



Special to ACA School Counselor Members

Transitioning to a School Counselor Position in the “New Normal” School

Recognizing that the nation’s schools are hopeful of a returning to full in-person learning in the fall of 2021, my thoughts turned to the rising crop of new school counselor candidates and how they must navigate the graduate school to work transition that often occurs around this time of the year. My curiosity was heightened as I considered how school re-openings will be impacted by the coronavirus pandemic and the “new normal” that has become a permanent fixture in how schools are going to have to function between now and the time when in-person education has fully restored.

This ACA School Counselor Brief is going to be a little different. Rather than address child or adolescent matters or the learning process and how school counselors can facilitate person/social/emotional development, academic, and career development, it’s going to be about graduating counselor education new school counselors and the hoops they are going to have to jump through to find active employment as a school counselor.

If the school counselor candidate performed their practicum or internship experience during the past fourteen or fifteen months, it’s likely that they had the opportunity to experience the remote education measures the nation’s schools were forced to adopt to remain viable during the pandemic period. Now another adjustment will be forthcoming as schools bring students back to the classroom for the 2021-2022 academic year.

Changes in the Hiring Process

Just as the innovative communication technology of the day gave us Zoom classes and related student and parent interfaces, so has it changed the manner in which candidates for employment will have to identify and go about applying for positions. These hiring process adjustments include:

- Searching for position vacancies via “job boards,” a dedicated portion of the school system or school website used to advertise job vacancies to the broadest base of qualified job seekers.
- Filing of formal applications for school positions electronically, using forms and protocols that utilize similar technologies
- Participating in a multilevel interviewing process that is also electronically driven (i.e., Zoom, Skype, Got-to-Meeting, etc.) as human resource professionals screen candidates and school administrators conduct the formal interviews.
- Expecting the candidate to explain how they have mastered new and innovative communication techniques during the remote education period that may now be included in their skill set and available for use in their daily work with students, parents, colleagues, etc.

Most of the above were already being used by many human resource professionals, as well as many formal job boards such as CareerBuilder, LinkedIn, Indeed and Monster, and their success in those settings has resulted in their become “new normal” fixtures in the general search and staffing community.

Inquisitive Interviewers May Want to Know

Once the school counselor candidate has mastered the art of the job search and application process and been successful at scheduling an employment interview, a measure of preparation is always necessary. During the actual interview, candidates for school counselor positions may find the questioning similar to that posed to candidates for varied educator positions (i.e., teachers, aides, specialists, media professionals, etc.).

Savvy administrators and human resource professionals, however, are going to have a heightened understanding of the academic and career development needs of children and adolescents and a recognize the mental health dimension of the school counselor role. As a result this interview is going to be more focused as the candidate will likely be asked questions that address, but not be limited to, the following eleven topics:

1. Motivation for becoming a counselor and choosing to work in an educational environment
2. Personal traits and characteristics that contribute to counseling work and role
3. Experiences in working with children, adolescents and young adults prior to and during counselor training
4. Importance of teacher-counselor collaboration in meeting the learning and development needs of all students
5. Lessons taught by the coronavirus pandemic “new normal” that counselors and schools may wish to sustain
6. Views on how the counselor establishes rapport and cultivates the positive relationship with students and parents needed to facilitate student learning and development
7. Outline of a comprehensive school counseling program, citing examples of both proactive and reactive counseling interventions and activities created for student consumption
8. Importance of the collegial relationships and partnerships required of all educators in order to support student achievement and growth
9. Examples of experiences in dealing with diverse student populations and those with special needs and the need to address inclusion and multicultural concerns in the school and community
10. Adaptability toward new counseling techniques, tools and technologies and the manner in which the candidate expects to address her/his personal professional development
11. Methods for engaging parents, guardians and families and gaining their commitment to support fully the learning and developmental experiences of the student

Keep in mind that this is not an exhaustive list of interview focal points and consider making contact with practicing counselors and other educators who can be help you make your responses more precise and complete. Be attentive to any “hot button” issues that are active in the school, school system and school community. Interviewers often like to learn the degree to which candidates for employment are “up” on the educational issues getting attention in the environment.

Similarly, be prepared with questions you’d like to have answered as you give further consideration of a position in the school or school system. And never fear asking the interviewer for additional specificity is any question they ask appears ambiguous or lacking in

clarity. Upon completion, extend a personal “thank you” for the opportunity to interview and “double down” in making known your positive interest in the position if that is the case.

Happy job hunting!

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Over his career he has also held leadership roles with the National Association for College Admission Counseling (Executive Director), American Counseling Association (Associate Executive Director), and the National Association of Personnel Services (Education and Certification Manager). He is the author of several Rowan & Littlefield Education books on career and college matters and currently resides in retirement in Springfield, VA and Rockport, ME.

