

ENHANCING THE RELATIONSHIP



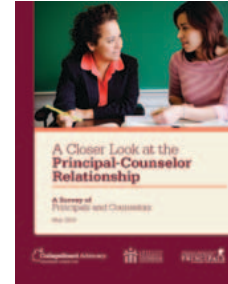
Introduction

The principal-counselor relationship toolkit comes from a multiyear research project undertaken by the College Board's National Office for School Counselor Advocacy (NOSCA), the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) to learn what principals and school counselors think is important in their relationships, how they view the current status of their own relationships within their schools, and what effective principal-counselor relationships might look like.

In 2008, thousands of school counselors and principals were surveyed about their relationships. The results were published in *A Closer Look at the Principal-Counselor Relationship*. After the data were analyzed, principals and school counselors who had been recognized for personal or school excellence (i.e., ASCA School Counselor of the Year and RAMP (Recognized ASCA Model Program) Awards, NASSP Principal of the Year, College Board Inspiration Award Schools) were interviewed to determine whether these award-winning professionals had developed effective working relationships with their principals or school counselor counterparts. Their stories were told in *Finding a Way*.

The stories from the teams were striking: although they came from diverse geographical and social backgrounds, the staff at each of these schools had "solved" the issues and challenges that were mentioned by their peers in the survey, leading to greater academic success for their students.

The toolkit has been reviewed by a very broad and diverse group, including principals and school counselors, staff from the College Board, ASCA and NASSP, members of the College Board's online counselor community, the College Board Schools principals, several of the school counselors and principals whose stories are highlighted in *Finding a Way*, and other interested counselors and principals.



Statement of Belief

The College Board, NASSP and ASCA believe that the principal-counselor relationship is a **dynamic and organic** relationship that evolves over time in response to the ever-changing needs of a school. The **goal** of an effective principal-counselor relationship is to use the strength of the relationship **to collaboratively lead** school reform efforts to increase achievement for all students. The **desired outcome** of an effective principal-counselor relationship is to raise achievement levels for all students and ensure equity in educational outcomes.

Toolkit Organization

The tools provided in this toolkit are designed to help school counselors and school principals analyze and enhance key areas of their working relationship with the overall goal of increasing student achievement.

The toolkit is organized in four sections:

- Communications
- Trust/Respect
- Leadership
- Collaborative Planning

These tools allow principals, school counselors and teams to:

- Analyze the current status of key aspects of the principal-counselor relationship for each individual and school;
- Develop ways of more effectively and closely working together as a team in an atmosphere in which all team members feel able to participate in open and honest communication; and
- Improve student achievement by eliminating barriers among staff members that inhibit their effectiveness.

PLEASE NOTE

This toolkit is not designed as a school counselor evaluation tool and cannot effectively be used as such. It is, rather, a means to assess, build and enhance a positive, effective working relationship between school principals and school counselors to benefit their students. In order to do this, it is vital to keep an open mind and a positive, nonjudgmental attitude throughout. Remember, it is not where you begin that counts, it is where you finish. Enhancing the working relationship will make both principals' and school counselors' jobs (and lives) easier, and it will help your kids.

The goal is to help principals and school counselors build effective relationships in which communications are open and fluid, all professionals trust and respect one another, all professionals serve in leadership roles, and planning involves close collaboration. While this task is too involved to be “fixed” by the use of any number of tools, this toolkit can help school professionals assess, understand and build their relationships. The toolkit is designed for group use, although a number of the tools provide value by themselves. Similarly, some of the tools can be used by individual practitioners to assess their role, but these self-assessments are more useful when combined with the group exercises that follow. For a number of these group exercises, we recommend that discussions take place after individuals complete their self-assessment tools and worksheets.

We recommend that as a prerequisite to using the toolkit, team members read *A Closer Look at the Principal-Counselor Relationship* and *Finding a Way: Practical Examples of How an Effective Principal-Counselor Relationship Can Lead to Success for All Students*. These can be downloaded at <http://advocacy.collegeboard.org/college-preparation-access/national-office-school-counselor-advocacy-nosca>. In addition, please have disaggregated student achievement data available.

