



SCHOOL COUNSELORS AS BRIDGES TO RIGOR FOR UNDERREPRESENTED STUDENTS

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SESSION OBJECTIVES:

01

Learn about the experiences of underrepresented students' access to rigor.

02

Identify potential barriers and protective factors related to underrepresented students and academic rigor.

03

Apply strategies that school counselors can promote students' equitable access to rigor.

What the Research Says

What School Counselors Can Do

Next Steps: Action Plan

Q&A

AGENDA



WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

EXPERIENCES OF UNDERREPRESENTED STUDENTS

Racial and
Ethnic
Minorities

Low SES

STEM

Students
with
Disabilities

English
Language
Learners

Geographic
Locations

And more...

BENEFITS OF ACADEMIC RIGOR

College and Career Readiness

- Increased enrollment, academic performance, and graduation from college
- Took fewer remedial courses
- Opens doors to challenging courses and wider elective selections

Social and Emotional Benefits

- Increased feelings of confidence and preparation for college
- Enjoyed being around like-minded peers and overall classroom atmosphere, and felt respected by teachers
- May relieve some financial burden of college tuition

CHALLENGES

Underrepresented high school students experience barriers in accessing and persisting in academic rigor.

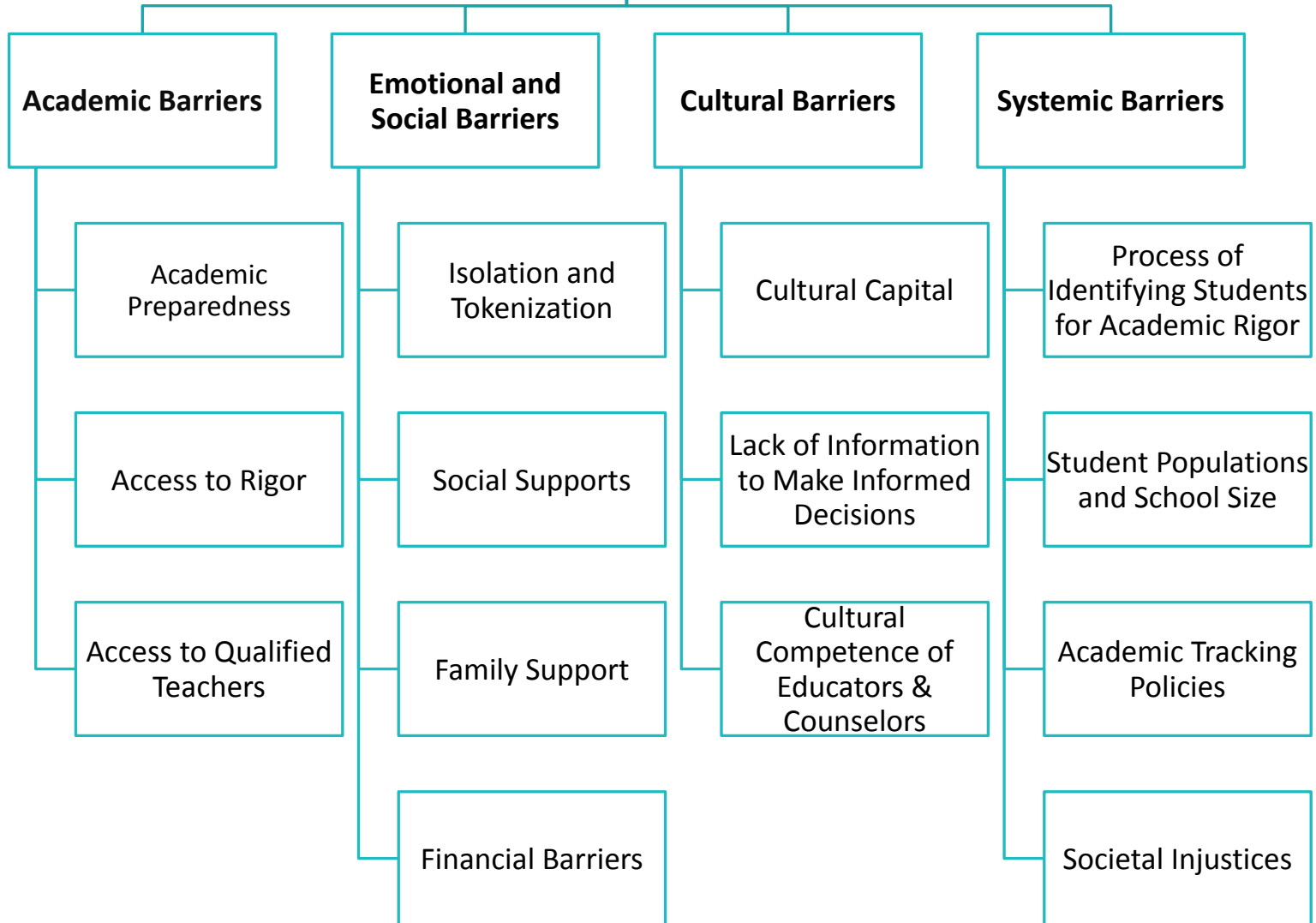
Academic
Barriers

Emotional
and Social
Barriers

Cultural
Barriers

Systemic
Barriers

Challenges



PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Research reported protective factors, or assets, that support underrepresented students' experiences in academic rigor.

Access to
Rigor

Culturally
Responsive
Practices

Personal
Connections

Systemic
Supports



WHAT SCHOOL COUNSELORS CAN DO

ROLES OF SCHOOL COUNSELORS

School Counselors as Bridges

- Comprehensive school counseling programming
- Gateways to information; social capital
- Cultural brokers
- Support school climate and culture



School Counselors as Potential Barriers and Impeded by Barriers

- Misperceptions about students' abilities
- Multicultural competence
- Caseload sizes
- Time and resources
- Non-school counseling tasks
- District/State support

HOW SCHOOL COUNSELORS CAN ENHANCE ACCESS AND EQUITY IN ACADEMIC RIGOR FOR UNDERREPRESENTED STUDENTS

School
Counselors as
Advocates

School
Counselors as
Collaborators

School
Counselors as
Leaders

School
Counselors
Impacting
Systemic
Change

SCHOOL COUNSELORS AS ADVOCATES

Advocacy for Students

- Build rapport
- Develop cultural awareness and humility
