

Making Student Achievement a Priority: The Role of School Counselors in Turnaround Schools

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Abstract

Much attention has been paid to administrators and teachers in turnaround schools; however, little focus, if any, is given to school counselors and the vital role that they play in improving student outcomes. In turnaround schools, it is critical that all school personnel are involved in improving school outcomes, such as academic achievement and graduation rates, in the lowest performing high schools in the United States. The authors highlight the critical role that school counselors play in turnaround schools and offer specific recommendations on how they may collaborate with other stakeholders to improve student achievement in such school settings.

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The U.S. Department of Education and the Obama administration have made turning around low-performing schools a major priority in national education reform (Hansen, 2012). This priority has been maintained through federal programs, such as *Race to the Top* and the *School Improvement Grant* competition, both created to provide funding to states and local school districts that design innovative strategies to improve student achievement (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Similarly, the Title I School Improvement Grant program has been given \$3.5 billion U.S. dollars to disperse to states for dissemination to local school districts to turn around their lowest performing schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). One of the primary goals of *Race to the Top* focused on improving low-performing schools by closing the achievement gap among different demographic groups, improving student academic performance, ensuring students are college and career ready, and raising graduation rates (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

Both state and local school districts have outlined actions and improvement benchmarks for their respective schools. These initiatives stem from No Child Left Behind (NCLB), which is federal legislation based on four principles: “accountability for results, more choices for parents, greater local control and flexibility, and an emphasis on doing what works based on scientific research” (U.S. Department of Education, 2005, para 2). Moreover, the major goal of NCLB is that all students will be proficient in reading/language arts and mathematics by 2020. At the state level, the focus for schools is to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) toward the overall goal of all students being proficient. Under NCLB, greater accountability measures have been placed specifically on teachers and administrators to meet AYP and state-level benchmarks. To note, NCLB has been replaced with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA; U.S. Department of Education, n.d.), which shifts the focus more to state-driven measures for identification and interventions for low-performing schools and does not use student testing performance as the only indicator for school ratings.

Turnaround schools, as they are often referenced, are schools transformed through changes in organizational structure (e.g., administration and other school staff) by the school district to produce quick gains (usually 18-24 months) in student achievement (Herman, 2012; Herman et al., 2008; Public Impact for the Center on Innovation & Improvement, 2007; Rhim, 2012). Specifically, turnaround schools address schoolwide challenges rather than a group of struggling students; they are characterized by a sustained period of

low performance over time, where student achievement is very low and far from proficiency levels (Herman, 2012; Peck & Reitzug, 2014). Furthermore, turnaround schools are whole-school reform models grounded in data-driven decision making, accountability, and evidenced-based strategies and interventions (Herman et al., 2008; Public Impact for the Center on Innovation & Improvement, 2007). Schools that are considered “turnaround” are persistently low performing (i.e., more than 20% of the student population failing to meet state requirements), require dramatic staff changes (in some cases, staff having to be rehired or fired, change of school leadership), and must provide evidence of academic improvement in a designated period of time (Herman, 2012; Herman et al., 2008). In essence, turning around under-achieving schools represents an assertive effort to assist all students with passing performance indicators (e.g., academic standards), specifically at the state level.

Other than low achievement benchmarks, turnaround schools are often characterized by students from low-income backgrounds facing immense educational and non-educational barriers (e.g., overcrowded classrooms, a higher percentage of unqualified teachers, higher drop-out rates, low student attendance, and a school climate not conducive to a successful learning environment; Calkins, Guenther, Belfiore, & Lash, 2007). In addition, bureaucracy and “teaching to the test” may add to the reasons that a school is underperforming (Duke & Jacobson, 2011). Peck and Reitzug (2014) noted that turnaround and school reform efforts have been mainly concentrated in urban areas. In addition, the U.S. Department of Education reported that the majority of school improvement grants were given to schools in urban areas during the 2010-2011 school year (as cited in Peck & Reitzug, 2014; Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, n.d.).

