



Finding a Way

Practical Examples of How an Effective
Principal-Counselor Relationship Can Lead
to Success for All Students

May 2009

Acknowledgments

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We express our appreciation to the dedicated principals and counselors who shared their stories for this booklet.

The College Board

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The College Board's National Office for School Counselor Advocacy (NOSCA) promotes the value of school counselors as leaders in advancing school reform and student achievement. NOSCA operates from the College Board's Washington, D.C., office. NOSCA seeks to endorse and institutionalize school counseling practice that advocates for equitable educational access and rigorous academic preparation necessary for college readiness for all students. For more information, please visit www.collegeboard.com/nosca.

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National Association of Secondary School Principals

In existence since 1916, the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) is the preeminent organization of and national voice for middle-level and high school principals, assistant principals and aspiring school leaders from across the United States and more than 45 countries around the world. The mission of NASSP is to promote excellence in school leadership. NASSP provides its members with the professional research-based and peer-tested resources, and practical tools and materials they need to serve as visionary school leaders. Through award-winning publications, professional development opportunities, ready access to relevant research and persistence in advocating on behalf of school leaders, NASSP helps to advance middle-level and high school education by promoting high professional standards, focusing attention on school leaders' challenges, providing a "national voice" for school leaders. Building public confidence in education, strengthening the role of the principal as instructional leader, and publicizing the issues and interests of our members in the news media. For more information, please visit www.principals.org.

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A Project of:

The College Board's National Office for School Counselor Advocacy

American School Counselor Association

National Association of Secondary School Principals

Partnerships for Success

The College Board is committed to inspiring students and giving them the tools they need to prepare for, enroll in and graduate from college. Students face so many challenges in their efforts to grow and learn; they need the support of effective partnerships in school.

These partnerships are vital to promote school reform and improved academic outcomes. Close collaboration between school principals and counselors can make this happen. School principals provide leadership and direction. They create and sustain a school climate with high expectations for all students and cultivate a college-going culture. School counselors, in turn, have unique skills and experience to support this vision by helping all students and their families successfully attain rigorous academic preparation and navigate the sometimes confusing path to college. The efforts and expertise of these professionals are especially important for students from families who do not have a college-going tradition. When principals and counselors work together effectively, college becomes more than just a dream for their students.

The College Board's National Office for School Counselor Advocacy has joined with the National Association of Secondary School Principals and the American School Counselor Association — the preeminent organizations in their fields — to find what makes effective principal-counselor relationships work (or not). After surveying more than 2,300 principals and counselors and carefully analyzing the results, we conducted interviews with several teams of principals and counselors around the country. Identified by the three partner organizations as including exemplary principals, counselors or counseling programs, these teams shared stories about their success in working together to promote educational reform efforts and improving the academic outcomes for their students.

Finding a Way tells some of the stories we heard from these dedicated professionals. Each of these teams is very different; some came from long-established schools, others from new ones, some have known each other for years, others for a short time. Their schools are equally diverse, including middle schools and high schools, from inner-city and rural areas with varied student populations. In addition to their inspirational stories, the teams interviewed for this booklet had practical advice for overcoming many of the barriers to successful principal-counselor relationships identified in the survey. By building on their work, I believe that many more principals and counselors can forge a stronger relationship, and create a true partnership for creating and supporting a school vision that can result in an academic climate that will prepare their students for successful futures, including college success.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gaston Caperton". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "G" and "C".

Gaston Caperton
President, The College Board

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Working Together

Snapshot: T.C. Williams High School

She'd heard it before. When school counselor Laura Newton listened to new principal Mel Riddile 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 Laura 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 T.C. Williams were often little more than scheduling machines. It is no wonder that when Dr. Riddile 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. The school is best known for being featured in the film, *Remember the Titans*; 45 percent of the students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, and the student body has a 30 percent mobility rate. 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," said Mel, "but they also last a lot longer. Changing the way people work together changes results more than changing structures does."

The schedule changes were not only a time issue. For many students, especially those from migrant and ELL backgrounds, the scheduling process was haphazard and resulted in their ending up in the wrong classes, and nobody had the time to help them sort it out. Consequently, many of these students were lost in the shuffle, with a high percentage ending up as dropouts. Laura knew that students were being placed out of the ESL program too early or not placed in it when they should have been. From tracking test scores, she knew they did not have the knowledge and skills they needed. Unfortunately, she was never given the opportunity to voice her concerns. She found it very frustrating, saying, "We were paper pushers. I was not an integral part of the school."

Laura quickly established her credibility with Mel by giving an impressive overview of the counseling program and the most effective role of the school counselor to the district's school board. She backed up everything she said with hard data, and showed Mel that he could trust her. He, in turn, gained her trust by fundamentally changing the school's scheduling policies. Each



Mel Riddile, Principal; Laura Newton, Counselor

"Collaborative decisions take longer, but they also last a lot longer."

Mel Riddile, Associate Director for High School Services, NASSP and [Former] Principal, T.C. Williams High School

"As we built trust, it benefited the students because the decisions we made were for the benefit of the students. ... The goal is the same, the vision is the same."

**Laura Newton, Counselor,
T.C. Williams High School**

student would get individual attention in the spring, and schedules would be set. Thereafter, if a student or parent wanted to make a schedule change, they had to make an appointment and come to the school to justify it. The school would no longer take requests (or demands) over the phone. In addition, teachers were given the responsibility for advising students on what courses to take the following year.

This had a pronounced effect, reducing schedule changes by 70 percent and freeing up the counselors' time for other professional activities. It had an even more profound influence on the ELL students; the simplified schedules and more personal counseling time increased state test passing rates from 9 percent to more than 60 percent, and Laura's data were used to justify hiring a part-time reading teacher for students who still lacked the necessary skills. With a much lower frustration level, the students felt empowered as well, resulting in a much lower dropout rate for the ELL population. "Helping more students stay in school," Laura said, "has been our greatest achievement."

Students in the middle were not ignored, either. One of the team's goals was to get more students focused on college as an option, and the team worked to increase the number of students taking the SAT®. From 2003 to 2008, the number of test-takers rose by more than 17 percent, and scores increased slightly as well. AP® results are even more pronounced. In the past four years, the number of AP Exams at the school has increased by 30 percent, and the number of "passing" scores of 3 or higher has increased by 13 percent, from a 39 percent passing rate in 2005 to a 52 percent passing rate in 2008.

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

**Mel Riddile [Former] Principal,
T.C. Williams High School**

Both Laura and Mel recommend taking the lead on communications. Since the role of the counselor is viewed differently in different places, Laura suggests making sure that the principal knows what the counselor's vision of her or his role is. Mel agrees, saying that each counselor should know the profession and stand behind it. Being accountable is vital; his relationship with Laura worked so well because she always had data available to support what she was doing. Laura cautions that communication is a two-way street, and that counselors need to listen as well as talk — you can't implement a principal's plan without knowing what it is.

The principal-counselor team at T.C. Williams High School was successful because they employed several strategies highlighted as vital in a recent principal-counselor survey,* including:

- Each team member gave and earned trust, backing it up with hard work, data and results.
- The team communicates regularly, with Mel saying that the frequency of their talks is more important than the duration.
- The team shared a vision: helping more students stay in school and helping more students get ready for college success.
- The principal empowered his staff to take leadership roles, and backed them up.

* The survey's findings are reported in a companion piece to this booklet, titled *A Closer Look at the Principal-Counselor Relationship*.

The Principal-Counselor Relationship

Educators face enormous challenges in helping their students achieve college success, especially those students from low-income, first-generation and other traditionally underrepresented populations. Principals and school counselors working together can form an effective partnership that advances achievement for all their students. The College Board, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) formed a partnership to study these vitally important relationships, identify effective practices, and determine how other principal-counselor teams could replicate their success.

In the summer of 2008, the College Board conducted a survey focusing on the principal-counselor relationship. Principals and counselors across the nation were invited to participate, and more than 2,300 responded; 15 percent were principals and 85 percent were counselors. About 85 percent were from public schools, and 37 percent were from Title I schools. As themes emerged from the survey, principals and counselors who had been recognized for their success by the partner organizations were interviewed to help determine what activities, skills and habits contributed to their principal-counselor relationships. Survey results served as a guide for the development of the face-to-face team interview questions.

