



# The Role of the Professional School Counselor

**P**rofessional school counselors are certified/licensed educators with a minimum of a master's degree in school counseling, making them uniquely qualified to address all students' academic, career and personal/social development needs by designing, implementing, evaluating and enhancing a comprehensive school counseling program that promotes and enhances student success. Professional school counselors are employed in elementary, middle/junior high and high schools; in district supervisory positions; and counselor education positions.

Professional school counselors serve a vital role in maximizing student success (Lapan, Gysbers, & Kayson, 2007; Stone & Dahir, 2006). Through leadership, advocacy and collaboration, professional school counselors promote equity and ac-

cess to rigorous educational experiences for all students. Professional school counselors support a safe learning environment and work to safeguard the human rights of all members of the school community (Sandhu, 2000) and address the needs of all students through culturally relevant prevention and intervention programs that are a part of a comprehensive school counseling program (Lee, 2001). The American School Counselor Association recommends a school-counselor-to-student ratio of 1:250.

## The Professional School Counselor's Role

Professional school counselors have a minimum of a master's degree in school counseling, meet the state certification/licensure standards and abide by the laws of the states in which they are employed. They uphold the ethical and professional standards of ASCA and other applicable professional counseling associations and promote the development of the school counseling program based on the following areas of the ASCA National Model: foundation, delivery, management and accountability.

### FOUNDATION

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

**Program Focus** – To establish program focus, school counselors identify personal beliefs that address how all students benefit from the school counseling program. Building on these beliefs, school counselors create a **vision statement** that defines what the future will look like in terms of student outcomes. In addition, school counselors create a **mission statement** that aligns with their school's mission and develop **program goals** that define how the vision and mission will be measured.



**Student Competencies** – Enhancing the learning process for all students, the **ASCA Student Standards** guide the development of effective school counseling programs around three domains: academic, career and personal/social development. School counselors also consider how **other student standards** that are important to state and district initiatives complement and inform their school counseling program.

**Professional Competencies** – The **ASCA School Counselor Competencies** outline the knowledge, attitudes and skills that ensure school counselors are equipped to meet the rigorous demands of the profession. The **ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors** specify the principles of ethical behavior necessary to maintain the highest standard of integrity, leadership and professionalism. They guide school counselors' decision-making and help to standardize professional practice in order to protect both students and school counselors.

## MANAGEMENT

School counselors incorporate organizational assessments and tools that are concrete, clearly delineated and reflective of the school's needs. Assessments and tools include:

- **school counselor competency and school counseling program assessments** to self-evaluate areas of strength and improvement for individual skills and program activities
- **use of time assessment** to determine the amount of time spent toward the recommended 80 percent or more of the school counselor's time to direct and indirect services with students
- **annual agreements** developed with and approved by administrators at the beginning of the school year addressing how the school counseling program is organized and what goals will be accomplished

- **advisory councils** made up of students, parents, teachers, school counselors, administrators and community members to review and make recommendations about school counseling program activities and results
- **use of data** to measure the results of the program as well as to promote systemic change within the school system so every student graduates college and career ready
- **curriculum, small-group and closing-the-gap action plans** including developmental, prevention and intervention activities and services that measure the desired student competencies and measure the impact on achievement, behavior and attendance
- **annual and weekly calendars** to keep students, parents, teachers and administrators informed and to encourage active participation in the school counseling program

## DELIVERY

School counselors provide services to students, parents, school staff and the community in the following areas:

### Direct Services with Students

Direct services are in-person interactions between school counselors and students and include the following:

- **School Counseling Core Curriculum** – This curriculum consists of structured lessons designed to help students attain the desired competencies and to provide all students with the knowledge, attitudes and skills appropriate for their developmental level. The school counseling core curriculum is delivered throughout the school's overall curriculum and is systematically presented by school counselors in collaboration with other professional educators in K-12 classroom and group activities.
- **Individual Student Planning** – School counselors coordinate ongoing

systemic activities designed to assist students in establishing personal goals and developing future plans.

- **Responsive Services** – Responsive services are activities designed to meet students' immediate needs and concerns. Responsive services may include counseling in individual or small-group settings or crisis response.

### 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 parents, teachers, other educators and community organizations.

## ACCOUNTABILITY

To demonstrate the effectiveness of the school counseling program in measurable terms, school counselors analyze school and school counseling program data to determine how students are different as a result of the school counseling program. School counselors use data to show the impact of the school counseling program on student achievement, attendance and behavior and analyze school counseling program assessments to guide future action and improve future results for all students. The performance of the school counselor is evaluated on basic standards of practice expected of school counselors implementing a comprehensive school counseling program.

## Summary

Professional school counselors are certified/licensed educators with the minimum of a master's degree in school counseling and are uniquely qualified to address the developmental needs of all students through a comprehensive school counseling program addressing the academic, career and personal/social development of all students.

## References

- Lapan, R. T., Gysbers, N. C., & Kayson, M. A. (2007). *Missouri school counselors benefit all students*. Jefferson City, MO: Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.
- Lee, C. (2001). Culturally responsive school counselors and programs: Addressing the needs of all students. *Professional School Counseling*, 4, 163-171.
- Sandhu, D. S. (2000). Alienated students: Counseling strategies to curb school violence. *Professional School Counseling*, 4, 81-85.
- Stone, C. B. & Dahir, C. A. (2006). *The transformed school counselor*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company.