

GEORGE LUCAS EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**3 Surprising Skills That School Counselors Need**

School counselors can increase their effectiveness by developing technology, data analysis, and public speaking skills.

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Everything that school counselors need to know, they learned in graduate school. Right? Well, sort of. While school counseling programs thoroughly prepare graduates, as with any degree, there is some on-the-job learning

that isn't always covered in school. In my nearly 15 years of experience as a school counselor, I identified three skills that I used regularly and hadn't realized would be so important when I was in graduate school.

Technology Skills

Technology skills are critical for every school counselor. This doesn't mean you have to be a guru, but a certain tech savvy is key. Regularly emailing with families and staff, creating class schedules, and delivering creative and meaningful lessons are among the basic skills school counselors should possess. There are fantastic and free technology resources that can transform your counseling program and help you connect with your students to give them important information. For example, I used PowToon to share *animated videos*

([https://www.youtube.com/watch?](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MIQai8ZY5dw&index=2&list=PL02xwmCErTL0eAaYPQfZWPK2FgjFxd4oa)

[v=MIQai8ZY5dw&index=2&list=PL02xwmCErTL0eAaYPQfZWPK2FgjFxd4oa](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MIQai8ZY5dw&index=2&list=PL02xwmCErTL0eAaYPQfZWPK2FgjFxd4oa))

that I created with my students to explain what school counselors do.

Are you looking for creative counseling ideas? Maybe it's your first time running a grief group or helping a student with a certain issue. Maybe you're simply looking for innovative counseling ideas. You can find fantastic resources on Pinterest. My favorite pinner is *S. Fuller Entirely Elementary* (<https://www.pinterest.com/eelementarysc/>), where you can find over 4,000 pins on school morale, small-group lessons, bulletin boards, being organized, and so much more. Are you interested in reaching out to other counselors to find resources? You can do that on Facebook: Two great pages to follow are *School Counselor Central*

(<https://www.facebook.com/School-Counselor-Central-102489186503748/>) and *Elementary*

School Counselor Exchange

(https://www.facebook.com/groups/590701787640166/#_=_).

Connecting with other school counselors across the country is as simple as following a blog. You can sign up for regular updates via email,

comment on posts, and ask questions, all the while learning from other professionals. One of my favorite blogs about how technology can enhance your program is *The Counseling Geek* (<http://www.thecounselinggeek.com/>). You can continue the counseling conversation on Twitter. You can follow the *American School Counselor Association* (<https://twitter.com/ASCAtweets>) for the latest updates. Twitter chats are a great way to collaborate with colleagues. Follow *Erin Mason* (<https://twitter.com/ecmmason>), founder of *#SCCHAT* (<https://twitter.com/search?q=%23scchat&src=typd>) (School Counselor Chat). You can follow the hashtag, or better yet, join the Twitter chat.

Data Analysis

As a school counselor, I never thought I would be doing so much data analysis—and I never thought I would actually love it. School counselors regularly use data to determine the effectiveness of their programs, advocate for resources, increase program funding, conduct needs assessments of staff and students, and more. It is necessary to know how to determine what data to collect, how to effectively and efficiently collect it, how to track progress, and how to analyze results.

All of this felt daunting to me when I first started, but there are many free tools that counselors can access to make this task easier. For example, Google Forms allow you to send out free surveys and questionnaires. Results are automatically collected in a corresponding Google Sheet. Analyzing the data is simple: You can generate summative graphs, including colorful pie charts and bar charts. Google has made data analysis not only easy but fun.

Public Speaking and Presenting

Public speaking is not something school counselors should shy away from: Counselors regularly advocate for program needs, resources, and students. The opportunity to provide information to students, families,

staff, and community is important. Often the most effective way to reach large groups is by speaking directly to them. Knowing how to communicate in this manner allows counselors to reach a larger audience on important topics. In classroom lessons, grade-level transition meetings with parents, board of education meetings, and advocating for students to the community, let your passion for the profession guide you.

Most of us are not fans of public speaking, and many of us have a great fear of it. I always avoided public speaking until I reframed it, reminding myself that I was speaking on important topics about which I cared deeply. I've learned to use Google Slides or some other presentation tool to shift the focus away from me and onto the topic itself. I don't look at presentation as a skill to attain but as a process. I still struggle to slow down when I'm nervous, pause at important points, and find creative ways to keep the audience engaged. If I approach a presentation as though I'm talking to a friend, it helps me get my message across. The more you practice, the more you'll find little tricks that help.

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