After review of the survey data, it is clear that counselors and principals see three broad areas as critical for the development of an effective principal-counselor relationship:

- Mutual trust and respect
- Principal-counselor communication
- Shared vision and decision making

Each interview provided insight into characteristics and practices that helped facilitate development of these partnerships. Although the methods and activities of the teams interviewed for this project differed widely, all of them had one common characteristic — a shared goal of success for every student — and a willingness to find a way to support and achieve that goal. A deep commitment to ensuring that all students have equal access and opportunities for high achievement permeates these partnerships.

Principals and counselors who completed the survey agreed on the most important aspects of their relationship, although they did not always have the same idea of how well their relationships fit the various characteristics of an effective relationship, and they did not necessarily give the characteristics the same importance. For example, while both groups considered communication to be very important, principals tended to focus on high-quality communication, while counselors tended to focus on the frequency of communication. Similarly, both groups cited respect, but principals looked for respect for their goals and vision, while counselors sought professional and personal respect. In general, principals were more likely than counselors to believe that the 10 characteristics of a good principal-counselor relationship identified through the survey were present in these relationships within their own schools. (See charts under each characteristic, starting on page 11.) The differing priorities and perceptions of principals and counselors can make their relationships contentious and ineffective. But the teams interviewed here have been able to overcome the barriers to a successful relationship by having each member of the team move toward the other position; that is, they were able to view the situation from their counterpart's point of view and either adjust their own perception or compromise. The success these educators have had is inspiring, and the insights shared by these teams provide a firm starting point for other principals and counselors interested in strengthening their own professional relationship.



Principal-Counselor Teams in the Project

Each of the partner organizations has a mechanism for celebrating success in their respective memberships. NASSP invited “Principal of the Year” recipients to participate, while ASCA invited a “Counselor of the Year” winner and a member of a RAMP (Recognized ASCA Model Program) team, and the College Board invited teams nominated for its Inspiration Awards. The teams interviewed included:

Benjamin Banneker Academic High School is a magnet public high school with a 96 percent African American student population, and is located in Washington, D.C. The school’s principal, Anita Berger, and the school’s counselor, Vernita Jefferson, are in constant communication, often via BlackBerry. Beginning her career as a physical education teacher in 1993, the principal immediately became known as a teacher who showed compassion, demonstrating that she had the best interest of the students at heart. As a teacher, she worked closely with the counseling staff. When she became the assistant principal in 2002 and later a principal, the relationship and mutual admiration with counselors had already been established. School counselor Vernita Jefferson began her career one year after Banneker opened in 1982. She is known for helping a school that began on a “wing and a prayer” succeed and establish a 100 percent college acceptance rate. Benjamin Banneker was a 2005 Honorable Mention School in the College Board Inspiration Awards competition.

Ernesto Serna School is a pre-K-8 school in El Paso, Texas. The school has a principal and a counselor who will grab any opportunity to touch base and talk, even at the student bus area early in the morning. The principal, Ricardo Damian, was a classroom teacher for 13 years, an assistant principal for five years and a principal for seven years, with the last four at Ernesto Serna. Tammi Mackeben has been a counselor at the school since it opened nine years ago. She was a teacher for 12 years before becoming a school counselor and was named the 2008 ASCA School Counselor of the Year. This principal-counselor duo describes itself as “a team to help students, we walk side by side and give 110 percent.”

Jefferson County High School, a grades 9-12 comprehensive high school, is located in Louisville, Ga. Molly Howard is the principal who opened the school 14 years ago and was named NASSP 2008 High School Principal of the Year. Ellen Farmer has been a counselor at Jefferson County for 14 years, and Cullen Porter has been a counselor at the school for 11 years. Jefferson County’s motto is: “JCHS is a fountain of knowledge — don’t leave thirsty.” Their promise is to have every student ready for postsecondary education and the workforce.

Kenwood Academy, a neighborhood public high school in Chicago, Ill., has a principal and counselor who will “do whatever it takes” to help students be successful. The principal, Elizabeth Kirby, was a teacher at Kenwood for five years and an assistant principal for three years before becoming principal, a post she has held for four years. Shelby Wyatt has been a counselor for 13 years, 10 of which have been at Kenwood. Shelby was presented the 2008 National Advocacy Award by the College Board’s National Office for School Counselor Advocacy. Shelby describes Elizabeth as “a contemporary educator ... willing to upset the status quo to benefit students, and she is not afraid of change.” Shelby and Elizabeth’s relationship continues to evolve as they work through challenges that present themselves in their daily activities.

Palm Beach Gardens High School is a comprehensive high school serving grades 9-12 in Palm Beach Gardens, Fla. School Principal Jon Prince was determined to make this school number one in the district. He is most proud of the school’s increased graduation rate, which rose from 57 percent to 85 percent in five years. After his first year, he brought in a new director of counseling, Olga Middleton. By working side by side they introduced a credit recovery program that serves more than 150 students who do not have enough credits to be promoted to the next grade level, increased the number of AP courses and removed gatekeeping policies for advanced courses. Palm Beach Gardens High School was an Honorable Mention School for the 2008 College Board Inspiration Awards.

T.C. Williams High School, a comprehensive high school serving grades 9-12 in Alexandria, Va., has a 30 percent mobility rate. Mel Riddile, the former principal, is a believer in distributed leadership and understands the expertise of the school counselor. Almost immediately after assuming leadership of the school, Mel made changes that directly affected the counselor's role in the school, which gave the school counselors a voice at the leadership table. During their two short years together, the principal and the director of school counseling, Laura Newton, made changes in scheduling policies and the ESL program, and created student advisories. Mel and Laura worked together to advocate and implement changes to better serve their students. Mel, who was also the 2006 NASSP Principal of the Year, is now at NASSP. Laura has been a school counselor at T.C. Williams for 15 years and continues to help move the school forward in education reform.

Visitacion Valley Middle School, an inner-city school in San Francisco, Calif., no longer resembles the run-down nearly empty building it was nine years ago. Today the building is utilized year round from early morning until late evening to support a diverse student population — and their families. The student body is 28.8 percent African American, 24.4 percent Asian, 18 percent Latino, 12 percent Filipino and 10 percent Samoan. Nearly one-fifth are special education students. Principal James Dierke has been in education 37 years; he has spent 18 years as a principal and the last nine years at Visitacion. James was named NASSP's 2008 Middle Level Principal of the Year. Donna Amador, the school counseling department chair, has been an educator for 15 years. She was an assistant principal before becoming a school counselor four years ago. In a school at which approximately 50 students have an incarcerated parent, and 74 percent of the students speak a language other than English, Visitacion Valley Middle School has established consistency and multiple in-house school-community partnerships. These partnerships not only support the students but provide resources for the parents that connect them to the school and increase parental involvement.



10

Characteristics of an Effective Principal-Counselor Relationship*

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 the 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 of 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

* The questions on the national survey of principals and counselors, including the characteristics of effective principal-counselor relationships, were suggested by experts at the College Board, ASCA and NASSP. While this is not an exhaustive list and there may be additional important characteristics of these relationships, all 10 presented here were endorsed by both principals and counselors as important characteristics of an effective principal-counselor relationship.

Snapshot: Ernesto Serna School

Ricardo Damian knew a good thing when he saw it. His new school had a very dynamic counselor who could really help with his goals for the school. Although he was new, he had spent 13 years as a teacher and eight years in administration. When he started his tenure as principal at Ernesto Serna School, the district's director of guidance made sure that he understood the role of the counselors. He also recognized a kindred spirit in counselor Tammi Mackeben. "I picked up that she was a hard worker," said Ricardo, "that she really liked her job, and she was here to work with me. And that was the nice thing — she understood that I was here to work with her." He continued, "You need to sit down with [the counselor] and get to know that person, even on a personal basis. That's very important because we work so closely together."

For her part, Tammi was not going to leave anything to chance; she wanted to make sure that the new principal realized how counselors could help throughout the school — especially with raising student achievement. "You know, you have to educate," she said. "You can't expect people to know what a counselor's role is unless you tell them. And I think you have to know what [the principal's] job is too and what they're up against, to have a good relationship. It can't always be about you."



Ricardo Damian, Principal; Tammi Mackeben, Counselor

Trust between the two was established early, when a student had an incident in a classroom. Ricardo called Tammi and asked how she thought it should be handled. "He asked me for my professional opinion," she said. "He wanted input from me like a member of a team to decide something important. That was the first 'aha!' moment to me that this was going to be a real team effort." And once they had made a decision, he followed through exactly the way he said he would.

