Thinking Beyond the Status Quo: How to Be Equitable in Your College Counseling Program

Alicia Oglesby
Christina Thomas
Carrie Woodard
“A failure to celebrate difference can be rooted in desires to erase one’s own accountability to others… However, when we centralize difference, we realize the strengths accumulated in solidarity and develop strategies to support ... vulnerabilities we do not face ourselves.”

—Audre Lorde
Objectives

1. Participants will increase their awareness of the importance of understanding students from diverse backgrounds.

2. Participants will learn practical strategies for cultivating a healthy school culture with a focus on equity, inclusion, and belonging.

3. Participants will identify two strategies they will use to move beyond the status quo at their school.
Agenda

01 Diversity & Underserved Students
02 Status Quo
03 Going Beyond the Status Quo
04 Review & Resources
Consider your school and the students present. What are their college aspirations and how does your program meet their needs? Is there data to suggest some students are being excluded?
01 Diversity & Underserved Students
Reflection

In what ways is your student population diverse?

Does your program meet the needs of everyone?

Who are your most underserved students?
Pittsburgh Brashear High School’s Diversity

Enrollment

- Total Students: 921
- Male: 504
- Female: 417
- Economically Disadvantaged: 77.65%
- Total Budget (2020): $11,922,572
- Title I Budget: $435,482
- Title I Percentage: 100.00%
- African American: 412
- Caucasian: 242
- Hispanic: 121
- Multi Racial: 76
- Asian: 70

Demographic Trends

[Graph showing demographic trends from 2010 to 2023]
Consider Diversity

Example: Pittsburgh Brashear High School

- Student or Parent/Guardian Education
  - Formal
  - Informal
- Language Proficiency
  - Multilingual
  - Dialect
- Academic Achievement
  - High
  - Low
- Economically Disadvantaged
- Immigration Status
  - Refugee
  - Undocumented
  - Green card/naturalized citizen
  - Unknown
- Age
- Family, Culture and Religious Norms
- College Bound
- First Generation
02 Status Quo
Equity in Action Responds to Diversity

Consider scenarios where we might center diverse needs in our practice:

- At Brashear
- At the PPS District-level
- In Collaboration
What small changes can you make tomorrow to center students who may be excluded?

Who within your school community benefits from programs and events?

“Individuals have a tendency to remain at the status quo because the disadvantages of leaving it loom larger than advantages.”
- Samuelson & Zeckerhauser (1988)
03 Beyond the Status Quo

Cultivating a Healthy School Culture
Strategies & Approaches

- Know your students, know the system and make them aware.
- Be vulnerable. Increase your knowledge of other cultures.
- Monitor bias.
Strategies & Approaches

- Partner with agencies/community partners to support students.
- Equitable School Counseling Program (College Counseling Curriculum)
- Advocate and be a change agent.
Strategies & Approaches

- Critique Act 158 practices and outcomes.
- Student leaders and influence
Relationships

Authenticity
Concern
Effort

Representation
Faculty
Staff
Guests
Materials
Lessons

Accountability
Accountability with Care
04 Review & Resources
Diversity is a fact. Respond with care.

Schools are only going to grow more diverse.

The evolution of our practice must meet the needs of our ever-changing populations.
Objectives Review

What Now?

- Do you better understand the importance of appreciating the diversity at your school?
- Do you better understand how inclusion helps create a welcoming school environment?
- Have you identified two strategies you can use in your school?
Pittsburgh-Area Resources

Texts for the School Counselor

School Counseling to Close the Achievement Gap

School Counseling to Close Opportunity Gaps

Interrupting Racism

Other

TED Ideas Worth Spreading

LOVE Radio

collegevine
Many Thanks!

Alicia Oglesby  
oglebya@winchesterthurston.org  
Associate Director of College Counseling, Winchester Thurston

Christina Thomas  
cthomas2@pghschools.org  
High School Counselor, Pittsburgh Brashears High School

Carrie Woodard  
cwoodard1@pghschools.org  
Director Student Support Services - School Counselors, Pittsburgh Public Schools