

FROM OUTSIDER TO INSIDER IN K-12 SETTINGS

Navigating a Career Shift: Reflections from School Counseling Field Experiences

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ABSTRACT

This poster highlights my professional and personal growth throughout the Educational Counseling and Leadership graduate program at Monmouth University, with particular emphasis on the completion of 700 hours of fieldwork across elementary, middle, and high schools. As a former marketing professional with over 10 years spent in offices, I entered the program with a nontraditional background that shaped my experience as both a graduate student and future school counselor.

Unlike many of my peers who came from education and teaching backgrounds, I navigated the program while redefining my professional identity. Throughout this program, I pushed beyond my comfort zone, developing increased confidence and multicultural competence, deepening my empathy, cultural humility, and commitment to social justice.

ROLE & PHILOSOPHY

“School counselors work to create a future world where all students thrive” (ASCA, 2025). As an intern and future school counselor, I strive to support students’ social, emotional, academic, and postsecondary success.

My philosophy is to lead with unconditional positive regard, empathy, and congruence. I aim to cultivate a culture and environment where students feel seen, heard, included, and safe. This requires building strong partnerships with teachers, administrators, parents/guardians, and community resources, while also advocating within and beyond this network to promote greater access and equity for all students.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Provided short-term individual counseling incorporating data-informed interventions to address academic, personal/social, and career development; used assistive technology to support communication with MLL students
- Spearheaded and led group counseling for first-generation high school seniors focused on postsecondary readiness, and for middle school students targeting coping skills and interpersonal development
- Coordinated an annual field trip to a career conference, doubling the attendance from the previous year
- Designed and delivered classroom lessons on communication, stress management, mindfulness, and other SEL competencies to groups of 20–30 students
- Led academic planning, including 8th-grade transition meetings and elective selection for 180+ students
- Collaborated with teachers, the Child Study Team, administrators, and HIB specialists to improve the school’s Behavior Intervention Plans (BIP) process
- Assisted in conducting 3+ threat & suicide risk assessments

FIELD EXPERIENCE

- Ocean Township High School, Spring 2026 (300 hours)
- Carl W. Goetz Middle School, Spring 2025 (300 hours)
- Elms Elementary School, Fall 2024 (100 hours)

700
TOTAL
HOURS

280
HOURS DIRECTLY
WITH STUDENTS

420
HOURS INDIRECTLY
WITH STUDENTS

REFLECTIONS & MOVING FORWARD

Understanding the Culture of K-12 Schools

I am now more familiar with the general culture of K-12 as a whole, including the dynamics of working with teachers and other support staff, logistical matters such as when and how to call down a student, and school-specific support systems like 504s, IEPs, and I&RS.

I also have a better grasp of the obstacles I may face in a school setting, such as funding, resources, and timing. Our roles as school counselors can sometimes be overlooked and underappreciated. While challenging, it is important that I advocate for myself, this position, and my students.

Looking Beyond Student Behavior

My unconditional positive regard has grown, especially after taking courses such as *EDC-550 Counseling At-Risk Children and Families*. This coursework, along with my field experience, has reinforced that behaviors often labeled as “bad” may instead reflect the impact of systemic inequities that lead to limited resources, trauma, crises, or mental health challenges.

Many students genuinely want to succeed but face barriers that are beyond their control. Moving forward, I will continue to exercise patience and curiosity when working with students.

REFERENCE

ASCA. (2025). The role of the school counselor.
<https://www.schoolcounselor.org/getmedia/ee8b2e1b-d021-4575-982c-c84402cb2cd2/Role-Statement.pdf>