Ernesto Serna is a pre-K-8 school located near the Mexican-U.S. border in El Paso, Texas; its student population is 99 percent Latino and more than 88 percent of its students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. The school's principal arrives every morning at 6:30 a.m. ready to start a new day, and by 7 a.m., the school counselor has arrived. By 7:30 a.m., both are at the entrance of the school greeting their students and having one of many conversations they will share throughout the day. When Tammi walks by the principal's



office, Ricardo will often seek her advice on student issues; he knows that she can provide data to support academic initiatives for improving student achievement. For example, Tammi suggested, and then promoted the idea that every student in eighth grade should take the PSAT/NMSQT®, not just a select few. Following extensive planning, the principal and counselor moved this initiative forward to send a clear message to the students in Ernesto Serna School: We believe that you can be successful, no matter what your background.

Together, the principal and counselor regularly work with the faculty members who teach in the lower grades to ensure that when students begin middle school, they have the academic skills necessary to participate in a curriculum that will prepare them for AP classes in high school and for college. This student preparation often includes the principal and counselor tutoring students after school. The principal personally hangs signs around the school halls telling students “together we will reach our testing goal,” and the counselor can be found working diligently with eighth-grade students to explain their academic options in high school and to ensure that they make the right choices.

“If we need to talk about something, it does not always have to be behind closed doors.”

**Ricardo Damian, Principal,
Ernesto Serna School**

Having a shared vision is important at Ernesto Serna. “Maybe that’s when we clicked,” said Tammi. “I thought, ‘we’re shortchanging our kids [because] we don’t have high enough expectations for them; they can do as well as anybody else can.’ But it was always kind of a philosophy that, ‘oh well, they’re doing as well as they can.’ And I always felt, ‘No, they’re not. We can do better — we’re shortchanging them.’ That’s the direction we both wanted them to go, to achieve as much as anybody else did. Because all the other stuff that was going on with them didn’t matter, they still can do it if you just have the expectation.” Ricardo agrees. “A counselor I can work with is one who shares my philosophy when it

comes to kids, that we need to serve them, not just pop in — you know, where you have your presentation and pop in the tape and sit there and do your paperwork.”

The focus at the school is on getting all students to achieve at high levels, and the team has been very successful at this. One strategy is to get the school’s two counselors involved in the classroom. Tammi attends teachers’ planning meetings to better understand what’s going on in the classroom and to give her views from a counseling perspective. The whole school is on the same team — not just the principal and counselor. Tammi says, “You couldn’t possibly have a principal-counselor team that worked really well together if it didn’t reflect the whole faculty. ... I don’t think it was just our team that made students successful, but it was just building a team on the campus. Everybody works together well.” She considers it important to educate the faculty on how counselors can support their work. Her work with teachers includes both offering suggestions on how to increase test scores and learning about issues facing individual students before they become major problems. “I go to block meetings because I want to get the information. We talk about students who are having difficulty and troubles and discuss what we are going to do, what interventions we are going to come up with.”

Working with lower-achieving students is just as important as working with the top students. Tammi made the case that they needed to give the entire student body the message that they’re all college bound. Ricardo said, “We spend lunchtime working with the kids and making sure they’re turning their assignments in. And we’ll chase them down if necessary.” Tammi will stay in the cafeteria while Ricardo goes to get others from the playground, saying, “All right, boys, you still have assignments, get in there.”

The work has paid off. Despite the challenges of working with an overwhelmingly disadvantaged population, the school has made adequate yearly progress regularly for the past several years. From 2005 to 2008, the number of students scoring “proficient” in reading improved from 65.9 percent to 86 percent. Average math proficiency improved from 47.9 percent to 75 percent. Eighty-six percent of the school’s students were proficient in writing in 2008.

1. Open communication that provides multiple opportunities for input to decision making

Survey results*	Importance (1-5)	Present in my school (1-5)	Gap between presence and importance
Principals	4.52	4.15	.37
Counselors	4.64	3.58	1.06

Although communication requires both the principal and the counselor to be invested in the partnership, it was apparent that in many of these teams the relationships were supported by the principal’s commitment to continuous dialogue. These principals understood the critical role that both formal and informal communication can have when building an effective relationship.

In these schools the principal encourages an open door policy and knows that if a counselor comes by, it is important. The principal in Florida reports, “The school counselor can come into my office any time, she has open access to me, she can say whatever she wants. If she disagrees with me, she will meet with me, talk to me and discuss why. I seek her counsel because I consider her a person who understands the perception of how things work.” At Jefferson County High School, the principal seeks to listen and to understand. She knows that there is another side to be considered, saying, “Ninety-nine percent of the time we come in seeking to understand.” She legitimizes the other person’s feeling and appreciates their right to those feelings, recommending that everyone should “Empathize with the other person’s position.” The Banneker counselor agrees. “You have to have some insight into that person,” she said. “Watching that person, listening to that person; and communication is just so key.”

“She [Olga] has open access to me. She can say whatever she wants and I’m not going to take it personally. She can challenge my ideas; she can disagree with me.”

**Jon Prince, Principal,
Palm Beach Gardens High School**

The principal in Texas said, “Our day starts with her; I’m in my office, she’s walking by, and it’s ‘Okay, how about this?’ Frequently during the day, we’re both out there [in the school]. We don’t even have to wait until we’re back in the office to find a solution.”

Counselors at several of the schools believe that educating the principal and other educators about the role of the counselor in the school is important, as is understanding the principal’s job. At Kenwood, the principal became familiar with the counseling program through the RAMP award program. She said, “A lot of times people don’t really know what counselors do, so that whole RAMP process really brought light to all the different kinds of things they do beyond paperwork and counseling, and how it ties in.” (The RAMP designation, awarded to schools that align with the criteria set in the ASCA National Model, recognizes schools that are committed to delivering a comprehensive, data-driven school counseling program and an exemplary educational environment. More than 180 schools have earned the RAMP designation since the program’s inception in 2003.)

* 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 meaning “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 meaning “extremely present.” The final column shows the gap between what the survey participants felt was important and its presence in their school.

2. Opportunities to share ideas on teaching, learning and schoolwide educational initiatives

Survey results	Importance (1-5)	Present in my school (1-5)	Gap between presence and importance
Principals	4.24	3.92	.32
Counselors	4.28	3.39	.89

Many of the principals on these teams understand that counselors have the pulse of the school. For these principals, an effective way to tap into that knowledge is through daily communication. Conversations occurred wherever and whenever they were needed — during hall duty, during lunchroom duty or stopping by each other’s offices. When issues arise, they do not wait to find a solution. Frequent, impromptu conversations help teams find solutions to problems large and small — providing transportation for a grandmother to be able to attend a conference or finding a way to help a student who is struggling in a particular class.

The counselors at Visitation Valley are involved in all aspects of the school. “We sat down as a school with the counseling department and we made up what the rules were going to be in the classrooms so the kids don’t have six sets of rules,” said the principal. “We came up with one set of rules and everybody has to follow it.” The counselor works with teachers who are failing a large percentage of their students, offering help in getting their students to achieve. “School,” the principal continued, “should not be a punishment.”

“It is important not to be afraid to communicate with the [principal]. As a counselor sometimes, you are intimidated to try and form a relationship with the principal, because he is the principal. You have to put the right foot forward.”

**Tammi Mackeben, School Counselor,
Ernesto Serna School**

The school counselors and principal at Jefferson County High School credit their honest communication for building a deeper level of trust. Said a school counselor: “Our beginning conversations led us to a deeper understanding of each other’s thinking.” The principal added, “Communicating honestly is risk taking and can potentially fracture the relationship, but when you sit down and talk openly with each other, you come out with a deeper level of trust because you have a greater knowledge of each other.” Trust was a continuing theme of the interviews.

Having clear, effective communication was reported by the teams as being a key characteristic in their principal-counselor relationship. Administrators and counselors from these teams were able to articulate what they expect from each other in terms of work and support. The principal from Ernesto Serna initiated conversations with his counselor to establish what he expects as well as what she can expect from him. “I will walk side by side with you; not in front of you, and not behind you,” he said. “I will give you 110 percent but you must be willing to give me 110 percent.” Said the school counselor: “We don’t have school hours, we do whatever it takes to make sure the kids succeed.” Many times this team would be sitting together until late afternoon tutoring students who needed help. This has paid off in student achievement; most of the school’s students are on a path to college.

In Washington, the principal *needs* her counselor to be involved, saying, “You need the counselor’s position to be more hands-on. If I need her to go into a classroom and observe how Johnny is doing in that classroom and the dynamics going on there, she’ll do that. She can’t do that if she’s stuck with housekeeping and the master schedule.”

