

Professional Development Activity on Ethical Decision Making

The following activity will help the school counselor–administrator team better understand one another’s core values and beliefs about students and their potential to achieve. Core values and beliefs drive decision making when answers are unclear. An experienced team may also use this activity to deepen its members’ rapport and strengthen future dialogue.

Time Frame

The team should allow thirty to sixty minutes for this activity.

Materials

This activity requires a facilitator, a note taker, and a piece of paper and a pen or pencil for every participant.

Process

One administrator and one school counselor should take turns facilitating discussion to balance leadership and focus the team. If the team desires, one person can facilitate the following three steps.

1. Pose the following questions. They are designed to encourage open dialogue about team members’ values and beliefs about students and their school. As the team considers individual responses, the note taker should record key words so the team can reflect on these notes later.
 - “Do you believe all students can be academically successful? Why or why not?”
 - “How is our school different from other schools?”
 - “What are the greatest challenges our students face? Why do you believe these are our greatest challenges? Do you honestly believe we have answers to these challenges? Why?”
 - “What is your dream for students in our school? What would this look like in practice?”
 - “What is our role in students’ social-emotional development?”
 - “How much influence do family values have on a student’s school performance?”
 - “To what extent do external factors such as trauma, poverty, or living conditions impact a student’s academic success?”

2. Ask each participant to reflect on the following questions. The note taker should take notes.
 - “What common values and beliefs do team members share?”
 - “What differences among values and beliefs have we identified?”
 - “Have you modified any of your values or beliefs as a result of this discussion?”
 - “Is it possible to prioritize any common values or beliefs we share? Are there any that we believe in so deeply that we will not compromise them and will hold ourselves responsible for them?”
 - “Have we identified any differences that we need to discuss further for clarity? Let’s avoid judging these differences.”
3. Have the note taker type the recorded responses and distribute them to team members in a timely manner. These responses serve as an important reminder of the individual and collective core values and beliefs impacting the team.

Results

Participation in this activity builds the team’s capacity to understand each other’s values and beliefs, helps the team appreciate differing perspectives that influence action plan development, and deepens the team’s rapport through collective values and beliefs. It encourages the school counselor–administrator team to develop common value or belief statements that will drive future decision making. This is most beneficial when difficult ethical decisions are necessary. The team should revisit these statements on a regular basis to ensure consistent decision making and relevance to the team.