Using the Toolkit

These tools are flexible and are designed to be effective whether they are used as a group or as individual exercises. They can be used by individuals for their own professional development, as group exercises on a single topic, as refreshers, for planning purposes or any number of other ways. Some tools are useful even if designed for someone in another role. For example, the “leadership styles” tool for principals contains information that could be beneficial to a counselor, especially to a head counselor or district leader. During the review process, numerous school counselors and principals noted that many of the tools would be equally effective for other school and district personnel, from teachers to superintendents. Some of the tools, such as the vision and mission tools, may be equally or even more effective when used with the larger school community.

The way a team (or individual) uses these tools will depend primarily on two factors: the current environment at the school and the amount of time available. For example, one school team may have effective communications skills but may be seeking ways to increase their leadership skills or joint planning, while others might recognize a need to build more effective communications strategies to improve student outcomes. It may be helpful to view the toolkit as a process rather than as an event.

In schools where more than one school counselor is participating in activities that may be listed as an activity between one counselor and one principal, please modify how you use the tool/exercise. In most cases, it is appropriate for each of the counselors to fill out the paper for the exercise. We suggest, however, that the school counselors analyze and discuss their collected views, assessments and issues with one another before meeting with the principal

about their individual concerns. This way the counseling team will have the opportunity to establish, among themselves, “what is most important” and to alleviate confusion and/or too many issues to work on immediately.

The toolkit is very comprehensive and requires more than one session to complete in its entirety. In any case, not every team will need or want to use every tool. For example, many schools will have already gone through a vision/mission process and do not need to repeat it. The toolkit can be divided into several sections, to be utilized during regularly scheduled professional development days during the school year. We recommend allotting approximately one hour for discussion for the majority of the tools. Since relationship development is the goal of the toolkit, discussion about what you learned or discovered when completing an exercise is often more useful than the actual tools. The toolkit is, however, flexible and principals and school counselors can choose which sections or exercises to focus on, depending on the needs at their own schools and the time available for these activities.

Choosing a Starting Point

Which tools you use will depend upon a number of factors, including the amount of time available, your goals, and the current relationship status in your school. If you are not sure where to begin, use the data tools in this section to determine the areas that most need attention in your school, and then use the “Taking One Step Forward” assessment to determine the effectiveness of your current team. Then use the tools in the appropriate section to begin building a stronger working partnership.

Using a facilitator

Whenever possible, we recommend using a facilitator or moderator, even if one is chosen from the staff. There is value in having someone think through the activities before they are used, and a moderator can keep discussions moving forward. It’s also a great way to foster leadership skills and confidence among staff members. (Please note that in any school there are large numbers of highly trained and experienced facilitators, also known as “teachers.”)* In schools with less well-developed relationships, an outside, neutral facilitator can help greatly. We do not recommend having the principal lead discussions; that tends to inhibit conversation and promotes the standard “top-down” management style. Above all, teams should work in an open manner in which everyone feels comfortable.

Types of Tools:

- **Self-Assessments.** Self-assessments help you get started by determining a starting place for a category. For example, ask: Are your communications helping? Do they need work? Are the principal and counselors on the same page? These self-assessments can be completed prior to any group activity.

* Please note that many of the exercises and tools are transferable and can be used by other staff members. In some cases, such as the mission and vision tools, we encourage as broad a representation of staff as possible.

- **Checklists.** Resources to help improve a specific skill.
- **Exercises.** Designed to facilitate growth among individuals and teams.
- **Case Studies.** In addition to providing case studies based on real situations, there are activities to help teams create their own case studies and develop solutions.
- **Other resources.** The school counselor strategic planning tool and school counselor management agreement template can help translate your goals into practice.