The counselors at Kenwood collaborate with the faculty to plan guidance lessons. The lessons are often parallel to the curriculum being taught. For example, when students are studying *Romeo and Juliet*, the counselors will give a program for the students designed around lessons from the play that are relevant in the students' lives. Since one of his responsibilities at the school is testing coordinator, the counselor at Kenwood received support from the principal for leading training sessions for the faculty during staff development days.

Snapshot: Visitacion Valley Middle School

"We're saving people's lives here," said Visitacion Valley Middle School Principal James Dierke, "That's our number one job. Educating them comes along as a big number two, just getting them to school [is a great accomplishment]. We have 97-98 percent attendance right now. We're very, very proud of the fact that we just got the state legislature and the governor to sign, unanimously, a bill to fund post-traumatic stress disorder [treatment] for children," he continued, "because we have a number of kids here who have it. No one knew what to do or how to handle it, so we went into partnership with some professors at Stanford Medical Hospital, and they used our school as a training ground to figure out how to start working with post-traumatic stress disorder." James got a *San Francisco Chronicle* reporter interested in the story, which became front page news for weeks. The local state assemblyman took up the cause and wrote the bill.

James and counselor Donna Amador have a close working relationship, partly because it's necessary. The school's challenges are just too great to handle alone. They share a common philosophy in trying to get help to students who face huge difficulties. "He knows that I've got his back," said Donna, "and I know he's got mine." It has to start with the principal. The principal has to be open to other people having different styles, but communicating where the boundaries are, and then having trust. "I don't sit in Donna's office and figure out what she's doing," said James. "She'll come to me when she needs my help. But we have an understanding of where the boundaries are, what the hot items are that I need to know about right away and what things she can just deal with."



Donna Amador, Counselor; James Dierke, Principal

"I think it has to start with the principal. I think the principal has to be open to other people having different styles, but communicating to the staff where the boundaries are. And then having trust. I think trust is a big thing."

**James Dierke, Principal,
Visitacion Valley Middle School**

Located in San Francisco's Mission District, Visitacion Valley's ethnically diverse student population has two things in common: The vast majority is economically disadvantaged and only 2 percent of the students' parents attended college. Poverty and violence are much more a part of these children's lives than is academic achievement. The student body is 12 percent Latino, 14 percent Filipino, 28 percent African American, 27 percent Asian and 18 percent Samoan. One out of six has a parent in jail, and two-thirds are nonnative English speakers. A third of the students arrive at the school with a record of chronic truancy, but average attendance figures have improved to close to 100 percent.

"We first started looking at what makes a school work and where to start nine years ago. You couldn't hold a meeting in the auditorium because you couldn't trust the kids to act right," said James. "People had their doors locked. Half the faculty left the first year I was here." The first order of business was to establish consistency. This included requiring — and often providing — uniforms. "Donna and her crew are the mothers and fathers of those folks who don't have uniforms. We give them uniforms and wash their clothes." The uniforms helped establish a culture of safety, since it is now clear when non-Visitacion students are in the building. It also eliminated envy among the students.

In addition to getting funding for PTSD treatment, the team wrote a grant to start the Roots Group for children of incarcerated parents. The group includes a social worker and a play therapist who are at the school every day. The program also provides support for the parents not in jail, and visits the prisoners as well. James said this has been a tremendous help with discipline issues in the school. “Those kids were the ones who were always in fights. So that’s eliminated a whole barrier, a group of problems.” Other grants funded a violence prevention program and a part-time school nurse. The school instituted a mediation program to reduce discipline issues and assigned all students and faculty to small “families” that meet regularly to talk and solve problems.

The team decided to get the community involved, keeping the doors open until 9 p.m. and on weekends, and having community agencies keep regular office hours at the school. This includes advocacy groups for Chinese, Latino, Samoan and other organizations. San Francisco City College offers an English language program at the school. “The class is absolutely full,” said James, “so now those parents have a whole different feeling about the school, and they’ll come upstairs and talk to us.” The school hosts a Beacon program, which has an after-school program, but also offers jobs programs and drug counseling for parents. “So now we’re getting our parents in for another reason,” said Donna, “and that makes the school just a more valuable place.”

The principal and counselor at Visitacion function almost like parents — and good ones. “We have a very excellent professional working relationship,” said James. “And it’s based upon mutual understanding and trust.” They support each other, and back each other up. Disagreements are private. The entire school is modeled that way, as a family. The results speak for themselves. Visitacion Valley’s students go on to many of the best high schools in the city, and then to college. “I had two girls come to see me last January. One is a junior at [UC] Santa Barbara and the other at [UC] Santa Cruz. And they live right here.” James wasted very little time sharing their success with his current students, saying, “I dragged them into classrooms.”



3. Sharing information about needs within the school and the community

Survey results	Importance (1-5)	Present in my school (1-5)	Gap between presence and importance
Principals	4.39	3.97	.42
Counselors	4.51	3.51	1.00

The principal at Palm Beach Gardens High School made improving communications between the counseling department and the rest of the school a priority, and one of his first actions was to have the counseling department become more integrated into the school. The new director of counseling circulated and communicated more with the faculty, and ultimately changed the perception of the guidance department within the school. She knew through their constant communication that the principal set high expectations and that he wanted to see change in the guidance department’s focus. At Visitacion Valley Middle School the school departments were moved from four departmental “houses” into one unit with multiple “families” based on grade level. The principal explains, “We are all in one house now and everyone has to talk to everyone. The departments have to talk and problem solve with each other. By having standard weekly meetings there is a consistency in communication.”

The counselors interviewed for this project were all effective advocates for their role and responsibility in advancing student success. The school counselor at Ernesto Serna made sure that her principal knew she attended faculty block meetings, and that she met with students individually to help them with their course work. The principal gained additional insight when he watched her presentation to eighth-graders about the high school academies. He was impressed with the knowledge she had about the high school academic programs and her efforts to help students prepare for the transition from middle school to high school. He showed his understanding of the counselor’s work when they were conducting interviews for another counseling position. The person they were interviewing wanted to know what the role of the counselor was at the school. To the surprise of the school counselor, the principal took the lead on this question and was able to explain exactly what the role of the counselor is in the school. She thought, “He really knows what I do here.” The counselor regularly communicates with teachers as well, even attending faculty meetings.

At Jefferson County High School, the counselors collaborate with teachers, administrators and the counselors at the local middle school. “We talk with teachers a lot, not just about children but about instructional strategies, and when they have meetings about representing some of these things to the faculty, we’re there too,” one of the school’s counselors said.

Snapshot: Jefferson County High School

When Ellen Farmer, a counselor at Jefferson County High School, was younger, her sister Barbara became one of the first African American students to attend her local high school — a predominantly white school — rather than be bused to an all black school 20 miles away. After Barbara had rehearsed a speech to give in class, the other students tried to prevent her from giving it. Fellow student Molly Howard would have none of it. She told the other students to stop; Barbara was going to give her speech. “That made the difference in my sister’s life,” said Ellen, “and in my family, and so I’ve always known her. She’s always been an advocate for people.” When Molly was appointed principal of Jefferson County High, Ellen eagerly applied to work with her as a counselor.

Molly was happy to have her. “The main thing is core beliefs,” she said. “I tried to choose people with core beliefs that I felt would complement the school: Children first.” Counselor Cullen Porter agrees, “We’re here because we want to be here. Bottom line,” Cullen said. He respects his colleagues, saying “They’re about student success; they’re about student relationships; they’re student-focused people.” They also believe in being accessible to students and parents.

The counselors and principal at Jefferson County High have achieved remarkable results in their school by focusing on their students and what it takes to help them succeed academically. The group has an unusually strong, close relationship.

According to Ellen, “We’ve developed a bit of intimacy in the relationship. With that, you can have some vulnerabilities. We found out that’s okay. I think it’s true in any good relationship.” All the team’s members see their role as supporting classroom success. Molly says, “Everybody here knows that the real magic is what happens in the classroom. We are the help and support roles. We’re also the keeper of the mission [of higher expectations for all] because teachers can become so isolated and insulated in that classroom.”



Ellen Farmer, Counselor; Molly Howard, Principal; Cullen Porter, Counselor

Located in rural Georgia, the nearly 1,000 students at Jefferson County are 80 percent African American and 20 percent white, and 80 percent are economically disadvantaged. Graduation rates have increased greatly in recent years, from 63.2 percent in 2004 to 74.5 percent in 2006. The increase is even more pronounced for African American and economically challenged students, each going from under 60 percent to more than 75 percent. The number of students taking AP Exams has increased 233 percent in the past five years.

