



Graduate Student Newsletter Spring 2016

THANK YOU!

...to all the amazing volunteers who helped make Conference run so smoothly!

YOU WERE ALL ROCKSTARS!

Ashley Shipman, Mindy Ganser, Babette Leon, Andrew Goldbach, Anna Adesso, Jessica Gomez, Amy Sylvester-Knudtson, Ashley Duda, Abby Milbrath, Amanda Lorentzen, Robert Jansen, Samantha Ahler, Melissa MauharDetlaff, Libby Strunz, Sarah Campbell, Amanda Jensen, Erin Burns, Erik West, Shannon Cowan, Desirae Schroeder, Lisa Thom, Amanda Sitron, Amber Leisgang, Trinidad Mascote, Samantha Ahler, Chris Aleckson, Jessica Brown, Edgar Wyman, Devon Norgaard, Mardi Peeters, Carissa Tumidajewicz, Jessica Taylor, Sam Hofacker, Lisa Berfeldt, & Sam Laguna.

Transition: A Time for Action

By Alyssa Pon-Franklin, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee

“How strange that the nature of life is change, yet the nature of human beings is to resist change.” Author Elizabeth Lesser hits the nail on the head with her commentary on human tendencies. Transition, by definition, is the process of changing from one state to another. As human beings, the idea of these changes can cause a host of emotions, from anxiety to sadness to anger. Hopefully, throughout life, we learn to navigate those transitions with grace and less kicking and screaming. As children and adolescents, however, our students are not as adept at handling these transitions. They need our help and support in order to develop effective ways to navigate those times.

Within schools, these transitions come in many shapes and sizes, ranging from changes in teachers, moving from elementary school to middle school, graduation from middle school, starting in a new district, and more. As counselors, we are key players in some of these transitions. By having practices in places, we can help our students (and their parents/guardians) learn to accept these natural progressions and be successful in new environments.

School transitions typically signify a change in academic and social environments. Students are required to take more responsibility for their work, and friendships may change based on new interests and goals. Students move from being the oldest class to the youngest and least-dominant within a school¹. Teacher relationships may change, and students may feel less connected to school

personnel.

Research suggests that the middle school to high school transition plays an important role in students’ success in high school. Students are physically, mentally, and emotionally changing, all while navigating the transition to a new school. As an adolescent, our students are fighting to discover their identity, surrounded by pressures to conform to certain societal standards. Students are expected to be planning for the future, advocating for themselves, and staying calm, all while struggling to figure out a new locker combination, navigate a new building, and adjust to high school responsibilities. When put in these terms, it’s easy to see why students can be overwhelmed.

A student’s high school success is significantly affected by his or her first-year experiences². More students fail ninth grade than any other grade². As counselors, it is our job to help ease this transition. Research also states that students who have access to transitional programs are less likely to drop out and tend to perform better than peers who don’t receive transitional support³. The presence of supportive adults in school aids in retention of students as well³. By working to help students decrease stress, increase active coping, and develop positive connections, we can mitigate the potential negative effects of the high school transition⁴.

There are many great examples of programs that are aiding students in the transition. In the Pewaukee School District, high school counselors meet with the incoming students to discuss scheduling, the high school hosts a “Freshman Orientation Night”, students can attend “Welcome to High School” activities,

WCSA Updates

WCSA Summer Academy

- Tuesday, July 26, 2016 from 9:00 – 4:00
- CESA #1 Conference Center – Pewaukee
- Learn about cultural competencies in comprehensive school counseling programs
- Register by May 31 to get the early bird price - \$40 for graduate students

SAVE THE DATE

WCSA Fall Summit

- Friday, October 21, 2016 from 9:00 – 4:00
- CESA #4 Conference Center – West Salem
- Learn about mental health in schools

As this school year nears the end, the Wisconsin School Counseling Association is looking for two graduate student individuals to be co-coordinators for the WCSA Graduate Student Committee. This is an incredible leadership opportunity to allow graduate students to be more involved in our profession and in the WCSA organization. Any graduate student interested in this position can email Katie Nechodom at nechodomk@gmail.com for an application. The application deadline is March 25th.

and counselors help students select their classes⁵, among other activities based on student need. Other districts offer similar events, such as a freshman-only day of school, parent/guardian education opportunities⁶, a three day “WINGS” orientation program⁷, or freshman-only activities. Other school systems, such as Milwaukee Public Schools, offer an Enrollment Fair to help students decide which high school best fits their needs⁸.

