

The Essential Role of High School Counselors



Research shows the implementation of a school counseling program, as outlined by “The ASCA National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs,” has a positive impact on student achievement. The development and implementation of these programs requires leadership from well-trained, highly competent high school counselors and includes a collaborative effort with school administrators, classroom teachers, school staff and community stakeholders.

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS’ DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS

High school is the final transition into adulthood, postsecondary education and the world of work as students begin separating from parents and exploring and defining their independence. Students are deciding who they are, what they do well and what they will do when they

graduate. During these adolescent years, students are evaluating their strengths, skills and abilities.

The biggest influence is their peer group. They are searching for a place to belong and rely on peer acceptance and feedback. They face increased pressures regarding risk behaviors involving sex,

alcohol and drugs while exploring the boundaries of more acceptable behavior and mature, meaningful relationships. They need advisement in using technology to further their academic and career goals and also need assistance managing and responding to the challenges of using technology safely and appropriately for personal expression.

High school students need advisement in making concrete and compounded decisions. They must navigate academic, peer and parental pressures as they face high-stakes testing, the challenges of college admissions, the scholarship and financial aid application process and entrance into a competitive job market.

MEETING THE NEED

High school counselors are educators uniquely trained in child and adolescent development, learning strategies, self-management and social skills who understand and promote success for today’s diverse students. They implement a school counseling program to support students through this important developmental period. The program provides education, prevention and intervention activities, which are integrated into all aspects of students’ lives. The program teaches knowledge, attitudes and skills students need to acquire in academic, career and social/emotional development, which serve as the foundation for future success.

High school counselors do not work in isolation; rather they are integral to the total educational program. They provide a proactive program that engages students and includes leadership, advocacy and collaboration with school staff, administration and community/family members in the delivery of programs and activities to help students achieve success. High school counselors also collaborate with teachers and parents on early iden-

tification and intervention of children's academic and social/emotional needs, which is essential in removing barriers to learning and developing skills and behaviors critical for academic achievement.

The work of high school counselors aligns with the school's mission to support all students' academic achievement as they prepare for the ever-changing world of the 21st century. This alignment is accomplished through the design, development, implementation and evaluation of a school counseling program. The tools guiding this work are the ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success, which address students' academic, career and social/emotional development, and the ASCA National Model, with its data-informed, results-based focus. Research demonstrating the effectiveness of school counseling programs continues to grow, and there is evidence of the positive impact these programs have on academic and social/emotional development.

IMPLEMENTING A SCHOOL COUNSELING PROGRAM

High school counselors define and focus the school counseling program based on the school's academic, attendance and discipline data. Identifying student needs through this data and consulting with administrators guides program development. High school counselors provide equitable and appropriate services by addressing students' academic, career and social/emotional developmental

needs in addition to balancing delivery methods, recognizing students learn in multiple ways. The end result of this work is reflected in improvement in academic, attendance and discipline outcomes related to academic development, college and career readiness and social/emotional development.

The ASCA National Model provides a flexible framework high school counselors use to develop a program designed to meet their students' unique needs. The delivery of these services includes:

Direct student services including:

- instruction – teaching the school counseling curriculum to students focused through the lens of selected student standards from the ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success.
- appraisal and advisement – assessing student abilities, interests and achievement to help them make decisions about their future.
- counseling – providing professional assistance and support to a student or small group of students during times of transition, heightened stress, critical change or other situations impeding student success. School counselors do not provide therapy or long-term counseling in schools; however, school counselors are prepared to recognize and respond to student mental health needs and to assist students and families seeking resources.

Indirect student services including:

- consultation – share strategies supporting student achievement with parents, teachers, other educators and community organizations
- collaboration – work with other educators, parents and the community to support student achievement
- referrals – support for students and families to school or community resources for additional assistance and information.

RESEARCH ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SCHOOL COUNSELING

Numerous studies demonstrate the value of school counseling for students in the domains of academic development, college and career readiness and social/emotional development. Results of research about the effectiveness of school counseling can be found at schoolcounselor.org/effectiveness.

THE ASCA NATIONAL MODEL: A FRAMEWORK FOR SCHOOL COUNSELING

For more information about school counseling programs based on the ASCA National Model, go to schoolcounselor.org/ascanationalmodel.

(Revised, 2019)

Why High School Counselors?

High school years are full of growth, promise, excitement, frustration, disappointment and hope. It is the time when students begin to discover what the future holds for them. High school counselors have an impact on these years by implementing a comprehensive school counseling program and collaborating with school staff, parents and the community to create a safe and respectful learning environment. High school counselors enhance the learning process and promote academic, career and social/emotional development. High school counseling programs are essential for students to achieve optimal personal growth, acquire positive social skills and values, set informed career goals and realize their full academic potential to become productive, contributing members of the world community.

High school counselors hold a master's degree and required state certification in school counseling. Maintaining certification includes ongoing professional development to stay current with educational reform and challenges facing today's students. Professional association membership enhances the school counselor's knowledge and effectiveness.