Because they shared common values, the team has been able to work through mistakes, becoming more effective in the process. Cullen relates a story from his transition from a mental health professional to a school counselor. “I dropped the ball on a college application on a student my first year here, and Dr. Howard and Ellen both said, ‘Okay, we know what we did wrong here, let’s move on.’ They brought me along. I’d never been a school counselor before, so they recognized the learning curve.”

The team is flexible. “We don’t have a set job description delineating our tasks. You’ve got to figure out where your niche is. When it comes, you’ll see it,” said Molly. This requires frequent, close communication. “Some of the things I throw on them force them to have to brainstorm,” she says. “I know that they’re going to try to do it well and do it right, so you have to talk.” This flexibility allows them to benefit from their very different working styles, rather than being in conflict over them. Molly and Ellen are both able to keep many balls in the air at once, while Cullen is very organized and good at following a specific activity through to completion.

The counselors trust the principal to support them as professionals. “Dr. Howard protects the integrity of what we do,” said Ellen. “She knows what counselors are supposed to be doing, and that’s what we’re able to spend 85 percent of the day doing.” Molly also goes out of her way to encourage the counselors to express alternative views, pointing out that it is important to “legitimize your right or another person’s right to have that feeling. Always legitimize it.” She added, “Yes, you have the right to feel that way, but I think if you had all the information that I can help fill in, you might see another side to it. They have to understand what it is to walk in my shoes, and I have to understand what it is to walk in their shoes.”

4. School 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

Ernesto Serna School in El Paso, Texas, has seen large improvements in student achievement — academic as well as behavioral. The counselor and principal both participate on tutoring teams. By working side by side with teachers, the faculty has come to trust and believe that the principal and counselor are supportive of their initiatives. This was clearly evidenced when 100 percent of the seventh- and eighth-grade teachers in core subject areas (reading, language arts, social studies, science and math) agreed to be trained in curriculum designed to prepare students for AP courses and college; this is now the default curriculum for the school. The principal attributes this success to his partnership with the counselor; they represent a united team focusing its efforts on what is best for students. The school counselor also works with the elementary school grades to ensure that students will be prepared for eventual enrollment in AP courses. She has a unique perspective on her leadership position, saying, “I never like to actually call myself part of the leadership team; I’m not part of the teacher team and I’m not part of the administration team. I like to stay in the middle.”

“We are a team ... I am not my own school or my own company.”

**Olga Middleton,
Director of Counseling,
Palm Beach Gardens High School**

The principal at Jefferson County High School believes that counselors are much more than just testing coordinators who count booklets. Together they select the correct reading teacher for students who need additional help. Molly Howard views the counselors as integral to the school’s leadership team, saying, “A school can’t function without them. As far as the real organization and the working of the school to promote high achievement for all kids and to improve instruction and services for kids and to get them to what our goals or mission is — postsecondary-workforce-ready — they’re key to that.” Molly also attributes increases in student achievement to the school counselors’ participation on instructional teams. She also believes that the advisory curriculum developed by the school counselor has been an important part of increased student success. The advisories have placed every student in direct contact with a supportive adult.

Today, Palm Beach Gardens High School is a much different school from five years ago. The principal’s inclusion of the school counselor on the leadership team has directly influenced many decisions that help to close the achievement gap. Because the principal-counselor team placed counseling at the academic focus of the building, the two were successful in targeted efforts to improve the curriculum; the school now has a strong program that keeps students enrolled in school through graduation. After collaborating to eliminate gatekeeping for AP enrollment, the team created a Summer Institute that offers students the opportunity to obtain credit for work in reading and writing in preparation for their upcoming AP course. These not only increase AP enrollment, they provide the support for students to succeed. The principal and counselor at Palm Beach Gardens have worked together to gain faculty buy-in for increased AP enrollment by showcasing successful students and providing pictures and background stories to bring home the reality of the students’ achievement. The principal and counselor will provide the teachers with rosters of students who match those profiles, to change “the perception of what an AP student looks like.”

Counselors in these interviews reported feeling valued as school counselors because the principals seek their advice on school matters and listen to their suggestions. Thus, these counselors have a voice within their schools. Their principals knew that the school counselors were experts in their field, and that their presence was essential to the success of the leadership team. The principal from Jefferson County High wouldn't have an effective leadership team without her school counselors. She believes that "high-quality education or standards requires counselor input and involvement." Acting on her beliefs, she had the counselors serve on advisement committees. The result was the creation of a summer curriculum development program called "Working on the Work."

At Kenwood Academy, the director of counseling is officially part of the leadership team as well. The principal says the counselors play a critical role: "They support the students academically. They support students in terms of their social/emotional growth. They support the students as they work toward their postsecondary plans. They support the parents as they figure out who [in the school] to deal with [about their] kids as they're changing into adolescents."



5. Joint responsibility in the development of goals and metrics that indicate success

Survey results	Importance (1-5)	Present in my school (1-5)	Gap between presence and importance
Principals	4.12	3.67	.45
Counselors	4.14	3.14	1.00

Palm Beach Garden’s school counselor, in partnership with the principal, abolished the school’s gatekeeping policies and practices. Using PSAT/NMSQT scores and AP Potential™, more students have been enrolled in AP courses. AP enrollment numbers increased significantly in only four years. The school also uses data to help students at the other end of the spectrum. Every Friday, administrators meet with counselors to review the status of students identified as at risk. Each person from these teams is responsible for a number of at-risk students, and the two groups meet weekly to discuss the students’ progress.

The principal said, “We go line by line and review how every one of these students is doing. I want to know. Are they in the lowest 25 percent, have they missed five days in the first nine weeks, do they have multiple F’s and do they have less than a 1.5 GPA?” The administrators and the counselors work together to ensure that these students are not lost. The team also used data to improve results on state tests. The test results showed that few students were completing either the short- or the extended-response questions in math. The principal and counselor used this information to convince the math department to put these types of questions at the beginning of classroom tests, and to weight them more heavily. This gave the students an incentive to take these questions seriously.

At Kenwood Academy, the counselor uses data to help the principal make decisions. For example, he visited the feeder schools to collect data on the incoming students’ academic strengths and deficiencies. He was then able to tell the principal that there would be large numbers of students arriving who were nonreaders, so that she could find a way to add support for them when she was creating the master schedule.

“It really was a lot of people working really hard to help kids, but not realizing what was happening. Once they saw the data, once they heard it explained, they understood what was going on.”

**Laura Newton, Counselor,
T.C. Williams High School**

Snapshot: Palm Beach Gardens High School

“We don’t see students after 1 p.m. — that’s paperwork time.” That was the counseling department policy when Jon Prince joined Palm Beach Gardens High School as principal. The faculty did not see the value of the counselors, and the counselors did not realize that the faculty didn’t understand what they did. “It was killing me,” he said, “as a principal. They did not perceive this as an effective organization.” The school was considered “failing,” however, and Jon was able to make changes. He brought in an experienced counselor, Olga Middleton, to lead the counseling department. Like Jon, she leads by example. “If I were going to ask them to do something, I was the first one doing it.”

Two-thirds of the 2,442 students at Palm Beach Gardens are minorities, 47 percent of them are African American and 11 percent are Hispanic. Jon’s proudest achievement is the increase in the school’s graduation rate. “Five years ago it was 57 percent. It’s going to be 85 percent this year.” The team uses data to drive higher achievement. “We’re very, very data driven because what it comes down to is numbers. And we really push these kids to graduate, Olga said. “We’ll do whatever we need to do to get students into credit recovery

and summer school, whatever it takes to help them succeed.” Jon said that “every decision we make is a data decision. Every decision. We meet every Friday [to discuss the students performing in the bottom 25 percent]. She’s got her team of counselors and I’ve got my team of assistant principals and deans. And then we go line by line and I want to know how every single one of those kids is doing. She should have met with all of her kids. These are kids that we’re going to lose if we don’t intervene. And if somebody doesn’t know their stuff, they’re woefully exposed.” Added Olga: “It’s not pretty.”

The two broadened the visibility of the counselors in the school. “I appreciate the fact that he brings me into a lot of the meetings because that gives me a sense of the entire school. The biggest problem at every school I’ve been before, and [what I’ve heard] from counselors, is that they’re very divided, very isolated.” The first year Olga was at Palm Beach Gardens, Jon had the counselors do lunch duty in the cafeteria with the teachers, and had them spend time visiting classrooms so they would get to know each other.