- Increase access to resources (e.g., mental health, college info)

Advocacy for Families

- Build rapport
- Conduct outreach to parents
- Act as cultural brokers
- Promote parent involvement

Advocacy Through Data

- Disaggregate student and school data
- Use data as advocacy
- Make decisions with data as your vehicle

Advocacy Through School Counseling Interventions

- Direct student services
- Consider and implement evidence-based interventions

SCHOOL COUNSELORS AS COLLABORATORS

Inside the School

- Partner with teachers, staff, administrators, interns, etc.
- Be the bridge between students and staff
- Initiate discussions in leadership team and advisory council meetings.

Outside the School

- Connect and build relationships with colleges/universities, community organizations, alumni, middle school counselors, and other stakeholders.
- Refer students and families to pre-college access programs, such as TRIO, Upward Bound, and more.

SCHOOL COUNSELORS AS LEADERS

Program Development

- Develop and implement comprehensive school counseling programs
- Define the program's focus
- Lead by example by modeling ethical standards and best practices for advocacy
- Acknowledge and address diversity of students' needs in program and goal development toward closing gaps

Initiatives to Promote Professional Identity Development

- Self-reflect upon own biases and multicultural competence.
- Increase visibility in school to mitigate role confusion.
- Model positive interpersonal relationships with students and adults.

School-Based Professional Development Initiatives

- Lead and support professional development training for school staff
- Lead or implement workshops and in-services for teachers, administrators, and staff about culturally relevant pedagogies, implicit biases, etc.

SCHOOL COUNSELORS IMPACTING SYSTEMIC CHANGE

Remove Barriers to Academic Rigor

- Challenge gatekeeping practices and academic tracking policies
- Recruit equitably through targeted outreach to underrepresented students and families
- Provide supports for high school students to accelerate their learning and access to rigor
- Advocate for college preparatory curricula for all students
- Engage in equitable educational planning

Promote a College-Going Culture and Climate

- Make academic rigor the default expectation
- Expand range of rigorous course offerings (not just math & sciences, but also arts & electives too)
- Implement counseling interventions to address social and emotional wellness and academic behaviors (e.g., study and learning habits)
- Set a culture of high expectations for all students

