

EVIDENCE BASED SCHOOL COUNSELING CONFERENCE

Centered in Joy, Care, Connection and Compassion: *Radically Reimagining Schools*

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"School counselors are the heart of the building."

— *A familiar cliché, but what does it mean TODAY?*

Joy

Fostering delight,
curiosity & love of
learning

Connection

Authentic relationships
at the center of school
life

Compassion

Radical care for self,
others & the system
itself

What We Believe

“School counselors are uniquely positioned to create inclusive learning environments that support equity and overall student wellbeing. We can foster inclusive school climates that prioritize authenticity and relationship development — so students can engage with the unique challenges of our era while also thriving.” *Lemberger-Truelove & Parker (2023)*

Using ASE theory & practice, along with related evidence-based practices, we identify multiple, concrete ways to create schools students need — and we want.

We believe that centering joy, care, connection, and compassion is crucial to our work - and is the best path to meaningful change.

What You'll Gain Today

01

Learn strategies for advocating within school systems to promote equitable, student-centered, and emotionally responsive schools.

02

Identify and implement targeted evidence-based systemic change strategies that are relevant for your context.

03

Leave with actionable ideas for empowering students to co-create learning environments that enable effective learning, radical belonging, and student wellbeing.

The World is Changing — So Must Our Schools

Machine Age (Past)

- Focus on efficiency, predictability, standardization
- Top-down planning
- Learning = consumption of information
- Set agenda, controlled information flow
- Established, repeated ways of doing things
- Values “doing”

Complex Modern Age (Now)

- Unpredictability; need to sense, respond & adapt, faster adoption of new methods
- Distributed intelligence, continuous learning
- Learning = generating ideas through exploration
- Conversational, tangential, innovative
- Values “being”

Key Question: "Does this work for our students?" (Werner & Le-Brun, 2025)

Advocating Student-within-Environment (ASE)

Developed specifically for school counseling (Lemberger, 2010)

Core Idea: Students and environments are inseparable. Challenges and strengths emerge from the ongoing, mutual interaction between the student and the cultural, relational, and systemic contexts that surround them.

Philosophy

Grounded in dependent origination and non-duality — students ARE their environments

Focus

Dual advocacy: individual student capacity AND systemic transformation

Evidence

#1 most-used theory in school counseling intervention studies (Kim et al., 2024)

Shifting Our Lens

Conventional / Deficit-Based	ASE-Informed Approach
Views student challenges as individual deficits to be fixed	Views challenges as emergent from student + environment interaction
Focuses on the student in isolation	Situates every student experience within cultural, relational & systemic contexts
Intervention stops when student behavior changes	Advocates for individual growth AND environmental transformation
Asks: What is wrong with this student?	Asks: What are the conditions shaping this student's experience?

Understanding the Full Landscape: The 3Cs

Culture

Individual & collective beliefs, values, customs, and social norms — including both personal and school culture — that shape how a student perceives themselves and their world.

"How do Maya's family values around academic success interact with peer group norms about effort?"

Constitution

The amalgamation of a student's internal qualities — personality, emotional well-being, cognitive abilities — and their internalized social influences. The student as a whole person.

"What are Jamie's executive functioning strengths? How does their identity shape how they navigate stress?"

Circumstance

The immediate, changeable conditions influencing a student's current situation — financial stressors, family instability, recent social events. The context right now.

"Marcus's withdrawal coincided with his family's housing uncertainty and increased work responsibilities."

These three lenses are always interrelated — like a kaleidoscope, every turn reveals new patterns of influence.