The two agree completely on their goal. “It’s student achievement and success,” said Olga. “So why can’t we just join the team and become even more powerful so we can get the results that we’re looking for?” Jon responds, “Olga continues to hit it on the head with her philosophy about teamwork. It’s not about me, it’s not about her. It’s about us and what we can collectively achieve.”

This philosophical agreement leads to trust. “I really feel very strongly,” said Olga, “that he will never lead me in the wrong direction. There are things I may not understand — I may disagree with him in private, but I will support him outside this door, because I believe that it’s his philosophy that he wants the best for our school and our students. [I’ve developed] a much, much deeper trust in his decisions.” Olga said this is because “he has shown that by his philosophy and his work ethic, and the way he has managed the school, that he’s an amazing leader. He’s good to his word.”



Olga Middleton, Counselor; Jon Prince, Principal

The relationship between the two has evolved, and overcome some issues. The lowest moment for Olga was when Jon told her that she was going to lose a counselor. With few students achieving at an acceptable level, he needed the position for instruction. “That was a challenge for me,” she said, “and it goes back to communication and explaining ‘this is why we’re doing this.’ [Jon said] this is where I need a position in place here because this is a bigger challenge for the school than it is for your department right now. And he gives me that holistic view of the school, that understanding that again, it’s not about me. It’s about the goals of the school and achieving our goals.”

Olga is comfortable enough in her role that she only goes to Jon when she needs his approval. “I think he has given me enough leeway to make decisions with the department,” she said. “I don’t walk in here with every minute little thing. So I think I just come in with things that I understand, well, it’s the principal’s approval that is needed.” Jon’s expectations are very clear, and his philosophy has filtered down to all the staff.

With Jon’s approval, Olga got involved in the school’s AP program. When she arrived at the school, each teacher had his or her own guidelines about who could take an AP course. Olga felt that it should not be a teacher’s decision, since they don’t know the students the way the counselors do. When necessary, Jon reassigned teachers out of AP who would not open their classes. Olga uses PSAT/NMSQT results with AP Potential to identify students who could succeed in AP. The school has gone from 240 students taking AP courses to more than 1,000. Minority student participation has tripled. And the percentage of students scoring 3 or higher on AP Exams has increased. The school identifies potential AP students and offers Summer Institutes with extra reading and writing. One program is in AP Human Geography. The teacher now has three sections, with 81 percent of the students earning scores of 3 or higher. Many of the students are freshmen.

6. Mutual trust between the principal and school counselors

Survey results	Importance (1-5)	Present in my school (1-5)	Gap between presence and importance
Principals	4.78	4.25	.53
Counselors	4.85	3.75	1.10

Trust is a prevalent theme among the teams. This includes personal trust, as illustrated by the Banneker team: “She’s got my back,” said counselor Vernita Jefferson, “and she’s got mine,” finished Principal Anita Berger, who added, “and we both know it.” Part of this is confidence in each other. The principal said, “I can’t recall hearing anything that I’ve discussed with her as an administrator outside of the room. You have to have a level of trust with a person for that. And I know she’ll come in to me with the things that I really need to know as an administrator.” The counselor knows that the principal will back her up, as she did with a parent who wanted to be overly involved in her child’s college applications.

In many of these schools the principals and counselors were willing to take risks on behalf of students. In Palm Beach Gardens High School, risk taking involved expanding a struggling program and eliminating gatekeeping practices and policies for AP enrollment. When Elizabeth Kirby of Kenwood Academy taught African American history, she took a group of students on a field trip to Africa. Some faculty members were concerned about the “extravagant” trip. Their concerns were put at ease when they saw the impact the experience had on the students’ overall perspective about African American history. At Benjamin Banneker Academic High School, the principal and counselor agreed to leave a counselor position vacant because they wanted to avoid bringing someone on board who would not share their philosophy about the work. Therefore, in partnership throughout the year, the principal and counselor worked together to meet all deadlines and commitments for students.

Principal Ricardo Damian of Ernesto Serna describes trust as coming from communications. “Trust in each other,” he said. “You know, to really believe in [the counselor’s] work and respect somebody else for what they do. And not just, ‘you have a title and I expect you to do this,’ but to also know the job.”

“Building trust first starts with you having a relationship, to really understand who you are, what your vision is, what your philosophy is, why that’s important. Ultimately, though, it’s important to have the accountability of a particular outcome.”

**Elizabeth Kirby, Principal,
Kenwood Academy**

7. A shared vision of what is meant by student success

Survey results	Importance (1-5)	Present in my school (1-5)	Gap between presence and importance
Principals	4.70	4.05	.65
Counselors	4.59	3.61	.98

The schools have different ideas about what constitutes success for their students; educators and counselors needed to be on the same page and share a common vision with the principal.

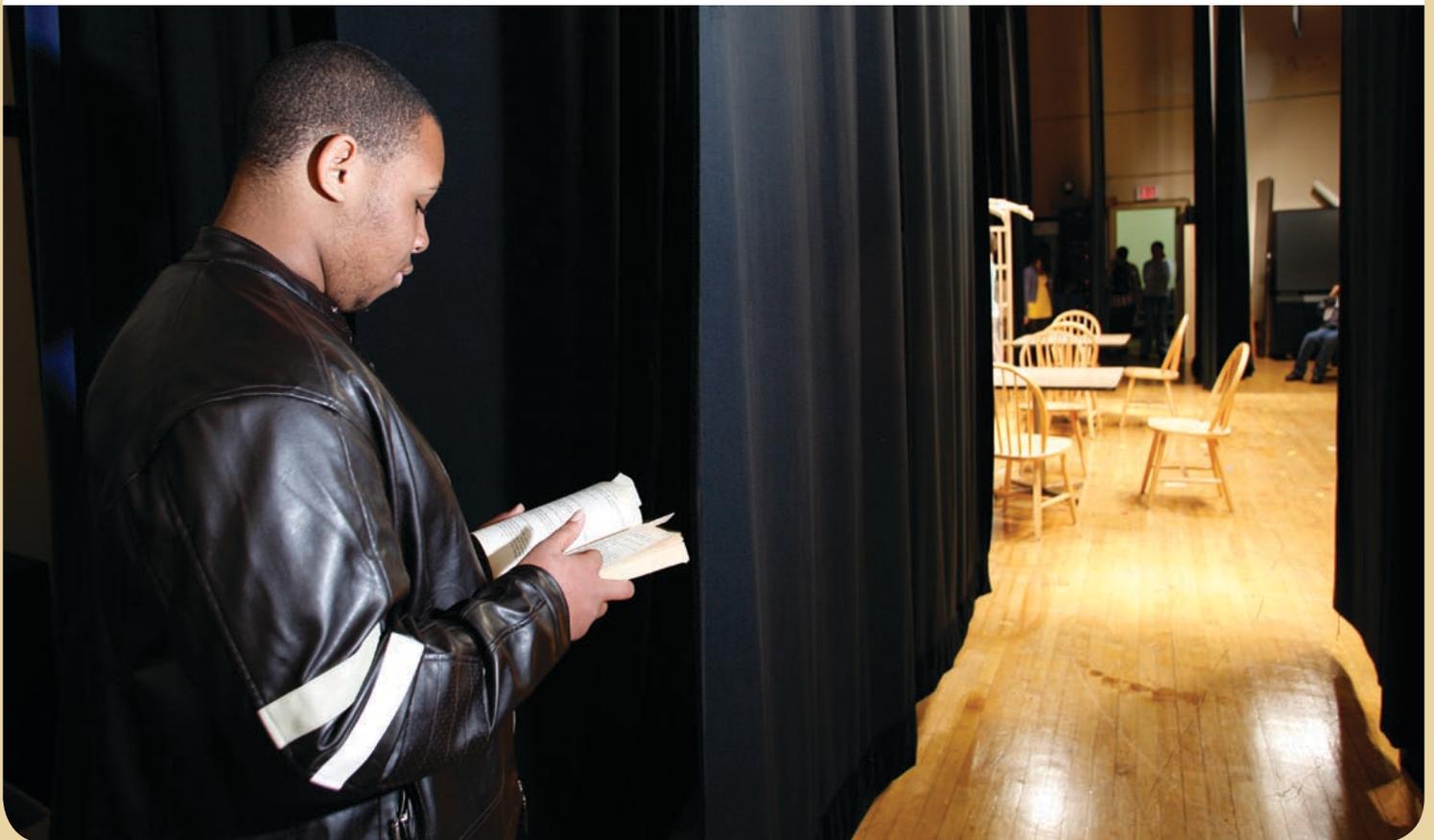
- For Kenwood Academy and Benjamin Banneker, student success equals college.
- At T.C. Williams, success means giving all students access to college-prep courses. For the school's large ELL population, it meant finding a way to help them stay in school.
- At Jefferson County, success is preparing all students for success in college or the world of work.
- At Visitation Valley success is a bit different. Creating a safe environment and support for the students is the most important thing. This provides a setting in which academic achievement is possible.

