

## **The School Counselor and School Counseling Programs**

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

### **The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Position**

School counselors design and deliver 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, 2019a) outlines the components of a 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**

The school counseling program is an integral component of the school’s mission. Informed by student data and based on the ASCA National Model, school counseling programs are provided by a state-credentialed school counselor and:

- are delivered to all students systematically
- include a developmentally appropriate curriculum focused on the mindsets and behaviors all students need for postsecondary readiness and success
- close achievement and opportunity gaps
- result in improved student achievement, attendance and discipline

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. 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 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 (2019b). The 20 percent or less of the school counselor’s time should be focused on program planning and school support including:

- Reviewing school data
- Developing annual student outcome goals
- Creating classroom, group and closing the gap action plans
- Reporting results of action plans to the school community
- Discussing the priorities of the school counseling program in the annual administrative conference

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 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 school counseling program consists of the following four components: define, manage, deliver and assess. See "The ASCA National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs" for more detailed information.

## **DEFINE**

Three sets of school counseling standards define the school counseling profession. These standards help new and experienced school counselors develop, implement and assess their school counseling program to improve student outcomes.

### **Student Standards**

- ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success: K–12 College- and Career-Readiness for Every Student

### **Professional Standards**

- ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors
- ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards & Competencies

## **MANAGE**

To be delivered effectively, the school counseling program must be efficiently and effectively managed. The ASCA National Model provides school counselors with the following program focus and planning tools to guide the design and implementation of a school counseling program that gets results.

### **Program Focus**

- Beliefs
- Vision Statement
- Mission Statement

### **Program Planning**

- School Data Summary
- Annual Student Outcome Goals
- Action Plans
  - Classroom and Group
  - Closing the Gap
- Lesson Plans
- Annual Administrative Conference
- Use of Time
- Calendars
  - Annual
  - Weekly
- Advisory Council

## **DELIVER**

School counselors deliver a school counseling program in collaboration with students, families, school staff and community stakeholders. The ASCA National Model (2019) and the ASCA National Model Implementation Guide (2019d) 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:

- Instruction
- Appraisal and Advisement
- Counseling

### *Indirect Services for Students*

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

- Consultation
- Collaboration
- Referrals

### **ASSESS**

To achieve the best results for students, school counselors regularly assess their program to:

- determine its effectiveness
- inform improvements to their school counseling program design and delivery
- show how students are different as a result of the school counseling program

Annually a qualified administrator completes the school counselor performance appraisal to evaluate the school counselor's overall performance. Appraisal documents are often developed in alignment with state or district guidelines and may appear in a variety of frameworks selected by state and district leaders.

Essential components of performance appraisal include evidence of:

- Design of a school counseling program
- Data-informed annual goals along with the measured impact of direct services delivery
- Data-informed classroom, small-group and closing-the-gap activities and interventions
- Calendars reflecting appropriate use of time aligned with ASCA National Model recommendation of 80% of time in direct and indirect services to students
- Collection and analysis of results data from classroom, small-group and closing-the-gap activities and interventions

### **Summary**

School counselors in both the brick-and-mortar and virtual/online environments develop and deliver school counseling programs supporting and promoting student achievement and standardizing the measurement of program effectiveness. As outlined in the ASCA National Model (2019a), these programs include a systematic and planned program delivery involving all students and enhancing the learning process. The 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.

### **References**

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