



# Principal and School Counselor Collaboration Toward More Socially Just Schools

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## Abstract

Greater efforts are needed from educational stakeholders to recognize and disrupt educational inequities. Educators engaged in social justice-oriented practices seek to increase opportunity and achievement for all students, taking into account subgroup identities, such as race, gender, sexuality, ability, language, religion,

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and immigrant status. Collaboration between social justice-oriented school principals and school counselors has potential toward these ends due to the unique role of the school counselor. The school counselor is positioned to engage with students and families, address systemic inequities, and lend their expertise to school-wide decision-making teams. However, it is important that the school principal effectively communicate, collaborate, and create structures for the counselor's work in this regard. When done effectively, this collaboration supports comprehensive school counseling. Through their collaboration toward social justice, principals and school counselors seek to eliminate systemic barriers to rigorous educational experiences for all students.

This chapter provides an overview of social justice leadership, and then is divided into six related sections. The discussion of principal–counselor collaboration for social justice is framed by critical theory. First, barriers that may inhibit collaboration between principals and counselors who promote social justice in schools are presented. Barriers to the school counselor's ability to carry out student-centered and standards-based duties are largely due to a lack of principal knowledge about counselor roles, role diffusion which leads to ambiguity about the role of the counselor, and ineffective or absent communication between principals and school counselors. Second and third, an overview of the important roles held by principals and school counselors are explained. Fourth, key concepts for principal and counselor collaboration are explored. Opportunities for collaboration include developing and working out of a social justice identity, resource alignment to support the counselor role, principal–counselor communication about roles and meetings to discuss progress, counselor communication with staff about their role, and participation in school-wide leadership teams involved in data-based decision-making. Fifth, a discussion of the collaboration of principals and counselors for social justice in international contexts is interwoven throughout. The sixth section provides an alignment of the National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) standards for educational leaders and the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) standards as a basis for the collaborative work between principals and school counselors. The chapter ends with implications for research and practitioners.

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**Keywords**

Principal–school counselor collaboration · Critical theory · Comprehensive school counseling · Social justice advocacy · Global awareness

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## The Case for Social Justice in Schools

On the night before his assassination in 1968, Martin Luther King, Jr. gave his final speech at a church in Memphis, Tennessee. He exhorted the crowd to fight for racial and economic equality:

Let us rise up with a greater readiness. Let us stand with a greater determination. And let us move on in these powerful days, these days of challenge to make America what it ought to be. We have an opportunity to make America a better nation. (King & Washington, 2003, p. 286)

Although spoken over 50 years ago, King's words are still relevant. School principals are charged to "rise up [and] stand" for equitable schools that contribute to a better nation through the promotion of social justice. The 2018 National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) standards for building level administrators set the expectation for the school principal to promote "a supportive, equitable, culturally responsive, and inclusive school culture" (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2018, p. 15). Additionally, the principal's collaboration with key stakeholders has long been an important skill required for successful school leadership (Marzano, Warrick, & Simms, 2014) and social justice (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014).

Of the many important collaborative relationships necessary for successful schools, collaboration between principals and school counselors is especially critical because of the unique role counselors hold in schools (Bore & Bore, 2009). For example, according to professional standards developed by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) (ASCA, 2014), effective school counselors "create systemic change through implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program," "demonstrate leadership [and] advocacy," "develop and implement action plans aligned with program goals and student data," and "collaborate with families, teachers, administrators and education stakeholders for student achievement and success" (p. 1). Therefore, school principals and school counselors are in unique positions to fight for social justice in their schools – to stand up for children who are denied equitable educational opportunities, are not proportionally represented in rigorous academic opportunities, and experience negative aspects of schooling, such as bullying, isolation, or academic failure often associated with a wide range of identities.

Diversity in schools has historically resulted in the marginalization of children who are: not White, of low socioeconomic status, of non-European heritage, not Christian, of limited proficiency in English, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ), or labeled as having a special need (Scanlan & Theoharis, 2015). As American schools have become increasingly diverse, the inequities associated with dimensions of diversity such as race, ethnicity, gender identity, socioeconomic status, religion, language, sexual orientation, immigration status, country of origin, and receiving special education services have been exacerbated (Scanlan & Theoharis, 2015; Skiba et al., 2011). These inequities in schools have resulted in some students becoming more privileged while others are marginalized (Dollarhide, Clevenger, Dogan, & Edwards, 2016; Furman, 2012; Lewis & Kern, 2018; Pounder, Reitzug, & Young, 2005; Theoharis, 2007). Social justice leadership is needed to create schools that "serve the common good and...eliminate marginalization across these multiple dimensions of diversity" (Scanlan & Theoharis, 2015, p. 1). Furthermore, effective collaboration between principals and school counselors promotes social justice in that teaching and learning that contribute to increased student achievement are likely to improve (Rock, Remley, & Range, 2017).

The term *social justice* has been defined in many ways. Since social justice is rooted in numerous disciplines such as theology, social work, law, philosophy, political policy, economics, and psychology, there are various interpretations

of its meaning. We use Theoharis's (2007) definition of *social justice leadership* to undergird our discussion because we discuss social justice as it relates to collaboration between school leaders (principals) and school counselors in this chapter. Theoharis stated that principals who ground their work in social justice leadership:

...make issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions in the United States central to their advocacy, leadership practice, and vision. This definition centers on addressing and eliminating marginalization in schools. Thus, inclusive school practices for students with disabilities, English language learners (ELLs) and other students traditionally segregated in schools are also necessitated by this definition. (p. 223)

Furthermore, Theoharis claimed that a social justice leader would focus on four outcomes: raising student achievement, improving school structures, recentering and enhancing staff capacity, and strengthening school culture and community.

