

School Counselors

By JENNY HUBLER

Many people I encounter seem to have a story like this one: "When I was in high school, my guidance counselor told me I would never have a career in ____." Fill in the blank with any career you choose. I also hear, "My guidance counselor told me I would never graduate from college." It is no wonder that many in my profession work tirelessly today to distance ourselves from the term "guidance counselor." Guidance counselors of the past were not always required to hold degrees in counseling, some were teachers who had extra blocks in their schedules and dispensed advice without any training. Guidance counselors did not have standards and were not asked to show data. While many were well-intentioned, far too many picked and chose which students to push towards higher education or to even meet with at all. I share this to say that the counselors who work in schools in 2014 are not the guidance counselors referenced above.



Today's School Counselors run comprehensive, data-driven programs based on a national model and standards from The American School Counselor Association. We are required to hold a master's degree in school counseling. We believe in educating all students about college and career readiness from pre-kindergarten through high school. We are focused on the academic and personal/emotional needs as well as the developmental needs of all students. We collaborate with other educational stakeholders such as parents, teachers, administration and the community to build and strengthen our school counseling programs. And, while we do help guide students, it is merely a function of our delivery system.

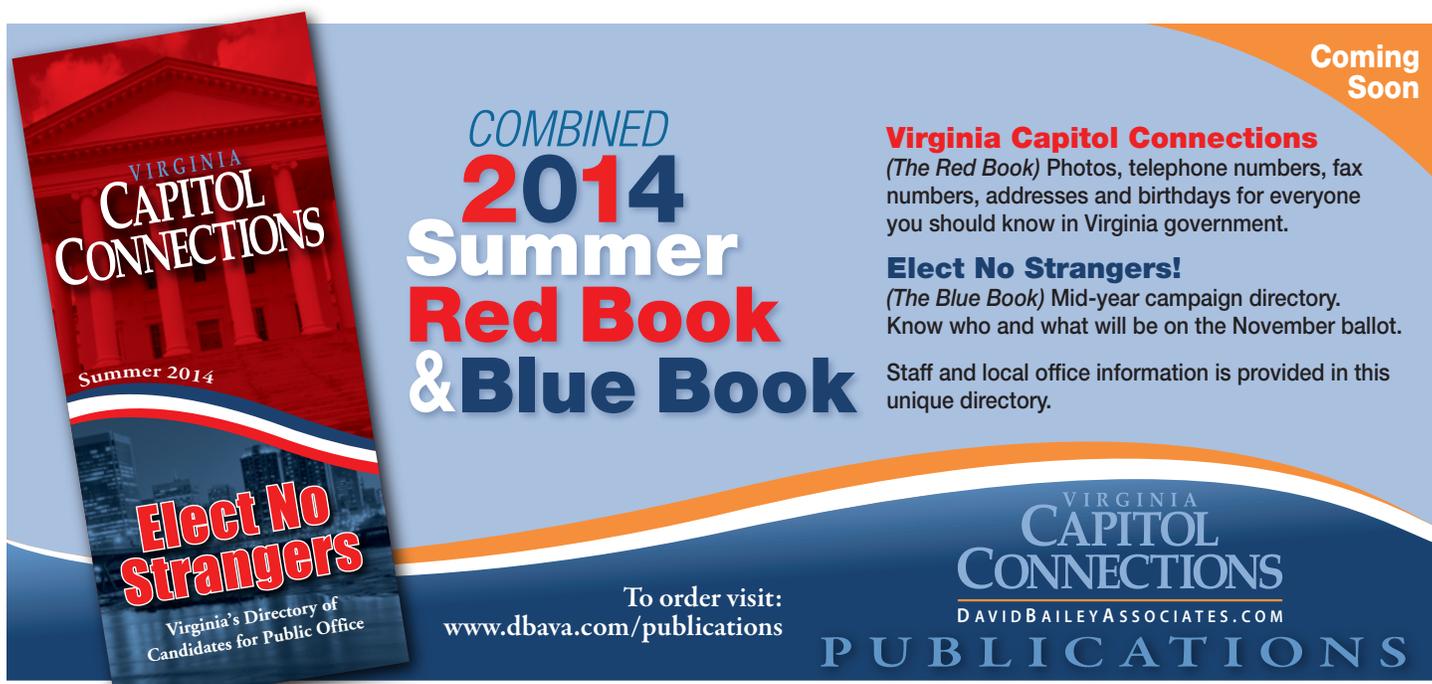
Too often school counselors are viewed as dispensable in schools. It is thought that counselors are just sitting in their offices waiting for students with "problems" to come to them. Again, maybe this is how guidance counselors unfortunately operated. Today's school counselors align their mission statements with those of the school and district as a whole. Today's school counselors are proactive in their agendas having students complete needs assessments and basing class lessons, small group counseling, and individual counseling off of the results. Today's school counselors proactively educate

school communities on bullying prevention, suicide awareness, and character education. Today's school counselors are an integral part of creating the school's culture and of the school community as a whole.

School counselors are grateful to the legislators who understand our roles and how we contribute to student success. In a recent letter to school officials, Arne Duncan, Secretary of Education, wrote, "School counselors are often the vital link between students' aspirations for the future and tangible opportunities for postsecondary success. They are also particularly important for our neediest students, who require expert and accessible guidance as they navigate a challenging and complicated college admissions and career preparation landscape." Secretary Duncan went on to say, "Despite the critical role school counselors play in supporting students' college and career readiness, they often are asked to perform many 'non-counseling' duties that can distract from their core work and ultimately leave students without the individualized attention they need to complete their academic course work, successfully navigate the college admissions and financial aid processes, and/or prepare for productive careers. Increasing the number of students who graduate from high school ready for college and careers requires that all students benefit from a holistic support system that ensures consistent access to effective school counselors."

The Virginia School Counselor Association urges all of those who make decisions regarding school counseling, Virginia's school children, and/or education as a whole to please keep Secretary Duncan's comments in the forefront of his/her mind. We want you to know that school counselors are working hard for Virginia's students and teaching them essential "soft skills," which many businesses today request and require, to further their education and to expand their career options. It is true that today's school counselors are often the heart of the school, but that heart guides students in a skilled and measured manner using data, expertise and collaboration to educate the whole child.

Jenny Hubler, president of The Virginia School Counselor Association, is a school counselor in Henrico County and can be reached at vsicapresident@gmail.com.



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