

Who Are School Counselors?

School counselors, referred to as “guidance counselors” in the past, help every student improve academic achievement, personal and social development, and career planning. School counselors in the 21st century are highly trained educators in pre K—12 settings who uphold ethical and professional standards to design, implement and manage comprehensive, developmental, results-based school counseling programs that promote and enhance student success.

School Counselor Qualifications

School counselors are certified or licensed professionals who possess a master’s degree or higher in school counseling, or a substantial equivalent, meet the state certification/licensure standards and abide by the laws of the states in which they are employed. School counselors are required by most public school systems to successfully complete advanced-degree coursework in the following topics:

- Human growth and development
- Counseling theory
- Individual counseling
- Group counseling
- Social and cultural foundations
- Testing and assessment
- Research and program evaluation
- Professional orientation
- Career development

School counselors also are required to complete a practicum and internship supervised by a certified school counselor in a school setting.

What Do School Counselors Do?

School counselors address the academic and developmental needs of all students, not just those in need, by collaborating with students, parents, school staff and the community. School counseling programs exhibit the following characteristics:

Foundational mission and goals. School counselors design, implement, and maintain guidance programs that align with the educational mission and philosophies of their schools and school districts. These programs help every student develop competencies in academic achievement, personal and social development, and career planning.

Delivery methods. School counselors follow a comprehensive guidance curriculum to work with students in individual, small group and classroom settings. School counselors help students create an academic plan for their education to prepare for successful careers after graduation and help students develop the necessary skills, such as organizational, time-management, and study skills. They also help students overcome obstacles that may form barriers to learning by helping students respond to issues such as divorce or death in their family, as well as developmental issues typical in childhood and adolescence.

Program management. School counselors manage their programs just as teachers manage their curriculum. They collaborate with administrators and other educators to ensure that the school counseling program helps fulfill the mission of the school by setting annual goals and putting mechanisms in place to facilitate the successful and effective delivery of the school

counseling program.

Accountability. School counselors hold their programs accountable for student achievement by monitoring student progress to ensure that the school counseling program meets its desired goals and objectives. School counselors collect, analyze and present statistics about grades, test scores, attendance and disciplinary records, and other information to make data-based and data-driven decisions about the school counseling program.

“The responsibilities of school counselors have increased tremendously over the years. School counselors are an integral part of the whole school community working to help children, teachers and other school personnel and parents. School counselors help children face challenges, tough classes, peer pressure, friendship problems, depression and more – all that can be roadblocks to future success.”

-- Angela Reformato, a school counselor in New York

How Do School Counselors Impact Student Achievement?

Numerous research studies show that school counselors, implementing a comprehensive school counseling program, can serve a vital role in maximizing student achievement.

A research study of Florida students in 5th through 9th grades found that students in schools with a comprehensive guidance program scored significantly better on state’s standardized test for reading and math.

--Does Implementing a Research-based School Counseling Curriculum Enhance Student Achievement? (Center for School Counseling Outcome Research, 2004)

School counselors provide solutions to help curb rates of school failure and dropout by addressing broader contexts that include personal, social, emotional, and career development.

—An Investigation of a Model of Academic Motivation for School Counseling, M. Scheel and J. Gonzalez, Professional School Counseling, October 2007.

School counselors are in a key position to assist schools in their education reform mandates to reduce the achievement gap among low income and minority children.

— Fostering Educational Resilience and Achievement in Urban Schools Through School-Family Community Partnerships, J. Bryan, Professional School Counseling, February 2005.

In working with at-risk youth, a 2004 study of middle school students in Baltimore County showed that school counselors helped increase academic achievement, raise career awareness, and improve overall student self-efficacy.

— Impact of Career Intervention on At-Risk Middle School Students' Career Maturity Levels, Academic Achievement, and Self-Esteem, H.L. Legum, and C. Hoare, Professional School Counseling, December 2004.

School counselors, because of their unique training and responsibility, have an influential role of helping students become more engaged in the academic and social arenas within the school.

—The Multidimensionality of School Engagement and Math Achievement Among Racial Groups, D. T. Sciarra, and H. J. Seirup, Professional School Counseling, April 2008.

The school counselor is an integral system support for the school-family-community relationship that meet the personal/social, academic, and career needs of a large number of students through collaboration, coordination, and consultation with school and community stakeholders.

—An Examination of School Counselor Involvement in School-Family-Community Partnerships, J. Bryan, C. Holcomb-McCoy, Professional School Counseling, June 2007.



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This publication was developed through the collaborative efforts of ACA, ASCA, and NEA.

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