

Leadership With Administration: Securing Administrative  
Support for Transforming Your Program

Kelli A. Saginak

University of Wisconsin Oshkosh

Colette T. Dollarhide

University of South Carolina

### Abstract

This article provides school counselors with a plan for securing administrative support for implementing of comprehensive school counseling programs. Systems and systems theory is introduced to explain systemic change in the context of leadership. Leadership theory is presented to assist school counselors in leading systemic change and securing support for program development from administrators and other critical stakeholders.

## Leadership With Administration: Securing Administrative Support for Transforming Your Program

“I want to re-design my program into one that conforms to the ASCA National Model, but my principal is vested in my current program. How do I communicate with my principal and district administrators in ways that will ensure their support for program transformation? What prevents my district from moving forward with implementing comprehensive developmental school counseling?” These are natural questions raised by school counselors who seek to transition their school counseling programs into the delivery models of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

With today’s school counselors positioned at the heart of school reform (Clark & Stone, 2000; House & Hayes, 2002), effective communication and leadership is essential to implement comprehensive developmental school counseling programs (Adelman & Taylor, 2002). This article will present a model that can support school counselors in seeking administrative support essential to transitioning their program from “guidance” to a comprehensive school counseling program that aligns with the ASCA National Model (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2003). The proposed model can provide school counselors with strategies for gaining administrative support, using an understanding of systemic change and leadership concepts. These leadership concepts, adapted from Bolman and Deal’s (1997) four frames of leadership, provide a template for school counselors to use as they plan systemic change within their schools and districts. Obstacles and roadblocks are explored in addition to concluding thoughts to assist school counselors with maintaining positive momentum for change.

### Current Forces in Educational Reform

The emphasis on students' academic achievement has never been greater, and the stakes for education have never been higher. The U.S. Department of Education, state education departments, boards of education, local school districts, and individual school buildings have, at the center of their concerns, the academic achievement and educational advancement of all students. This core vision calls upon everyone involved in the education of students to join together and confront the issues and challenges of educating today's youth. Students' increasing academic, career, and social needs (Lambie & Williamson, 2004), coupled with higher expectations for these needs to be addressed by schools (American School Counseling Association [ASCA], 2003), combine to create pressure on schools to change the way they educate today's students. Responses to these pressures have come from No Child Left Behind, the Education Trust, and the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2003).

The legislation of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) authorizes every state and school district to ensure high standards of quality education for *all* students within a framework designed to improve the academic achievement of students and involvement of parents (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Accountability provisions built into the NCLB legislation require districts to develop clear timelines for student achievement, place emphasis on closing the achievement gaps, and ensure that parents and the community have access to what and how schools are doing (The Education Trust, 2003; U.S. Department of Education, 2005). In order to realize the goals of NCLB, states and districts must ensure that high quality curriculum is taught by high quality teachers with "high standards as the expectations for all" (The Education Trust, 2003). The Education

Trust provides assistance to states in meeting these and other goals as part of educational reform. The Trust's mission is to create schools that meet the needs of all the students they serve by continuously improving education of all students, especially those students traditionally left behind.

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) emphasizes the role of school counselors in educational reform and their ability to "contribute directly and substantially to their local districts' educational goals" (ASCA, 2003, p. 4). The ASCA (2003) National Model was developed to provide school counselors with a vision for designing and implementing comprehensive school counseling programs (CSCPs). The National Model presents a structural framework centered on fundamental CSCP components that mandate best practices and stimulate innovative and creative strategies for improvement. The four elements of the ASCA National Model – Foundation, Management System, Delivery System, and Accountability -- integrated with the four themes – Advocacy, Systemic Change, Collaboration, and Leadership – create an operational and structural framework for the implementation of comprehensive developmental school counseling (ASCA, 2003).

As educational reform efforts evolve, so does the school counseling profession and the role of school counselors. Historically school counselors were recognized as a vocational guidance specialist. Today's school counselors are at the heart of educational reform efforts. The Education Trust promotes that school counselors are uniquely positioned to promote academic excellence for all students (The Education Trust, 2003). School counseling programs are the essential services and resources that all students need in order to reach their full academic potential and succeed beyond

high school. Providing these services and resources is above and beyond the capabilities of school counselors and traditional school counseling programs.