The collaboration of school counselors and school principals is crucial if social justice is to be realized in schools. To fully address the complex problems that schools face, purposeful collective action is required. Both counselors' and principals' roles are guided by professional standards (ASCA and NELP) that advocate for social justice leadership. Working as allies, counselors and principals can lead their schools through systemic change, ensure student success, and develop school community partnerships that will support social justice in schools (Connolly & Protheroe, 2009; Dahir, Burnham, Stone, & Cobb, 2010; Rock et al., 2017).

This is also true on a global scale. As school counseling services continue to grow throughout the world (Dem & Busch, 2018), it is wise to understand school counseling in an international context. This perspective helps to broaden researchers' and practitioners' perspectives about social justice issues, trends due to globalization (Dem & Busch, 2018), and immigration factors of students who enter and exit local school systems.

The authors of this chapter are faculty members of a principal's and a school counselor's preparation program at the same university. They have engaged in a multiyear effort to collaboratively redesign their respective coursework to incorporate the principles of social justice leadership and to effectively prepare candidates to collaboratively engage in comprehensive school counseling programs. (This collaboration is made possible through generous funding from a grant provided by the Lilly Endowment Inc.) In comprehensive school counseling programs, principals create structures and systems so that counselors are provided the time and resources to engage with students and families in individual and classroom settings in order to support equitable access to academic rigor and success, social-emotional development, and college and career readiness opportunities (ASCA, 2012; Dahir et al., 2010; Wilkerson, Pérusse, & Hughes, 2013). This topical investigation and review of literature emerged from an extensive process of practice-based inquiry to understand extant research, and occurred over 2 years.

The theoretical framing of the authors' approach to understanding and fostering principal and counselor collaboration for social justice is critical theory (Freire, 2009).

Critical theory orients one's understanding to the ways in which structural inequities, as opposed to deficits of individuals or groups, create systems of oppressions. The application of critical theories to an understanding of lived experiences in an inequitable society develops critical consciousness. Critical consciousness propels one to ask questions regarding internal biases, power, privilege, and analyses and action against social, political, and economic forms of oppression. In schools, this leads to an examination of beliefs held by faculty, staff, and an examination and disruption of inequitable school systems societal inequities in concert with students and families (Bogotch & Reyes-Guerra, 2014; Brown, 2004; DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Jean-Marie, Normore, & Brooks, 2009; Pounder et al., 2005; Shields, Dollahide, & Young, 2018). Critically oriented principals and counselors have the potential to develop collaborative relationships between themselves, other faculty, staff and stakeholders to create educational opportunities and eliminate inequity.

This chapter is divided into six sections. First, the barriers that may inhibit collaboration between principals and counselors as they strive to establish more socially just schools are presented. The next two sections highlight the important roles held by principals and school counselors. In the fourth section, important aspects of principal and counselor collaboration are explored. A discussion of the collaboration of principals and counselors for social justice in international contexts is presented in the fifth section. The sixth section provides an alignment of the National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) standards for educational leaders and the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) standards as a basis for the collaborative work between principals and school counselors.

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## Barriers to Principal-School Counselor Collaboration

The ability of the counselor to perform standards-based duties that align with social justice is a prerequisite for collaboration between principals and school counselors. However, this is often not the case. Despite the importance of the counselor in providing services to align students with appropriate academic planning and socio-emotional support, many counselors find themselves doing non-counselor-related duties such as testing coordination, assigning discipline consequences, or substitute teaching. These are in contrast to standards-based duties such as interpreting test data, counseling students who struggle with behavior issues, or collaborating with teachers to present counseling curriculum (ASCA, 2012; Bardhoshi, Schweinle, & Duncan, 2014; Edwards, Grace, & King, 2014). Figure 1 further delineates appropriate and inappropriate activities for school counselors.

Barriers to the school counselor's ability to carry out student-centered and standards-based duties (ASCA, 2012) are rooted in a lack of knowledge and/or communication. Scholars point out that these barriers are largely due to a lack of principal knowledge about counselor roles (Clemens, Milsom, & Cashwell, 2009; Dahir et al., 2010; Graham, Desmond, & Zinsser, 2011), role diffusion which leads to ambiguity (Shimoni & Greenberger, 2018) about the role of the counselor, and

Appropriate Activities for School Counselors	Inappropriate Activities for School Counselors
Individual student academic program planning	Coordinating paperwork and data entry of all new students
Interpreting cognitive, aptitude, and achievement tests	Coordinating cognitive, aptitude, and achievement testing programs
Providing counseling to students who are tardy or absent	Signing excuses for students who are tardy or absent
Providing counseling to students who have disciplinary problems	Performing disciplinary actions or assigning discipline consequences
Providing counseling to students as to appropriate school dress	Sending students home who are not appropriately dressed
Collaborating with teachers to present school counseling core curriculum lessons	Teaching classes when teachers are absent
Analyzing grade-point averages in relationship to achievement	Computing grade-point averages
Interpreting student records	Maintaining student records
Providing teachers with suggestions for effective classroom management	Supervising classrooms or common areas
Ensuring student records are maintained as per state and federal regulations	Keeping clerical records
Helping the school principal identify and resolve student issues, needs, and problems	Assisting with duties in the principal's office
Providing individual and small-group counseling services to students	Providing therapy or long-term counseling in schools to address psychological disorders
Advocating for students at individual education plan meetings, student study teams, and school attendance review boards	Coordinating school wide individual education plans, student study teams, and school attendance review boards
Analyzing disaggregated data	Serving as a data entry clerk

**Fig. 1** Appropriate and inappropriate activities for school counselors. (This list of appropriate and inappropriate activities for school counselors was developed by the American School Counselor Association (2012) to aid in the development of school counseling programs that facilitate standards-based alignment of counselor activities.)

ineffective or absent communication between principals and school counselors (Janson, Militello, & Kosine, 2008).

