



Building an Effective Principal-School Counselor Relationship: Leadership



She'd heard it before. When school counselor Laura Newton listened to new principal Mel Riddle expound on his goals for the school, and how this time they would be achieved by empowering the staff, she did so with skepticism arising from years of frustration. Despite advanced degrees and years of experience, the counselor office run by Dr. Newton and her colleagues was usually an afterthought to the principal, who had too many other things to worry about. Laura's frustration was very real. Rather than using their expertise to guide students to a better education, the counselors at TC Williams were often little more than scheduling machines, averaging over 800 schedule changes each fall. It is no wonder that when Dr. Riddle announced that he would focus on helping students, and that he "saw counselors as part of the solution, not as scheduling clerks," she was dubious.

*Located in Alexandria, Va., **T.C. Williams High School** is a comprehensive high school serving 2,800 students. Best known for being featured in the film *Remember the Titans*, 45 percent of the students qualify for free or reduced-fee lunch, and the student body has a mobility rate of 30 percent. Seventy-five percent of the students are members of minority groups and more than 22 percent are English language learners.*

Mel began by establishing leaders in each department and giving them the power to advocate for their department, asking that they provide key information to use in data-driven decision making. He already had a clear idea of the importance of the counselor in individual students' decision making. Laura was ready; she had been keeping detailed logs of everything the counseling staff did, showing each service the department provided to a student, and also documenting the more than 800 schedule changes her department made each year, bleeding their time. Teamwork is an important part of decision making at the school. "Collaborative decisions take longer," says Mel, "but they also last a lot longer. Changing the way people work together changes results more than changing structures does."

Adapted from *Finding a Way*

INTRODUCTION

You do not lead by hitting people over the head; that's assault, not leadership.

—Dwight D. Eisenhower

Findings from the Research

School counselors and principals were asked to rate “the importance and presence of counselor participation on school leadership teams.”

Survey Results*	Importance (1–5)	Present in my school (1–5)	Gap between presence and importance
Principals	4.29	4.01	.28
Counselors	4.38	3.56	.82

Principals and school counselors both think that it is important that counselors participate in school leadership. They have very different perceptions about how well that is happening in their own schools.

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- 4.3 Principal-Counselor Shared Decision Making: Principal Worksheet
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- 4.5 Leadership and Student Achievement
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- 4.7 Counselor Leadership Planning Worksheet
- 4.8 Leadership Styles for Principals

“A leader who can’t immediately give a list of other leaders he’s created and empowered may be in the wrong position.”

— Mel Riddle, NASSP

* Survey results are based on a sampling of more than 2,300 counselors and principals throughout the U.S. Participants were asked to rate a number of characteristics on a scale of 1–5, with 1 meaning not important and 5 extremely important. Next, the participants were asked to rate whether these characteristics were present in their current school, with 1 meaning not present and 5 extremely present. The next column shows the gap between what the survey participants felt was important and its presence in their school.

4.1 School Counselor Self-Assessment: Leadership

Leadership Requires Shared Responsibility for Student Success

Leadership takes a level of commitment that requires a shared responsibility by both parties. If the commitment does not exist, both the principal and counselor will need to be intentional and deliberate in committing to shared leadership. A commitment to leadership supports student success.

You can't stay in your corner of the Forest waiting for others to come to you. You have to go to them sometimes.

— A. A. Milne, *Pooh's Little Instruction Book*

Time: 5 minutes to complete page 1; 45 minutes to complete page 2 (plus ongoing updates).

Activity: Rate your commitment toward leadership:

School Counselor Participation on School Leadership Team	Yes	No
I participate on the school leadership team.		
I contribute relevant information in my expertise area to the leadership team.		
I contribute to key decisions that impact student achievement.		
Joint Responsibility in the Development of Goals and Metrics	Yes	No
I align my school counseling program with the vision and mission of the school/principal.		
My school counseling activities or methods support schoolwide goals and metrics.		
I demonstrate program outcomes that relate to the metrics and goals of my school.		
I develop an action plan that is congruent to the goals established with my principal.		
I solicit input from teachers, students, parents, administrators and community stakeholders in development of metric and goals for my school counseling program.		
Shared Decision Making on Initiatives that Impact Student Success	Yes	No
I use results data to make positive change in school policies.		
I implement change to foster student success.		
I take a leadership role in facilitating schoolwide change.		

1. Review your rating in the three areas above.
2. Prioritize the area in which you need to improve.
3. Create steps toward improving your commitment.

Areas of Leadership Commitment I Need to Improve	The Steps I Need to Take to Improve

4.2 Principal Self-Assessment: Leadership

Leadership Requires Shared Responsibility for Student Success

Leadership takes a level of commitment that requires a shared responsibility by both parties. If the commitment does not exist both the principal and counselor will need to be intentional and deliberate in committing to shared leadership. A commitment to leadership supports student success.