Given the national dialogue about education reform, little is known about the role of the school counselors and the contributions they make to improve student outcomes. Oftentimes, the focus of turnaround schools is school leadership (e.g., assistant principals and principals) and teacher effectiveness to transform low performance into success. Specifically, principals perform multiple duties, such as leading teachers, school counselors, and other school staff, and implementing and augmenting policies, practices, and interventions, that change the dynamic of the school culture to produce positive results in this era of accountability (Lynch, 2012). Moreover, Dollarhide, Smith, and Lemberger (2007) suggested that school leaders (e.g., principals and assistant principals) can shape the role of the school counselor and how they execute their duties. However, little attention is paid to support personnel (e.g., school counselors) and how their skill sets can affect the academic success of students attending turnaround schools.

Schools counselors serve an important role in schools (Moore, Henfield, & Owens, 2008); they address the academic, social/personal, and career development needs of all students (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2012). Specifically, school counselors address these needs by “designing, implementing, evaluating and enhancing a comprehensive school counseling program that promotes and enhances student success” (ASCA, n.d., p. 1). Moreover, school counselors serve as leaders in schools through collaboration and advocacy to create a school environment that bolsters school achievement through culturally responsive programmatic interventions (i.e., individual counseling, group counseling, and classroom guidance; ASCA, 2012). The transformed role of the school counselors shifts from viewing the student as the problem to addressing academic and institutional barriers within the school, which often impedes student success (Erford, 2015).

Given the transformed role, school counselors are in a position to collect and analyze data to identify systemic issues that affect students negatively. As part of their role, they can use these data to build a collaborative taskforce aimed at eliminating systemic inequities through teaming with teachers, students, staff, parents, and community members (ASCA, 2012; Erford, 2015). This collaboration allows for a consistent network of support for students while still holding students to high standards of excellence. Based on their academic training, school counselors are equipped to use district- and school-level data to identify specific measurable goals of the comprehensive counseling program activities. They are also able to create interventions based on data to improve student achievement. Thus, our purpose of writing this article was to convey the role of school counselors and their contributions to turning around low-performing schools.

Theoretical Framework

Ecological Systems Theory

Extant research has shown that environmental factors influence the academic performance and development of students (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Hines & Holcomb-McCoy, 2013; Stewart, 2007). For this article, the authors use Urie Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) to discuss how school counselors in turnaround schools could positively shape the school environment as well as learning outcomes. Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) theory consists of five systems explaining how certain environmental factors affect the behaviors of individuals, particularly children. First, the microsystem is where students have direct interactions with individuals, such as

parents, friends, teachers, and school counselors, in their environment. Second, the mesosystem describes the relationships between individuals in the microsystems. For example, students' parents may interact with their teachers about an academic or behavioral issue. Third, the exosystem is not directly related to students, but it still affects their development. An example of the exosystem would include access to libraries or bookstores that students have in their communities, which may affect their ability to receive supplemental educational resources. Fourth, the macrosystem involves the sociopolitical issues that may affect children, such as funding for schools at the state and local district levels. Last, the chronosystem characterizes the events that influence development over the span of students' life, such as divorce of parents and aging.

School counselors are charged with working with students and other educational and non-educational stakeholders (i.e., to ensure that students are academically successful, socially and personally competent, and college and career ready; ASCA, 2012; Erford, 2015). Therefore, school counselors are interacting with students at the microsystem level (e.g., working with students via individual and group counseling), mesosystem level (e.g., working with parents and teachers on behalf of students), exosystem level (e.g., advocating for student resources at the district and state levels), macrosystem level (e.g., understanding and working within the cultural context of students), and chronosystem level (e.g., assisting students with life events such as divorce between parents; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). For this article, school counselors are included in the microsystem and mesosystem, given their ability to work with both the student and stakeholders (i.e., school administrators, teachers, and parents) to improve school environments and academic outcomes for students.