The elementary school to middle school transition is rife with anxiety as well. For the first time, students may be changing classes and teachers regularly, navigating a locker, or choosing electives. There is more individual responsibility to turn in homework, and students are expected to advocate more for their own needs⁹. This transition usually causes significant anxiety for parents/guardians as well, who are worried about their child’s adaptability and preparedness for the next level. Some existing programs that help ease the transition include the use of “locker boxes” in the hall to help students learn which materials are needed for class¹⁰, having middle school students visit classrooms to discuss questions, surveying students about their concerns⁵, and hosting an open house for students to meet their teachers and try their lockers⁵.

As professional school counselors, we can add to these already-existing structures to better help our students transition. According to research, effective transition programs have five or more diversified activities⁹. As a high school counselor, consider adding a “managing stress” workshop to the orientation. Think about running a small group for freshmen who may struggle during the transition. Contemplate collecting data to determine your school’s biggest needs for these students. At the middle school level, toss around the idea of having high school students visit to answer questions. Consider hosting a small group to help students prepare themselves for freshman year. Ponder offering resources for parents/guardians to ease their anxiety*. As an elementary school counselor, think of ways for students to interact with their new teachers to ease concerns. Determine how students can interact with their new environment before school starts. Consider running a lunch group to alleviate student concerns.

The possibilities are endless. Through the use of our own creativity, plus past research that provides great ideas and suggestions, we can provide support for our students and their families during these difficult time periods. By addressing transitions and being proactive, we can assuage our students’ and parents/guardians’ concerns and help our students withstand the stress that comes from change.

*I suggest reading the book *Anxious Kids, Anxious Parents* by Lynn Lyons and Reid Wilson. [Thanks to Kelly Curtis’s WSCA sectional for the recommendation]

References

¹ Weiss, C.C., & Bearman, P. S. 2007. Fresh Starts: Reinvestigating the Effects of the Transition to High School on Student Outcomes. *American Journal of Education*, 113, 395-421.

² Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (n.d.) *School graduation resources*. Retrieved from <http://dpi.wi.gov/graduation/resources>

³ Smith, J. B. 1997. Effects of eighth-grade transition programs on high school retention and experiences. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 90, 3, 144-152.

⁴ Forrest, C.B., Bevans, K. B., Riley, A. W., Crespo, R., & Louis, T. A. 2013. Health and school outcomes during children’s transition into adolescence. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 52, 186-194.

⁵ Pewaukee School District (2016). *Transitioning*. Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/a/pewaukeeschools.org/plach/transitioning>

⁶ Kettle Moraine School District (n.d.) *Parent resource network*. Retrieved from <http://kettle.schoolwires.net/site/Default.aspx?PageID=483>

⁷ Arrowhead Union High School (2016). *WINGS*. Retrieved from <http://www.arrowheadschoools.org/academics/wings.cfm>

⁸ Milwaukee Public Schools (2015). *All school enrollment fair*. Retrieved from

<http://mps.milwaukee.k12.wi.us/en/Schools/How-to-Apply/All-School-Enrollment-Fair.htm>

⁹ Cauley, K.M. & Jovanovich, D. (2006). Developing an effective transition program for students entering middle school or high school. *The Clearing House*, 80, 1, 15-25.

¹⁰ Waukesha School District (2011). *Planning for school*. Retrieved from <https://www.waukesha.k12.wi.us/STUDENTS/PlanningforSchool.aspx>



Embracing the Thaw

By Jessica Brown, University of Wisconsin – Superior

I never feel more like an introvert than when wading through wave after wave of enthusiastic, energetic, impossibly perky WSCA conference attendees. Amidst all the excitement of gaining new knowledge and techniques at sectionals, I can't help but give myself the break I know I need to process. "I didn't come here to network and socialize," I find myself thinking. Give me a few good speakers and a pile of handouts—so many handouts, more than I even know what to do with—and I'll be perfectly content. I'm sure I wasn't the only one eating lunch in an out-of-the-way, downstairs hallway, but sometimes I sure feel like I am.