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Time: 5 minutes to complete page 1; 45 minutes to complete page 2 (plus ongoing updates).

Activity: Rate your commitment toward leadership:

School Counselor Participation on School Leadership Team	Yes	No
I allow school counselors to participate on the school leadership team(s).		
I value relevant information from my counselors in their area of expertise when it is presented to the leadership team.		
I welcome and encourage my counselors to contribute to key decisions that impact student achievement.		
Joint Responsibility in the Development of Goals and Metrics	Yes	No
I ensure that my school counseling program aligns with the vision and mission for my school.		
I ensure that my school counselors' activities or methods support schoolwide goals and metrics.		
I monitor and expect program outcomes that relate to the metrics and goals of the school.		
I review action plans to make sure they are congruent to the goals I have established for the school.		
I solicit input from teachers, students, parents, administrators and community stakeholders in development of metric and goals for my school counseling program.		
Shared Decision Making on Initiatives that Impact Student Success	Yes	No
I use results data to make positive change in school policies.		
I implement change to foster student success.		
I take a leadership role in facilitating schoolwide change.		

1. Review your rating in the three areas above.
2. Prioritize the area in which you need to improve.
3. Create steps toward improving your commitment.

Areas of Leadership Commitment I Need to Improve	The Steps I Need to Take to Improve

4.3 Principal-Counselor Shared Decision Making: Principal Worksheet

The survey data revealed that school counselors and principals see four broad areas as critical for the development of an effective principal-counselor relationship: One is **Principal-Counselor Shared Decision Making**.

Directions: Read each case study in the *Finding a Way* booklet and then answer the questions below.

Time: 30–45 minutes

Snapshots of Effective Principal-Counselor Relationship					
T.C. Williams High School (page 2)	Ernesto Serna School (page 9)	Visitation Valley Middle School (page 13)	Jefferson County High School (page 15)	Palm Beach Gardens High School (page 19)	Kenwood Academy (page 23)
					Benjamin Banneker Academic High School (page 25)

Activity/Discussion

- Which, if any, of the principal-counselor pairs demonstrate or model shared decision making similar to you and your school counselor(s)? _____

- If none of the shared decision making modeled or demonstrated fit with your situation, how can you replicate some of the effective practices of the teams in the different schools? _____

- If your shared decision making is different from any of the pairs, what are the behaviors that make your shared decision making effective or not effective? _____

- What are the outcomes/results of your shared decision making with the school counselor in your building? _____

- How does the shared decision making of the pairs in each school appear to impact student outcomes? _____

- How does your shared decision making with your school counselor appear to impact student outcomes? _____

4.4 Principal-Counselor Shared Decision Making: School Counselor Worksheet

The survey data revealed that school counselors and principals see four broad areas as critical for the development of an effective principal-counselor: One is **Principal-Counselor Shared Decision Making**.

Directions: Read each case study in the *Finding a Way* booklet and then answer the questions below.

Time: 30–45 minutes.

Snapshots of Effective Principal-Counselor Relationship					
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					Benjamin Banneker Academic High School (page 25)

Activity/Discussion

- Which, if any, of the principal-counselor pairs demonstrate or model shared decision making similar to you and your principal? _____

- If none of the shared decision making modeled or demonstrated fit with your situation, how can you replicate some of the effective practices of the teams in the different schools? _____

- If your shared decision making is different from any of the pairs, what are the behaviors that make your shared decision making effective or not effective? _____

- What are the outcomes/results of your shared decision making with the principal in your building? _____

- How does the shared decision making of the pairs in each school appear to impact student outcomes? _____

- How does your shared decision making with your principal appear to impact student outcomes? _____

4.5 Leadership and Student Achievement

Overview: Thinking about leadership from a different perspective can be a powerful tool for change. The objective of this exercise is to translate different views of leadership into terms that describe student achievement. An experienced moderator will help to facilitate this exercise.

Directions

1. Read through each quote below and briefly describe how you would relate to it in your role as a principal or school counselor leader in improving student achievement.
2. Collate the responses, using a neutral party whenever possible.
3. Have a free discussion about each of these statements, and then
4. Discuss the leadership roles played by the principals and by the school counselors, and how they enhance student achievement.

Time: 20 minutes for each to complete sheet; 1 hour for discussion.