Literature Review

Turnaround Schools

Throughout the theoretical and scientific literature, education scholars acknowledge widespread factors undergirding a lack of academic success at low-performing schools (Moore & Lewis, 2014; Stein, 2012; Travers & Christiansen, 2010), specifically a culture of low expectations was a common thread in underachievement (Stein, 2012; Travers & Christiansen, 2010). Travers and Christiansen (2010) highlighted the cyclical nature of school failure, involving “persistently poor performance, declining expectations . . . remaining students [falling] further behind and [having] higher needs, resource levels and expertise no longer [matching] needs . . .” (p. 4), and

recommended a repertoire of resources to break the cycle. Also, overwhelmingly, demographic trends such as schools being comprised of mostly students of color, students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and students with limited English proficiency (LEP) emerged as a common factor within low-performing schools (Manwaring, 2011; Moore & Owens, 2008; Stein, 2012; Travers & Christiansen, 2010).

When examining low-performing high schools, Duke and Jacobson (2011) addressed impediments, such as departmental fragmentation and the effects of the influx of students who are already performing below grade level. In addition, referring to the reform efforts of a high school principal, Duke and Jacobson noted seemingly minor mistakes to support their argument, such as losing track and sometimes mistakenly destroying important academic records, which were counterproductive to effective monitoring of student progress. Teachers, administrators, and parents were oftentimes unaware of students' progress until it was too late or more costly and time-consuming to address underperformance (Robinson & Buntrock, 2011). Moreover, Stein (2012) indicated the importance of communicating information about student performance between teachers and administrators, teachers and students, and teachers and parents. Once schools were designated as low performing and received federal resources, tutorial services were seen as quality supports that would aid in the school turnaround (Duke & Jacobson, 2011). However, the administrators realized that subpar tutorial services were being delivered and hampering the efforts of the schools to progress forward. Not only were tutorial services inferior, but there were also pockets of underperforming and uncommitted teachers at many of the referenced schools, which lowered the morale of other teachers, thus working to maintain a self-fulfilling prophecy for students, and being counterproductive to the reform efforts of school administrators (Herman et al., 2008; Manwaring, 2011; Stein, 2012; U.S. Department of Education, 2009). For example, daily classroom assessments, interim benchmarks, and carefully planned instructional time work to prevent wasted time and teaching approaches without proven results (Robinson & Buntrock, 2011; Stein, 2012).

Competent leadership at the school and district levels leads to enhanced communication and serves as a model of high expectations, while having students as central to its mission (Malone, Mark, Miller, Kekahio, & Narayan, 2014). According to Stein (2012), school administrators and district-level leaders should be willing to work independently when collaboration is not practical and to effectively seek input when time constraints are not an issue. Models of this type of leadership typically revolve around instructional trade-offs with leaders adjusting class schedules to focus on the critical content areas as designated by NCLB, now replaced with ESSA. In past studies, this allowed for double-block

scheduling to provide students with additional instructional time in problematic areas, while another example involved implementation of an after-school and summer school initiative for freshmen who were behind at the end of a grading period or academic year (Duke & Jacobson, 2011; Duke & Landahl, 2011; Robinson & Buntrock, 2011). Moreover, turnaround schools are in a position to promote equity and academic success through a transformative culture that gives support through committed adults that have high expectations of students, who are strong advocates for resources as well as create an environment that promotes an ethos of excellence (NCTSC, n.d.).

School Counseling in Turnaround Schools

As greater accountability measures are being placed on schools, even greater accountability is needed for the role of the profession of school counseling in student achievement (Erford, 2015). Traditional school counseling models have focused more on equality, providing individual counseling to students with little understanding of larger systemic issues that influence students (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). These school counseling programs often maintained the status quo, perpetuating disparate outcomes for historically underserved students (Martin, 2015). However, under the current economic and political terrain, more accountability for the educational success of *all* students demands that all educational professionals need to be involved in preparing students to achieve academic success to compete in a global economy (Chen-Hayes, Ockerman, & Mason, 2014; Erford, 2015; Harris, Mayes, Vega, & Hines, 2016).

