

The Professional School Counselor and Smaller Learning Communities

(Adopted 2005)

American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Position

Professional school counselors recognize the importance of smaller learning communities within large high schools in improving achievement, attendance and behavior for all students. Professional school counselors provide leadership, advocacy and collaboration within smaller learning communities as a part of the comprehensive school counseling program.

The Rationale

Although large high schools may offer more opportunities for course selection and activities, large school settings can hinder student achievement if school staff is overburdened with overwhelming numbers of students and is unable to provide the support individual students may need to be successful. Research shows that students in high schools with fewer than 500 students have: higher attendance rates, higher grade-point averages, lower dropout rates, students and teachers who report they are more satisfied with the high school experience and lower incidences of serious crime, physical attack or fight with a weapon, theft, larceny and vandalism. One approach to personalize the high school setting and improve student achievement is to create smaller learning communities within large schools where every student is provided with an adult advocate and the opportunity to develop a relationship with a staff member. This staff member gets to know the student well during the high school years and is also able to provide increased communication between home and school to promote student success.

The Professional School Counselor's Role

Professional school counselors serve a vital role in maximizing student achievement. Incorporating leadership, advocacy and collaboration, professional school counselors promote equity and access to rigorous educational experiences for all students. Professional school counselors are certified/licensed professionals with a master's degree or higher in school counseling or the substantial equivalent and are uniquely qualified to address all students' developmental needs.

Professional school counselors collaborate with teachers and administrators to redesign large high schools into a personalized environment for all students. In these smaller learning communities, professional school counselors implement a comprehensive school counseling program as described in "The ASCA National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs" (ASCA, 2005). These data-driven programs are built on standards in academic, career and personal/social development. The new three R's of smaller learning communities, rigor, relevance and relationship, are integrated within the comprehensive school counseling program in the following manner:

In the smaller learning community structure, a teacher may serve as advisor to a small group of students throughout their years in high school. In this new role, the teacher may fulfill advising and advocacy functions designed to create a more personal high school experience for all students. Professional school counselors provide essential support to the advisory program by:

- collaborating with teachers and administrators to develop and implement the advisory program
- providing resources to advisors to address needs based on student data
- providing consultation to advisors relating to student issues
- providing individual student planning and responsive services to students referred by the advisor

As teachers take on the role of advisor, professional school counselors continue to provide comprehensive school counseling programs designed to promote student achievement and close achievement gaps for underachieving students. These pro-

grams, based on The ASCA National Model, require the unique training, qualifications and skills of a professional school counselor in order to address all students’ academic, career and personal/social development needs. The comprehensive school counseling program is delivered through the following areas:

- School Guidance Curriculum
- Individual Student Planning
- Responsive Services
- System Support

Professional school counselors are responsible for spending a minimum of 80 percent of their time in direct services to students. Although professional school counselors collaborate with staff, parents and the community to implement the comprehensive school counseling program, the role of the professional school counselor is to provide programs to students that promote student success and achievement. To achieve maximum program effectiveness, the American School Counselor Association recommends a school-counselor-to-student ratio of 1:250.

Three R’s of Smaller Learning Communities	The ASCA National Model®
Rigorous Instruction – Challenging all students with high expectations	Academic Development: Standard B – Students will complete school with the academic preparation essential to choose from a wide range of substantial postsecondary options, including college.
Relevant Curriculum – Helping students connect their studies to the real world	Career Development: Standard C – Students will understand the relationship between personal qualities, education, training and the world of work
Meaningful Relationships – Fostering supportive relationships between students and adults	Personal/Social Development: Standard A – Students will acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and interpersonal skills to help them understand and respect self and others.

Summary

Professional school counselors recognize the importance of smaller learning communities within large high schools. In smaller learning communities, professional school counselors implement a comprehensive school counseling program that is essential for student success. The principles of rigor, relevance and relationship are integrated within the comprehensive school counseling program to create a more personalized high school experience and to improve achievement, attendance and behavior for all students.

References

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Making the Case for Small Schools
<http://www.gatesfoundation.org/NR/Downloads/ed/evaluation/BMG911SmallSchoolsBrochure.pdf>

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Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, High Schools for the New Millennium: Imagine the Possibilities
<http://www.gatesfoundation.org/nr/downloads/ed/edwhitepaper.pdf>