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Top 5 Ways to Engage with Your Community

by Angela Cleveland and Diane Lee

School counselors are in the unique position to affect change within their buildings, school districts and community. The direct involvement of school counselors with students and their families, not only for school activities but for neighborhood events, builds trust and enforces stronger bonds for a continuous home-school connection. Here are five ways New Jersey school counselors can engage stakeholders in the community.

Municipal Alliance

Municipal Alliances are community-based drug and alcohol prevention organizations. Active in all 21 counties in New Jersey, the alliance is composed of community stakeholders, such as educators, law enforcement, leaders in religious organizations and more. They actively develop and support programming targeting substance abuse prevention initiatives.

School counselors match available resources, school/community needs, and providers. For example, some schools lack funding and facilitators to run esteem-building running clubs like [Girls on the Run](#) or [Boys on the Right Track](#). The local municipal alliance can provide financial and/or staffing support.

Are you looking for resources or a dynamic speaker for annual events like [Red Ribbon Week](#)? Reach out to your municipal alliance! Many school counselors identify this committed organization of one of their key community connections.

2. Connecting with local resource agencies

- Traumatic Loss Coalitions in each county can support both families and school districts when tragedy strikes.
- The [Family Resource Network](#) provides family and individual support services for those with intellectual and developmental disabilities.
- [PerformCare](#) is a full-service behavioral health managed care company offering a “unique partnership between parents, family support organizations, service providers and care managers that provides “a central support group for children and youth in need, with parents and caregivers as the primary force behind the planning and treatment process.”

3. Student support beyond the school day

School counselors connect student mentors with mentees such as a new student buddy, social support from an older student, or academic support through after-school student tutoring. Many counselors connect at-risk students with a supportive staff member in a school-based mentor relationship. School counselors are experts both at building and supporting positive relationships during the school day and connecting students with supportive programming and networks beyond the school day. High school students in Key Club and other groups can assist younger students while earning community service hours. Such a program is a college resume builder and rewarding experience for students of all ages.

4. Parent-Teacher Organizations

Whether a PTO, PTA, or PTSO, these organizations are vital to uniting school staff with families. School counselors often serve as collaborators for the entire student body and all school staff in their buildings. A great start to forming a strong relationship between the PTO and staff is to promote 100% staff membership. School counselors promote unity in support of students by kicking off the school year with reminders to staff to join their PTO, attend meetings, and invite collaboration. Many PTO groups fund staff members through grants for student assemblies and activities. School counselors are often responsible for leading these schoolwide events, and the assistance of the PTO is beneficial to promote participation and provide funding. Events for Respect Week, Violence Prevention Week, Great Kindness Challenge, Mix-it-Up at lunch, and Student Reward Assemblies, to name a few, become even more memorable for our students with the support of our PTOs.

5. Fundraisers and participation in events

Each district is unique in their participation beyond the school community, identifying which type of events attract and unite its population. Many businesses provide ways school staff can participate in fundraising events that assist their school while increasing sales for the businesses. Local restaurants and chains such as [Applebees](#), [McDonald's](#), and [IHOP](#) offer community fundraising opportunities. For example, "McTeacher Night" is an opportunity for school personnel to become workers at McDonald's in all areas of the restaurant for one evening. This is a great hit because it offers an added layer of fun to the dining experience as families spend the evening connecting with other school families and seeing educators in a new role, all while raising funds for their school! School counselors are a critical link to community events by identifying community partners and encouraging participation from staff, students, and their families.

The [ASCA Ethical Standards](#) say, "School counselors are advocates, leaders, collaborators and consultants who create systemic change by providing equitable educational access and success." Allies in this advocacy include our many community resources. They are key stakeholders invested in the success of all students. The examples above are not only in line with these standards, but they also give us the building tools and beneficial component of the strong relationship bonds formed between school counselors and community when we go beyond the school building

Angela Cleveland has 15 years of experience as a school counselor. She is webmaster for [NJSCA](#) and consults for the [National Center for Women & Information Technology's Counselors for Computing](#). Angela received the 2017 NJSCA School Counselor of the Year award. Learn more about her at www.angelacleveland.com.

Diane Lee has 28 years of experience as a public school educator with 19 years as an elementary school counselor. She is the VP of elementary counselors for [SCA](#) and is a disaster response crisis counselor for [NJDRCC](#). Diane is also a lead response counselor for TLC of Middlesex County.

In This Issue

[Military-Connected Youth In Your School And Community](#)

[In Your Community: Ethical Behavior Is Context-Dependent](#)

[Bridging Students To The Community](#)

[Getting Creative With Community Partnerships](#)

[President's Letter: Reinforcing Our Resources](#)

ASCA - 1101 King Street, Suite 310, Alexandria VA 22314, (703) 683-ASCA, asca@schoolcounselor.org

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