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Book Review: Fulfilling the Promise

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Book Review:

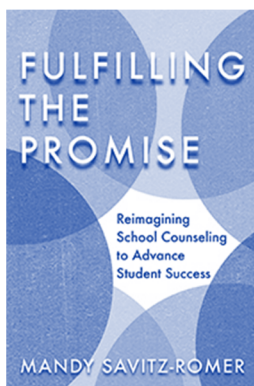
Fulfilling the Promise: Reimagining School Counseling to Advance Student Success



Reviewed by
Tony Parsons (*Youth Villages*)

Over the course of the last sixty years, the educational landscape in the United States has changed, just as the populace of students has. Students have been asked to spend more time thinking about their future, both career and college. The individuals at the helm of this change and tasked with leading students to better outcomes are school counselors. However, history has shown us that over the course of time they have become underutilized and their role has become somewhat unclear. In *Fulfilling the Promise: Reimagining School Counseling to Advance Student Success*, Mandy Savitz-Romer makes the case for just how effective school counselors can be if given the proper training, are supported, and commit to the adoption of what she refers to as the “Academic Home” model. Romer, a faculty member at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, examines how counselors can fit into the larger mission of the education system, when given the proper supports and utilized in the way they are supposed to be. She correctly emphasizes that students deal with issues that span across academic, social-emotional, and mental health. While no one person is equipped to adequately solve all problems in these areas,

counselors are the best at starting that process. As someone who works to provide professional development for school counselors especially focused on their work with students and getting them to college, Romer’s work is not only enlightening, but refreshing, and spot on.



What I enjoy most about *Fulfilling the Promise*, is its comprehensive and illustrative examples of how counselors can be and have been successful. Romer offers multiple case studies to emphasize her points and show that the “Academic Home” model is not only something easy to implement, but that it works across the board at the different types of schools in our country. Also Romer makes the case that a reinvestment in counseling has to be one in which everyone (school personnel, administrators and community partners, parents, and sometimes students) is brought to the table to contribute a shared goal of creating better student outcomes. I am fully convinced that if the examples laid out by Romer are understood and taken to heart, students will be better served and their futures will be bright. If I am to offer a critique for Romer, it would be that success is never clearly defined. Based on the



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topic, it is implied that it getting a student to college or set up on their path to a career is success, but not every example given was indicative of this. While success looks differently for each student and each school, having a clear understanding of how Romer defines success would be helpful as she discusses it.

The perception of school counselors and the counseling profession has become overwhelmingly negative, perpetuated by stereotypes in popular culture. When someone thinks of a school counselor they often think of a burnt out adult, disengaged, and uncaring. Or perhaps it's the image of a testing coordinator that pops into the mind's eye. While these certainly exist, by in large this is not what many counselors do, and it is exactly what none of them should be doing. To create the changes Romer advocates for, establishing trusting and understanding relationship between administrators and counselors is a must. It is often the case that administrators do not know what a counselor is actually trained to do, because if they did the perception problem surrounding the counseling profession wouldn't be so large. Yes schools need people to monitor lunches and coordinate testing schedules, but counselors are far too valuable to be the ones to do it. While counselors need to be supported, they must also advocate for themselves to create changes within their own realm and how they operate. The "Academic Home" model advanced by Romer not only is straightforward but also makes perfect sense


in an academic landscape in which counselors are expected to effortlessly navigate. This model proposes that counselors act as the coordinator of resources and supports for students rather than trying to provide everything for a given student. This will not only allow counselors to be more effective, it will also help to ensure all students are more likely to get what they need and that supports are delivered in a way that is equitable. An "Academic Home" will require that counselors foster relationships with other faculty and community partners in order to create the outcomes that a student needs. Different partners in the "Academic Home" will have different strengths and be able to provide resources for students that the counselor alone could not, this is especially the case in the realm of preventative and mental health services.

Like many of us, we perform well when our roles are clearly articulated and understood by all of the relevant players and we are held to high expectations. The same is true for counselors. When they are held to high expectations, Romer is quick to point out, great things happen. However, for expectations to be set, an understanding of a counselor's role must be in place, and an updated one at that. Some schools have not updated the description of a school counselor since the 1980s! This begs the question, of how can we expect counselors to serve 21st century students and help fix the problems they have if, we are holding them to standards from 30 plus years ago? In short, we cannot. Romer

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points out that major success occurs when a counseling department's mission is aligned with the broader goals of the school district. Without a doubt, district leaders like superintendents would do well to build in social emotional and mental health goals into the academic goals of the district. All vested agents of change being in alignment on the mission helps ensure that all the work that is being done is adequate to support the stated mission and support students.

Support however, has to go beyond just the district leaders and building administrators sometimes. Sometimes outside organizations that can provide professional development, and enrichment opportunities for counselors are necessary. Thankfully with organizations like the American School Counselor Association, etc. there are no shortage of supports available. However, financial and personnel limitations are a real thing for many counselors. Their development must be seen as an investment in the student population and the district as a whole. This is especially true when counselors are working in places with a large population of low income, first generation, or students of color. Having one adequately trained and supported school counselor working with a student aforementioned, increases the likelihood that said student will pursue a postsecondary credential increases by 10%. Imagine what our education and society would look like if every counselor found themselves supported, trained, and properly utilized.

Fulfilling the Promise is a book that I would recommend. An inward reflection of one's profession and how to improve upon it is always good. Similarly anyone who is tasked with training school counselors whether it be for professional development or in the academic setting would be remiss to not include this book as a resources in some capacity. Romer is offering a fresh perspective on a profession that is misunderstood, and it is done so with great examples, and her passion for counseling and reshaping the profession to do what it was intended to do is evident. Not only can everyone learn from the insight Romer provides, but if we are able to implement the reforms and learn from the examples, we will all begin to do our part of *Fulfilling the Promise*. 

Reference

Savitz-Romer, M. (2019). *Fulfilling the Promise: Reimagining School Counseling to Advance Student Success*. Harvard Educational Press.