

The School Counselor and Confidentiality

(Adopted 1974; reviewed and reaffirmed 1980; revised 1986, 1993, 1999, 2002, 2008, 2014)

American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Position

School counselors recognize their primary obligation for confidentiality is to the student but balance that obligation with an understanding of the family or guardians' legal and inherent rights to be the guiding voice in their children's lives (ASCA Code of Ethics, 2010, A.2.d).

The Rationale

ASCA members affirm their belief in the individual's worth and dignity (ASCA, 2010, A.1.a). It is the school counselors' responsibility to fully respect the right to privacy of those with whom they enter a counseling relationship and to provide an atmosphere of trust and confidence (Glossoff & Pate, 2002; Lazovsky, 2008; Welfel, 2002).

Confidentiality is an ethical term denoting a counseling practice relevant to privacy. A student who has a counseling relationship with a school counselor has the right to privacy and the promise of confidentiality. Exceptions to confidentiality exist, and students should be informed that situations arise in which school counselors must inform others of information obtained in counseling relationships in order to protect students themselves or others. Privileged communication between a school counselor and a student is a legal term granting privilege to a counseling relationship only if said "privilege" is granted by federal or state statute. If "privilege" applies it can provide additional safeguards to confidential information.

The School Counselor's Role

The role of the school counselor in regards to confidentiality is:

- To support the students' right to privacy and protect confidential information received from students, the family, guardians and staff members
- To explain the meaning and limits of confidentiality to students in developmentally appropriate terms
- To provide appropriate disclosure and informed consent regarding the counseling relationship and confidentiality
- To inform students and the family of the limits to confidentiality when:
 - Student poses a danger to self or others
 - Court ordered disclosure
 - Consultation with other professionals in support of the student i.e. colleagues, supervisors, treatment teams, and other support personnel
 - Privilege communication is not granted by state laws and local guidelines (e.g. school board policies)
- To keep personal notes separate from educational records and not disclose their contents except when privacy exceptions exist.
- To seek guidance from supervisors and appropriate legal advice when their records are subpoenaed
- To assert their belief that information shared by students is "confidential" and should not be revealed without the student's consent
- To adhere to all laws protecting student records, health information, and special services (i.e., HIPAA, FERPA, IDEA)

Summary

The counseling relationship between students and their school counselor requires an atmosphere of trust and confidence. Students must trust the school counselor in order to be able to enter into a meaningful and honest dialogue with the school counselor (Iyer & Baxter-MacGregor, 2010). However, students should be informed that exceptions to confidentiality exist in which counselors must inform others of information they obtained in the counseling relationship in order to prevent serious and foreseeable harm to students themselves or others and if it is legally required.

The School Counselor and Student Mental Health

(Adopted 2009, Revised 2015)

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Position

School counselors recognize and respond to the need for mental health and behavioral prevention, early intervention and crisis services that promote psychosocial wellness and development for all students. School counselors are prepared to address barriers and to assess ways to maximize students' success in schools, communities and their family structure by offering education, prevention, and crisis and short-term intervention until the student is connected with available community resources.

The Rationale

Students' unmet mental health needs can be a significant obstacle to student academic, career and social/emotional development and even compromise school safety. Schools are often one of the first places where mental health crises and needs of students are recognized and initially addressed (Froeschle & Meyers, 2004). Most students in need do not receive adequate mental health supports (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2013). Research indicates 20 percent of students are in need of mental health services, yet only one out of five of these students receive the necessary services (Kaffenberger & Seligman, 2007).

Furthermore, students of color and those from families with low income are at greater risk for mental health needs but are even less likely to receive the appropriate services (Panigua, 2005; Vera, Buhin, & Shin, 2006) despite increased national attention to these inequities (Alegria, Vallas, & Pumariega, 2010). Of school-age children who receive any behavioral and mental health services, 70 percent–80 percent receive them at school (Atkins et al., 2010). Preventive school-based mental health and behavioral services are essential. Without planned intervention for students exhibiting early-warning signs setbacks in educational, social and career development during later school years and adulthood can result. The ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors (ASCA 2014) identify and prioritize the specific attitudes, knowledge and skills students should be able to demonstrate as a result of a school counseling program. School counselors use the standards to assess student growth and development, guide the development of strategies and activities and create a program that helps students achieve their highest potential. This includes offering education, prevention and short-term intervention services designed to promote positive mental health and to remove any barriers.