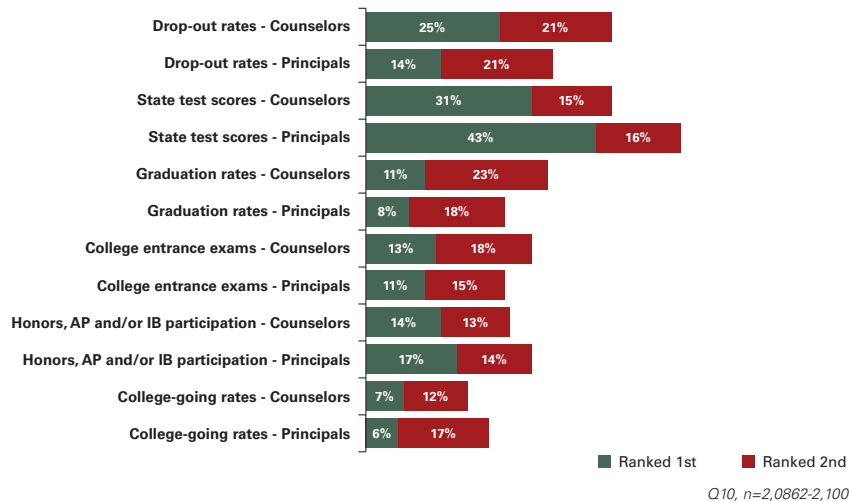
Getting Started

When principals and school counselors work together effectively, they are able to solve many of the issues that matter most in their schools. The data below show the issues that principals and school counselors believed to be most important; they are ranked in terms of which gaps are in greatest need of being addressed in their own school. Each of the teams profiled in *Finding a Way* faced — and solved — similar challenges. This toolkit is designed to help school counselors and principals understand the greatest needs in their school and then to develop a better working partnership to meet these needs so that all their students are prepared for a full range of postsecondary college or career options. The following chart shows areas that principals and counselors believe are important.



Drop-out rates and state test scores are the areas with the greatest gaps between student subgroups.

Please rank these areas where there may be gaps between student subgroups in terms of which gaps are in greatest need of being addressed in your school.



Exercise 1.1: The Current Situation: Student Outcomes

Take a look at your own data, comparing where you are now to where you want to be. Use this chart to determine the most critical issues. (If possible, have someone fill in the current data prior to the discussion. If you have goals for each data point, add those as well. Take one-half hour to discuss what your data is telling you and what you need to do to move toward your target. Use the blank spaces to add additional data points that are important in your school (i.e., attendance, disciplinary actions, promotion rates, credit recovery, etc.).

Data Point	Current	Target
Drop-out rate		
Graduation rate		
State test score: Meets Expectations – English		
State test score: Meets Expectations – Math		
State test score: Exceeds Expectations – English		
State test score: Exceeds Expectations – Math		
College Entrance Exam participation (ACT & SAT®)		
College Entrance Exam Average score (ACT)		
College Entrance Exam Average score (SAT)		
AP®/IB Participation		
College-going rate (2-year)		
College-going rate (4-year)		

Exercise 1.2: The Current Situation: Student Outcomes by Race and Gender

Goal: Get a clear picture from the data about student outcomes in your school, and determine how principals and school counselors can work together to improve them. This is an important first step in clarifying the counselors’ role and responsibilities for those outcomes.

Time: 1 hour to fill in the worksheet (depending on how the data are available); 1–2 hours for discussion.

Now, try to break the data down further. Use the “Other Ethnic” columns to record data for large subgroups in your school (e.g., Hmong, Samoan, etc.).

Data Point	Overall		African American		Hispanic		Asian/PI		White		Other Ethnic	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Drop-out rate												
Graduation rate												
State test score: Meets Expectations – English												
State test score: Meets Expectations – Math												
State test score: Exceeds Expectations – English												
State test score: Exceeds Expectations – Math												
College Entrance Exam participation (ACT & SAT)												
College Entrance Exam Average score (ACT)												
College Entrance Exam Average score (SAT)												
AP/IB Participation												
College-going rate (2-year)												
College-going rate (4-year)												

Questions for Discussion:

1. Are these data readily available? Are you able to disaggregate them?
2. What does the data show? Are there obvious gaps in either participation or achievement for particular ethnic groups? Genders?
3. What steps are you taking to address these issues?
4. Who is in charge of monitoring the data?
5. Who is responsible for helping these students plan, prepare and make informed choices about their postsecondary options? Who is in charge of ensuring that their course selections, extracurricular activities, etc., will meet requirements for those options?

Exercise 1.3: The Most Pressing Issues at Our School

Goal: Develop, clarify or formalize the school counselor’s role in enhancing these student outcomes.

Time: 15 minutes to fill out and tabulate the chart; 1–2 hours for discussion.

Instructions: After reviewing and discussing the two data worksheets above (Exercises 1 and 2), have the principal(s) and school counselors each complete the following chart, ranking each issue on a scale of 1–12, with one being the most critical issue and 12 the least important. Tabulate and average the results from all participants to get a consensus on the most critical achievement* issues at your school. To do this, you should take into account your school, district and state priorities.

