

## Finding a Way: Lessons from These Successful Teams

The survey of principals and school counselors about different aspects of their relationships showed several things. First, it showed that principals and counselors have similar views about the major issues that drive their relationships, and the relative importance of many of these facets. It also pointed out, however, that the two groups of professionals define some of the issues differently. And, in general, principals have a much more positive view of their relationships with the counselors than counselors have of their relationships with the principals.

The teams chosen for these interviews were not picked because of any special relationships between them. In most cases, rather, they were chosen because they had a nationally recognized principal or counselor or had been effective in creating a college-going culture in their school. But the interviews made one thing very clear: In each case, the teams had to confront the issues identified in the survey and find a common ground between the principal and the counselor. And each one of these teams was successful in doing so.

The partnerships were formed in very different ways; some had long-term relationships, others were new at the school and had never met before. The issues facing their students were very different as well. Their partnerships were formed out of necessity and a strong desire to see their students succeed; certain common characteristics are found in many of these teams.

Most often, the principal created a culture in which the skills and expertise of the counselors were valued, encouraged and supported. "I think it has to start with the principal," said Principal James Dierke. "I think the principal has to be open to other people having different styles, but communicating to the staff where the boundaries are, and then having trust."

In turn, many of the counselors found a way to communicate what the principal needed to know, and they frequently backed up their efforts with data. They understood the principal's perspective and that they were dealing with larger issues. Ellen Farmer said of her principal, "She is extremely busy; she's bombarded with a lot of stuff. I've got to try to figure out if this is something big, when is the best time so that I know she has time to hear me."

Perhaps most important, none of the teams were afraid to change their approach when necessary; all of them found a way to work together to increase student success. Donna Amador put it succinctly: "There's really no rule book when kids are troubled and you want to try and get them the help they need."

**"We're on the same page. We're in the same book. The student achievement, the student success, is that book."**

**Cullen Porter, Counselor,  
Jefferson County High School**

**"There's really no rule book when you want to get [kids] the help they need."**

**Donna Amador, Counselor,  
Visitation Valley Middle School**