

Counseling Today Professional Resource Series

Administrator Leadership Guide

Helping Students Navigate *Political, Cultural, and Social Change*

Talking Points for Principals and School Leaders

Purpose

This guide is designed to help principals, assistant principals, district leaders, and school counselors have productive conversations about supporting students during periods of political, cultural, and social change while maintaining a student-centered, ethically grounded school environment.

Key Message

Political, cultural, and social issues do not remain outside school walls. Students bring questions, emotions, and experiences with them every day.

The goal is not for schools to become political. It is for schools to remain places where students feel safe, supported, and ready to learn.

School counselors are uniquely positioned to help schools achieve that goal through leadership, advocacy, collaboration, and direct student support.

Administrator Talking Points

The following talking points are intended to guide collaborative conversations between school counselors and school leaders while keeping student well-being at the center of every decision.

1. Student Well-Being Must Remain the Priority

Consider asking:

- How are current events affecting our students emotionally?
- Are students expressing increased anxiety, fear, or confusion?
- Which students may need additional support?

Remember:

Student well-being should always take precedence over political perspectives.

2. Clarify the School Counselor's Role

School counselors are not political advocates. Instead, they:

- ✓ Support student mental health
- ✓ Foster belonging
- ✓ Teach coping and communication skills
- ✓ Promote respectful dialogue

- ✓ Help students process emotions in developmentally appropriate ways
- ✓ Advocate for equitable access to student supports

3. Maintain Safe Learning Environments

Ask:

- Do students feel emotionally safe?
- Are respectful conversations being modeled?
- How are staff responding when controversial topics arise?

School climate begins with adult behavior.

4. Support Staff

Teachers often become the first adults students approach.

Consider:

- Have staff received guidance on responding to difficult conversations?
- Do teachers know when to involve the school counselor?
- Are counselors available to consult with staff?
- Are faculty responding consistently across classrooms?

5. Protect Counseling Time

During periods of increased uncertainty, counselors should spend more, not less, time serving students. Avoid assigning counselors to unnecessary administrative responsibilities when student needs are elevated.

Protecting counseling time protects student access to mental health support when it is needed most.

Questions for Leadership Teams

During leadership meetings, discuss:

- ☐ How are students experiencing current events?
 - ☐ Are we seeing increases in anxiety or behavioral concerns?
 - ☐ Which students or groups may need additional support?
 - ☐ Are counselors being utilized according to the ASCA National Model?
 - ☐ What proactive schoolwide supports should we implement?
 - ☐ Are staff receiving adequate guidance?
 - ☐ What message are students receiving from the adults in our building?
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Signs Students May Need Additional Support

Watch for:

- Increased anxiety
- Withdrawal from peers
- Emotional outbursts
- Declining attendance
- Increased peer conflict

- Fearful or catastrophic thinking
- Identity-related concerns
- Significant changes in behavior or academic performance

Early intervention matters.

Collaboration Checklist

Administrators and school counselors should work together to:

- ☐ Protect emotionally safe learning environments
 - ☐ Reinforce respectful dialogue
 - ☐ Maintain consistent communication
 - ☐ Support teachers responding to student concerns
 - ☐ Preserve counseling services for students
 - ☐ Strengthen family partnerships
 - ☐ Monitor school climate
 - ☐ Review student needs regularly
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Reflection Questions

Before making decisions, ask:

- How does this decision affect students?
 - Does it strengthen student belonging?
 - Is it consistent with the ASCA National Model and Ethical Standards?
 - Does it preserve counseling services?
 - Will it help students learn, grow, and thrive?
 - How will this decision affect students who are already vulnerable?
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Closing Reflection

Political, cultural, and social issues may create uncertainty. Schools can provide stability.

School counselors help transform uncertainty into understanding, fear into resilience, and division into opportunities for respectful dialogue.

Supporting school counselors is ultimately about supporting students.

Administrator Takeaway

Student well-being comes first.

Support your school counselors. Protect counseling time.

Lead with empathy. Build a culture where every student feels safe, respected, and ready to learn.



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Companion Guide to:
Helping Students Navigate Political, Cultural, and Social Change
Read the complete pillar article at www.susanrardonrose.com/helping-students...

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