Transforming school counseling programs into comprehensive programs that can assist and meet the needs of all students requires the efforts of all those involved in the education of today's youth. Increasingly clear is the fact that school counselors are not the sole determiners of their programs; that school counselors' professional roles are the product of the expectations of administrators, parents, community members, and teachers (Lambie & Williamson, 2004; Herlihy, Gray, & McCollum, 2002). In other words, educational systems, family systems, and the larger societal systems dictate the roles and responsibilities of today's school counselors and school counseling programs.

As articulated by NCLB, the Education Trust, and ASCA, the success of educational reform and the transformation of school counseling programs rely on leaders and system's ability to change (ASCA, 2003; The Education Trust, 2003; U.S. Department of Education, 2005). In order for school counselors to be on the front line of reform and transformation efforts school counselors must have a working knowledge of systems and systemic change. Secondly, school counselors need to understand leadership and its roles in systemic change. Thirdly, school counselors need to be able to integrate their understanding of both in order to facilitate program transformation.

### Systems and Systemic Change

Generally speaking, a system is a collection of parts that interact purposefully and function together as a whole. For example, a collection of auto parts is not a system; however, combining those auto parts together into a running automobile produces a system. Similar to the concept of the automobile, school districts are a

collection of parts – counselors, pupil services professionals, educators, administrators, staff, students, parents, and communities. Each is a viable and necessary part in the operation of the whole school system.

Systems also react to change. Take the automobile for example. Change the oil and the entire system runs smoother; run out of gas, and the entire system shuts down. Change in any part of a system affects the entire system (O'Neil, 1993; Regional Laboratory for Educational Improvement of the Northeast and Islands, 1995), not just the individual parts. Similarly, school systems react to change. The impact of NCLB and the charge from The Education Trust, and ASCA have resulted in monumental systemic reactions felt by state boards of education, school districts, buildings, and communities. In order to address the demands of these educational reform movements, school systems and educational leaders must begin to think systemically.

Systemic change is a paradigm shift from thinking individually to thinking holistically, and from thinking about problems and solutions to thinking about systems and how systems operate. It entails moving beyond prescriptions and toward philosophies. Systemic change calls for attitude and beliefs that promote ongoing and continuous reflecting, rethinking, and restructuring. It means gaining support from and working with all levels of the system (Adelman & Taylor, 2002). Systemic change equates to working with *every school*, and with *every aspect* of the school system *systemically* in order to create *fundamental* change (Holzman, 1993, p. 18) – improved educational achievement for students.

### Leading Systemic Change

Just as the elements of a mobile move when one element is touched, so too will the elements of a school resonate with movement away from the historical “guidance” program toward a CSCP. Improved educational achievement for all students calls for systemic change that includes the transformation from guidance programs to comprehensive school counseling programs (CSCPs). The implementation of CSCPs require school counselors to serve as leaders in securing school-wide system support, which often begins with administration (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). Crucial to systemic change and transformation efforts is the role of principals and administrators (Lambie & Williamson), who provide administrative supervision and define professional boundaries within the school system (Pérusse, Goodnough, Donegan, & Jones, 2004). To begin the process of systemic change and transformation, school counselors need to ask themselves the following questions:

1. Who forces maintain the status quo in my program (teachers, principal, district administration)?
2. What are the issues, roadblocks and concerns that keep those forces from supporting the transformation of my program?
3. What values are implicit in these forces? What are the values I see manifest in the actions of my principal and district administration?
4. How can I connect those values with the values of a comprehensive school counseling program?
5. What is the political process of my building and district? What approach will I use with my principal?



With an understanding of leadership and systemic change, school counselors can use the answers to these questions to initiate dialogue with others to secure administrative support. Using Bolman and Deal's (1997) four "frames" or contexts of leadership, it is possible to construct a plan and timeline that will increase the chances for administrative support (Dollarhide, 2003). As can be seen from Table 1, the first context of leadership involves *structural leadership*, in which the counselor establishes within-program professional structures that will ensure success for students of the CSCP. The second context, *human resource leadership*, is natural and comfortable for counselors, as believing in and empowering others is part of the professional persona. The third context, *political leadership*, in contrast, is usually the most challenging for counselors, as it requires counselors to assess, then using persuasion and negotiation, to access formal power structures within buildings and districts to effect systemic change. Finally, the *symbolic leadership* context empowers counselors to create and communicate a vision, to use symbols and metaphors to describe for others the value of a CSCP.