Leadership	Principal's View on Student Achievement	School Counselor's View on Student Achievement
The difference between the impossible and possible lies in a person's determination.		
Leaders instill in their people a hope for success and a belief in themselves. Positive leaders empower people to accomplish their goals.		
Nothing limits achievement like small thinking. Nothing equals possibilities like unleashed thinking.		
Dream no small dreams, for they have no power to move the hearts of men.		
Believe in yourself and act on your convictions.		
A real leader faces the music, even when he doesn't like the tune.		
Good leaders develop through a never-ending process of self-study, education, training and experience.		

4.6 Identifying Opportunities for School Counselors to Participate in School Leadership Teams

Work in small groups to identify potential leadership opportunities, determine whether your school is taking advantage of those opportunities and note where school counselors participate in them. Have each group present their ideas, and then determine whether there is a shared idea about what constitutes leadership and whether your school is on the right track. Check the box if this is currently utilized and whether school counselors participate. Only check one box per row. Examples are provided.

Time: (Ongoing)

[illegible]

4.7 Counselor Leadership Planning Worksheet

Instructions: This exercise allows principals and counselors to work together to identify at least one activity (and preferably more) in which each counselor can serve in a leadership capacity. Note that this is not a detailed work plan; rather, it is a summary of activities that each counselor will lead.

Time: ½ hour (ongoing)

Activity	Goal	Counselor Leader	Activities	Timeframe	Measurement
Example Financial Aid Forms	100% of Seniors Fill Out the FAFSA	Jane Smith	Master Calendar Letter to Parents Training for Advisory Teachers After-School Workshops Parent Meetings Checklists	August September October Sept. – March Sept. – March August – May	Completed ____ Mailed ____ Training Conducted ____ Workshops Conducted ____ Meetings Conducted ____ Keep track of student responses ____ Follow-up ____

4.8 Leadership Styles for Principals

SOME EXAMPLES OF LEADERSHIP METHODS

Here are some ways principals can choose to influence their staff and the work they do in the school. Each has pros and cons. (These methods are valid for leadership activities taken by other staff members as well.)

Persuasion

Pro: Since it uses evidence and logic to make a case for an action, this method requires good upfront planning.

Con: Persuasion is not always possible or even desirable (especially on small matters) with time constraints and staff size. Some people may not buy in no matter how persuasive the argument.

Consultation

Pro: This method obtains buy-in by soliciting the opinions and ideas of the other party; they may have ideas you don't.

Con: It can be messy if you don't like the input or feedback you get.

Appeal

Pro: This can generate enthusiasm if the appeal is based on emotion or speaks to core values.

Con: Some topics don't generate much enthusiasm. ("And, you get to do two extra hours of lunchroom duty!")

Pressure

Pro: This is a very hands-on leadership style, and you know immediately if assigned tasks are being accomplished.

Con: Pressure tactics tend to turn adversarial, and they prevent others from assuming a leadership role.

Collaboration

Pro: This creates strong buy-in by creating a team of professionals and soliciting their advice and feedback. It increases the sense of value among team members and helps to create leaders.

Con: Some tasks and decisions are not well suited for collaboration. Groups can require hands-on management, and often one or two people tend to dominate.

Decree

Pro: This is the simplest way to accomplish many goals, especially small ones, and it is quick.

Con: It can backfire if a large group resists the directive. It can erode both trust and respect if used too often.

SOME REACTIONS TO ATTEMPTS AT INFLUENCE

Staff will usually react to a leadership action in one of these four ways:

Compliance

People go along with the program, although levels of enthusiasm can vary widely.

Commitment

This is the desired outcome because it leads to active support of an initiative.

Resistance

If buy-in is not obtained, staff can actively subvert initiatives without openly opposing them.

Refusal

In rare cases, resistance can turn into rejection of an initiative or order, especially if a large enough group opposes the initiative.

Leadership Styles for Principals (Continued)

Time: 10 minutes; 20 minutes for discussion

Overview: This exercise requires principals to reflect upon their actions and identify/examine their behaviors and leadership style in the context of the school and student achievement. For discussion with school counselors, a neutral moderator may be desirable.

ACTIVITY

Think of an action, project or other activity that required some form of influence from you as the leader. Write it down in 2–3 sentences. You may want to choose something that did not entirely lead to the outcome you wanted; this can help you understand why it did not work.

Now think about what type of leadership method you used: _____

What was the reaction? _____

Did you expect that result? ____ Yes ____ No

Did that outcome positively impact your students? ____ Yes ____ No

Would you choose the same style or tactic if you had to do it again? ____ Yes ____ No

Try again, using another type of project, decision or activity.

Now think about what type of leadership method you used: _____

What was the reaction? _____

Did you expect that result? ____ Yes ____ No

Did that outcome positively impact your students? ____ Yes ____ No

Would you choose the same style or tactic if you had to do it again? ____ Yes ____ No

Why or why not?

Discuss your results with your counselors. Which leadership styles work best for them? Why?