

The Professional School Counselor and Dropout Prevention/Students-At-Risk

(Adopted 1989-90; revised 1993, 1999)

American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Position

Professional school counselors at all levels make a significant, vital and indispensable contribution toward the mental well-being of “at-risk” students. School counselors work as a member of a team with other student service professionals including social workers, psychologists and nurses, in liaison with staff and parents, to provide comprehensive developmental counseling programs for all students including those identified as being potential dropouts or at-risk.

The Rationale

There are probably as many definitions of the “at-risk” student as there are school districts. Any student may at any time be at risk with respect to dropping out of school, becoming truant, performing below academic potential, contemplating suicide or using drugs. The underlying reasons for these behaviors often deal with personal and social concerns such as poor self-esteem, family problems, unresolved grief, neglect or abuse. Students experiencing these concerns can be helped by professional school counselors. The decision to drop out of school can carry with it devastating lifelong implications. The school counselor, in conjunction with other school staff members, identifies potential dropouts and other students considered at risk and works closely with them to help them stay in school or find alternative means of completing their education.

The Professional School Counselor’s Role

The professional school counselor provides consultation in defining and identifying at-risk students. The goal is to identify and intervene before they move through a continuum of self-destructive behavior. The school counselor provides responsive programs, including short-term individual, group, family and crisis counseling; provides programs for individual planning to meet academic, educational and career counseling needs; provides curriculum programs to strengthen personal/interpersonal skills (choice, self-acceptance, feelings, beliefs and behaviors, problem-solving, decision-making); identifies suicidal students, counsels them and refers them to appropriate outside agencies; provides in-service support presentations to staff; provides referrals for additional specialized support services within the district and from other community resources; and provides consultation with and support for parents/guardians of at-risk students. The school counselor works as a member of a team with other student service professionals.

Summary

Professional school counselors work with other educators and community resources to provide early identification and intervention for potential dropouts and other students who may be considered at-risk through a comprehensive, developmental, K-12 counseling program.