Using these four contexts for leadership ensures that all participants and stakeholders in the educational process are included, that counselors will not leave out important constituents in the systemic change process. Each of the leadership contexts is separate from the others; therefore, the point of entry to the leadership process can be at any point that is comfortable for the counselor. In order to focus on the transformation process, counselors may want to design two plans, one for *program transformation* (the *content* changes to your program which may take several years), and one for *leadership strategies* (the *process* by which administrative support for

Table 1

*Bolman & Deal's Four Frames of Leadership*

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## 1. Structural Leadership

Build a foundation and implement an effective school counseling program.

Attain technical mastery of counseling and education.

Design strategies for growth of the school counseling program.

## 2. Human Resource Leadership

Believe in people and communicate that belief.

Be visible and accessible.

Empower others.

## 3. Political Leadership

Assess the distribution of power within the building and district.

Build linkages with important stakeholders such as parents and board members.

Use persuasion and negotiation.

## 4. Symbolic Leadership

Use symbols and metaphors to capture attention.

Frame experience in meaningful ways for followers.

Discover and communicate a vision.

Maintain relationships with the community you represent (students, parents, and school professionals).

Embody health on all levels to inspire others.

Lead by example.

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*Note.* Adapted from Dollarhide, 2003

program transformation will be secured). Both of these overall plans, which may take years to fully implement, will then be scheduled within a timeline, with sub-goals for Year One, Year Two, etc. *It is important to recognize that the full transformation to a CSCP in alignment with the National Model may take from three to five years or longer.* Systemic change takes time to fully develop.

The following suggestions will highlight one possible overall plan (in which program transformation and leadership strategies are fused for the purpose of illustration), which would then be further refined with a timeline. Leadership contexts are included in parentheses to ensure that all leadership aspects are utilized. Unforeseen events, unexpected opportunities, and changes in personnel and procedures would necessitate flexibility, so the plans and timelines would be revisited and revised yearly.

*Keys to Leadership: Creating a Plan*

*Look for what is important.* What are the overriding goals and mission of your district? Some examples could be accountability (No Child Left Behind), excellence and academic achievement for students, fiscal and budget pressure, parental concerns and expectations, and community initiatives (Political leadership). What are the goals and mission of your building? These are usually derived from the district's goals (Political leadership). As seen within the National Model (ASCA, 2003), the Foundation of your program is built on the Beliefs, Values, and Philosophy that define your professional work. Using these beliefs, values, and philosophy, identify the goals for your CSCP (Symbolic leadership). Frame the goals for your comprehensive school counseling program in alignment with the goals of your district. If your district's main impetus is academic achievement for all students, the goals of your CSCP should align with and

support that initiative. At every opportunity, highlight how the goals of the CSCP are consistent with the goals of the district and building (Symbolic leadership).

*Design a viable program that highlights your program's strengths and aligns with the ASCA National Model.* Building on the Foundation of the Model, design the Delivery System and Accountability elements of your program (Structural leadership). Chapter 7 of the ASCA National Model, Implementation (ASCA, 2003), can guide you through this process. You can then use this "ideal" program as a) the source of the symbols and metaphors you use to convince others (Symbolic leadership), and b) as a template for your long-range planning for program transformation.

*Look for what is working and build on those system strengths.* Within all school districts and communities are available program, human, and fiscal resources that support the shared vision of the district. Identify and mobilize those resources in establishing an advisory board. Per the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2003), this advisory board would consist of persons who care about the school counseling program and about students. These people could include parents, faculty, counselors, administrators, social workers, psychologists, nurses, and community members who are committed to the program. (See the ASCA National Model for additional ideas for appropriate members.) Educate the advisory board in the National Model and your "ideal" program phrased in terms of the district's vision. Use the advisory board to set program standards that move the program in the direction that will result in a comprehensive school counseling program (Structural, Political, and Human Resources leadership).

*Look for how things get done.* Understand the change process in your district. This means being aware of how change happens, how decisions are made, and who leads the charge. Do all changes originate from the school board? Do parents maintain a grass-roots influence? Does the principal hear and respond to faculty? Observe and identify who holds the power, and how that power is utilized and expressed in your district. This may involve attending school board meetings and networking with other counselors in your district; practices these authors highly recommend engaging in anyway. Strategize ways to access the political process in professional ways (Political leadership).

*Establish your credibility in the eyes of your colleagues.* Become visible in the school and district (Symbolic leadership). Be involved! The relationships you build will help support your school counseling initiatives (Human Resources leadership). Participate on committees with your principal and at the district level (Political leadership); create a school counseling newsletter for parents, faculty and staff to inform them about the school counseling program (Political leadership, Human resources leadership).

