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The ISLLC Standards: A Unifying Force in School Administrator and Counselor Preparation

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Over the past several decades, federal and state governments have called for nationwide school reform (Cobia & Henderson, 2007). This need for improvement has been detailed in reports such as *A Nation at Risk* (U.S. Department of Education, 1983) and has culminated with the No Child Left Behind Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Both documents have directed attention to the fact that the United States public school system has been unsuccessful in educating its youth. The focus of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has been on improving literacy, closing the achievement gap, and increasing standardized test scores. In response to these proposed initiatives, the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards have been developed to promote excellence in the professional preparation of future school administrators to achieve this mission. Furthermore, the standards call for the training of visionary leaders who are able to implement a school improvement plan that is shared and supported by all school stakeholders (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008). This plan that focuses on closing the achievement gap must include all certified staff, not just teachers, to be more accountable for student success (Stone & Dahir, 2004). Therefore, it is up to the school administrators to assure that all “ancillary” programs be an integral part in identifying barriers to student learning (Fitch & Marshall, 2004; Lieberman, 2004).

One relationship often overlooked and vital in this effort to provide a better academic environment is between administrators and school counselors (Niebuhr & Niebuhr, 1999; Ross & Herrington, 2006; Stone & Clark, 2001). In this article, the authors propose the possibility of improved collaborative efforts between the two professions in addressing the NCLB mandate of closing the achievement gap, improving literacy, and increasing standardized test scores through incorporating the ISLLC standards into school counseling and educational leadership preparation program curricula. An overview of the standards and how they can be infused into professional preparation curricula will be reviewed. In addition, other interdisciplinary

recommendations for school counseling and educational leadership programs will be discussed.

ISLLC Standards Across Curricula

Ross and Herrington (2006) state that graduate preparation programs in educational leadership and school counseling need to become the catalyst for strengthening the relationship between school administrators and counseling programs at the K-12 level. For this to occur, the authors propose that there must be more interdisciplinary collaboration at the graduate preparation level between the two professions. Without this collaboration, the problem arises that neither profession receives much training about what the other does (Fitch, Newby, Ballesteros & Marshall, 2001; Struder & Allton, 1996). This, in turn, may result in a lack of understanding concerning the unique leadership role each plays in promoting academic achievement for every student. A better understanding may be achieved through integrated curricula and coursework in training. In response to Ross and Herrington's call, the authors advocate using the ISLLC standards as a guide in school counseling and educational leadership preparation programs to develop effective K-12 school counseling programs that promote academic excellence for all students.

Overview of the Standards

The Education Leadership Policy Standards: ISLLC 2008 are comprised of six standards or function areas that define strong leadership: (1) Setting a widely shared vision of learning; (2) Developing a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth; (3) Ensuring effective management of the organization, operation, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment; (4) Collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources; (5) Acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner; and (6) Understanding, responding to, and influencing the political, social, legal, and cultural contexts. Currently 43 states employ the standards completely or as a model for developing their own standards for selection, preparation, licensure and addressing the professional development needs of current school leaders. The authors of the standards believe their implementation is necessary to promote the success of every student. Implementing these performance expectations in graduate programs will ensure future school leaders have the tools necessary to positively impact student learning prior to entering their leadership positions (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008). The standards can be accessed through the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) web site at: <http://www.ccsso.org/projects/isllc2008research/documents/ISLLC%202008%20final.pdf>

The following questions adapted by the authors from the ISLLC standards are a proposed tool for reflective thinking during pre-service training. Future school administrators can use this tool to evaluate school counseling programs, and future school counselors can use this tool in developing a successful school counseling program. For instance, during the graduate school experience counselor educators could discuss

questions 1 thru 7 concerning the first standard entitled vision with students allowing them to begin conceptualizing a mission statement for their future counseling role.

Vision

1. Does the counseling department have a vision/mission statement?
2. Is the vision of the counseling office effectively communicated to all stakeholders?
3. Does the counseling office staff model the core beliefs of the school's vision?
4. Does the counseling office have an implementation plan in which objectives and strategies to achieve the vision and goals are clearly articulated?
5. Is the counseling office proactive in identifying, clarifying, and addressing barriers to student success?
6. Is the counseling office actively obtaining resources to support the implementation of the school mission and goals?
7. Is the counseling office effective in supporting the teaching staff in working with students who create learning barriers in the classroom?

School Culture

1. Do students feel valued and respected in the counseling office?
2. Does the counseling staff understand the role of the counseling office?
3. Is there a culture of high expectations for self, students, and staff when students are referred to the counseling office?
4. Are counseling programs developed to meet the needs of students and their families?
5. Does the counselor(s) develop an "action plan" for referred students?
6. Are all students treated equitably during the scheduling process?
7. Is the counseling program perceived as being supportive of the instructional process?