**"The main thing is core beliefs:
- Children first.
- Whatever it takes."**

Molly Howard, Principal,
Jefferson County High School

**"Everything we do somehow
affects student outcomes and
student achievement."**

Ellen Farmer, Counselor,
Jefferson County High School



Snapshot: Kenwood Academy

After Elizabeth Kirby, the new principal of Kenwood Academy in Chicago, changed the school's mission to just one word — college — counselor Shelby Wyatt wondered how that was going to work. "But as time progressed," he said, "it was like the gatekeeper had been removed and students started going to the college lab. They just didn't say 'all 4.0 students come in,' just, anyone. So you actually had students who had heard that you should go to college." The program has been so successful that they have made college retention for their former students a priority, even helping with financial aid issues.

Kenwood Academy hosts more than 1,700 students in grades 7-12. African Americans make up 93 percent of the student body, which is 98 percent minority. Nearly 75 percent are economically disadvantaged. The graduation rate has increased by more than 11 percent from 2007 to 2008. AP participation increased by 97 percent from 2003 to 2008.

Despite the challenges, Kenwood Academy has a culture of high expectations throughout the school. The counselor believes it's important to work closely with the principal and to know that they share the goal of student success. Shelby says, "It's a growth process. We all grow; we all have to understand each other's positions. But we all have the same goal of making sure that students have access to equitable education."

Before Elizabeth arrived, the counselors had often been thought of as "free people" who could be assigned to any task that needed to be done. With the help of a district counseling leader, the counseling staff at Kenwood helped show the principal the value they added to the school and the success of its students when they were utilized effectively.

One of Shelby's great accomplishments was forming a self-empowerment group for young males called the Kenwood Brotherhood. Run by its members and advised by Shelby, the membership requirements are simple: "Membership into the Brotherhood is open for any male that would like to improve himself. Members are required to accept our Creed: FRATERNITY, RESPONSIBILITY, and CREATIVITY. Members must also pass all seven of their classes in order to attend the field trips. Members are also expected to not have any disciplinary referrals." In addition to helping each other maintain high academic standards and expectations, the group makes a college visit at least once each month, and supports students preparing for the Gates Foundation Millennium Scholars program. Members have been co-presenters with Shelby at several education conferences across the country. This has boosted their self-esteem by allowing them to present to adult educators. Initially, Elizabeth's predecessor was ambivalent about Shelby creating "another group" at the school. He was referred to Elizabeth, who was an assistant principal at that time. When he approached her about it, she responded with enthusiasm, providing funding, space and other resources. "That's an example," he said, "of a commitment and a vision and contemporariness, if that's a word, to move forward and take that risk." For Elizabeth, however, it was an easy decision. "To me, that's something critical, because I knew that was going to support the students academically," she said. "I knew that it was going to provide them an opportunity to connect and have a sense of belonging with the school, and I knew that it would serve a need that we had not been able to serve within the classrooms." She, in turn, appreciated Shelby's initiative, saying "Absolutely. I'm just glad that somebody's willing to take that time."



Shelby Wyatt, Counselor; Elizabeth Kirby, Principal

"Counselors are trying to drive that college enrollment, scholarship, but also student progress throughout the school from grades 9 through 12 as well ... We work in partnership because he [Shelby] represents one critical arm to the way that we achieve the mission for the students."

**Elizabeth Kirby, Principal,
Kenwood Academy**

8. Mutual respect between the principal and school counselors

Survey results	Importance (1-5)	Present in my school (1-5)	Gap between presence and importance
Principals	4.77	4.33	.44
Counselors	4.84	3.82	1.02

Principals and counselors from these teams were able to have honest communication by keeping the focus on the issue rather than the individual and what is best for students. Respect was not only given, but earned. These educators know that they can rely on each other, and that their colleagues are only interested in the

success of their students. This allows them the freedom to be flexible, to take risks, and to learn and grow from mistakes. “I think the most successful schools are the ones that have really good relationships between the counseling department and everybody else,” said the Visitation Valley principal. He observed that “the more good little things that the school counselors do, the less bad little things that come to my office. I figured that out real early on. If they’re doing their job, my job is so much easier. And then I have time to be more creative and do other things.”

“Mutual respect has grown, and that helps.”

Shelby Wyatt, Counselor, Kenwood Academy

In Virginia, the principal’s philosophy of building trust through transparency meant there were no hidden agendas and communications could be frank. When the school counselor from Virginia was working to improve the ESL program within her school, the team kept the focus on the issue, even though they had differing ideas about how to improve the program. “It never got personal, my relationship with the counselor is a partnership,” he said. “We kept having conversations, we all respected each other’s perspective.” The school counselor from Illinois described transparency as “speaking your mind; keeping it here.”

At Banneker, the counselor knows that the principal respects both her as a person and the role of the school counselor, and she returns that respect. “We both have unique gifts to bring to the table that ultimately impact the success of our students,” she said, “so the respect that we have for each one to give, that’s the key to the success of the relationship. You have to respect the principal’s talents just like she respects mine.” The group from Georgia extends respect to valuing each other’s differing work styles, rather than demanding conformity.

Trust within the team at Kenwood Academy has grown over the years, but not without some bumps in the road. For example, in response to a district announcement that all buildings were going to be inspected for cleanliness, the principal told the staff to clean out their offices, without explaining why or to what degree they needed to be emptied. The counselor, who has been an educator for more than 20 years, decided to take her literally and removed everything from his office — even the posters from the wall. The principal got the message that being imperious was unlikely to work. Now, she said, “I approach him differently than I would approach a different counselor, because he’s more experienced; I’ve got to be specific and explain the philosophy, and not just mandate, mandate.” This lesson also helped her understand that she can’t deal with veteran teachers the same way she deals with young teachers.

9. Shared decision making on initiatives that impact student success

Survey results	Importance (1-5)	Present in my school (1-5)	Gap between presence and importance
Principals	4.52	4.15	.37
Counselors	4.64	3.58	1.06

Many of these principals and counselors understand the importance of shared decision making in fostering an atmosphere of collaboration. The principals view the counselors as vital to increasing student achievement, and they understand that the role of counselors in the building is much larger and more important than “pushing papers.” In turn, the counselor is an integral member of the leadership team and the administrators clearly state that counselors are key players, often serving as an extension of the administrative team. Counselors from these schools have taken the initiative to extend their work beyond the counseling department by stepping into the hallways and classrooms to provide support for the school administration, faculty and students.

The principal at Banneker uses her counselor as a sounding board, “closing the door and collaborating with her, asking her [for her opinion on] some of those things that normally an administrator would not share with their counselor; showing that I respect you enough to get your opinion about an administrative decision.”

The counselors at Kenwood Academy are a critical part of maintaining high student achievement. “Their set of expectations and outcomes that they are trying to drive [leads to] college enrollment and scholarships,” said the principal, “but also student progress throughout high school from grades 9 through 12.” Together with the principal, the team uses both hard data and anecdotal data.

Snapshot: Benjamin Banneker Academic High School

Located in the heart of one of the most challenging school districts in the country, the entire school community at Benjamin Banneker Academic High School shares a philosophy and goal: Everybody is going to college. The principal and counselor have a close personal and working relationship built on that shared mission.

Counselor Vernita Jefferson said: “We knew our principal was committed when she first came to our school. If we had a student who needed extra hand-holding, we would put that student in her advisory [homeroom]. If [a student were] a diamond in the rough, we would match that student with her and we would see growth every year with that student. The student would graduate and be accepted to eight or more colleges. We as school counselors admired that quality; she was an extension of our counseling department. She really cared and focused on our students, and she would always collaborate with the counseling department. That was the beginning of our relationship. Anyone who came into the Banneker family really believed in the mission



Vernita Jefferson, Counselor; Anita Berger, Principal

of the school. We believed in the philosophy that our students, whatever it took, would be successful. That is the way we have approached the relationship with our students. Her caring compassion with our young people also earned our respect. Knowing what it takes to move regular adolescents who come in with [a great deal] of societal baggage, we take them as they are. The only thing the students have in common is that they all want to go to college ... We have to ensure that each and every one will be successful and move on."