The 5Cs — ASE Practice Values

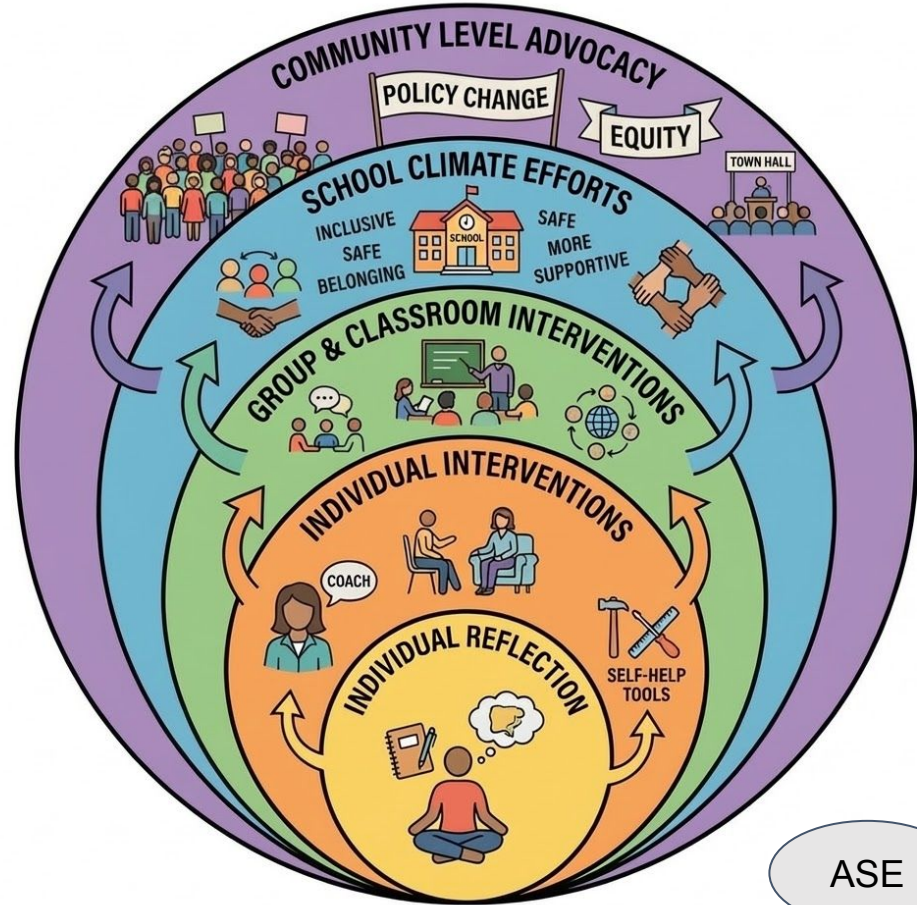
Curiosity	Connectedness	Co-regulation	Compassion	Contribution
Student Outcome Student develops critical self-awareness & contextual wisdom	Student Outcome Student experiences belonging, safety & authentic engagement	Student Outcome Student develops self-regulation across personal, family & school contexts	Student Outcome Student builds self-acceptance, resilience & capacity to engage challenge	Student Outcome Student builds purpose, belonging & agency for social contribution

Each practice value counselors embody inspires the parallel capacity in students and educators.

Theory into Practice: What does this look like?

We move across nested levels of support, working with everyone in the extended school community to create positive changes

NESTED LEVELS OF SUPPORT: FROM REFLECTION TO ADVOCACY



1. INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION

The work starts with **individual reflection** about values, mission, how we want to be in the world, awareness of possible implicit biases, and more. We keep asking ourselves:

- What is my work? Where is my joy? What values am I enacting?
- What are my goals? What am I trying to change?
- How am I going to keep growing in awareness and skills?
- How can I show up with care, compassion, and intentionality?
- How can I engage in radical self-compassion?



Chat: How do you center yourself?



Individual reflection is the foundation of intentional practice grounded in who we are and what matters to us, our students, their families, and our communities. We each do this in our own ways - journaling, meditation, supervision, therapy, rest, exercise, creative pursuits...

2. INDIVIDUAL INTERVENTIONS

While tier 1 and 2 interventions are the core of our work, and they allow us to meet the needs of the larger student population, we also sometimes need to do individual interventions when there is:

- a crisis
- a gap in school or community resources
- a unique situation for a student
- a specific mental health or behavioral need
- and so on....