The School Counselor's Role

School counselors focus their efforts on designing and implementing comprehensive programs that promote academic, career and social/emotional success for all students. School counselors acknowledge they may be the only counseling professional available to students and their families. While implementing a comprehensive program school counselors:

- Deliver the school counseling core curriculum that proactively enhances awareness of mental health; promotes positive, healthy behaviors; and seeks to remove the stigma associated with mental health issues
- Provide responsive services including internal and external referral procedures, short-term counseling or crisis intervention focused on mental health or situational (e.g. grief, difficult transitions) concerns with the intent of helping the student return to the classroom and removing barriers to learning
- Recognize warning signs: changes in school performance (changes in grades, attendance), mood changes, complaining of illness before school, increased disciplinary problems at school, experiencing problems at home or family situation (stress, trauma, divorce, substance abuse, exposure to poverty conditions domestic violence), communication from teachers about problems at school, and dealing with existing mental health concerns
- Provide school-based prevention and universal interventions and targeted interventions for students with mental health and behavioral health concerns
- Provide students with individual planning addressing their academic, career and social/emotional (including mental health) needs

- Educate teachers, administrators, parents/guardians, and community stakeholders about the mental health concerns of students, including recognition of the role environmental factors have in causing or exacerbating mental health issues and provide resources and information
- Advocate, collaborate and coordinate with school and community stakeholders to ensure that students and their families have access to mental health services
- Recognize and address barriers to access mental health services and the associated stigma, including cultural and linguistic impediments
- Adhere to appropriate guidelines regarding confidentiality, the distinction between public and private information and consultation
- Direct students and parents to school and/or community resources for additional assistance through referrals that treat mental health issues (suicidal ideation, violence, abuse and depression)
- Help identify and address students' mental health issues while working within the ASCA's Ethical Standards; Competencies for School Counselors; and national, state and local legislation (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act and Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act), which guide school counselors' informed decision-making and standardize professional practice to protect both the student and school counselor
- Seek to continually update their professional knowledge regarding the students' social/emotional needs

Summary

Students' unmet mental health needs pose barriers to learning and development. Because of school counselors' training and position, they are uniquely qualified to provide education, prevention, intervention and referral services to students and their families. Although school counselors do not provide long-term mental health therapy in schools, they provide a comprehensive school counseling program designed to meet the developmental needs of all students. As a component of this program, school counselors collaborate with other educational professionals and community service providers.

References

- Allegria, M., Vallas, M., & Pumariega, A. J. (2010). Racial and ethnic disparities in pediatric mental health. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America*, 19(4), 759–774. doi:10.1016/j.chc.2010.07.001
- American School Counselor Association. (2012). *The ASCA National Model: A framework for school counseling programs* (3rd ed.). Alexandria, VA: Author.
- American School Counselor Association. (2014). *Mindsets & behaviors for student success: K-12 college- and career-readiness standards for every student*. Alexandria, VA: Author.
- Atkins, M., Hoagwood, K. E., Kutash, K., & Seidman, E. (2010). Toward the integration of education and mental health in schools. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health*, 37, 40–47.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2010). Mental health surveillance among children – United States, 2005-2011. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/features/childrensmentalhealth>
- Erford, B. T., Newsome, D. W., & Rock, E. (2007). Counseling youth at risk. In B. T. Erford (ed.) *Transforming the school counseling profession* (2nd ed.) (pp. 279-303). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.
- Erickson, A., & Abel, N. R. (2013). A high school counselor's leadership in providing school-wide screenings for depression and enhancing suicide awareness. *Professional School Counseling*, 16(5), 283-289. doi: 10.5330/psc.n.2013-16.283
- Froeschle, J., & Moyer, M. (2004). Just cut it out: Legal and ethical challenges in counseling students who self-mutilate. *Professional School Counseling*, 7, 231-235.
- Kaffenberger, C., & Seligman, L. (2007). Helping students with mental and emotional disorders. In B. T. Erford (ed.) *Transforming the school counseling profession* (2nd ed.) (pp. 351-383). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.

