

The Professional School Counselor and Student Assistance Programs

(Adopted 1994, Revised 2000)

American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Position

Professional school counselors play a key role in initiating and creating student assistance programs in the schools.

Rationale

Although the problem of chemical dependence has received widespread attention in the media and in the helping professions, there remains a variety of approaches to address this problem. Student assistance programs, which can deal with substance abuse as well as other high-risk situations, serve as a systematic effort to help students understand themselves as self-respecting human beings while helping them to accept responsibility for their own actions.

The Professional School Counselor's Role

Professional school counselors provide comprehensive programs with a variety of counseling services. Although the focus of school counseling programs is on primary prevention and development, the realities of life and work cause school counselors to address problems that already exist and that are in some cases well-entrenched. This emphasizes the need to include crisis and remediation components in comprehensive school counseling programs, and student assistance programs may complement them. The school counselor may be the key person to coordinate the student assistance program. These programs provide proactive approaches to existing substance abuse problems and other high-risk or crisis situations. Assistance involves early identification of problem behavior by specifically trained staff, thorough assessment and appropriate referral and follow-up.

Summary

Student assistance programs are designed to help students and their families with problems affecting their personal lives and academic performance. Professional school counselors, through comprehensive school counseling programs, should assist in the integration of student assistance programs. It is the professional school counselor's responsibility to refer the student to the appropriate agencies and/or other professional consultants if the counselor learns that the student's problems are beyond the counselor's own professional expertise or scope of practice. The counselor must use information in accord with ASCA's prescribed professional ethics and within the limitations defined by local, state and federal laws.