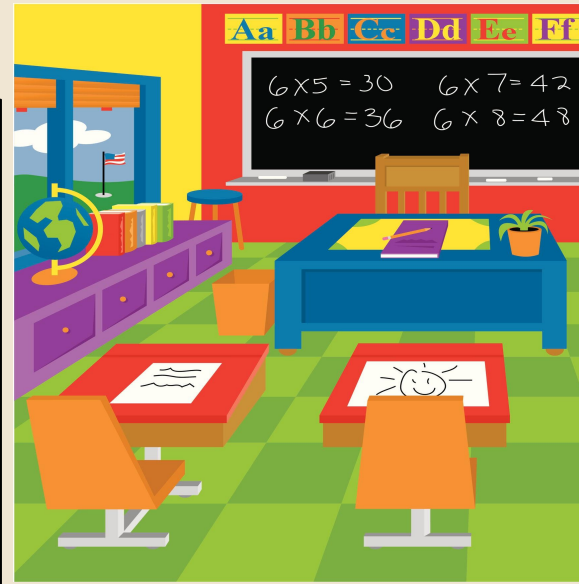
**Chat: What
do you
believe?**

We believe that it's crucial to:

- consider how the contexts are contributing to the situation
- empower students to co-create the changes needed
- include families in the conversation
- use evidence-based interventions to ensure that we are alleviating the situation quickly and effectively

We do classroom interventions, and we also collaborate with our school peers to create caring, effective learning environments by:

- Moving from “classroom management” to “classroom facilitation” to “classroom community member”
- Prioritizing relationships to support learning
- Using EBP in teaching, supporting student growth, and structuring classrooms (UDL, UbD, etc.)
- Using culturally affirming teaching and assessment practices
- Co-creating engaging and inclusive classroom contexts



How do you use your counseling skills in the classroom?

Group counseling practices involve:

- EBP where they exist - Coping Cat, Skills for Academic and Social Success (SASS), Student Success Skills (SSS), etc.
- Groups for social identity exploration and affirmation
- Learning strategies and positive relationship skill development
- Career exploration and leadership development... and MORE

What Does This Look Like in Classroom Interventions?

Current Reality & Future Aspirations

- As we help students prepare for the future, we need to balance:
 - Helping students be ready for the world we currently live in (ex. economic demands)
 - Helping students feel empowered to challenge oppressive/harmful systems and make change in their communities

Adaptability

- The world is constantly changing; this makes it difficult (and exciting!) to help students envision their futures
- Adaptability is both a tool and lens:
 - As counselors, being adaptable means we can best balance students' needs/hopes with systemic demands
 - Building students' adaptability can help them best prepare for an ever-changing future

Career-Focused Classroom Lessons

SC Curriculum Book

- Working on a school counseling curriculum book, with the overarching goal of re-imagining curricula and centering students
- Trying to find the reality & aspiration balance
- See lessons as dynamic starting points rather than fixed end points: encouraged to adapt materials as needed

Backwards Design

- All curriculum was developed using backwards design
 - Start with the goal: what do you want students to learn, consider, or know how to do?
 - Once you know your goal, then design activities to meet this
- Goals are open, flexible, and leave space for student input

Other Guiding Processes

- Universal Design for Learning: how can activities be scaffolded or adaptable for all students?
- Reality of SC: how can we keep lessons short, impactful, and both individual/cohesive?
- Ever-changing world: how can we make sure these lessons and activities hold up in 10-15 years?

Lesson #1: Social Contexts of Work

Goal	Questions	Opening	Activity	Closing
<p>Discuss the ways in which different communities conceptualize work; understand how our social contexts influence our perceptions of labor.</p>	<p>What value does labor hold in our families? Communities?</p> <p>How do these perspectives shape my own thinking about work?</p>	<p>Think, Pair, Share: How do our families talk about work? → Helps see how peers may have similar or different perspectives on work/labor</p>	<p>Career Community Maps → Like genogram, but with entire community; done indiv. then group</p> <p>→ Visual rep. of the range of work/labor contributions of the classroom's community</p>	<p>Reflection & exit ticket: How does context shape our view of work? How might this be a factor in career decision making? → Builds off the idea that there are multiple "influencers" that shape our career decisions</p>