At my elementary internship site, my supervisor often gives students feedback about how they're interacting in the group by telling them about their talents and gifts before revealing their opportunities to grow. "Your greatest strength is, in a way, your greatest weakness," she tells them (in developmentally appropriate words, of course). Working with her and attending WSCA has reminded me to never stop growing and reflecting on how far I've come and what I can do to keep improving, little by little.

The counseling internship, for many graduate students, is the course in which most of our skills are learned as we constantly stretch ourselves to meet new challenges. As an intern I've felt the pressure of two conflicting desires: to get as much experience in every aspect of school counseling as possible by piling on tasks until there's no room to breathe, and to be aware of my limitations and practice good self-care, as we are ethically bound and highly encouraged to do, even before the first full-time counseling position of our careers. In negotiating between these two, I have learned that I can't be the exactly perfect counselor, with the exact solution to

every problem, for every person, all the time. Even with experience, no counselor can make all her students' problems disappear, not should she expect herself to be able to. I've also learned to approach my weaknesses by focusing on my strengths. I am not the type of person who thrives by diving in head first, but I can immerse myself successfully if I start out step by step. Some people take action quickly, while I prefer to stop and think before deciding what to do. We all have our styles, and it's all right to be accepting of mine. I've learned to never give myself advice I wouldn't give to a student. I would never tell an introverted child they weren't good enough or needed to be more like "everyone else." But I would encourage that child to take small steps as they build comfort and competence in new skills.

Today, one week after WSCA's Heat it Up, with the thermometer at a balmy 37 degrees and the sun high overhead, I laced up my ice skates and stumbled onto the rink. The ice was bumpy and cracking, and so weak in spots that I kept breaking through, falling and staggering, wishing for more solid footing. I even completely biffed it once or twice. But I didn't take off my skates and call it a day just then, with stinging elbow and sore back and feet, even though I wanted to. I got up and kept at it, in a style that I knew would work for me. I went slowly, step by step, until I found a little stability, concentrating on the challenge at hand. While I don't think I've ever completely "biffed it" as a counselor-in-training, it hasn't been easy. What can be easy, and comfortable, at this time in the school year or this far into an internship, is to settle for smooth ice. Maybe there is some resistance in you that could use a gentle thaw. If so, I encourage you to play to your strengths. Listen to your instincts and make the right choice for you as you choose to let a new challenge begin.



The School Counselor's Role in Advocating for LGBT Students

By Libby Strunz, Winona State University



Although bullying is a widespread problem affecting youth of various demographics, a large body of evidence suggests that sexual minority (LGBT) youth are at increased risk for bullying victimization in comparison to heterosexual youth (O'Malley Olsen, Kann, Vivolo-Kantor, Kinchen, & McManus, 2014). In fact, an analysis that examined data from eighteen studies found that LGBT youth are more than twice as likely to experience bullying than their heterosexual peers (Fedewa & Ahn, 2011). In what is regarded as the most comprehensive study of LGBT youth bullying and victimization experiences to date, the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), found that more than eight in ten sexual minority students reported being victims of verbal harassment due to their sexual orientation, whereas four in ten stated that they had been physically harassed (e.g. pushed or shoved). The effects of bullying victimization on sexual minority youth can be both devastating and long-lasting. LGBT youth who are victims of bullying are at a greater risk of a variety of psychological, social, physical, and academic problems (Fedewa & Ahn, 2011). Specifically, victimization can "increase the risk for suicide and other mental health problems including depression and lowered self-esteem, multiple other health-risk behaviors, and poor academic performance among all adolescents, but particularly among sexual minority adolescents" (O'Malley et al., 2014, p. 436).

