

The Essential Role of Middle School Counselors



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

MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS’ DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS

Middle school is an exciting yet challenging time for students, their parents and teachers. During this passage from childhood to adolescence, middle school students are characterized by a need to explore a variety of interests, connecting their learning in the

classroom to its practical application in life and work; high levels of activity coupled with frequent fatigue due to rapid growth; a search for their own unique identity as they begin turning more frequently to peers rather than parents for ideas and affirmation; extreme sensitivity to the comments from others; and heavy reliance on friends

to provide comfort, understanding and approval.

Identifying students’ academic and social/emotional needs, as well as providing any necessary interventions, is essential in removing barriers to learning and helping students develop skills and behaviors critical for academic achievement. The knowledge, attitudes and skills students acquire during these years build the foundation for future success.

MEETING THE NEED

Middle school counselors are educators uniquely trained in child and adolescent development, learning strategies, self-management and social skills. They implement a comprehensive school counseling program to support students through this important developmental period. The school counseling program provides education, prevention and intervention activities, which are integrated into all aspects of students’ lives. The program teaches students the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary for academic, career and social/emotional development.

Middle 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. Middle school counselors also collaborate with teachers and parents on early identification 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 middle 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 comprehensive 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-driven, results-based focus. Research demonstrating the effectiveness of comprehensive school counseling programs continues to grow, and there is evidence of the positive impact these programs have on students' academic and social/emotional development.

MIDDLE SCHOOL COUNSELORS IMPLEMENT A COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL COUNSELING PROGRAM

Middle school counselors define and focus the comprehensive school counseling program based on the school's academic, attendance and behavioral data. Identifying student needs through this data and consulting with administrators guides program development. Middle school counselors balance their program by addressing students' academic, career and social/emotional development in addition to balancing delivery methods, recognizing that students learn in multiple ways. The end result of this work is reflected in improvement in academic, attendance and behavioral outcomes related to academic development, college and career readiness and social/emotional development.

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

Direct student services including:

- school counseling core curriculum
 - instruction – direct instruction, team teaching, developing learning activities
 - group activities – planned activities outside the classroom promoting academic, career or social/emotional development
- individual student planning
 - appraisal – assist students in evaluating interests abilities, skills and achievement
 - advisement – assist students in goal setting based on academic, career and social/emotional data
- responsive services
 - counseling – in individual or small-group settings school counselors provide planned, short-term and goal-focused counseling. 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.
 - crisis response – provide support and assistance to students and families as they navigate crisis and emergency situations

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 comprehensive school counseling programs based on the ASCA National Model, go to schoolcounselor.org/ascanationalmodel.

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Why Middle School Counselors?

Middle school students are characterized by rapid physical growth, curiosity about their world and an emerging self-identity. Middle 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, respectful learning environment whereby young adolescents can maximize personal and academic achievement.

Middle school counselors enhance the learning process and promote academic, career and social/emotional development. School counseling programs are essential for students to achieve optimal personal growth, acquire positive social skills and values, set informed career goals and realize full academic potential to become productive, contributing members of the world community.

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