With the focus on preparing all students to participate in a global economy, the school counseling profession had to shift from a traditional model as viewing students as the problem to one that emphasized removing systemic barriers to student success for whole groups of students (Martin, 2015). Instead of answering the question of “What do counselors do?,” school counselors now focus on addressing the question, “How are students different because of what school counselors do?” (ASCA, 2012). To address these questions, the school counseling profession has transformed to find systemic actions to meet the academic, personal/social, and career needs of *all* students. Transformed school counselors champion educational equity for all students by ensuring that all students have access to high-quality education and opportunities (Chen-Hayes et al., 2014; Erford, 2015; Mayes & Hines, 2014; Moore, Sanders, Bryant, Gallant, & Owens, 2009).

A New Vision for Professional School Counseling

In moving away from the traditional model, school counselors use their position to affect systemic change in school to address inequities. The scope of

work for a transformed school counselor includes leadership, advocacy and systemic change, teaming and collaboration, counseling and coordination, assessment as well as use of data (Chen-Hayes et al., 2014; Martin 2015).

Leadership. School counselors play a key role in helping PK-12 schools achieve their mission (Flowers, Milner, & Moore, 2003). School counselors are leaders who engage in systemic change to ensure the success of all students. More specifically, school counselors work as leaders, advocates, and collaborators in closing the achievement gap between students of color, poor students, or underachieving students and their more advantaged peers (ASCA, 2012). School counselors work to remove barriers to learning through collaboration with all educational stakeholders (Sink, 2009). They also promote, plan, and implement comprehensive counseling curriculum, which includes prevention programs to foster greater student achievement (Martin, 2015).

Advocacy and systemic change. School counselors are student advocates; they advocate for students' educational needs and work to ensure that these needs are met through collaboration with educational stakeholders (ASCA, 2012). In addition, school counselors utilize data to understand whole-school needs and student outcomes to identify and address systemic barriers to student achievement (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Martin, 2015).

Teaming and collaboration. School counselors are a part of a larger group of educational stakeholders. They work collaboratively with these stakeholders to find solutions that ensure equity, access, and academic success of all students (ASCA, 2012; Martin, 2015). School counselors also work collaboratively with student families and community members to foster greater supports for students both inside and outside of school (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Martin, 2015).

Counseling and coordination. School counselors find ways to meet the unique needs of smaller groups of students through brief, individual, and group counseling. As a part of that experience, school counselors coordinate additional resources for students and families to improve student achievement (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007; Martin, 2015). In addition, they coordinate professional development opportunities that address larger systemic issues (i.e., lack of parental involvement or high suspension rates among certain student demographics) within schools.

Assessment and use of data. School counselors are data driven; they collect and analyze data to identify inequities in student achievement, attainment,

and access as well as to gain an understanding of school culture (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Lee & Goodnough, 2015; Sink, 2009). They also use data to establish measurable goals and functions of the comprehensive school counseling program. In addition, evaluative data are used to demonstrate school counselors' accountability in closing gaps in achievement, attainment, and access through the comprehensive school counseling program as a whole (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Lee & Goodnough, 2015; Sink, 2009).

Through various different roles, transformed school counselors have the ability to ensure that all students have access to a high-quality education, specifically students who are in a turnaround school (Erford, 2015). Moreover, school counselors are trained to serve students equitably to meet their unique needs to create a successful school experience (Erford 2015). As a result, transformed school counselors should challenge the status quo, work to eliminate education gaps (i.e., access, attainment, and opportunity) through strategic and systemic approaches that are needed in turnaround schools (National Center for Transforming School Counseling, n.d.).