Management

1. Does the counseling office function efficiently and effectively?
2. Does the counselor manage her/his time to maximize the attainment of schools' goals?
3. Does the school have a guidance committee that meets regularly?
4. Is/are the counselor(s) part of a "support team" that meets regularly to identify and assess barriers to student achievement?
5. Does the school administrative staff meet periodically with the counseling staff to set and evaluate goals of the guidance department?
6. Does the counseling department keep records of number of students referred to the counseling department? If so, is there a monthly report submitted?
7. Is the counseling department staff accountable for services rendered?

8. Is the counseling staff responsible for sharing their goals and objectives with the school staff?
9. Is the counseling office perceived by students and staff as being efficient and organized?
10. Are effective communication skills used by the counseling staff?
11. Is technology used to increase counselor effectiveness?

Collaboration

1. Are the counselors proactive and visible with staff, students, and parents?
2. Does the counseling office serve as a valuable resource for the school?
3. Are community stakeholders treated and respected by the counseling staff?
4. Does the counseling office recognize and practice diversity?
5. Does the counseling office and youth service center staff collaborate on ways to reduce barriers to student learning?
6. Do teachers perceive that the counseling office is effective in helping the school meet the mandates of NCLB?

Ethical Integrity and Fairness

1. Does the counseling office staff model a code of ethics?
2. Does each counselor consider the impact of their practice, behavior, and decisions on others?
3. Does the counseling office and/or practice become an enabler to a student's problem, or a catalyst to assisting a student to resolve her/his own issue?
4. Is the counselor sensitive and respectful of the legitimate value of students, staff, and parent diversity?
5. Do(es) the counselor(s) protect the rights and confidentiality of students, parents, and staff?
6. Does the counseling staff fulfill the legal and contractual obligations of their organization?

Political, Social, Economic, Legal, and Cultural Context

1. Is the environment in which the counseling office operates influenced on behalf of students and their families?
2. Does the counseling staff communicate the trends, issues, and potential changes in the environment in which the counseling office operates?
3. Does the counseling staff utilize local, state, and federal resources to enhance student opportunities for employment, advanced education, career information, etc.?

By incorporating the ISLLC Standards into school counseling and educational leadership preparation curricula, future school leaders will evaluate and maintain programs through similar standards and aim for mutual goals, and will: (a) make a

difference between failure and success for students; (b) make a difference between sufficiency and excellence; (c) make a difference between inertia and progress; (d) help shape the school environment and promote success for all students; (e) energize students and celebrate progress toward achieving schools' goals; and, (f) work more effectively in collaboration to provide success for all students. In addition, each group will achieve a better understanding of the other's role. Other specific programmatic recommendations for school counseling and educational leadership preparatory programs in this regard follow.

Other Programmatic Recommendations for School Counselor Education Programs

To better prepare pre-service school counselors to be effective educators and school leaders, it is essential that graduate programs in school counseling inform students about the ISLLC standards and how these standards are implemented by school leaders. In the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) position statement concerning school counseling preparation programs, it is recommended that faculty in school counselor education programs are knowledgeable about the organizational structure and governance of educational systems and the necessity to collaborate with school administration. A working knowledge of the standards will help school counselor educators obtain this goal (ACA, 2008). In addition, school counselor education faculty members must become knowledgeable of the standards and introduce them into core curriculum courses in order to give students opportunities to begin applying these standards in both their coursework and their practicum and internship experiences. Furthermore, when school counselor educators reference the ASCA National Model and its call for the integration of school counselors into the total educational program of the school, they must also infuse the ISLLC standards into this discussion. In addition, school counselor education programs should provide opportunities for their students to take courses in educational leadership to better understand the role and duties of principals (Fitch et al., 2001; Ross & Herrington, 2006).

Other Programmatic Recommendations for Educational Leadership Programs

Educational leadership programs must better prepare future school administrators to understand what a school counselor does and how the proper utilization of a school counselor can contribute greatly to a school's mission of educational success for all students (Fitch, et al. 2001; Lieberman, 2004; Romano, Goh, & Wahl, 2005). The ISLLC standards are being taught in some programs and this should continue to flourish. Some additional possible curriculum and programmatic suggestions include teaching a leadership course with co-instructors consisting of one instructor from a counselor education program and one instructor from an educational leadership program. By dividing students in the course into groups mingling future principles and counselors together and asking them to discuss dilemmas they may be faced with in their future roles, participants will begin to analyze and critically think about issues facing schools collaboratively. In addition, allowing educational leadership students to take an

introduction to school counseling course to better understand the role and duties of a school counselor is highly recommended (Fitch et al., 2001). Also, introducing the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model and the Council for Counseling and Related Educational Program Accreditation Standards (CACREP) in core curriculum courses can be beneficial to a more thorough understanding of counseling and guidance programs (ASCA, 2003; CACREP, 2007).

Conclusion

While educational leadership programs are beginning to implement the ISLLC standards into their curriculum, it is also necessary for school counselors to be educated about the standards. Furthermore, since the ISLLC standards set the benchmarks for school leaders in establishing a high performing school, they are essential for school counselors to implement in their practice (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008). Also, utilizing the ISLLC standards can facilitate more effective school collaboration between educational administrators and school counselors. Working together using this document as a map for school improvement will strengthen the relationship between administrators and school counselors.

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