

ADVOCACY: THE DO'S & DON'TS

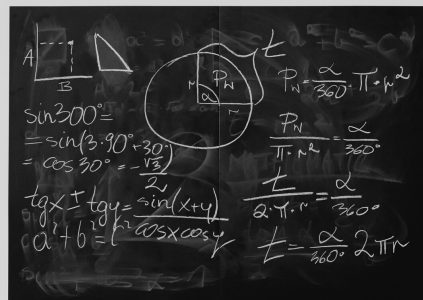
ADVOCACY FOR CONTINUED EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR SCHOOL COUNSELORS



WRITTEN BY CAVELLE GONGA

The role of a school counselor reaches beyond just the needs of our students. We are the glue our of schools, and in these times of uncertainty, we are all doing our best to hold everything together. In light of National School Counseling Week (February 1-5th), many of us spent time defining our role as a school counselor, as well as, celebrating our faculty and staff for their continued support in encouraging the holistic success of our students. In this pandemic, it has been made abundantly clear just how important our role is, which has only increased the need for continued training and awareness. The unfortunate reality of this pandemic is that it has left such significant gaps in areas such as, academic, social emotional and college and career readiness. It is not only imperative, in this profession, we remain privy and sensitive to the changes occurring in the world around us, but also in the way that we address the needs of our students. These needs extend far beyond just the school walls, and it is our responsibility to seek continued training and education to address these needs.

Many of us understand the importance of maintaining a student mentality and a hunger for continued knowledge as we work to stay relevant in our profession, however some of us may not know where to begin when advocating for our role to our stakeholders. As we navigate our journey, we quickly realize just how crucial it is to maintain administration buy-in. Admin-counselor relationship can make or break a successful comprehensive school counseling program, and it is just as important when advocating for the time and funding for training opportunities. To offer a bit of guidance on how we might go about this, Mrs. Kim Rollins, a school counselor at Northeast Middle School in Clarksville, TN, and myself, the school counselor at Northeast Elementary School, reached out to our administration inquiring about the most effective way for us to advocate for our role. Mrs. Rollins and I are fortunate to have such approachable and supportive administration, and they were happy to provide information that could be helpful to school counselors that may struggle with the confidence, time and funding to seek out and participate in training opportunities.



“I learned a long time ago the wisest thing I can do is be on my own side, be an advocate for myself and others like me.”- Maya Angelou.

ADMINISTRATION INTERVIEW RESPONSES

What is the best way to approach you regarding the possibility of attending a training (in person, email, set meeting, etc..)?

“Initially I prefer you to mention it in person to see if it is even a possibility. Then, I will ask you to submit an email proposal of what it is about, how you will use it, and how you think it will help our school. Further, anyone that goes to a training will be expected to turn-key the learning for their peers.” - Laura Boss

“In person or email....I typically give a bunch of dates and times to Charles.” - Kelly Daniel

“Send an email with your request, then we will meet in person.” - Dr. Regina Lyle

Should I be prepared to provide you with an estimated cost of the trip, with or without travel expenses?

“Yes, money estimates will need to be discussed in the initial meeting to determine if money is potentially available and if there is a reason to proceed with a proposal.” - Laura Boss

“Sure...if we need to reimburse to ensure there is enough money in the account or which account we are allowed to use” - Kelly Daniel

“Yes ma’am. Prepare all expenses in advance of the meeting. The bookkeeper will know exactly which expenses the school could possibly pay for based on the training, location, district approval, etc.” - Dr. Regina Lyle.

Should I be prepared to share how I will utilize the information to provide services or additional training to all stakeholders?

"Yes, all those who attend a training should plan to redeliver with their peers or at ENGAGE sessions." - Laura Boss

"Yes, it's always great to share info. Professional growth...for all!" - Kelly Daniel

"Yes ma'am. All staff trainings require redelivery of the materials to align with the school goals. You will state how it relates to the students and staff. When the delivery will happen (timeframe suggestions). How does it help classroom teachers become better with SEL." - Dr. Regina Lyle

Any other thoughts or ideas you would like to share?

"For the last couple of years, Social Emotional Learning is finally being seen from multiple perspective. I see a lot of the stigma that was associated with SEL being redefined. Students and staff that would have never shared information in past years have opened up consistently about their struggles." - Dr. Regina Lyle

What would you say are the advantages of a positive counselor-admin relationship?

"A good working relationship fosters productivity and fulfillment in the workplace." - Laura Boss

"Open lines of communication are the best. It's always best to understand where the other person is coming from!" - Kelly Daniel

"The ability to discuss students' needs: Open and honest relationship to ask for help with counselor needs; suggestions for groups based on data without feeling a need to be cautious about the admin. reaction; Suggestions for school-wide improvements from a different point of view; STUDENTS thrive when we all work together." - Dr. Regina Lyle

As we reflect on the challenges we are facing this school year, ask yourself a few questions: "How do I continue to maintain a positive admin-counselor relationship?"; "Where is my greatest need for continued education and training?"; "What are some ways I can help foster and facilitate SEL trainings in my school?"; and most importantly "What are some things I overcame and conquered despite an everchanging environment?"

With the school year we have endured thus far, it is beneficial for us to celebrate even the smallest triumphs. After all, "a person who never made mistakes never tried anything new." - Albert Einstein



"To be an advocate is to have courage, independence and passion for the things that matter." - Kristen Uedoi