Principals often positively view counselors and their contributions (Zalaquett & Chatters, 2012), but lack the knowledge about how to effectively utilize counselors to address student achievement effectively (Mason & Perera-Diltz, 2010). Without an adequate, research-based understanding of the role of school counselors, principals “may relegate school counselors to ancillary duties – being the hall monitor, test coordinator, scheduler, planning for prom. . .” (Bickmore & Curry, 2013, p. 130) because the principal does not have research-based expectations for the counselor role (McCarty, Wallin, & Boggan, 2014). This lack of knowledge hinders the implementation of relevant induction experiences for new school counselors (Bickmore & Curry, 2013), when principals view them as mental health providers tangential to core practices of the school (Militello & Janson, 2007).

A lack of knowledge about the school counselor's role also contributes to role diffusion and role ambiguity (Shimoni & Greenberger, 2014), which hinder effective collaboration. Role diffusion and role ambiguity are linked concepts, in that role diffusion contributes to role ambiguity. Astramovich, Hoskins, Gutierrez, and Bartlett (2013) defined role diffusion "as the process of assuming or being appointed to roles and duties that individuals from other fields or specialties are equally qualified to perform in the work environment" (p. 176). For example, assigning a school counselor school-wide test coordination duties does not draw upon the counselor's "unique graduate-level training" (p. 177). As a result, the role of the school counselor is diffused, which may lead to role ambiguity, because the unique role of the counselor is not emphasized. This hinders principal and counselor collaboration for social justice because it is unclear what counselors ought to do and they likely will not have the time to commit to standards-based duties.

A lack of clear and/or effective communication between principals and counselors also creates barriers to effective collaboration, as regular and meaningful communication contributes to increased trust and relationship quality (Duslak & Geier, 2018). In their study of principal and counselor perspectives of their professional relationship, Janson et al. (2008) found that "a lack of understanding and communication. . . seemed to impede a working alliance" (p. 356). Although counselors often advocate for more time for appropriate tasks, they might continue to accept inappropriate tasks assigned by principals in an attempt to show their competency (Dahir et al., 2010) rather than explain why their current assignment is not aligned with best practices.

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## The Principal's Role in Promoting Social Justice

The role of the P-12 school principal has evolved over time. Early accounts portrayed the principal as a middle manager, primarily responsible for management of school operations, facilities, planning, supervision of teachers, student discipline, and some community involvement (Jacobson, Reavis, & Logsdon, 1941; Rousmaniere, 2007). In subsequent decades, the importance of the principal as an instructional leader was highlighted. Researchers identified both instructional and managerial leadership as essential components in a principal's capabilities to advance school improvement and promote student learning (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Milstein, Bobroff, & Restine 1991). As instructional leaders, principals took on more collaborative roles, with effective principals encouraging teamwork, facilitating professional learning communities, and practicing distributive leadership (Portin, 2004; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). The principal's responsibilities expanded to include areas such as team development of vision and goals, collaborative school improvement planning, targeted professional development, increased parental involvement and community engagement, public accountability reporting and planning, and the utilization of shared decision-making strategies based on relevant data (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010; Wallace Foundation, 2009; Waters et al., 2003).

Today's more collaborative and instructionally focused principals reap the benefits of years of research to guide their practice. Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) presented a matrix of 21 responsibilities of effective school leaders as a result of their meta-analysis of 69 studies on principal leadership. They reported that being a "change agent" and developing a positive school culture based on shared beliefs and cooperation were two key research-based responsibilities of principals in creating successful schools (p. 42). Hattie's (2009, 2012) meta-analyses of almost 60,000 studies have been instrumental in revealing top school factors that influence student achievement. For example, the importance of the teacher–student relationship and the teacher's effective use of feedback are two factors that have been highlighted. These factors, and others, have been synthesized and developed into a hierarchical school improvement framework by Marzano et al. (2014).

A principal's leadership practice is deemed essential in school reform because multiple studies have substantiated the effectiveness of the principal as a significant, although indirect, variable in improving student achievement (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2013; Horng & Loeb, 2010; Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Louis et al., 2010; Marzano et al., 2005; Rice, 2010). However, a contemporary perspective requires that school success be defined by more than just academic achievement, as this narrow focus downplays the ethical commitment required of school leaders and overlooks the complex and diverse nature of our global society (Dianis, Jackson, & Noguera, 2015; Rebore, 2014; Terrell, Terrell, Lindsey, & Lindsey, 2018). In addition to academic achievement, it is imperative that school leaders understand and address the needs of the "whole child" (ASCD, 2015). Sergiovanni underscored this when he described school leadership as a moral imperative that extends past academic achievement and includes a commitment to democratic values of justice and equity (Sergiovanni, 2009).

Principals have the potential to play a crucial role in dismantling educational practices that foster inequities and in developing school cultures of inclusivity that provide rich and culturally relevant curricula and engaging instruction (Auerbach, 2009; Khalifa, 2010; Scanlan & Lopez, 2012). In short, although academic achievement remains critically important, school principals must pay close attention to more than students' academic performance – they are also responsible for leading change. As such, principals must understand and address important issues of diversity, inclusion, and social justice (Jean-Marie et al., 2009; Kemp-Graham, 2015; Miller & Martin, 2015; Theoharis & Scanlan, 2015).

