

The Professional School Counselor and Students with Special Needs

(Adopted 1999; revised 2004)

American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Position

Professional school counselors encourage and support all students' academic, personal/social and career development through comprehensive school counseling programs. Professional school counselors are committed to helping all students realize their potential and make adequate yearly progress despite challenges that may result from identified disabilities and other special needs.

Rationale

Professional school counselors have increasingly important roles in working with students who have special needs. State and federal laws require schools to provide an equitable education for all students, including those with special needs. Components of federal laws such as due process, individual educational programs, least restrictive environment and other plans for student with accommodations and modifications provide opportunities to use the professional school counselor's skills to benefit students with special needs. Professional school counselors work with students with special needs both in special class settings and in the regular classroom and are a key component in assisting with transitions to post-secondary options. It is particularly important that the professional school counselor's role in these procedures is clearly defined and is in compliance with laws and local policies.

The Professional School Counselor's Role

When appropriate, interventions in which the professional school counselor participates may include but aren't limited to:

- leading school counseling activities as a part of the comprehensive school counseling program
- providing collaborative services consistent with those services provided to students through the comprehensive school counseling program
- serving on the school's multidisciplinary team that identifies students who may need assessments to determine special needs within the scope and practice of the professional school counselor
- collaborating with other student support specialists in the delivery of services.
- providing group and individual counseling
- advocating for students with special needs in the school and in the community.
- assisting with the establishment and implementation of plans for accommodations and modifications
- providing assistance with transitions from grade to grade as well as post-secondary options
- consulting and collaborating with staff and parents to understand the special needs of these students
- making referrals to appropriate specialists within the school system and in the community

The professional school counselor advocates for students with special needs and is one of many school staff members who may be responsible for providing information as written plans are prepared for students with special needs. The professional school counselor has a responsibility to be a part of designing portions of these plans related to the comprehensive school counseling program, but it is inappropriate for the professional school counselor to serve in supervisory or administrative roles such as:

- making decisions regarding placement or retention
- serving in any supervisory capacity related to the implementation of IDEA
- serving as the LEA representative for the team writing the IEP
- coordinating the 504 planning team
- supervising of the implementation of the 504 plan

The professional school counselor continues to seek opportunities for professional development to better understand special needs in regards to assessment, research and legislation. The professional school counselor also collaborates with members of the community who are providing services to students with special needs.

Summary

The professional school counselor takes an active role in providing a comprehensive school counseling program to students with special needs. Professional school counselors advocate for all students and provide collaborative services to students with special needs consistent with those services provided to students through the comprehensive school counseling program.