Issue	Counselor Rating	Principal Rating	Overall Rating
Drop-out rate			
Graduation rate			
State test score: Meets Expectations – English			
State test score: Meets Expectations – Math			
State test score: Exceeds Expectations – English			
State test score: Exceeds Expectations – Math			
College Entrance Exam participation (ACT & SAT)			
College Entrance Exam Average score (ACT)			
College Entrance Exam Average score (SAT)			
AP/IB Participation			
College-going rate (2-year)			
College-going rate (4-year)			

* Please note that this exercise is designed to focus on student achievement. While other issues such as truancy or violence may be critical for a school, they are beyond the scope of this toolkit.

Discussion

Once you have identified the most pressing issues, have a conversation about how you can collaborate to solve them. The next exercise can tell you a great deal about the current state of that relationship, and the tools in the following sections can help to strengthen the collaboration at the school. Some questions for discussion might include:

1. Do the issues identified by your school's data provide any surprises? Why?
2. How would you prioritize these critical issues?
3. How closely do these align with your district and state priorities and goals?
4. Do you have the resources, skills and capacity to prioritize and address these issues?
5. What are the school counselor's responsibilities in addressing the most critical issues? Are these responsibilities clearly defined and understood by all parties? Should these responsibilities change?
6. In what ways do the principal(s) and counselor(s) need to work together in order to accomplish your student outcome/achievement goals?

Now that you have examined the critical issues in your school, the next step is to take a closer look at where you can strengthen your current relationship to assist you in reaching the goals in your school. To do this, use the self-assessment tool that follows.

Exercise 1.4: Advance Practice: *Taking One Step Forward:* A Self-Assessment Tool

Goal: Gain a clear sense of each team member’s view of the current relationship and the importance of each of these areas, and identify gaps and areas that require attention.

Time: 1 hour to complete and tabulate the form; 1–3 hours for discussion. (Note: Due to the sensitive nature of the information, it might be helpful in some cases to have principals and counselors complete the worksheet separately and then have a third party tabulate the results.)

This exercise can help teams become self-reflective practitioners. It can help assess the degree to which the areas in need of work impact the team’s ability to address issues of school reform, solve problems, engage in strategic planning, introduce new initiatives, handle resistance to change, and handle crises and other issues with critical impact on student achievement.

Complete this form by having the principal and counselor(s) rate each characteristic on the level of importance from 1 to 5, with 1 being “not important” and 5 being “very important.” Next, do the same for the extent to which the characteristic is present in your relationship, with 1 being “not present” and 5 being “extremely present.” After rating each characteristic, note the difference between the level of importance and the level of presence in the “Gap” column.

PRINCIPAL			Ten Characteristics of an Effective Principal-Counselor Relationship	COUNSELOR		
Importance	Presence	Gap		Importance	Presence	Gap
			1. Open communication that provides multiple opportunities for input to decision making			
			2. Opportunities to share ideas on teaching, learning and schoolwide educational initiatives			
			3. Sharing information about needs within the school and community			
			4. School counselor participation on school leadership teams			
			5. Joint responsibility in the development of goals and metrics that indicate success			
			6. Mutual trust between the principal and school counselors			
			7. A shared vision on what is meant by student success			
			8. Mutual respect between the principal and school counselors			
			9. Shared decision making on initiatives that impact student success			
			10. A collective commitment to equity and opportunity			

Now that you have completed this assessment, examine where the greatest gaps appear. Each item above is represented in one of the four sections of the toolkit: Communications, Trust

and Respect, Collaborative Planning, and Leadership. Because you are busy and time is at a premium, the key below can help determine a starting point for using the toolkit. Once you work through the areas with your greatest gaps you can reexamine the assessment to determine the next area of work. Each section will help you strengthen your working relationship to better achieve the goals for each of the critical issues you have identified using your school's data. The last section of the toolkit contains advanced practice and solution finding that all principals and counselors will find helpful as they test the collaborative strength of their relationship.

Areas for Focus

High “gap” scores on the various items above correspond to the toolkit sections below:

Communication: Items 1 & 3

Trust and Respect: Items 6 & 8

Leadership: Items 4, 5 & 9

Collaborative Planning: Items 2, 7 & 10

Advanced Practice: Items 1–10