Social Justice and School Counseling

At the core of the skills of transformed school counselors is the context of social justice. Transformed school counselors acknowledge the broad, systematic societal inequities that are present within and outside of school, and assume responsibility in taking action to eliminate said inequities (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). This means that school counselors for social justice focus on historically underserved and marginalized groups. This is particularly important as traditionally underserved students (e.g., students of color, students with disabilities, English language learners, etc.) often fall through the cracks and are underprepared for postsecondary educational opportunities.

When school counselors focus on social justice, they realize their stake in closing the achievement gap (Bemak & Chung, 2008; Griffin & Steen, 2011) and so much so that when school counselors implement comprehensive, data-driven, accountable programs, substantial gains are made in student outcomes, including the narrowing and closing of achievement gaps (Bodenhorn, Wolfe, & Airen, 2010; Bruce, Getch, & Ziomek-Daigle, 2009; Wilkerson, Pérusse, & Hughes, 2013). They readily challenge the status quo and bias in the effort to hold themselves and others accountable for the success of every student in their building (Bemak & Chung, 2008; Griffin & Steen, 2011; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). When implemented in culturally responsive ways, school counselors can provide programs, interventions, and supports that work to eliminate achievement gaps while being culturally aware and inclusive (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007). Access to comprehensive school

counseling can provide avenues for students to develop positive academic, career, and personal/social identities, which ultimately leads to students achieving their potential and being prepared for postsecondary endeavors (Schellenberg & Grothaus, 2011).

While comprehensive school counseling programs can create more opportunities and support for the success of all students, there are barriers to the implementation of such. For example, comprehensive school counseling programs require all of the aforementioned skills which may call for additional professional development and training experiences for school counselors who may have been educated in more traditional ways (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007; Burkard, Gillen, & Skytte, 2012). Each of these roles is critical in closing the achievement gap at any school let alone the most vulnerable schools. While these skills are necessary for school counselors, there are often larger barriers at play that prevent the implementation of systemic, equitable, comprehensive school counseling programs. For example, building administrators and school staff often shape the role of school counselors (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007; Hines & Holcomb-McCoy, 2013; Vega, Moore, & Miranda, 2015). Although school counselors may have the necessary skills to implement equitable, data-driven programs, school staff and leaders may have a limited view of school counseling. This view may severely limit a school counselor's ability to team and collaborate with multiple stakeholders and implement comprehensive school counseling programs to support the success of all students (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007; Dollarhide et al., 2013). In addition, institutional barriers, such as school policies and time constraints, may impede a school counselor's ability to use their skillset that could reduce barriers to student learning and increase student success.

Within a comprehensive school counseling program, school counselors taking a social justice approach can address systemic issues through leadership, advocacy, data-based decision making, collaboration with key educational personnel, thus affecting school effectiveness and improvement. Furthermore, school counselors should be viewed as agents of organizational development as they can identify problems around student achievement and personal social development and implement interventions to improve student success as well as academic outcomes (ASCA, 2012; Illback & Zins, 1995). Thus, the role of the school counselor is essential to turning around failing schools.

Recommendations

Chen-Hayes et al. (2014) suggest that school counselors are most successful when they collaborate with the school and community stakeholders, promote

cultural consciousness, and implement strategic research-based counseling interventions. Culturally conscious school counselors can accurately assess students' needs, and offer services or promote the provision of services that best fit those needs (Chen-Hayes et al., 2014). School counselors are encouraged to incorporate students' lives or "funds of knowledge" into classroom guidance curriculum (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007; Schellenberg & Grothaus, 2011). "Funds of knowledge" refers to students' social and linguistic practices or cultural and historical knowledge; such cultural inclusion can empower minority or low-income students, and consequently facilitate student learning. Over the years, many researchers have acknowledged the absence of such cultural responsiveness when working with diverse youth, and have noted that equity focused, culturally responsive practices of school counselors allow them to be advocates of social equity by challenging administrators and their implementation of unfair policies and practices (Bemak, Chi-Ying, & Siroskey-Sabdo, 2005; Bemak & Chung, 2005).

