

The School Counselor and Comprehensive School Counseling Programs

(Adopted 1988; revised 1993, 1997, 2005, 2012, 2017)

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Position

School counselors design and deliver comprehensive school counseling programs that improve a range of student learning and behavioral outcomes (Carey & Dimmitt, 2012). These programs are comprehensive in scope, preventive in design and developmental in nature. “The ASCA National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs” (ASCA, 2012a) outlines the components of a comprehensive school counseling program. The ASCA National Model brings school counselors together with one vision and one voice, which creates unity and focus toward improving student achievement and supporting student development.

The Rationale

A comprehensive school counseling program is an integral component of the school’s mission. Comprehensive school counseling programs, driven by student data and based on the ASCA National Model:

- ensure equitable access to a rigorous education for all students
- identify the knowledge and skills all students will acquire as a result of the K–12 comprehensive school counseling program
- are delivered to all students in a systematic fashion
- are based on data-driven decision making
- are provided by a state-credentialed school counselor

Effective school counseling programs are a collaborative effort between the school counselor, families, community stakeholders and other educators to create an environment resulting in a positive impact on student achievement. Education professionals, including school counselors, value and respond to the diversity and individual differences in our societies and communities in culturally sensitive and responsive ways. Comprehensive school counseling programs in both the brick-and-mortar and virtual settings ensure equitable access to opportunities and rigorous curriculum for all students to participate fully in the educational process.

One study found that schools designated as Recognized ASCA Model Program (RAMP) schools had significantly higher schoolwide proficiency rates in English as compared with the control schools (Wilkerson, Perusse, & Hughes, 2013). This same study also found four-year longitudinal results indicating a significant positive difference between RAMP-designated elementary schools and their control schools in math. “Findings provide support for the impact of comprehensive, data-driven, accountable school counseling programs at the elementary level...” (Wilkerson et al., 2013, p. 172).

According to Lapan (2012), “When highly trained, professional school counselors deliver ASCA National Model comprehensive school counseling program services, students receive measurable benefit” (p. 88).

The School Counselor’s Role

School counselors focus their skills, time and energy on direct and indirect services to students. To achieve maximum program effectiveness, ASCA recommends a student-to-school-counselor ratio of 250:1. Although ratios vary across states, school districts and even grade levels, the growing body of research as summarized by Carey and Martin (2015) supports that implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs positively affects outcome data (e.g., student achievement and discipline referrals) at all grade levels.

ASCA also recommends that school counselors spend 80 percent or more of their time in direct and indirect services to students. These direct and indirect activities should come from the ASCA National Model rather than inappropriate duties assigned to school counselors as listed in the ASCA National Model Executive Summary (2012b). The 20 percent or less of the school counselor’s time should be focused on program and management planning including:

- Developing an annual plan
- Results reports and data projects

- School counseling program assessment
- Other activities as determined by the school counselor and administrator when developing the annual plan

Duties that fall outside of the school counselor framework as described in the ASCA National Model should be limited and performed by other school staff to support a school’s smooth operation and allow school counselors to continue to focus on students’ academic, career and social/emotional needs. Fair-share responsibilities should not preclude implementing and managing a comprehensive school counseling program.

School counselors participate as members of the educational team and use the skills of leadership, advocacy and collaboration to promote systemic change as appropriate. The framework of a comprehensive school counseling program consists of the following four components: foundation, management, delivery and accountability. See “The ASCA National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs” for more detailed information.

FOUNDATION

School counselors create comprehensive school counseling programs that focus on student outcomes, teach student competencies and are delivered with identified professional competencies (ASCA 2012c).

- Program Focus: Developing personal beliefs, a vision statement and a mission statement with program goals measuring the vision and mission statements.
- Student Standards: Effective school counseling programs look at three developmental domains for students as well as state and district initiatives. These three domains include:
 - Academic
 - Career
 - Social/emotional
- Professional Competencies: The school counselor competencies outline the knowledge, attitudes and skills that ensure school counselors are equipped to meet the profession’s rigorous demands. See the ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors for specific information to guide school counselors’ decision making and standardize professional practices.

MANAGEMENT

School counselors incorporate organizational assessments and tools that are concrete, clearly delineated and reflective of the school’s needs. See the ASCA National Model (2012) for more detailed information. Assessments and tools include:

- School counselor competency and school counseling program assessments
- Use-of-time assessments
- Annual agreements
- Advisory councils
- Use of data to measure the program as well as to promote systemic change
- Curriculum, small group and closing-the-gap action plans
- Annual and weekly calendars

DELIVERY

School counselors deliver a comprehensive school counseling program in collaboration with students, families, school staff and community stakeholders. The ASCA National Model (2012) and the ASCA National Model Implementation Guide (2016) have specific details and examples about each of the following areas:

Direct Services With Students

Direct services are face-to-face or virtual interactions between school counselors and students and include the following:

- School counseling core curriculum
- Individual student planning
- Responsive services

Indirect Services for Students

Indirect services are provided on behalf of students as a result of the school counselors’ interactions with others including:

- Referrals for additional assistance
- Consultation and collaboration with families, teachers, other educators and community organizations

- Other activities that fall in line with the appropriate duties of a school counselor as detailed in this statement and in the ASCA National Model (2012)

ACCOUNTABILITY

To demonstrate the effectiveness of the school counseling program in measurable terms, school counselors:

- Analyze school and school counseling program data to determine if students are different as a result of the school counseling program
- Use data to show the impact of the school counseling program on student achievement, attendance and behavior
- Analyze school counseling program assessments to guide future action and improve future results for all students

The school counselor’s performance is evaluated on basic standards of practice expected of school counselors implementing a comprehensive school counseling program. There are three sections within this component, and each section has various tools for analysis. These sections and tools as listed in the ASCA National Model (2012) are:

- Data analysis: school data profile analysis and use-of-time analysis
- Program results: curriculum results report, small-group results report, closing-the-gap results report
- Evaluation and improvement: four components
 - Self-analysis of the school counselor’s strengths
 - Self-analysis of the school counseling program’s strengths
 - Evaluation of the school counselor’s performance by administration using the school counselor performance appraisal
 - Review of the program goals created at the beginning of the school year

Trish Hatch (2014) discussed intentional guidance as “a deliberate act by a school counselor to guide, lead, direct or provide purposeful interventions for students in need academically, personally or socially” (p. 37). Becoming proficient at using data will help school counselors efficiently serve their students and have intentional guidance or counseling services.

Summary

School counselors in both the brick-and-mortar and virtual/online environments develop and deliver comprehensive school counseling programs supporting and promoting student achievement and standardizing the measurement of program effectiveness. As outlined in the ASCA National Model (2012), these programs include a systematic and planned program delivery involving all students and enhancing the learning process. The comprehensive school counseling program is supported by appropriate resources and implemented by a credentialed school counselor. The ASCA National Model brings school counselors together with one vision and one voice, which creates unity and focus toward improving student achievement and supporting student development.

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