The responsibility of school principals to move beyond academic achievement alone, to confronting issues of social justice is not a new concept. Scholars have addressed the ethical dimensions of school leadership regarding democracy and equity (Fullan, 2003; Sergiovanni, 1992, 2009; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016). More than three decades ago, Cummins (1986) proposed conditions that could be implemented in schools to empower minority students, reduce school discriminatory practices, and promote equity. However, these and other social justice-related goals are yet to be achieved.

To be effective social justice advocates, principals must first develop awareness of equity issues, be committed to equity, and be prepared to lead for social justice



(DeMatthews, Edwards Jr., & Rincones, 2016; Feldwisch & Whiston, 2015; Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016; Theoharis, 2007). Therefore, it is important that school leadership preparation programs include social justice leadership as integral and required components of their curricula (Furman, 2012; Lalas & Morgan, 2006; McKenzie et al., 2008; Miller & Martin, 2015). Principals committed to social justice in international contexts also demonstrate their awareness of equity issues. For example, Arar, Beycioglu, and Oplatka (2017) compared how school principals in Israel and Turkey perceived their roles in promoting social justice in their schools. In both countries, the principals' definitions of social justice were centered upon issues of economic injustice and other concerns that led to disadvantages for students of low-income families and lesser education. Dempster (2011) found that educators in Australia and New Zealand have a strong commitment to equity and social justice in schools, although there is much work to be done in these areas. Slater, Potter, Torres, and Briceno (2014) studied the perspectives of school directors in both England and Costa Rica. The directors in both countries saw themselves as social justice leaders who respected students and created safe and caring learning environments. Researchers have found that principals enact social justice leadership by addressing challenges that impact students out of school, advocating for safer and more equal communities (DeMatthews et al., 2016; Slater et al., 2014).

Several international studies have identified that school principals are passionate about community engagement and improving education (Buenviaje, 2016; Mogadime, Mentz, Armstrong, & Holtam, 2010; Ryan, 2016a). For instance, Ryan (2016a) pointed out that inclusive-minded principals in Ontario involved the community in school activities, and that major pieces of this involvement were communication and exchanging knowledge. In a study of female principals in South Africa, Mogadime et al. (2010) recognized "their moral and ethical commitments which include social emancipation, compassion, and care for the community's children [were] firmly rooted at the center of their leadership identity" (p. 817). Similarly, in their study of Swedish and US principals, Angelle, Arlestig, and Norberg (2015) discovered that principals expressed a belief in the value of all children, regardless of their background or situation. Thus, there are principals in countries around the world who fervently seek effective educational opportunities for students and equality within schools.

Principals must learn to create school cultures that promote success for all students through the development of a social justice vision, critical consciousness, asset-based thinking, and culturally responsive leadership and instructional practices that are implemented in collaboration with school-community stakeholders (Brooks, Jean-Marie, Normore, & Hodgins, 2007; DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Khalifa et al., 2016; Author et al.). As social justice leaders, principals must clearly communicate their expectations for supportive, inclusive, and positive environments for all. They must ensure that every student has access to rigorous curricula, align resources to carry out the school's mission of equity of opportunity, challenge normalizing assumptions, and counter practices or beliefs that promote disparities based on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, disability, religion, or native language (Terrell et al., 2018; Theoharis & Scanlan, 2015). For example,

DeMatthews and Mawhinney (2014) described how two principals navigated systemic issues to minimize self-containment of students labeled with a disability and transform schools toward an inclusion model.

Principals cannot do this important work alone. It is essential that they create collaborative cultures that focus on teamwork and call on the entire school community to support success for all students (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, & Cohen, 2007; Jean-Marie et al., 2009). Principals and counselors have been described as “natural partners” to lead in efforts to effectively serve students (Zalaquett & Chatters, 2012, p. 100). Principals and counselors must align their commitments as leaders for social justice aimed at reducing inequities and helping all students achieve academic, social-emotional, and career success (Crawford, Arnold, & Brown, 2014; Dahir et al., 2010). Therefore, it is important to understand the role of the counselor in achieving social justice.

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## The School Counselor’s Role in Promoting Social Justice

Social justice advocacy is the key task of school counselors, as their role is to create pathways for success for all students. Indeed, numerous scholars of school counseling argue that school counselors are called as social justice advocates to close academic and opportunity gaps and to promote socially just schools (Dixon, Tucker, & Clark, 2010; Feldwisch & Whiston, 2015; Griffin & Steen, 2011; Ratts, DeKruyf, & Chen-Hayes, 2007; Shields et al., 2018; Trusty & Brown, 2005). School counselors who act as social justice advocates are “educational leaders who challenge the status quo, use data to increase access and address equity for all students, and provide services in classrooms and communities” (Ratts et al., 2007, p. 91). Further, they address oppressions, systemic barriers, inequity, marginalization, and achievement/opportunity gaps that impede students’ personal, social, academic, and career development (Shields et al., 2018).

The school counselor’s role as a social justice advocate is supported by professional standards. The ASCA National Model (2012) states that social justice advocacy is an integral theme in delivering a comprehensive school counseling program to promote equity and social justice in schools. Specifically, school counselors design, implement, and evaluate comprehensive school counseling programs by identifying achievement, opportunity, and attainment gaps with data-driven skills and identifying challenges and barriers of underrepresented, underserved, and underperforming students (ASCA, 2012). The model offers four themes in terms of leadership, advocacy, collaboration, and systemic change that should be woven into comprehensive school counseling programs to promote students’ academic, career, and personal/social development. Moreover, ASCA (2016) revised its *Ethical Standards for School Counselors* to highlight social justice advocacy. The standards now state that “school counselors are advocates who create systemic change by providing equitable educational access and success by connecting their school counseling programs to the district’s mission and improvement plans (p.1).”