*Engage in a dialogue with your administration about the resources and support for the transformation process.* Using your advisory board as support, present your ideal program, wrapped in the goals of the district and building and framed in the change process of your district, to your administration. Open the dialogue for the Management System and the tools of Accountability that will provide administration of assurance of a quality program (Structural leadership, Human Resource leadership, Political leadership, and Symbolic leadership).

*Engage in long range planning to transform your program.* Have yearly targets for incremental growth of your program; revisit and revise as needed. You cannot neglect the leadership process however, as maintaining awareness of shifting values and priorities within the district and building can keep you “in the loop” as additional changes in the district, building, and community occur.

*Roadblocks and Obstacles: Resistance*

Systems do not always react favorably to change. Recall the automobile example, where without gas the system changed, reacted, and shut down. Systems can also react to change in the form of resistance. Professional school counselors, as experts in the change process, are aware that resistance is a predictable reaction to change. Knowing that systemic change can often result in various forms of systemic resistance can decrease the anxiety and frustration school counselors feel when parts of the system react negatively to change. Transforming school counseling programs may not always be a welcomed endeavor. Due to the systemic nature of transforming school counseling program, school counselors may often face administrators, colleagues, parents, and community members who do not understand the value of a CSCP. Being aware that resistance is a normal part of the change process will assist school counselors in working with resistance instead of against it.

In addition to awareness, having a plan to address resistance will be essential. Such a plan would begin with listening carefully to those who oppose the change. Understanding the values and priorities of persons who create impediments to change will enable counselors to address fears, concerns, and objections directly. Persons who oppose program transformation may be convinced to support the new CSCP by seeing

a well-designed and accountable program (structural leadership), by feeling important and empowered (human resource leadership), by persuasion and negotiation (political leadership), or by the vision of what the new CSCP can accomplish for students (symbolic leadership).

Many objections may surround questions of who will do tasks that were formerly located within the old guidance program. Gysbers and Henderson (2000) outlined strategies for countering these objections. Incremental changes to displace non-CSCP activities would include crystallizing the responsibilities down into smaller tasks, then eliminating the tasks altogether, shifting the responsibility for doing the task to someone more appropriate, or reducing involvement with each task (p. 203). However, for every proposed change, there will be some persons who will never give support. If after using all tools at the counselor's disposal, there continues to be no agreement, the counselor may need to find ways to accomplish program transformation without that person's support.

### Conclusions

System change within schools in general, and school counseling in particular, are required to move guidance programs into compliance with the ASCA National Model and with the larger vision of all children having access to a CSCP that addresses academic, career, and personal/social development. Research documenting the transformation process may prepare practicing school counselors for additional future changes, and may provide counselor educators with specific systemic leadership skills to infuse into program curricula and clinical training. In addition, longitudinal research may enable researchers to juxtapose pre-CSCP-transformation school data (test

results, attendance data, parental involvement, and other indicators) with post-transformation data, in a longitudinal version of the Sink and Stroh (2003) study, to provide additional support for CSCPs.

As with any change process, *ownership* of the process and *patience* with all members of the system is paramount. Ownership becomes essential as counselors take ownership over, and responsibility for, the efficacy and viability of the school counseling program. Patience is essential, also, as refining and developing leadership skills, designing the new delivery system, and recruiting and educating the advisory board, all in the face of inevitable resistance, will take time. However, if counselors believe that transformation is necessary because it gives students the best chances for academic, career, and personal/social success, then the transformation process becomes imperative.



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### Biographical Statement

Kelli A. Saginak, Ed.D., is an Assistant Professor and the Coordinator of School Counseling Track for the Department of Counselor Education at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh in Oshkosh, WI. Her interests include school counselor leadership development and assisting school counselors with leading systemic change through the implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs. Her specializations are in Group Work and Service-Learning in Counselor Education.

Colette T. Dollarhide, Ed.D., NCC, LPC, is currently an assistant professor in Counselor Education at the University of South Carolina. She earned her master's and doctorate from the University of Nevada, where she was a counselor and administrator. She has been involved with schools as a consultant for over 20 years, and served as a school counseling volunteer in Reno, Nevada; Emporia, Kansas; and Milwaukee, Wisconsin. She has been a counselor educator for the past eleven years, teaching in the areas of school counseling, career counseling, consultation, and field experiences. In addition, she has co-authored one textbook on secondary school counseling, and is under contract for a K-12 edition. She has also published and presented on a variety of subjects, including career counseling, leadership in school counseling, supervision, and counselor education.