

The Role of the Professional School Counselor

The professional school counselor is a certified/licensed educator trained in school counseling with unique qualifications and skills to address all students' academic, personal/social, and career development needs. Professional school counselors implement a comprehensive school counseling program that promotes and enhances student achievement. Professional school counselors are employed in elementary, middle/junior high, and high schools and in district supervisory, counselor education, and post-secondary settings. Their work is differentiated by attention to developmental stages of student growth, including the needs, tasks, and student interests related to those stages.

Professional school counselors serve a vital role in maximizing student achievement. Incorporating leadership, advocacy, and collaboration, professional school counselors promote equity and access to opportunities and 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. Collaborating with other stakeholders to promote student achievement, professional school counselors address the needs of all students through prevention and intervention programs that are a part of a comprehensive school counseling program. To achieve maximum program effectiveness, the American School Counselor Association recommends a counselor-to-student ratio of 1:250.

Professional school counselors have a master's degree or higher in school counseling or the substantial equivalent, 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 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

Professional school counselors identify personal beliefs and philosophies as to how all students benefit from the school counseling program and act on these beliefs and philosophies to guide the development, implementation, and evaluation of a comprehensive school counseling program. Professional school counselors create a mission statement supporting the school's

mission and collaborate with other individuals and organizations to promote all students' academic, career, and personal/social development.

Delivery

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

- Guidance Curriculum – This curriculum consists of structured lessons designed to help students achieve the desired competencies and to provide all students with the knowledge and skills appropriate for their developmental level. The school guidance curriculum is delivered throughout the school's overall curriculum and is systematically presented by professional school counselors in collaboration with other professional educators in K-12 classroom and group activities.
- Student Planning – Professional school counselors coordinate ongoing systemic activities designed to help students establish personal goals and develop future plans.
- Responsive Services – Responsive services are preventative and/or interventive activities meeting students' immediate and future needs. These needs can be necessitated by events and conditions in students' lives and may require any of the following:
 - ✓ Individual or group counseling
 - ✓ Consultation with parents, teachers, and other educators
 - ✓ Referrals to other school support services or community resources
 - ✓ Peer helping
 - ✓ Information

Professional school counselors develop confidential relationships with students to help them resolve or cope with problems and developmental concerns.

- System Support – System support consists of management activities establishing, maintaining, and enhancing the total school counseling program. These activities include professional development, consultation, collaboration, program management, and operations. Professional school counselors are committed to continual personal and professional development and are proactively involved in professional organizations promoting school counseling at the local, state, and national levels.

Management

Professional school counselors incorporate organizational processes and tools that are concrete, clearly delineated, and reflective of the school's needs. Tools and processes include:

- 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, counselors, administrators, and community members to review school counseling program results and to make recommendations
- Use of student data to affect systemic change within the school system so every student receives the benefit of the school counseling program
- Action plans for prevention and intervention services defining the desired student competencies and achievement results
- Allotment of 80 percent of the professional school counselor's time in direct service with students
- Use of master and weekly calendars to keep students, parents, teachers, and administrators informed and to encourage active participation in the school counseling program

Accountability

To demonstrate the effectiveness of the school counseling program in measurable terms, professional school counselors report on immediate, intermediate, and long-range results showing how students are different as a result of the school counseling program. Professional school counselors use data to show the impact of the school counseling program on school improvement and student achievement. Professional school counselors conduct school counseling program audits to guide future action and improve future results for all students. The performance of the professional school counselor is evaluated on basic standards of practice expected of professional school counselors implementing a school counseling program.

Summary

Professional school counselors are certified/licensed professionals with a masters' degree or higher in school counseling or the substantial equivalent and are uniquely qualified to address the developmental needs of all students. Professional school counselors deliver a comprehensive school counseling program encouraging all students' academic, career, and personal/social development and helping all students in maximizing student achievement.