As calls for school counselors to be social justice advocates continue to grow, school counseling literature increasingly includes frameworks, strategies, and concrete steps that school counselors can incorporate into their practice (Betters-Bubon & Schultz, 2018; Kim, Fletcher, & Bryan, 2017; Ratts et al., 2007; Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018; Shields et al., 2018; Young & Bryan, 2015). For example, Ratts et al. (2007) developed a framework for school counselors to serve the myriad needs of students, families, and communities in a school setting using the advocacy competencies developed by the American Counselor Association's Governing Council in 2003. The competencies outline three levels of social justice advocacy ranging from the individual client-student level to the school-community level and systems advocacy efforts. At the individual client-student level, counselors work to empower and/or advocate on behalf of clients and students. At the school-community level, counselors use organizational development strategies and collaboration skills to foster positive changes in schools and community agencies and organizations. At the systems level, counselors make efforts for social and political advocacy.

Young and Bryan (2015) developed a school counseling leadership framework comprising of interpersonal influence, systemic collaboration, resourceful problem solving, professional efficacy, and social justice advocacy. In this framework, social justice advocacy requires leadership skills to challenge the status quo and inequities, advocate on behalf of students and parents, take risks, and use accountability strategies to identify barriers. School counselors act as leaders by changing existing educational policy, procedures, or practices that may contribute to perpetuate student inequity, marginalization, and oppression.

Relatedly, a special issue of *Professional School Counseling* (2018) focused on school counseling leadership to ensure equity and access for all students in schools. Shields et al. (2018) reported that school counselor leaders should address social justice advocacy by challenging deficit-thinking, racism, oppression, prejudices, and discrimination that might be entrenched in the school environment. Betters-Bubon and Schultz (2018) described how a school counselor's collaboration with family and community promoted Latino student achievement and family engagement. Kim et al. (2017) suggested social justice advocacy practices that can encourage marginalized parents to become empowered in schools. For instance, school counselors can design a conscious-raising discourse group that provides a comfortable and safe space for traditionally marginalized parents and supports them to share frustration, confusion, and alienation that parents might experience in schools. Counselors' facilitation skills such as empathy, reflection, and process illumination assist parents to feel their voices are respected and their perceptions are valued.

Lastly, Ratts and Greenleaf (2018) offered a leadership framework that school counselors can use to address multicultural and social justice issues in schools. First, school counselors identify how a student problem is connected with larger multicultural or social justice issues. Next, school counselors should be cognizant of their own biases, beliefs, and attitudes regarding the student's concerns and understand the student's cultural frame of reference, cultural values, beliefs, and awareness of social group identities to design a culturally responsive intervention. Then, school counselors should develop the self-awareness to understand how their own worldview

and students' worldviews affect their counseling relationships. Next, school counselors should develop social justice advocacy interventions at the intrapersonal, interpersonal, institutional, community, public policy, and global/international levels. Examples of social justice strategies include: self-advocacy development, restorative justice, creating a student club for Latino/a students and bully-free zones, public discourse in the community, and changing unfair policies for racially, economically, sexually or gender diverse, and linguistically marginalized students.

There are limited studies about school counselors as social justice advocates in countries outside of the United States. This may be due to the lack of school counseling programs in various countries. Leuwerke and Shi (2010) stated that school counseling programs in specific parts of China are in their infancy. This may be true of many school counseling programs around the world. However, a few existing studies focus on the roles of school counselors in schools and the community (Leuwerke & Shi, 2010; Mrvar & Mažgon, 2017). For example, Leuwerke and Shi (2010) found that school counselors in China engage in a wide range of tasks and had positive views toward giving classroom guidance despite a lack of support by others in the education system. Mrvar and Mažgon (2017) recognized the importance of school counselors' collaboration with the community in Slovenia and contended that this community involvement is crucial to solving issues students and their families face. Extant research about school counselors and social justice within and outside of the United States reveal that school counselors who wish to create socially just schools understand the value of social justice advocacy, develop knowledge and skills to address social justice issues in schools, and implement programs that impact students, schools, and their surrounding communities. Next, key elements of collaborative relationships between principals and school counselor toward these goals are explained.

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## **Principal and School Counselor Collaboration for Social Justice**

Collaboration between principals and school counselors to promote social justice centers on their efforts to address individual and systemic inequities, thereby creating equitable opportunities for students (McCarty et al., 2014). To lead for social justice, principals and counselors must prioritize key collaborative behaviors shown to improve the school environment and heighten student achievement, such as creating safe and inclusive school cultures (Theoharis & Scanlan, 2015). The effective use of data and is also needed to create culturally competent, equitable, and rigorous curricular programs for all students (Khalifa et al., 2016; Leithwood & Louis, 2012). Family and community engagement is also essential (Khalifa et al., 2016). There are several ways this collaboration is actualized in schools, including developing and working out of a social justice identity, resource alignment to support the counselor role including principal–counselor communication about roles and meetings to discuss progress, counselor communication with staff about their role, and participation in school-wide leadership teams involved in data-based decision-making.