Lesson #2: The Labor Market

Goal	Questions	Opening	Activity	Closing
<p>Understand how labor market trends/info can influence career decisions.</p> <p>Practice using O*Net or other online tools to find and understand labor market trends.</p>	<p>Similar to social contexts, how can the labor market help me make career decisions?</p> <p>What are some of the tools I can use to learn more about jobs?</p>	<p>Group think: What do you think of when you hear “labor market” or “job market”? → Helps facilitator understand what students already know, or possible misconceptions</p>	<p>O*Net Career Exploration: → Students think of a few potential jobs to explore, then brainstorm questions → Example questions/jobs available to help scaffold</p>	<p>Reflection & exit ticket: How does market information shape our view of work? → Continue to build off the idea that there are multiple “influencers” that shape our career decisions</p>

A recent rigorous meta-analysis of 258 studies of universal K-12 school-based SEL interventions (Cipriani, et al., 2023) found the following:

1

Overall, SEL programs significantly improved students' skills, attitudes, and behaviors, with an $ES = .194$ for 1862 outcomes across 12 domains, as well as significant intervention effects for the SEL interventions compared to a control groups ($p < .001$)

2

SEL programs demonstrated impact for 12 domains: SEL skills^{***}, attitudes^{***}, prosocial behaviors^{***}, externalizing behaviors^{***}, civic attitudes/behaviors^{*}, peer relationships^{***}, emotional distress^{***}, school functioning^{***}, disciplinary outcomes, school safety/climate^{***}, family relationships, and physical health. ^{***} = $p < .001$ ^{*} = $p < .05$

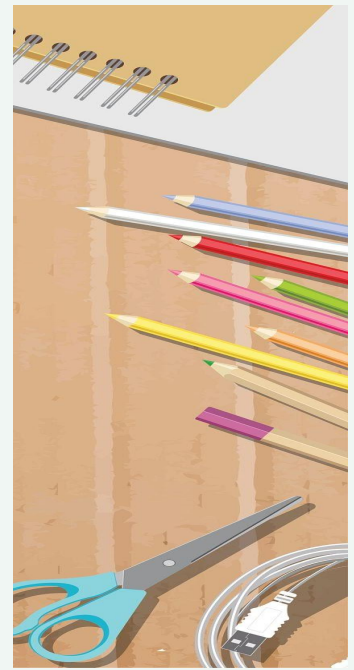
3

Most interventions were classroom based, included free-standing lessons, and focused on improving school climate. There was a family component in 59.2% of the interventions in the studies. Most interventions were sequenced and instructed on intrapersonal skills before interpersonal skills, with the content of the interventions ranging widely.

Chat: What school-level interventions exist in your building?

At the school level, we can co-create and collaborate to support a caring, safe, kind, and empowering environment through:

- School-wide SEL interventions
- School-based mental health services for all students who need them
- PBIS and MTSS programs, with universal academic and mental health screening
- Social justice advocacy, awareness raising, training, and resources
- Early intervention for learning and behavioral challenges
- Culturally affirming practices across all contexts
- The use of data to identify inequities and gaps



Concrete actions for care and connection (radically reimagining) at the school level:

- Warm greeting, by name, as students enter the building
- Movement breaks scheduled throughout the day
- Yoga, meditation, and mindfulness spaces and/or opportunities for students and staff
- Gratitude journals, spaces to post “thank you” and notes acknowledging support among all school members, noticing acts of kindness, and MORE



Three Levels of School Counselor Advocacy

1

Individual Student Advocacy

Identify students experiencing barriers — bullying, cultural isolation, academic struggles — then intervene through counseling, referrals, and individualized support services.

2

School-Wide Advocacy

Use disaggregated data to identify inequities in achievement, discipline, or access to rigorous coursework. Promote evidence-based systemic changes: equitable discipline policies, inclusive curriculum, staff training on bias.

3

Community & Policy-Level Advocacy

Engage families, communities, and policymakers to support structural reforms — mental health access, inclusive school policies, and systemic resource equity.