The School Counselor and the Promotion of Safe Schools through Conflict Resolution and Bullying/Harassment Prevention

(Adopted 1994/2000, Revised 2005, 2011)

American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Position

School counselors recognize the need for all students to attend school in a safe, orderly and caring environment. To promote this type of environment, comprehensive school counseling programs include anti-bullying/harassment and violence-prevention programs along with comprehensive conflict-resolution programs to foster a positive school climate.

The Rationale

A safe school environment is essential for effective learning. Incidents involving bullying, harassment, violence, weapons or gang behavior threaten student and staff safety (Van Velsor, 2009). Students, parents/guardians, staff and policy makers recognize the need to provide a safe school environment. Students who experience positive relationships with school personnel and can identify at least one trusted adult at school feel safe and validated (Davis, 2005).

Prevention activities are integral to creating a safe school environment that is free of fear, bullying, harassment and violence. Delivered by school counselors, teachers, administrators and qualified community experts, prevention programs increase the opportunity for improved academic achievement, appropriate behavior, positive relationships, successful resolution of conflicts, safe school climate and increased attendance. Participating in prevention activities empowers and encourages students to take responsibility for their behavior and for the climate of their school and community.

The School Counselor's Role

School counselors collaborate with others in the school and community to promote safe schools and confront issues threatening school safety. School counselors encourage the development of policies supporting a safe school environment, and they provide leadership to the school by assisting in the design and implementation of schoolwide prevention activities and programs. Additionally school counselors recognize differentiated interventions are needed for bullying and resolving a conflict. Comprehensive anti-bullying/harassment/violence-prevention and conflict-resolution programs require data-driven decision making, coordination, instruction and program evaluation. These programs are most effective when incorporated into the academic curriculum by all members of the school community (Young, Hardy, Hamilton, Biernesser, Sun, & Niebergall, 2009). The school counselor includes prevention programs as a part of the comprehensive school counseling program and ensures these programs include training in:

- communication skills
- conflict-resolution skills
- decision-making skills
- development of cultural competence
- acceptance of differences
- intervention strategies for bullying/harassment
- recognition of early warning signs of violence
- prevention/intervention services
- crisis response
- appropriate use of technology and social media
- community involvement
- parent/guardian and faculty/staff education
- evaluation of program effectiveness
- building positive staff and student relationships

Summary

School counselors understand the need for all students to attend safe, orderly and caring schools. Through participation in prevention programs and activities aimed at bullying, harassment and violence prevention, students learn communication, problem-solving and conflict resolution skills that help them achieve their goals and also establish successful relationships. School counselors collaborate with teachers, administrators, parents/guardians and the community to deliver prevention programs that encourage student growth and achievement and ensure a safe school climate.

References

Davis, S. (2005). *Schools Where Everyone Belongs*. Research Press: Champaign, IL.

Van Velsor, P. (2009). School counselors as social-emotional learning consultants: Where do we begin? *Professional School Counseling*, 13:1, 50-58.

Young, A., Hardy, V., Hamilton, C., Biernesser, K., Sun, L., & Niebergall, S. (2009). Empowering students: Using data to transform a bullying prevention and intervention program. *Professional School Counseling*, 12:6, 413-420.

The School Counselor and Academic Development

(Adopted 2017)

American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Position

School counselors implementing comprehensive programs strive to have an impact on student growth in three domain areas: academic development, career development and social/emotional development (ASCA, 2012). School counselors recognize students should demonstrate growth in these domains equally to be successful. School counselors understand these domains are not considered separate but are intertwined, each affecting the other (Schenck, Anctil, & Smith, 2010, p. 16). Although this statement focuses on academic development, it is understood career development and social/emotional development need to be considered with equal diligence.

The Rationale

Recent educational initiatives (e.g., No Child Left Behind [NCLB]; Every Student Succeeds Act [ESSA]) have stressed academic achievement as a measure of school success. As a result, school counseling programs align their program goals with that of the institution, emphasizing academic achievement. School counselors contribute to the educational and academic outcomes of the school by enhancing student engagement and performance (Carey & Harrington, 2010a; Carey & Harrington, 2010b) through designing, implementing and evaluating comprehensive school counseling programs (ASCA, 2012).