Principal Anita Berger feels the same way, "Our school counselor bleeds Banneker blood. Her passion, you cannot help but trust it. She is hands-on with helping students complete their college applications. She will have marathon sessions until the last college or scholarship application is mailed, including making sure they are postmarked. The school counselor works unconditionally for the success of students. We know what can happen if you give kids the support they need. It takes all of us; I will take off my administrator's hat to support the school counselor and I will bring the school counselor in meetings to get her thoughts on school-related issues. We built the trust because she doesn't have a problem speaking her mind. I knew when I was a teacher that I could trust her and we could collaborate and work together. We are able to sit at the table and have a discussion. She works well with the kids but also well with the teachers and the parents. She will sit in on a parent conference and I know she is going to say the things that are going to have my back. She is a different messenger."

"There's going to be success with the children here. So, you know, it takes all of us."

**Anita Berger, Principal,
Benjamin Banneker Academic High School**

Banneker has 100 students in each grade from 9 to 12. Largely African American, 96 percent of the students are minorities and 40.3 percent are economically disadvantaged. The school's grading policy is tough: scores of 95 to 100 receive an "A"; 88-94 receive a "B." Even so, more than 40 percent have a GPA over 3.0. The school has strong IB and AP programs, and all students are on a college track: 100 percent of the seniors are accepted into college. Banneker's reading scores have risen from a passing rate of 92 percent in 2006 to 97 percent in 2008, and from 87 to 98 percent in math.

"You have to have some insight into the person, the administrator ... listening, observing, seeing the common goals that person may possess."

**Vernita Jefferson, Counselor,
Benjamin Banneker Academic High School**

In one recent case, Vernita brought to the principal's attention a student who had stopped coming to school. The two made a series of unsuccessful phone calls, and eventually decided to go out to the house and personally bring the student back to school. Said Anita: "You have kids that you have to do hands-on. And so you have to have a team that's willing to go beyond what they're really supposed to do." In another instance, Anita supported Vernita in dealing with an overzealous parent.

Vernita had told the parent that she did not need to be present when her child was putting college applications together. The parent wanted "to do the application for the child, write all the essays." Unable to get Vernita to allow her to do so, the parent called Anita. "But by the time she called me," Anita said, "I already knew about it, because, again, that communications piece." Anita supported her counselor and the parent backed off.

10. A collective commitment to equity and opportunity

Survey results	Importance (1-5)	Present in my school (1-5)	Gap between presence and importance
Principals	4.47	3.91	.56
Counselors	4.48	3.48	1.00

School counselors and principals on these teams had the same commitment to and focus on putting their students first. The school counselor from Kenwood said, “Every student has a right to an equitable education; when you start living it, it makes sense.” With the encouragement of the principal, the counselors started taking every student on college tours. In Texas, the school counselor works hard to ensure that her eighth-grade students are educated on their high school academic options. She enlists faculty members to ensure that these students develop the skill set to succeed in challenging high school courses.

At Palm Beach Gardens High School, the principal and school counselor attribute the success of their relationship to each other. The counselor summed it up by describing their relationship as “walking the talk, having the same goal of high achievement for all students, and the same work ethic.” The principal and counselor worked together to establish programs of credit recovery for students not eligible for promotion, offering Summer Institutes for any student preparing to take an AP course in the fall, and by tracking, on a weekly basis, the progress of — and being responsible for — students considered at risk. After examining dropout data, the principal and counselor saw the potential of the school’s culinary program in enrolling and keeping students engaged in school. The principal recruited faculty who could create a strong culinary curriculum, and the counselor worked to place students in the program; it has grown from 100 students to 300 students and has a waiting list. “It is always working together as a team to create student success,” said the counselor. “Anything from Saturday tutorial to after-school tutorial, you name it, we run each of these ideas back and forth.”

“That’s the direction we both wanted [the students] to go — to achieve as high as anybody else. All the other stuff going on with them doesn’t matter. They can still do it, if you just have the expectation.”

**Tammi Mackeben, School Counselor,
Ernesto Serna School**

Principals from these schools also said that their counselors have a strong connection to the student population. One principal noted that the school counselor would just as readily work with struggling students as she would with academically advanced students. She genuinely cared for and nurtured all of them; he knew she had every student’s best interest at heart. These school counselors have established themselves as providing a safe place for the students, and their reputation precedes them.

These school counselors greet students each morning and have a presence throughout the day in areas where students can be found. When the principal in Georgia does not know a particular student she is working with, she will immediately contact the school counselors to find out which one has a relationship with that student. She depends on the school counselors to know their students so that she can better serve their

individual needs. The school counselor at Visitacion Valley Middle School advised, “Get to know the students, talk to them about their skateboards, about their birthday party, because if you are the kind of person who only waits in their office for the kids to come in because they are in *trouble*, your only understanding of them is trouble. So get out and catch them being good. Then they come in without that level of fear. They know they’ve done wrong, but they also know that I know them for being a good soccer player.”

At Benjamin Banneker, the entire school team shares a philosophy. The counselor said: “We believed in the philosophy and mission of the school. We knew that with our students, whatever it took, we were going to make our students successful. Whatever it takes, we’re going to try and do it.”

Kenwood Academy also has a culture of high expectations throughout the school. The counselor believes it’s important to work together and to know that the principal and counselor share the goal of student success. “It’s a growth process,” he said. “We all grow; we all have to understand each other’s positions. But we all have the same goal of making sure that students have access for equitable education.” Changing the school’s focus to college for all students removed the barriers to college for many students who previously would not have considered themselves to be college material.



Finding a Way: Lessons from These Successful Teams

The survey of principals and school counselors about different aspects of their relationships showed several things. First, it showed that principals and counselors have similar views about the major issues that drive their relationships, and the relative importance of many of these facets. It also pointed out, however, that the two groups of professionals define some of the issues differently. And, in general, principals have a much more positive view of their relationships with the counselors than counselors have of their relationships with the principals.

The teams chosen for these interviews were not picked because of any special relationships between them. In most cases, rather, they were chosen because they had a nationally recognized principal or counselor or had been effective in creating a college-going culture in their school. But the interviews made one thing very clear: In each case, the teams had to confront the issues identified in the survey and find a common ground between the principal and the counselor. And each one of these teams was successful in doing so.

The partnerships were formed in very different ways; some had long-term relationships, others were new at the school and had never met before. The issues facing their students were very different as well. Their partnerships were formed out of necessity and a strong desire to see their students succeed; certain common characteristics are found in many of these teams.

Most often, the principal created a culture in which the skills and expertise of the counselors were valued, encouraged and supported. "I think it has to start with the principal," said Principal James Dierke. "I think the principal has to be open to other people having different styles, but communicating to the staff where the boundaries are, and then having trust."

In turn, many of the counselors found a way to communicate what the principal needed to know, and they frequently backed up their efforts with data. They understood the principal's perspective and that they were dealing with larger issues. Ellen Farmer said of her principal, "She is extremely busy; she's bombarded with a lot of stuff. I've got to try to figure out if this is something big, when is the best time so that I know she has time to hear me."

Perhaps most important, none of the teams were afraid to change their approach when necessary; all of them found a way to work together to increase student success. Donna Amador put it succinctly: "There's really no rule book when kids are troubled and you want to try and get them the help they need."

"We're on the same page. We're in the same book. The student achievement, the student success, is that book."

**Cullen Porter, Counselor,
Jefferson County High School**

"There's really no rule book when you want to get [kids] the help they need."

**Donna Amador, Counselor,
Visitation Valley Middle School**

Taking One Step Forward: A Self-Assessment Tool

This chart can help teams become self-reflective practitioners. You can use it to assess the degree to which the areas in need of work affect 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 things that are critical points in helping a school move forward.

Complete the form by having the principal and counselor(s) rate each characteristic on level of importance from 1 - 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 level of importance and level of presence in the “Gap” column. If the relationship is not at its best, the principal or counselor needs to approach her or his counterpart to begin the process of moving forward. Having concrete examples from *Finding a Way* can help. Many people will find themselves in the stories in this publication or could see the potential of what they could be in the stories. It may be a way to start the conversation — “Which teams are we most like?”

PRINCIPAL			Characteristics of an Effective 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 team			
			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			

Based on our initial conversation about the identified gap(s), we agree to work to improve the following characteristics:

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