Collaborative Stakeholders

Collaboration is essential to the professional success of a school counselor in an underperforming school. The school counselor should work collaboratively with each stakeholder—namely parents, teachers, administrators, and community agencies—who may influence student performance (Chen-Hayes et al., 2014). Wadenya and Lopez's (2008) findings indicate that parent-school counselor collaboration is critical because the presence or absence of parental involvement influences student outcomes. Previous studies have implicated parental involvement in the following student measures: academic achievement, well-being, school attendance, and discernment of the school climate (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). With this in mind, school counselors can encourage parental participation by providing the parent with both positive and negative reports regarding their student, and encouraging teachers to do the same (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007; Chen-Hayes et al., 2014). Parents who consistently receive negative feedback may not be inclined to participate in school activities or voice their concerns with school faculty. Thus, valuing parents' opinions may encourage their participation in their children's educational experiences.

Amatea and West-Olatunji (2007) encourage school counselors to develop a family-centric school environment versus an edu-centric environment. The term *family-centric* refers to an acknowledgment of the family's expertise and usefulness, while edu-centric implies that the expert is the school staff. School counselors can encourage family collaboration by promoting trust, two-way communication, and mutual support (Amatea & West-Olatunji,

2007; Chen-Hayes et al., 2014). Furthermore, school counselors should consider the feasibility of parental involvement, and how the school creates spaces within which parents can engage. For example, minority or low-income parents may work hours that make school visits or school participation difficult; thus, the counselor may need to offer opportunities outside of the scheduled school hours (Chen-Hayes et al., 2014).

Moore-Thomas and Day-Vines (2010) discussed several models of parental collaboration with culturally responsive practices and strategies. At the center of each model, school counselors serve as cultural brokers and liaisons between the school and families. Moore-Thomas and Day-Vines (2010) call for school counselors to take a strengths-based approach in developing relationships and alliances with families that build on common educational goals. As school counselors pursue these relationships, they affirm and value the lived experiences of families while working to eliminate power differentials and barriers that may impede in successful partnership.

In addition, Amatea and West-Olatunji (2007) encourage school counselors to help teachers effectively manage a diverse classroom. It is imperative that school counselors encourage teachers to adopt a strengths-based approach that takes into account each student's unique cultural experience. Research suggests that teachers in low-performing schools tend to highlight the students' deficits rather than their strengths (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007). Middle-class teachers working with low socioeconomic students may label certain student characteristics as deficits rather than recognizing that some characteristics are simply a product of culture or ethnicity. The academic deficits that the students in those schools endure become a by-product of inherent flaws that the teacher perceives exist within the child. In some instances, teachers may adopt a defeatist attitude toward their students, and believe that no amount of contribution can improve student performance. Such views could lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy, wherein the student adopts the teacher's misperceptions. Thus, school counselors should help teachers identify and focus on cultural strengths (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007). The efforts described above not only highlight the school counselor's role as a "cultural bridge" but also highlight the importance of advocacy in the school counseling profession.

The school counselor-principal relationship is also critical to school improvement efforts (Chen-Hayes et al., 2014; College Board, 2009). Both share the same vision for student success; however, in most turnaround schools, the principal is the lead decision maker and often sets the tone for change in the school building. School counselors and principals can help each other in various ways, given the unique skillsets they have to offer. Dollarhide et al. (2007) recommend school counselors talk with their

principals to discuss expectations and how they see their role in the school setting. Communication between principal and school counselor can bring about a mutual understanding on how to improve academic achievement in turnaround schools. All parties previously mentioned have a significant role to play in school turnaround.

