

# Director- Level Leadership

The move from a school counselor at the building level to a district school counseling director requires a new outlook and focus. Learn to identify what's most important and what makes the greatest impact.

B A C E E A E





Leadership, advocacy, collaboration and systemic change provide a framework for school counselors, but these four tenants also help to guide the role of the school counseling district directors as they support the school counselors.

Generally, when school counselors move into the role of a school counseling district director, the training may be limited. However, district directors need to recognize the important contributions their school counseling training has provided them as they continue working toward equitable outcomes for all students in this new role. District directors have

sends a clear message to your colleagues, the community and those you support about your values. District leaders need to reflect on the needs of the system, the students and the school counseling professionals and allocate their available time accordingly.

As a district director, undoubtedly, there will be some commitments you will be expected to take on to support the school system. Beyond that, your annual goals as well as the district's mission and vision should guide decisions around how you allocate your time and your budget. District school counseling leaders are often double- or triple-booked with meetings and committee participation. How would you, for example, handle a principal request to present information about the district's bullying prevention program at a parent meeting when, at the same time, you're scheduled to meet with a community partner offering to provide scholarships to college-bound

- r How does this work fit into the goals, mission and vision of our programs? Is there a strong connection between the work and the goals or a weaker one?
- r What is the impact on staff and students if I am unable to do this work? Does that impact relate to the overall goals of our district?
- r Do I have the resources necessary to complete this work? If not, will I be able to secure the necessary human and capital resources to complete the work?
- r Is the timeline reasonable for completing this work? Can I work with my supervisor if it is not?

### Understand Your Impact

Ideally, each day school counselors get to experience the positive outcomes of their work with students, families and teachers. Watching students grow, learn, overcome challenges and reach goals gives us a sense of purpose and meaning in the work we do to serve them. The high fives, hugs and heartfelt thank-you notes can

become a distant memory at the district office. Suddenly, getting 100 percent of students to graduate on time takes on a whole new meaning when you have to worry about 12,000 of them as opposed to a few hundred of them.

Just as school counselors use data to determine their impact on students, district leaders also examine data to see their impact on school counseling programs and the students they serve. District school counseling leaders consider the specific needs and goals of the school counseling division when setting goals for their work. In addition to considering the needs of students, district leaders translate those needs into the training, resource and policy needs for the district. For example, the division may have a goal focused on closing achievement gaps. District leaders must determine the needed professional development, resources and policy changes to address the division goal. As a district leader, it is important to consider the process, perception and outcome data you will collect to understand the impact of your programs and services on students and the school counselors that you support. To help you in identifying meaningful metrics for your work, consider the following:

How will I know if school counselors have the resources, knowledge and skills to address the needs of our students in relationship to our division and school strategic goals?

How will I know if the resources and professional development school counselors are accessing are meeting their needs?

How will I know if school counseling

programs are having an impact on student achievement, discipline and attendance?

How will I know the impact of policies, program and practices on students and schools?

Success at a district level looks and feels vastly different than success in a school. The wins are fewer and farther between, and often, you will not see the individual impact of your work on a student. However, there is great joy to be found in the success at the district office. Securing funding to expand school counseling positions to make sure students have the supports they need to be successful, changing a district policy that disadvantages certain students or finding a business partner to fund a college trip for all students in your district represent systemic change and are victories you should celebrate. Although it may take you much longer to check something off the to-do list as a district leader than it did when you were a school counselor, when you do get to check something off, it's a big deal.

## Find Partners

Partnerships play a critical role in mobilizing district initiatives. Building-level school counselors rely on school staff, parents and community partners to secure the resources and support necessary to implement comprehensive school counseling programs. As a district leader, you will form similar partnerships to secure resources and supports for schools