Because a large body of research resoundingly emphasizes the negative effects of bullying victimization on sexual minority youth, it is essential that schools work to engage in research-based, best practices to reduce bullying and its negative outcomes. School counselors can play a key role in helping to reduce bullying victimization in schools. While providing responsive services to sexual minority bullying victims is essential, it is perhaps even more pertinent for school counselors to advocate for students by helping to establish an inclusive school climate and effecting systemic change. Because school counselors interact with administrators, teachers, students, and other key stakeholders, they can work collaboratively with others to promote an environment of inclusivity. School counselors can advocate for the establishment and enforcement of inclusive policies, programs, and curriculums; provide relevant professional development opportunities for staff; and communicate to LGBT students that school counselors are allies who can provide a safe space.

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) code of ethics calls on school counselors to promote social justice by advocating for equitable school programs, policies, and practices (American School Counselor Association, 2010). An especially important area in which school counselors can advocate for sexual minority youth is in regards to the establishment and enforcement of

comprehensive anti-bullying policies. Although the majority of schools have bullying policies, less than 8 percent of students surveyed by GLSEN indicated that this policy includes specific protections based on both sexuality and gender identity, indicating that this is an issue that requires advocacy in many schools (Kosciw et al., 2012). In addition, because school counselors work closely with both administrators and teachers, they can help provide professional development to other staff members. School counselors can educate other staff members about how to recognize, respond to, and report bullying targeting sexual minority youth in order to ensure that, once established, anti-bullying policies are enforced. Thus, it is essential for school counselors to advocate not only for the establishment, but also enforcement, of anti-bullying policies that specifically protect sexual minority youth.

Furthermore, school counselors play an essential role in advocating for sexual minority students, including bullying victims. When asked which staff member they would feel most comfortable discussing LGBT-related issues with, students most commonly responded that they would talk to a school-based mental health professional such as a school counselor (Kosciw et al., 2012). School counselors can provide students with a safe space to discuss their sexual orientation or gender identity, provide responsive services to bullying victims, and help to connect students with appropriate community resources. Because LGBT individuals sometimes lack support from family, peers, and others in the community, it is especially essential for school counselors and other educators to communicate a message of support, acceptance, and inclusivity. Through systemic and individual student advocacy, school counselors play an important role in helping schools to develop safe and inclusive environments.

References

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WSCA Committee's Need Your Help!

If you're thinking, "How can I be involved with WSCA after I graduate," or "How can I be more involved with WSCA while I'm still a student?"... Join a committee!

If you were at Conference, you undoubtedly heard about the opportunity to join committees—and the need for help on committees so that WSCA can continue to do great things like putting on one of the best school counseling conferences in the nation!

Here's a brief overview of the committees you may want to consider joining:

Graduate Student

Tasks: Represent your university's school counseling program, relay information from meetings to your peers, attend quarterly meetings.

Contact: Katie Nechodom at nechodomk@gmail.com

We are currently looking for 2 graduate students to be Co-Coordinator for the Graduate Student Committee. Contact Katie Nechodom for more information on how you can be a leader within WSCA!

Education and Professional Development

Tasks: Non-conference professional development for members, including Summer Academy and Fall Summit; WSCPAR Sub-Committee.

Contact: Paula Haugle at hauglep@elmwood.k12.wi.us

Government Relations

Tasks: Day at the Hill pre-conference sectional, building connections with state agencies, and creating partnerships for school counselors.

Contact: Nate Rice at ricen@wawm.k12.wi.us

Professional Recognition and Scholarship

Tasks: Read high school and graduate student scholarship submissions, compile electronic database of all school districts in the state.

Contact: Kaila Rabideau at kaila.rabideau@gmail.com

Public Relations

Tasks: Help promote National School Counselor Week, develop promo materials for school counselors, share great work done by WSCA members statewide.

Contact: Lisa Koenecke at lisa.koenecke@gmail.com

Technology

Tasks: Connect school counselors through social media and develop other mediums for online networking.

Contact: Katrina Eisfeldt at keisfeldt@spencer.k12.wi.us

~ Graduate Schools with WSCA Student Chapters ~

Concordia University, Lakeland College, Marquette University, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Mount Mary University, University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh, University of Wisconsin-Platteville, University of Wisconsin-River Falls, University of Wisconsin-Stout, University of Wisconsin-Superior, University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, Winona State University.