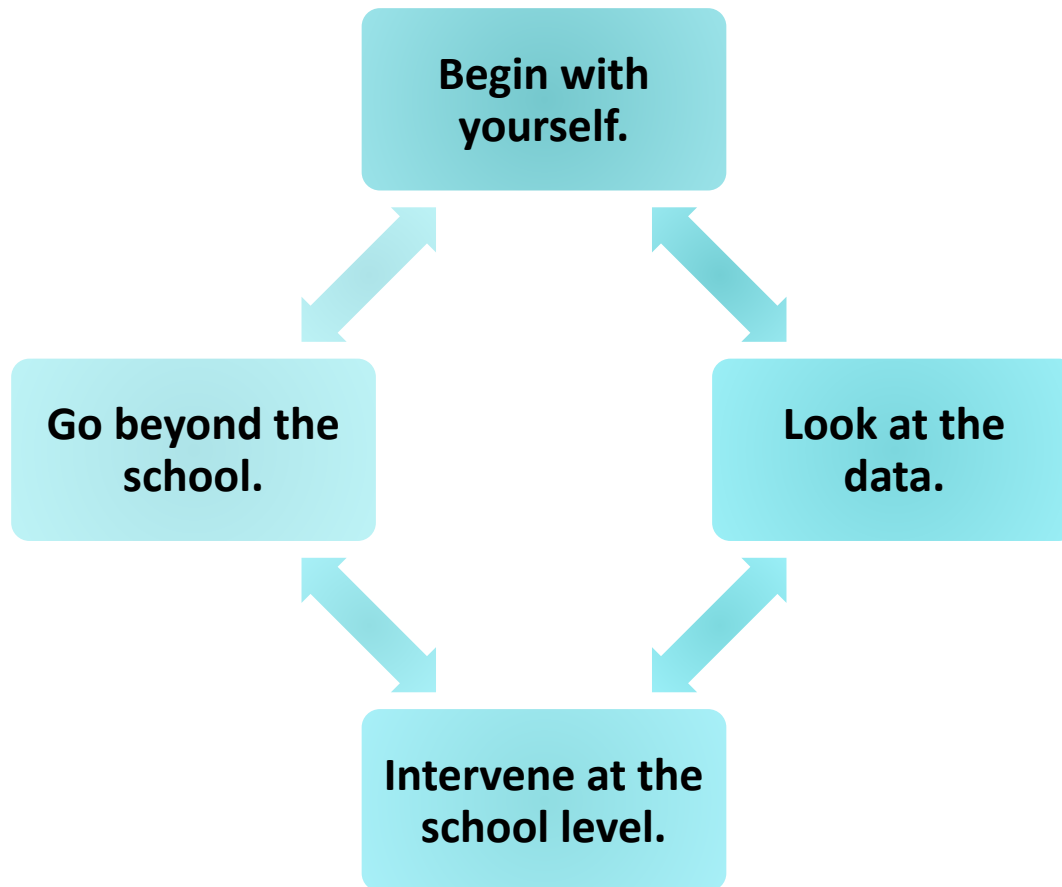
Promote Policies That Impact All Students

- Question how educational resources are distributed within schools and districts
- Understand practices that discourage and hinder participation in academic rigor
- Advocate for district-level professional development
- Engage in political advocacy

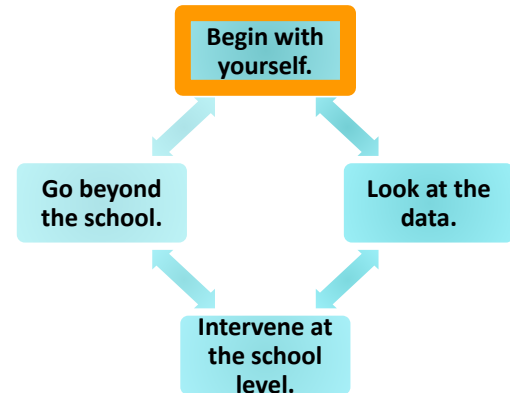


**NEXT STEPS:
WHAT IS YOUR
ACTION PLAN?**

NEXT STEPS FOR TAKING ACTION



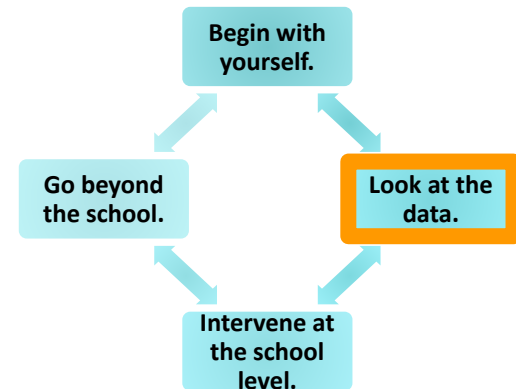
1. Begin with Yourself



Engage in critical self-reflection of your own school counseling program and practices.

- What kinds of gaps in services and interventions are present in the school counseling program?
- How does the school counseling program and initiatives enhance access and break down barriers for our underserved students and families?
- What are my implicit and explicit biases? How might my language, practices, and policies unintentionally or intentionally communicate deficits? And how can I transform them to focus on my students' and families' strengths?
- What supports and resources do I need to ensure that I am continuously self-reflecting and learning?

