

## “Open Letter” from Counselor to School Community

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

As a school counselor, my work would not be possible without the tireless support of the teachers, school leaders, and students who work and learn in this building. I feel privileged to be a part of our school community. As we have been working to make our school more student-centered, I am excited to participate in what I know will be a positive shift for our school and our students. **I am writing to let you know I am ready and able to be more involved in this evolution.**

Counselors can play a crucial role in the successful implementation of student-centered approaches to learning. In my work, I strive to:

- Help students develop their social/emotional competencies;
- Enable students to demonstrate that they are ready to drive their own futures;
- Provide opportunities to learn outside of traditional classroom settings; and
- Empower students to have agency and ownership over their own learning.

I want to share some of my strategies and be a resource, but in order to do that, I will need to deepen my understanding of student-centered approaches within the greater school community. Below, I’ve laid out some suggested actions to help me do this.

First, it would be helpful to **have opportunities for cross-role collaboration**, and to **spend more time in classrooms** so that I can see how a student-centered framework plays out throughout the day. Whether that means I join in planning sessions with teachers or spend one full day a month in a room, I’d love to have the opportunity to observe student-centered learning strategies and then debrief shortly thereafter with the teacher. This way, I can further support your methods with students, as well as support students in understanding these new methods more deeply.

### ***Examples of cross-role collaboration and professional development opportunities***

- *The Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education ([SCOPE](#)) released a set of case studies in 2014 that highlight best practices in student-centered professional development and practice. Their [case study on Impact Academy](#) provides an overview of how “lead teams,” consisting of a teacher, learning specialist, counselor, and administrator, meet once a week to discuss opportunities for professional development and anticipated school policy changes prior to being presented to the larger school community. (Details on this can be found on pp. 43-45 of the study.)*
- *The Maine DOE created a [Maine Comprehensive School Counseling Program Model](#), which emphasizes counselors’ need to receive “training in student learning styles, classroom behavioral management, curriculum and instruction, student assessment and student achievement” (p. 9). Though this guide is older, it draws on the [ASCA National Model](#) and is quite comprehensive.*
- *Initiatives such as the [Shadow A Student Challenge](#) invite district leaders to observe classrooms and gain insights on day-to-day student experiences. As part of “Shadow a*

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*Student” day, counselors could be given the opportunity to do the same. This is a low-effort, high-impact way to support counselor integration and understanding.*

Second, it would be useful to **have counselor-specific professional development** that prepares me to be an active part of a student-centered school. Professional development will allow me to understand how you, as teachers and school leaders, engage students, support their agency, and develop relationships with students. And it could help prepare me, as a professional in the building who has experience working with students on social/emotional issues, to work with educators on these strategies and perhaps lead to some peer-to-peer professional development or coaching.

To see some examples, click here. (for the HTML version – we can provide a downloadable Word version as well)

### ***Examples of professional development in school settings***

***A quick note:*** Because of the dearth of current examples of counselor-specific professional development opportunities in student-centered schools, we draw here on several examples of professional development opportunities geared for teachers that can be used as models when considering professional development options for support staff.

- *The Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education ([SCOPE](#)) released a set of case studies in 2014 that highlight some best practices in student-centered professional development and practice. At [Dozier-Libbey Medical High School](#) in Antioch, CA, a weekly early release of 90 minutes allows for teachers to partake in “Collaboration Wednesdays.” This weekly professional development opportunity is intended for teachers to connect with each other and see how their work is aligned with other classrooms. On page 47 of the [SCOPES case study](#), a Health teacher expresses appreciation for the collaboration time: “I can do things here in class that help the [students] with their physiology or English. If they’re doing a big assignment there, I can try to do something that supports what they’re doing. So I feel like that helps a lot with the student experience. They know that we’re communicating with each other. I think that just makes them feel better about what they’re doing.”*
- *At [Casco Bay High School](#) in Portland, ME, professional development means [daily planning time](#) for teachers, independently or in teams. “Learning walks” and monthly check-ins with lead teachers and administrators help develop understanding and capacity. Casco also has a three-day summer institute to support the Casco community in preparing for the upcoming year.*
- *[New York City Department of Education offers Professional Development](#) opportunities that include teachers, counselors, and school leaders for a number of topics: “Classroom Management and Youth Development Principles,” “Curriculum Development,” and “Leadership Development.”*
- *Professional development can also exist online. The [American School Counselor](#)*

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*[Association](#) offers [professional development online](#), with a number of topics relevant to integrating counseling more deeply in the classroom. Webinars are archived, free, and can be viewed by members anytime, anywhere (there is an annual fee). Relevant topics include [“The School Counseling Supervisor’s Role in District-wide Program Advocacy”](#), [“Incorporating STEM Into Your School Counseling Program”](#), and [“Culturally Competent School Counseling”](#).*

Third, **technological tools** can create more efficiency in regard to our student-centered efforts, helping us address barriers such as insufficient time or inefficient data sharing. I can assist in developing and implementing the use of technology tools in a strategic way that helps us manage our workloads and enables us to foster relationships with students and make them the center of our work.

*For a list of curated technological tools to support communication, collaboration, and professional development for support staff, [visit this resource page](#).*

Please let me know if you have other ideas how I could get more involved. I am eager to be part of this exciting transition.

Sincerely,

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