

# Collaborative Counseling

Girls Athletic Leadership Schools

Denver, CO



**COLORADO**  
Department of Education

At Girls Athletic Leadership Schools in Denver, the unique Counseling Department brings creative arts and mindfulness-based and traditional counseling approaches to the school community. The department is founded on a somatic, mind-body orientation to mental health. Counselors develop strong relationships with families and community agencies to provide resources and referrals for crisis and therapeutic support, as well as afterschool and summer activities. The Counseling Department also offers an adoptive parents support group and a group for parents of gender non-conforming students. Counselors work closely with the school social worker on truancy issues and to access emergency family assistance when needed. Counselors also work closely with the school psychologists on data collection for evaluation. Such collaboration insures coordination of consistent care for students and families.

The goal of the Counseling Department is to provide innovative social and emotional support to students so that they can more fully access their education. In alignment with the school's movement-based school pedagogy, different staff members are trained in Dance/Movement Therapy, Art Therapy, Wilderness Therapy, and mindfulness-based practices. Counselors address a range of issues including crisis support, depression, anxiety, family stressors, relationship challenges, grief and loss, sexual orientation and gender identity, substance use and prevention, sexual health, skills for emotion regulation, and academic focus and organization. Counselors also support teachers in the classroom when academic content may be emotionally overwhelming or when an individual student's emotional state is impeding access to their education. For students with transient or chronic stressors, the support of a trusted adult outside of the classroom can help them gain the necessary skills to navigate life challenges and stay engaged in their education.

At the end of each school year, data is collected on the number of students served, the range of issues addressed, supplemental supportive services, academic progress, and student retention. Additional programming is then developed from this review, including staff training, parent education and support groups, and groups in areas such as relationship skills and substance use prevention.

When implementing such an innovative counseling program, the Counseling Department staff at GALS highlights the importance of have the support of school leadership. Additionally, developing partnerships with university master's degree programs can be crucial for insuring you can provide enough support staff to students and families, and as such you must be sure you can meet CACREP and other internship guidelines for interns. Finally, ongoing communication and relationship building with teachers and families while maintaining the confidentiality of the students is critical in order for such a program to increase student engagement and success.