School counseling programs use data to understand student needs, provide school counseling core curriculum and closing-the-gap interventions and remove systemic barriers to ensure all students as early as preschool and kindergarten have opportunity to develop academic goals at all grade levels reflecting their abilities and academic interests and can access appropriate rigorous, relevant coursework and experiences. Because of their unique position within a school and their unique training, school counselors can work with students facing mental health issues, family and social problems as well as career exploration and course planning to make school relevant (Howe, 2009).

School counselors play a critical role in ensuring schools provide a safe, caring environment and that students have the necessary mindsets and behaviors to advance academic achievement outcomes. School counselors work collaboratively with stakeholders to ensure equity, access and academic success of all students (ASCA, 2012).

The School Counselor's Role

School counselors support students' academic success by:

- Leading development of a safe and caring school culture
- Delivering a comprehensive school counseling program based on data identifying student needs
- Delivering information to students and teachers within the school counseling core curriculum on best practices in mindsets and behaviors (i.e., learning strategies, self-management skills, social skills) and metacognition skills (McGuire, 2015) critical in academic success
- Providing relevance to academic effort and educational pursuits by assisting in students' career planning and future career-related goals
- Working with administration, teachers and other school staff to create a school environment encouraging academic success and striving to one's potential (Stone & Clark, 2001)
- Working to remove barriers to access and provide students with the opportunity for academic challenge in the most rigorous coursework possible
- Establishing data analysis methods to identify and target systemic barriers deterring equitable access
- Providing opportunities for students to:
 - Enhance their self-efficacy beliefs and competence
 - Develop attributional beliefs
 - See value in tasks related to achievement
 - Develop mastery/learning goals
 - Develop autonomy
- Relate to others (Rowell & Hong, 2013)

- Working to establish student opportunities for academic remediation as needed
- Emphasizing family-community-school relationships in addressing academic needs (Brown, 1999)

Summary

Educational institutions are evaluated on student outcomes, especially academic achievement. School counselors working in this educational environment play a critical role in ensuring students have the academic development (in addition to the social/emotional and career development) knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to be successful. School counselors can assist schools in providing an environment conducive to and supportive of academic success.

References

- American School Counselor Association. (2012). *ASCA National Model: A framework for school counseling* (3rd ed.). Alexandria, VA: Author.
- American School Counselor Association. (2014). *Mindsets & behaviors for student success: K-12 college- and career-readiness standards for every student*. Alexandria, VA: Author.
- Brown, D., (1999). Improving academic achievement: What school counselors can do. Eric Digest, U.S. Department of Education.
- Carey, J.C., & Harrington, K.M. (2010a). *Nebraska school counseling evaluation report*. Amherst, MA: Center for School Counseling Outcome Research and Evaluation.
- Carey, J.C., & Harrington, K.M. (2010b). *Utah school counseling evaluation report*. Amherst, MA: Center for School Counseling Outcome Research and Evaluation.
- Howe, Sally A. (2009). School counseling services and student academic success. *Counselor Education Master's Theses*, Paper 54.
- McGuire, S.Y. (2015). *Teach student how to learn: Strategies you can incorporate into any course to improve student metacognition, study skills, and motivation*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.
- Rowell, L., & Hong, E. (2013). Academic motivation: Concepts, strategies, and counseling approaches. *Professional School Counseling*, 16(3), 158-171. Retrieved from <https://cochise.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/1368152287?accountid=7278>
- Schenck, P., Anctil, T., & Smith, C.K. (2010). Career counseling identity of professional school counselors. *Career Developments*, 26, 16-17.
- Stone, C. & Clark, M. (2001). *School counselors and principals: Partners in support of academic achievement*. NASSP Bulletin.
- Resources**
- American School Counselor Association. (2016). *Ethical standards for school counselors*. Alexandria, VA: Author.
- Berger, C. (2013). Bring out the brilliance: A counseling intervention for underachieving students. *Professional School Counseling*, 17(1), 86-96. Retrieved from <https://cochise.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/1558312662?accountid=7278>
- Bryan, J., et al. (2012). The effects of school bonding on high school seniors' academic achievement. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 90(4), 467-80.
- Dahir, C. A., Burnham, J. J., Stone, C. B., & Cobb, N. (2010). Principals as partners: Counselors as collaborators. *National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin*, 94(4), 286-305. Retrieved from <https://cochise.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/863827836?accountid=7278>