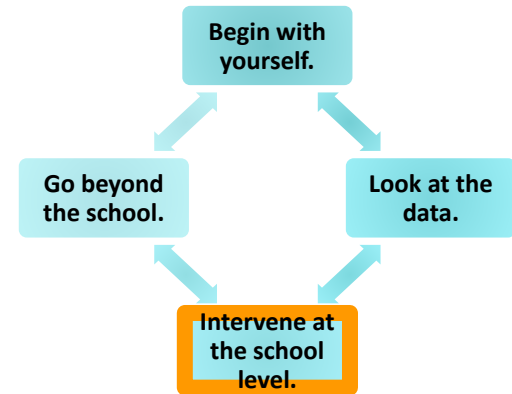
2. Look at the Data



Disaggregate, and note any disproportionalities, gaps, and barriers in the school and student data.

- What are your school counseling mission & goals, and does it align with your school and district mission & goals?
- What does the school data say? (For example, start with the [School Accountability Report Card \[SARC\]](#) for California schools.)
 - Who is represented and who is not?
 - How do these data points compare to the context of your district or state?
 - If we are aware of these data points, what have we already tried, and what do we need to do?
 - What is the data not showing? What additional data (e.g., needs assessment data, pre-post test data, etc.) can we collect to be more informed about students' needs and next steps?
- What does the research say about interventions that will work for our students and school? Are we being critical about what the research tells us?

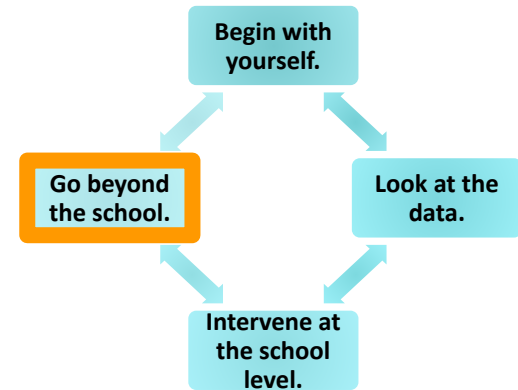
3. Intervene at the School Level



Intervene locally and within our reach at the school level.

- Who is represented (or not represented) on the school leadership team? Is the school counselor voice and expertise included in school goals and decisions?
- Are we collaboratively and transparently discussing gaps and inequitable practices and policies at our school (e.g., tracking, gatekeeping)?
- Are we having conversations with our students and stakeholders about why they enjoy rigorous programs and why others they might be leaving them?
- Are we brainstorming potential ideas together and consulting with others (e.g., staff, stakeholders) to determine resources and interventions?
- What is our role in leading and advocating for culturally responsive practices and school policy changes for staff and students?
- How is our school building trust with our students and families?
- How do we communicate high expectations for all students and that they matter and belong?

4. Go Beyond the School



Make systemic changes inside and also outside of your school building.

- How are the identified opportunity gaps connected to district, state, and federal policies?
- How do we call attention to and address inequalities in access to rigor? How do we challenge the status quo (e.g., “*But that’s how it’s always been done...*”)
- How do we strengthen and leverage school-family-community partnerships to best support and advocate for our students and families and achieve the school/school counseling program mission and goals?
- How are we inviting families’ perspectives and implementing culturally responsive interventions to close information gaps?
- How are we empowering students to amplify their voices for change they want to see and need to be successful and belong?
- How can we serve as expert consultants for our schools and districts about changing policies and practices and promoting anti-biased measures of how students are identified and invited to academically rigorous coursework?
- How can we advocate for authentic professional development to strengthen our practice as school counselors?

Takeaway and Take Action!

- How can we think of our work and roles as school counselors in more expansive and transformative ways?
- Rather than determining who should/should not enter rigorous courses & programs, how do we provide students and their families and communities with the keys to open doors to opportunities?
- How do we advocate for systemic change by calling attention to and dismantling inequitable beliefs, practices, and policies that limit access to educational opportunities?
- How do we become culturally responsive, equity-minded allies for our students, families, and schools?
- Thus, what action steps can I/we take this school year to transform my/our role and position to promote equitable access to educational opportunities for our students?

FURTHER READINGS

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Hooker, S., & Brand, B. (2010). College knowledge: A critical component of college and career readiness. *New Directions for Youth Development*, 127, 75–85. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1002/yd.364>



QUESTIONS?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME!

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