## Social Justice Identity

Social justice identity is defined as the “pervasive internalization of social justice values and the consistent demonstration of commitment to foster social justice in society” (Dollarhide et al., 2016, p. 627). The development of a social justice identity is perhaps the most important aspect of a collaboration between principals and counselors who strive to create social justice. Without this orientation toward equity, other actions toward the goal of social justice will likely fall short. Individuals’ social justice identities are often shaped by their own early personal experiences, which caused changes in their affect, behavior, cognition, and context (Dollarhide et al., 2016). Those with social justice identities bring this orientation to every relationship, personal and professional. As part of this identity, educators develop cultural awareness or cultural competence that recognizes the strengths of diverse groups within the school community (Barakat, Reames, & Kensler, 2018; Terrell et al., 2018), and go beyond that to create change. Scholars within educational leadership discuss this concept as the development or raising of critical consciousness (Brown, 2004; Furman, 2012; McKenzie et al., 2008). As Crawford et al., (2014) pointed out: “With a critical consciousness of the processes and systems that perpetuate marginalization, leaders can become aware of the areas they might focus on to mitigate inequities in their schools and districts” (p. 5). Curricular activities such as cultural autobiographies, life histories, or reflective journals have been recommended to facilitate this process (Brown, 2004). Scholars agree that the development of this commitment to recognizing and disrupting inequities requires ongoing personal reflection about leaders’ own biases, prejudices, and systemic inequities (Brown, 2004; Furman, 2012; Terrell et al., 2018). Leaders who develop the capacity to continually engage in these processes either through self-study or a social justice-oriented preparation program

develop a commitment at the center of their ethical core [that enables them] to feel compelled to personally and organizationally uncover and address those practices in schools that continue to propagate racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, and all other abuses of power. (McKenzie et al., 2008, pp. 122–23)

The development of a social justice identity includes global awareness. Principals and counselors ought to seek to understand how global events and local realities influence one another (Jean-Marie et al., 2009). An awareness of experiences related to accessing resources, immigration, and war will hopefully increase leaders’ general background knowledge and inclination to support students and families who navigate similar circumstances (Shields et al., 2018). Additionally, an orientation toward global issues increases the potential to leverage expertise from colleagues in diverse contexts aimed at improving student experiences and services. Jean-Marie et al. (2009) expressed the potential benefits of such collaboration:

Imagine a world in which school leaders look not only to their peers in a neighboring school district or even another US city for ideas and solutions that might help their students, but to a global community of leaders who understand that the success of the local should be informed by and contribute to the success of students around the globe. (p. 18)

## Resource Alignment

Underserved students must receive additional resources to gain equitable educational opportunities (Young, Winn, & Reedy, 2017). In December 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed into law to allow the federal government to have a role in supporting equitable educational opportunities. However, the leadership within individual schools or districts typically determines how resources are distributed (Bore & Bore, 2009). At the same time, leaders often have limited resources to use within their school communities and feel they need to distribute these resources to the areas that will yield the best outcomes in student achievement (Young, Millard, & Kneale, 2013). When the counselor and principal collaborate to anchor the school counseling programs to the mission of the school and show that these programs positively impact student achievement, they can gain support or buy in from key stakeholders (Stone & Clark, 2001).

Principals often have the ability to ensure counselors receive necessary resources and supports (Bore & Bore, 2009). They can ensure that counselors have the time to engage in collaborative work and their own professional activities. This might involve minimizing non-counseling-related responsibilities and establishing regular, structured conversations between principals and counselors to discuss the needs and work of counselors. This ongoing communication can help ensure correct allocation of resources (Young et al., 2013).

## Role Alignment

Collaboration between principals and counselors allows them to have the necessary understanding of each other's roles. This understanding facilitates principals' ability to align counselor duties with appropriate functions (Bore & Bore, 2009; Lashley & Stickl, 2016). School counselors are trained in multicultural issues (Schmidt, 2008) and are equipped with culturally competent practices (Sue & Sue, 2008) that can help them provide service to diverse students. This supports counselors to be "instrumental in training the school community on multicultural sensitivity and appropriate practices" (Sue & Sue, 2008, p. 132). Some principals resist releasing school counselors from inappropriate noncounseling tasks (Young et al., 2013). However, if the counselor and principal have a strong relationship with open and authentic communication, this should not be a challenge.

Counselors must be given adequate time to provide direct services such as individual or group counseling (Balkin & Leddick, 2005). Although principals are given the responsibility of ensuring all students have access to mental health services, counselors are expected to provide greater access for those especially in need. Meanwhile, the counselors need time allocated for them to provide these necessary services (Bore & Bore, 2009). If counselors and principals function interdependently with mutual support, they can help all students gain access to equitable education (Janson et al., 2008).

Communication with faculty, staff, families, and community members about their role is also important for maintaining key understandings about the counselor's role. Shimoni and Greenberger (2014) found that counselors communicated the most with school staff and less with students, parents, and community members. They argued that counselors' communication about their role is important for the advocacy of their profession. McCarty et al. (2014) stated that counselors contribute to increased understanding about their role when they demonstrate skill areas particular to their role in school settings. Stakeholder knowledge about their profession will likely increase the willingness to cooperate with and support counselors carrying out standards-based, appropriate duties.

Another important way principals effectively support the role of the counselor is to ensure they are able to participate and carry out the roles agreed upon. Principals can minimize non-counseling-related duties and foster staff understanding about the importance of the school counselor performing standards-based duties in building and district-wide decision-making meetings. For example, by creating a plan for responding to crises when the counselor is in meetings, the principal can ensure that time dedicated to team meetings remains a priority. As it is often difficult for principals to reallocate noncounselor time and duties, it is imperative that counselors develop the skills to be efficient time managers so they can maximize their time with students and their presence in team meetings (Young et al., 2013).