Advocating for Three Types of Schools

Equitable Schools

- Climate matters — differentially by race/ethnicity (Graham et al., 2026)
- All students have access to all services & opportunities
- Social service resources for students facing ACEs & trauma
- Universal Design so all students can learn regardless of LD status

Student-Centered Schools

- Centering student opinions, goals & interests in school decisions
- Amplifying student leadership in meaningful ways
- Asking: What does student-centered really look like here?
- Actively inviting student voice into climate conversations

Emotionally-Responsive Schools

- Build classroom & school-level community through shared values & goals
- Social events that foster authentic belonging
- Staff & structures that recognize students' full emotional lives
- Frameworks like Darling-Hammond's learning community work

How Do We Create Lasting Change?

Werner & Le-Brun (2025)

Shift how people see the world

Mindset change precedes behavior change; the narrative must shift first

Shift in how we act

New patterns of behavior embed new values into daily practice

Messy, emergent process

Change is not linear; expect iteration, setbacks, and unexpected breakthroughs

Works best when co-created

Tap into collective experience and motivation — change happens WITH people

Linked to values and deep learning

Sustainable change connects to what people genuinely care about

Let go of what doesn't serve

Look for unproductive practices or gatekeeper functions you can drop

We cultivate and support effective learning, belonging, and well-being with students, **at every level.**

Developing a positive school climate

Mindfulness interventions

Tier 1 prevention programs

Data-based decision making

Developing trauma-informed schools

SEL interventions

Supporting Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Integrated hands-on learning opportunities

Centering all of our work in joy, care, connection and compassion

Universal mental health screening

Building affirming relationships

Teaching metacognitive and study skills to support learning

Co-Creating Learning Environments

School Counselors as Role Models, Architects & Advocates

Student Voice

Create structured opportunities for students to share feedback on school climate, learning conditions, and programs.

Radical Belonging

Audit school culture for exclusionary practices; champion inclusive events and community-building rituals; be the heart of the building!

Collaborative Action

Partner with students, teachers, colleagues, admins and families to co-design solutions and programs

Data-Informed Advocacy

Use disaggregated data to identify opportunity gaps and drive conversations about equitable access. Include youth in your discussions.

Personal Modeling

Embody the 5Cs in your own practice — your curiosity, compassion, and connectedness are contagious!

Student Leadership

Develop student advisory groups, peer-led initiatives, and shared governance structures. Include students wherever possible.

From This Session to Your School

You are a systems-changer

School Counselors collaborate with the school community to create environments that support learning, development, connection, and empowerment.

ASE is your framework

Culture, Constitution & Circumstance. Curiosity, Connectedness, Co-regulation, Compassion & Contribution.

Equity starts with data

Disaggregate, examine, share — using data as a tool for advocacy. Let data tell the story!

Students co-create with you

Their voice, leadership, and lived experience are central to the environments we are building; empower them to create change.

"Centered in Joy, Care, Connection & Compassion — this is the school we build together."

What's at the center? We have all hopefully had those moments in our lives - personally and/or professionally - where we were able to be fully ourselves, open-hearted, and connected with the people around us and with what was happening. How can we co-create this in our schools?

Joy

We are joyous when there is intersection of the self, others, and what matters (Arnett, 2023). We can support our students and colleagues in identifying and nurturing that intersection, and build the joy in our building. **Where is YOUR joy?**

Connection

When we engage in conversations from a place of relaxed authenticity, with a willingness to be curious about what the students say they need, and to hearing the inherent wisdom in what they share, we are providing a time and place for real exploration and potential development. **Where are YOU connecting?**

Compassion

As school counselors, we know how to deepen conversations, we know how to hold challenging and complicated content, we know how to honor and value differences, and we know how to nurture kindness and care with others. **Where do YOU give and receive compassion?**

Share in the Chat!

1 How have YOU created lasting change in your own life or school community?

2 Where in your school context do you see the greatest opportunity for student-centered reform?

3 Which of the Three Levels of Advocacy (Individual, School-wide, Community) feels most within reach for you — and which is most needed?

4 What is one concrete thing you can do this week to foster joy, care, connection, or compassion?

THANK YOU all for your presence today, and please don't
hesitate to connect

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