School counselors can also help develop instructional teams to increase teacher collaboration by subject and grade level, and establish effective partnerships with feeder middle schools (Duke & Jacobson, 2011; Manwaring, 2011). Also, they can assist principals engaging teachers in team-building exercises and retreats to create group cohesion and solicit input from students about their needs and underutilization of available resources, such as tutoring (Duke & Jacobson, 2011). Consistent monitoring of students emerged as a critical element to the turnaround process, allowing teachers and administrators to notice trends in students' performance and take on a proactive role. Successful administrators are visible throughout their schools, conducting frequent announced and unannounced classroom walkthroughs, greeting students and parents, and meeting with teams of teachers (Manwaring, 2011; Stein, 2012). Thus, collaboration in the school environment, especially in turnaround schools, is essential to student success. Paletta, Candal, and Vidoni (2009) posited that improving the quality of a failing school system necessitates that all stakeholders join forces to construct the change process rather than leaders continually mandating changes.

Experts (Bemak & Chung, 2005; Chen-Hayes et al., 2014; Griffin & Steen, 2011) encourage school counselors to collaborate with community organizations or agencies as well. Collaborating with community organizations may ensure the school's ability to address the child's holistic needs. Students from poorer backgrounds, for example, may face more struggles—namely developmental delays, low graduation rates, or behavioral difficulties—than their middle-class counterparts (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007). Furthermore, urban or low-income schools lack the resources that affluent schools can access (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007; Griffin & Steen, 2011). Bryan and Griffin (2010) suggest that school counselors strengthened school–family–community partnerships by reaching out to various stakeholders to seek their perspective on how to understand and meet and ensure student needs are met.

This can initially be executed through by community asset mapping, a process where school counselors compile or “map” out valuable community resources that can be shared with educational stakeholders, including students, families, educators, and administrators (Griffin & Farris, 2010). After completing a needs assessment with students in their respective schools, school counselors can begin to identify community resources and agencies to

partner with to meet the academic, career, and personal developmental needs of students (Bryan & Griffin, 2010; Griffin & Farris, 2010; Kaffenberger & O'Rorke-Trigiani, 2013). As these partnerships develop, school counselors can work to bring these resources or agencies to the school environment, or provide referrals for students and families to access these resources outside of school. For example, school counselors may partner with a local community college or university to start a mentoring and tutoring program for students. In addition, school counselors may seek out-of-school partnerships with local mental health and healthcare agencies that can provide a range of services for individuals from economically diverse backgrounds as school-based and community-based services (Griffin & Farris, 2010; Kaffenberger & O'Rorke-Trigiani, 2013). Some approaches in the school turnaround process have more consensus than others, although replication of strategies perhaps should not be performed in a one-size-fits-all manner (Travers & Christiansen, 2010). However, it may be worthwhile to explore the practicality of additional options such as creating partnerships with area colleges and universities to improve the quality of education and assist schools with functioning more autonomously once the partnership has ended (Paletta et al., 2009).

Advocacy

Parents and students in "high needs" schools often need an advocate, and experts believe that school counselors working in those settings must satisfy that role (Bemak & Chung, 2005; Chen-Hayes et al., 2014; Griffin & Steen, 2011; Hines, Borders, & Gonzalez, 2015; Hines, Borders, Gonzalez, Villalba, & Henderson, 2014). Bemak and Chung (2005) define advocacy as actions that lead to systematic changes for the less fortunate, and purport that advocacy is instrumental in improving student performance and decreasing the achievement gap rather than focusing on individual students, advocacy requires that school counselors focus on student groups, parents, and teachers (Chen-Hayes et al., 2014). Griffin and Steen (2011) highlight specific advocacy strategies that school counselors can implement such as consciousness raising, initiating difficult dialogue with teachers or administrators, and teaching students self-advocacy techniques.

Advocacy is critical in the turnaround setting; however, counseling graduate programs must effectively prepare preservice counselors to become social justice agents (Griffin & Steen, 2011). To advocate, school counselors must recognize educational inequities and be aware of worldviews and biases (Griffin & Steen, 2011). Collaboration, advocacy, and cultural consciousness highlight the indirect strategies that school counselors can implement to influence student performance; however, experts have also proposed

strategic, research-based interventions that may directly influence achievement outcomes.

