and challenges, while at the same time allowing for a structure to examine the juxtaposition of the counselor’s function. Wilkerson’s study (2010) gathered data about what is important to principals and connected those themes to the standards important to school counselors found in the American School Counselor Association’s National Model (ASCA, 2005), pointing to alignment between the two professions.

Further, Wilkerson’s analysis of issues (2010) showed a primary focus on school reform and increased accountability as a result of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB; U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Educational reform has increased the accountability of academic achievement for all students regardless of external issues not controllable by the school, a reality which compounds the expectations of the school’s leadership team.

The principal forms his leadership cadre and accepts that “the ultimate responsibility for the appropriate and effective utilization of all school-based personnel resides with the school principal” (Dodson, 2009, p. 481). With this responsibility comes the opportunity to systematically incorporate the counselor as a key component to the leadership team in order to effectively address leadership issues in working with students in the 21st Century. The counselor has the responsibility to address the ambiguity of the role and demonstrate skill areas that serve all students with vital assets in the educational setting different from mental health professionals or school social workers and psychologists. Identifying emerging themes that foster allying the two professional parties may diffuse both role confusion and negative perceptions. As pinpointed in the Wilkerson study (2010), six clusters of skills are addressed that may develop more

supportive relationships between principals and counselors. These areas include student achievement programs, stakeholder collaboration, reform minded goals, accountability measures, technology in programs, and professional development. These innovative skills are necessary in the leadership repertoire of both counselor and principal to address contemporary school issues (Wilkerson, 2010).

The current challenge in schools is to provide an environment where every student can learn and succeed. School leadership teams face an extremely complex job in meeting the needs of all students so that the focus can be on engaged learning. School personnel—principals, counselors, and teachers—are being held to high accountability standards to produce academic achievement based on the federal enactment of NCLB (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). An important theme of any school leadership team is to develop a plan that acknowledges the need for providing a socially just environment where all students are treated equally and fairly. “Leaders of social justice are administrators, teachers, counselors, and staff members who are challenged by the call for equity in the face of adversity” (Walker, 2006, p. 116). Leadership teams in school settings support a wide range of professionals collaborating to prepare students for our complex society. Depending on the specific approach and cultural identity, leadership teams can encompass various members of the school community including lead teachers, community members, and student body representatives who all can offer varying expertise to enhance the learning environment. The significance of relating diversity issues and meeting the requirements of federal mandates in NCLB (U.S. Department of Education, 2001) draws attention to the complementary skills and areas of expertise in the principal and counselor as an ideal core of the educational leadership team (Walker, 2006). The teaming process allows for the development of services and programs that comprehensively incorporate the academic, physical, social, emotional, and mental arenas of student well-being. Specifically, a principal-counselor leadership model allows all dimensions of student development and enhancement to be addressed.

A Collaborative Leadership Model: Principals and Counselors

Principals model leadership skills on a daily basis. School counselors utilize leadership practices, as well. Leadership qualities traditionally exhibited by counselors such as enabling, modeling, and encouraging, are equally as prevalent and required in a school setting as the leadership qualities of principals which include challenging, inspiring, and motivating (Shillingford & Lambie, 2010). By merging the professional attributes of both principal and counselor, the leadership team can serve students more effectively. As called for by their professional standards ISLLC (2008; NPBEA, 2007), ELCC (2011; NPBEA, 2011), and ASCA (2005), the principal and counselor must possess professional attributes such as reliability, expert knowledge, trustworthiness, and resourcefulness, while at the same time demonstrating how to be approachable, innovative, respectful and an advocate. With such strong leadership assets, the possibilities, when combining these professionals as a team, allow the focus to become enabling service delivery and values that correlate positively with comprehensive leadership management in educational settings (Shillingford & Lambie, 2010).

At the forefront of educational professionals are principals and counselors whose training and perceptions may differ, but whose common goal of student support for success lends itself to useful merging opportunities. According to Dollarhide, Smith, and Lemberger, “Data

suggest that the counselor- principal relationship has far-reaching influence on the systems that impact school climate” (2007, p. 386). When merging the roles of principal and counselor with their respective skills and areas of expertise, there is evidence of enhanced success in reaching individual students while juggling systemic constraints with a broader understanding of developmental and curricular aspects guiding student learning. Both professions, Educational Administration and School Counseling, have overlapping goals that can be supportive in forming a highly functioning school setting ready to serve students effectively.

Three components of school reform are rigor, relevance, and relationship according to the International Center of Leadership in Education (Wilkerson, 2010). Principals need the help of a strong leadership team to fulfill these three components, and school counselors can support these components while fulfilling the counseling standards of strengthening student development in the academic, career, and personal/social domains.

Obstacles such as “conflicts with principals’ expectations for school counselors,” (Wilkerson, 2010, p. 419) have been identified when considering strengthening the principal and counselor team. Challenging relationships between principals and counselors have existed due to reasons such as training emphasis, leadership style, perception, and role confusion. Correcting missed opportunities to connect principals and counselors in collaborating for school reform is a task for 21st Century educators. However, strong and active connections between principals and counselors do not appear to be happening in an effective manner on many school campuses (Wilkerson, 2010). “In fact, in many cases, principals seek to maintain school counselors in a kind of quasi-administrative role” (Wilkerson 2010, p. 423). When collaboration is reduced, the counselor is removed from an interactive role with students, staff, community members, and administration, thereby limiting the total amount of resources available to the principal and school community.

Professional standards for both the principal and counselor focus on active student development. Principals follow the ISLLC Standards (2008; NPBEA, 2007) and ELCC Standards (NPBEA, 2011), while counselors align with ASCA National Model Standards (ASCA, 2005). Professional collaboration that forms a strong educational environment is pivotal to student development and success as seen in both sets of professional standards. It is through the merging of skill sets that current issues and challenges can be addressed more comprehensively, and creative possibilities can be imagined and implemented.

Conclusion

Combining the expertise of two key personnel, principal and counselor, is vital to the wellbeing of schools. Principals and counselors serve in uniquely different roles, but merging can create strong leadership teams within schools. By recognizing the need for a new type of school leadership team model that fosters collaboration between professional codes and merges leadership techniques and philosophies to benefit positive school cultures, obstacles can be addressed and overcome. By targeting training programs for both principals and counselors, clearer paths to educational alliances can be recognized and embraced by the two professions. In addition, allowing collaboration and meaningful interaction at the pre-service level can work to positively reinforce the importance of developing educational leadership teams from various

perspectives and expertise to enhance the ability of the school to respond to the wide range of issues and dilemmas presented in an educational setting.

It is encouraging that the educational community is recognizing the value of leadership development and reviewing the value of combining principals and counselors in effective partnerships. Nevertheless, more attention is needed to expand the understanding of a dynamic relationship between principals and counselors in order to comprehensively meet the challenges of school leadership. Attempts to merge ideas, techniques, and approaches on educational leadership teams must continue in order to strengthen commitment to the goal of academic success for all students. Building the relationship between principals and counselors as team members that strengthen both roles and create alliances allowing supportive and responsive services to students will impact overall school success. Further research is needed to connect university training of both professions with measurements of preparedness, satisfaction, and perceptions of a merging role model, as well as on the availability and effectiveness of professional development training models on collaborative leadership for current principals and counselors.

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