## Communication

The creation of a trusting relationship as the foundation for collaboration is a must for principals and counselors. Ponec and Brock (2000) determined that the frequency of communication is an important determinant of mutual trust between principals and counselors. Frequent communication can increase the quality of the relationship, and creating a consistent, set meeting time can provide structure to ensure this frequency. Annual agreements can provide additional structure to help improve the quality of the relationship between principals and counselors. Having both set meeting times and an annual agreement can prevent role ambiguity and confusion (Duslak & Geier, 2018). Additionally, frequent, meaningful communication can influence the development of school counselors' professional identity, when communication leads to the establishment of clear roles and expectations for school counselors (Chata & Loesch, 2007; Clemens et al., 2009). It is important for principals and counselors to find time to establish open and authentic communication, which will create the shared vision, leadership, communication, and trust that are vital in successful principal and counselor partnerships (DeSimone & Roberts, 2016). These successful relationships enhance role understanding, prevent burnout, and positively impact the overall performance of a school (Duslak & Geier, 2018).

Communication between principals and counselors should be open and provide opportunities for shared decision-making (Edwards et al., 2014). When principals informally and formally interact with counselors and collaborate effectively and often, counselors can clarify their roles. Researchers recommend that counselors be

proactive in communicating about their roles to principals, faculty, and staff (Carnes-Holt, Range, & Cisler, 2012; Chata & Loesch, 2007). This interaction is important due to the positions' "overlapping and integrated work tasks and whole school focus" (Bickmore & Curry, 2013, p. 143).

## **Leadership and School-Wide Data-Based Decision-Making Teams**

Principals and counselors can combine their efforts through collaboration on school leadership teams. Leadership teams typically include various combinations of teachers, faculty and staff, community members, and/or students. McCarty et al. (2014) asserted that this creates "a synergistic approach that enhances and supports student development. . .[and] strengthen skills contributing to the success of students" (p. 1). To make this happen, principals "systematically incorporate the counselor as a key component to the leadership team" (p. 5). Principals and counselors leverage their leadership skills on these teams to serve students most effectively in different ways. Counselors enact leadership, advocacy, and collaboration skills to develop students' academic, career, and social proficiencies, while principals engage in leadership coaching to support counselor leadership with students (McCarty et al., 2014; Rock et al., 2017). Additionally, counselors have a unique position because they are able to see the school from a wider perspective than most school staff members (Beale & McCay, 2001) because they personally interact with students, teachers, parents, and other members of the community (Amatea & Clark, 2005). Amatea and Clark (2005) found that in schools where principals who viewed their counselors as "innovative school leaders" (p. 21) who worked with the entire staff, the counselors were instrumental in facilitating staff growth. This demonstrated growth was regarding how staff viewed students and families, and the role school systems have in increasing student achievement.

When collaborating as leaders, principals and school counselors play critical roles in creating an environment of support and inclusivity among school staff members (Auerbach, 2009; Khalifa, 2010; McKenzie et al., 2008; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008; Scanlan & Lopez, 2012; Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011; Youngs & King, 2002). The knowledge and skills of these leaders can be important to achieving educational equity, but when leaders are not prepared to support equity, inclusivity, and cultural responsiveness, they can be a barrier (Young et al., 2017). Furthermore, scholars agree that leadership development of counselors can help them to be transformative leaders toward equity and inclusivity (Shields et al., 2018). Young and Bryan (2015) developed an emerging framework of school counselor leadership based on their survey of school counselors and counselor supervisors. The framework consists of five dimensions: resourceful problem solving, systemic collaboration, interpersonal influence, social justice advocacy, and professional efficacy. They suggest that the framework can be used to increase graduate school counseling students' understanding and application of leadership theories to their practice.

When principals and counselors combine their unique perspectives on decision-making teams, they have the potential to strengthen the entire team (McCarty et al.,



2014). To create structures to allow this, school leaders should ensure that the goals of the counselor's role aligns with the school's goals and ensure that the counselor is included in the school-wide decision-making team (Young et al., 2013). This allows teams to collaboratively identify barriers to equitable achievement and problem solve how to address them (Young et al., 2013). With the leadership of principals and counselors who understand how to analyze disaggregated data, teams can examine disaggregated data about instruction, student achievement (Rock et al., 2017), and the extent to which students are equitably placed in rigorous classes. For example, Ratts et al. (2007) explained that school counselors can take a leadership role with counselors and administrators teams to examine the causes for and then address why Latinx students were underrepresented in advanced placement courses.

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## Principal–School Counselor Relationships in International Contexts

A review of literature that is published in the English language yielded few studies about school principal–counselor collaboration in contexts outside of the United States. As with all research, a search for articles published in English is a limitation. This limitation is more evident when scholars purposefully seek to understand a topic in an international context.

The limited number of studies so far have focused on principal and school counselor collaboration in Turkish public and private schools and the comparison of collaboration between Turkish and American schools (Ergüner-Tekinalp, Leuwerke, & Terzi, 2009; Yavuz, Dahir, & Gumuseli, 2017). In a study of principals' views of school counselors' priorities and responsibilities in Turkish schools, Yavuz et al. (2017) found that private school principals tended to have more accurate and positive perceptions of school counselors' roles than public school principals (Yavuz et al., 2017). In a comparative study, Ergüner-Tekinalp et al. (2009) researched the development and implementation of comprehensive developmental school counseling (CDSC) programs in the United States and Turkey. They found these programs have been established more easily in schools that have sufficient funding, fairly high stability, and low political influence. The authors assert that school counseling as its own entity is significantly less developed in Turkey than it is in the United States, and more collaboration between school counseling associations throughout the world may be beneficial to enhancing and growing school counseling programs internationally.

