



# The Essential Role of Elementary School Counselors



**R**esearch shows implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program, as outlined in “The ASCA National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs” (ASCA, 2012), has a positive impact on student achievement (Carey & Martin, 2015). The development and implementation of these programs requires a collaborative effort among well-trained, highly competent school counselors, school administrators, classroom teachers, school staff and community stakeholders.

## **ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS’ DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS**

The elementary years are a time when students begin to develop their academic self-concept and their feelings of competence and confidence as learners. They are beginning to develop decision-making, communication and life skills, as well as character values. It is also a time when students develop and acquire attitudes toward school, self, peers, social groups and family. Comprehensive developmental school counseling programs provide education, prevention and intervention services, which are integrated into all aspects of children’s lives. Early identification and intervention of children’s academic and social/emotional needs is essential in removing barriers to learning and developing skills and behaviors that are critical for academic achievement. The knowledge, attitudes and skills students acquire in academic, career and social/emotional development serve as the foundation for future success.

## **MEETING THE CHALLENGE**

Elementary school counselors are professional educators uniquely trained in child development, system support, change theory and family engagement who understand and respond to the challenges presented by today’s diverse student, family and community populations. Elementary school counselors do not work in isolation; rather they are integral to the total educational program. They provide proactive leadership that engages students, school staff, administration and community/family members in the delivery of programs and services to help students achieve school success. School counselors align with the school’s mission to support the academic achievement of all students as they prepare for the ever-changing world of the 21st century. This mission is accom-

plished through the design, development, implementation and evaluation of a comprehensive, developmental and systematic school counseling program. The foundational elements of this work are: the academic, career and social/emotional development within ASCA's Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success and the data-driven and results-based focus of "The ASCA National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs" (2012). Research demonstrating the effectiveness of comprehensive, developmental and systematic school counseling programs continues to grow, but there is evidence of the positive impact these programs have on academic and social/emotional development (e.g., Gysbers, 2001; Lapan, 2001; Sink & Stroh, 2003).

### ELEMENTARY SCHOOL COUNSELORS IMPLEMENT A COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL COUNSELING PROGRAM

Elementary school counselors define and focus the comprehensive school counseling program by using data as the driving force. This, along with consulting administrators and responding to student and family needs, should direct the development of the program. Elementary school counselors seek to balance their program by addressing students' academic, career and social/emotional developmental needs in addition to balancing the delivery methods, recognizing that students learn in multiple ways. The end result of these findings are reflected in the annual agreement developed in collaboration with the school administration. The ASCA National Model pro-

vides a flexible framework elementary school counselors can use to develop a comprehensive program suited to meet the unique needs of their students. 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 activities. 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

### REFERENCES

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- Gysbers, N. C. (2001). School guidance and counseling in the 21st century: Remember the past into the future. *Professional School Counseling*, 5, 96-105.
- Lapan, R. T. (2001). Results-based comprehensive guidance and counseling programs: A framework for planning and evaluation. *Professional School Counseling*, 4, 289- 299.
- Sink, C., Stroh, H. (2003). *Improving Academic Achievement in Primary Students Through a Systemic Approach to Guidance and Counseling*. A Research Report from The Washington School Research Center
- (Revised, 2017)

## Why Elementary School Counselors?

Elementary school years set the foundation for developing the knowledge, attitudes and skill necessary for children to become healthy, competent and confident learners. Through implementation of a comprehensive developmental school counseling program, elementary school counselors collaborate with the school staff, parents and the community to create a safe and respectful learning environment. By providing education, prevention, early identification and intervention, elementary school counselors can help elementary students achieve academic success, develop understanding regarding career options and develop social/emotional skills in response to issues they face. Elementary 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.