

School Counselor Educators and Supervisors: The Personal Story of Advocacy and Action

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Lee (2007) stated, “Advocacy refers to the process or act of arguing or pleading for a cause or proposal, either of one’s own or on behalf of someone else” (p. xvi). From that framework, a group of professional counselors started a conversation about advocacy. That conversation has turned into concrete actions we have accomplished in order to advocate for school counselors as well as establishing community-building at the state level. We have engaged in specific activities and hope our story will inspire more social justice work from counselors as it has been tremendously beneficial for our counselors, our state, and ourselves.

It began with a meeting, sitting around the table with six universities’ school counselor educators and the state licensure person from Teachers Standards and Practice Commission (TSPC). Rules had changed and new school counselor competencies were being introduced to the counselor educators. Due to the changes, confusions and concerns were cropping up for us.

We shared a common thought, “Finally, we are able to gather and talk about all these changes.” There were new faces and some of the counselor educators who had worked so closely before with TSPC had retired or moved to another state. There are six school counselor programs in Oregon. Three programs are CACREP accredited and three are not. Regardless of the accreditation, we were all together and shared similar concerns and goals: to provide the best education and field experience for our students and to develop highly qualified professional school counselors.

From this meeting, we decided we wanted and needed to continue to meet on a regular basis. We agreed that it was important to have consistency and all have a similar understanding. As this informal group was solidifying, another issue was emerging, one that could have grave impact on school counselors.

One of our colleagues was getting word that a state representative was lobbying for MSW's to get into the schools to work as school social workers. This representative was working with a local university's MSW program and the MSW program was pressing to have their school social workers fulfill school counseling duties, without having to go through the licensure process. Some school personnel contacted one of the school counseling programs, asking about internship placements because schools were being asked to provide internship placements exclusively to school social work interns.

As we scrambled to keep on top of what was happening, it became clear that not only do we train our students to advocate for their profession, we as the school counselor educators needed to have a more systemic understanding and approach to advocating for our school counselor profession and for our students. We met more regularly in a central location and had some counselor educators calling in from remote locations. We brainstormed what to do, who did we need to contact, and what partnerships did we have or need to develop.

Several of us were on the state school counseling association board and acted as messengers and connectors. Two more counselor educators had connections with state leaders and would connect with them. Several other counselor educators agreed to contact state education leaders. As we met and began the advocacy process, our collaborative work on a common purpose strengthened our resolve to form a strong state school counselor educators and supervision group and to work on behalf of our students and our practicing school counselors. We rallied to prepare to bring our concerns to the state capitol and were relieved to recently discover that the bill has been derailed. However, our commitment and resolve has continued to be demonstrated.

As school counselor educators we stress several important aspects of the field to our students: advocacy, engagement, involvement, and action. As a group, we espouse these principles in our work and embraced the opportunity to model these values to our students. Although one of our primary functions has been to advocate at the state level for our profession, we regularly keep our students informed of our efforts and provide ways in which they can advocate as well. Many of our students have learned to communicate with their state representatives and others have felt inspired to advocate at local levels within their schools and school districts.

We are also finding ways to advocate for our profession so entire communities and populations understand the training and expertise professional school counselors have. Some of the unique outcomes that have been produced from these centralized counselor educator and supervisor advocacy efforts are shared below:

- Students have created and provided presentations in order to educate and inform school administrators about the role and responsibilities that school counselors have. These presentations have been shared with school administrator students and have been received warmly and with “ah, ha” expressions. The counseling students are learning through advocacy while developing a sense of belonging and ownership in our field. The administration students realize how effective comprehensive programs are for schools.
- Initiatives have been taken to present our work to key professionals in order to ensure the continuation of comprehensive school counseling programs. Some of our targeted conference presentations include: Oregon School Personnel Association (Human Resources), Oregon School Board Association, and Superintendents Summer Institute.

- The Oregon Department of Education has allowed their Educational Improvement Specialist to attend our meetings to obtain first-hand knowledge of the work that is being accomplished by state school counselors. Additionally, advocacy steps have been taken by a School Counseling Consultant from an individual school district.
- An Oregon School Counselor Day on the Hill is being discussed as well as how to rally our troops for participation. We are looking to have a massive showing and making this an annual event. The “who, how, and where’s” are currently being addressed in order to teach our school counselors how to advocate within their districts and statewide.
- Rather than keeping our group exclusive to ivory-tower bound professors, we actively include students, state leaders, practicing professionals, administrators, and others who would like to participate in our work. Although our core group meetings are small, our effort expands well beyond the walls of our conference room.
- Connections have been made to our national organization, ASCA, and we continually look for other people to make connections with. We are not trying to push an agenda but are trying to create an informed public about the benefits added by having a comprehensive school counseling program.

Perhaps one of the most remarkable features of our effort is the sense of collegiality and collaboration that has emerged both within the group and beyond. As program coordinators, we are able to learn about the great features of all of the programs in the state. We are able to learn and be inspired by our colleagues, which improves the quality of all our programs. We are modeling the collaborative spirit we would like to see our students champion as they learn to

work as professional school counselors. The more they work well with others, the greater their work will be.

The overarching spirit of collaboration is truly present in all of our interactions, whether this be our live meetings, our email communications, or in our collaborative work efforts where everyone contributes in accordance with their talent, interest, and expertise. Our colleagues each work hard for the group, and all efforts are met with appreciation, respect, and honor.

We do not know yet whether the results of our advocacy for the profession will be as positive as we are hoping. However, we do know that the following implications for counselors have been demonstrated through our advocacy:

- We know our effort has brought people together in the name of advocacy for the counseling profession.
- We see that the new generation of school counselors are benefitting from the opportunities for important engagement on local and state levels.
- We are certain that we are reaching out to professionals who have power and influence on the school counselors and school counseling programs in our state
- We are creating dialogue, sharing information, and working for justice for our school counselors and, in turn, our state's students.

References

Lee, C. C. (2007). *Counseling for social justice*. Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.