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## Implications

Schools are complex and dynamic organizations. Principals and counselors in today's P-12 schools face increasingly diverse and unremitting demands on their time and energies (Crawford et al., 2014; Klocko & Wells, 2015). Strong teamwork between principals and counselors increases potential for reaching the goals of social

justice in schools by promoting unity and coordination in student services and school improvement efforts (Connolly & Protheroe, 2009; Dahir et al., 2010; Dollarhide, Smith, & Lemberger, 2007; McCarty et al., 2014).

However, without being trained for collaborative social justice leadership, it cannot be assumed that principals and counselors will know how to work together effectively and efficiently to create inclusive, supportive, and opportunity-rich environments for all students (Crawford et al., 2014). Principals and counselors need to be adequately prepared for this collaboration and must also develop an understanding of each other's roles, responsibilities, and professional standards (Bringman, Mueller, & Lee, 2010; Carnes-Holt et al., 2012; Connolly & Protheroe, 2009). Therefore, important implications emerge regarding the need for standards-aligned education and training at both the preservice and practitioner levels for principals and school counselors.

At the preservice level, principal and school counselor candidates should receive training on collaborative social justice leadership and advocacy based on the leading professional standards and expectations from both fields, the National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) standards for building-level leaders (2018) and the American School Counseling Association (ASCA) competencies for counselors (2012), ethical standards for counselors (2016), and the ASCA college and career readiness standards for students (2014). Higher education programs that prepare principals and school counselors must begin to work together to respond to this call for collaborative social justice leadership preparation. Faculty members from departments of school counseling and educational leadership/school administration should spend sufficient time together developing standards-aligned curriculum maps, content, and pedagogy for their principal and counselor preparation programs with the goal of advancing the knowledge and skills that promote candidates' effective teamwork in support of all students. For example, Beck (2016) outlined pedagogical recommendations for school counselor–principal alliance within a school counseling training program that prepares them to advocate for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students.

Lessons that merge principal and counselor standards should be collaboratively developed and delivered in ways that promote development of candidate's critical consciousness and dispositions for social justice advocacy (Carnes-Holt et al., 2012; Crawford et al., 2014; McCarty et al., 2014). For example, NELP Standard Component 1.2 (2018) requires that principal candidates demonstrate how to use data to develop school improvement processes, which aligns with ASCA Competency I-A-3 (2012) requiring counselors to understand how to use data to identify impediments to student learning to work toward closing opportunity gaps. Each of these standards/competencies calls for data-based understanding of student achievement and school programs from an equity perspective, and can be taught simultaneously to candidates within a collaborative social justice leadership context that fosters student advocacy.

There is also a need for practicing principals and counselors to receive training on collaborative advocacy and social justice leadership. It is necessary for educators to engage in personal reflection in order to counter their own deficit views of

marginalized students and families (Khalifa et al., 2016). Without professional development and personal reflection, practitioners may be unaware or unclear about their responsibilities and appropriate roles per collaborative social justice leadership model (Crawford et al., 2014; McCarty et al., 2014). One example of such an emphasis has been researched by Dahir et al. (2010). The Tennessee Department of Education (TNDOE) ranked high in comparison to other state departments of education in “its commitment to developing a state school comprehensive school counseling program model and its delivery statewide” (p. 289). The TNDOE has committed to educating school principals and counselors about the relationships between its state counseling standards and school improvement and achievement since 2003, and established one vision for school counseling programs and school counselors throughout the state.

Finally, there is a need for family engagement and school-community partnerships throughout this process. Principals and counselors, as collaborative social justice advocates, must be willing to lead strategic activism in confronting issues of injustice (McCarty et al., 2014; Ryan, 2016b), to incorporate culturally responsive practices (Santamaría & Santamaría, 2015; Theoharis & Scanlan, 2015), and to involve families and the community in creating inclusive and welcoming school environments with high expectations for all (College Board, ASCA, & NASSP, 2009; DeMatthews et al., 2016).

As mentioned previously, the authors are engaged in creating principal and counselor preparation programs to address these important goals. This emerging program development is offered as an example for others who may be considering or are already engaging in this work. Standards-aligned curricula have been collaboratively designed and implemented for candidates in school counseling and educational leadership programs. The units, which include the development of critical consciousness, social justice competencies, and culturally responsive leadership practices, encourage future principals and school counselors to work together as partners to provide equitable learning environments for all P-12 students. A core social justice leadership text (Theoharis & Scanlan, 2015) is used in six foundational courses throughout the principal preparation program. A culminating reflection and social justice leadership application activity is incorporated in the internship experience at the end of the program. In addition to preservice preparation, practitioners’ training opportunities are being developed for schools, conferences, and state-level principal and counselor associations. Relationships continue to be developed with community organizations with the goal of joining forces to improve conditions for youth. Collaborative social justice leadership between principals and school counselors is a critical component of this valuable initiative toward school improvement and reform.

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## Conclusion

School counselor and principal collaboration from preservice programs to practitioners offers much hope and opportunity for improved practice as well as further research. As education preparation faculty, preservice candidates, and practitioners

answer calls to, as King said in 1968, “rise up with a greater readiness” to improve our nation, the goals of social justice must be a priority. Just as King increasingly broadened his perspective and understanding of the ills of social injustice from outside of the American south, to poverty in the north, then globally to oppose the Vietnam War (Branch, 2006), principals’ and counselors’ collaborative approaches to social justice ought to include a global perspective. Our identification of key elements for collaboration from the development of a social justice identity, or critical consciousness, role alignment, communication, and teaming present ripe opportunities for further research in those areas. Longitudinal studies and studies that utilize a wide range of research designs and methods are warranted. Finally, research about school principal and counselor collaboration in countries outside of the United States and perhaps comparative studies about principal–counselor relationships in different contexts would augment this field of inquiry and practice.

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