Strategic Counseling Interventions

According to Brown and Trusty (2005), strategic interventions are those that school counselors implement after assessing student needs. Just as with school, community, family, partnerships, strategic counseling interventions tie directly to school counseling activities that can meet specific student needs as indicated by assessments. Once school counselors determine need, it is important for school counselors to identify programs and activities that have been shown to be successful. This approach to programming and activities is in line with the structure of schools deemed as turnaround schools—using assessments to drive the implementation of evidence-based prevention and intervention (Duke & Jacobson, 2011). As such, school counselors may implement prevention and intervention programs in different aspects of students' systems (e.g., individual/group level, grade level, schoolwide, family, community, district, etc.). For example, high school counselors may see that groups of students are struggling academically and are less engaged in the classroom (as indicated by needs assessment and school-level data). As such, the school counselor may choose to implement the evidence-based group counseling program such as *Bring out the Brilliance* (Berger, 2013), which addresses and improves skills for students identified as underachievers. This particular intervention is an eight-session group counseling curriculum guided by the literature regarding underachievement and achievement models, which has been shown to improve organization, motivation, and time management for students (Berger, 2013).

Another example of strategic counseling intervention may be around college and career readiness. School counselors may see that there is a gap between the rates at which students apply for postsecondary educational opportunities. School counselors may seek out specific interventions that target the groups that may be falling in the cracks with college and career readiness. One such intervention may be guided by the systemic intervention developed by Marisco and Getch (2009), which focused on increasing the number of Latino students applying to postsecondary educational opportunities. The intervention involved collaboration between educational stakeholders (e.g., English for speakers of other languages [ESOL] counselors, language translators, and administrators) to create and implement a parent workshop and group counseling intervention providing information and support concerning the college application process, which includes goal setting, conducting financial aid searches, preparing application materials, and

connecting with representatives at postsecondary educational institutions of interest. Results from this intervention indicated that Latino students who applied for postsecondary educational opportunities by January 1st increased from 32% from the previous year to 48% in the current year. Furthermore, the percentage of Latino students who applied by May 1st increased from 56% in the previous year to 61% in the current year.

The ASCA (2012) National Model recommends school counselors use data-driven interventions to address the achievement gap and produce equitable outcomes for all students. Specifically, the ASCA National Model gives school counselors the tools to create a comprehensive school counseling program dedicated to improving academic and social outcomes for students (ASCA, 2012; ASCA, n.d.). For example, ASCA (2012) recommends school counselors to frame their mission statement and beliefs about students based on data-driven evidence.

School counselors can develop a mission statement for preparing *ALL* students for postsecondary opportunities, increasing attendance rates and improving achievement, all of which contribute to turning around schools. Also, school counselors can use the school data profile form to assess attendance rates, graduation rates, school safety, racial/ethnic breakdown of students, and number of students with disabilities to get information to know the issues to address (ASCA, 2012). Last, school counselors can use the Closing the Gap Action Plan to document their interventions, number of students to target, outcome data to be assessed (e.g., attendance, behavior, achievement, and the time frame of intervention(s); ASCA, 2012).

Conclusion

The current climate of accountability and academic success for all students warrants the need for school counselors. School counselors are in a unique position to work systemically in turnaround schools to improve academic outcomes and success for all students (Moore & Owens, 2008). The transformed role of the school counselor encompasses a myriad of skill sets that can not only create systemic change to foster academic achievement but also galvanize a collaborative effort with stakeholders to develop a strategic plan to improve student achievement, specifically in turnaround schools. School counselors and all other stakeholders are able to synergize and set a tone for determination, excellence, and innovation to turn low-performing schools into schools that are thriving and high achieving.

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