Use the ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors database to increase college and career readiness through research-based standards.

College and career readiness is a phrase that is getting much-deserved attention from educators and education stakeholders alike, including the White House, legislators, the business community and the media.

BY ERIC SPARKS, ED.D.
As it turns out, high school grades are a stronger predictor for college GPA and college graduation — stronger predictors than test scores, class rank and family background.

The message is clear – postsecondary education is needed not only to improve individual outcomes such as job opportunities, income and overall health but also for the national good, including maintaining a globally competitive workforce and growing the U.S. economy.

Although there are many possible routes to obtaining a postsecondary education, just attending isn’t enough. Students must successfully complete postsecondary degrees to reach their fullest potential. So what is needed to help all students be best prepared for higher education so they are most likely to graduate?

The 2012 literature review “Teaching Adolescents to Become Learners: The Role of Noncognitive Factors in Shaping School Performance” provides a detailed review of research about predictors of college success. Although test scores are often thought to be the best predictor, research indicates they actually are not strong predictors of whether a student will graduate from high school or college. As it turns out, high school grades are a stronger predictor for college GPA and college graduation — stronger predictors than test scores, class rank and family background.

Therefore, to increase college graduation rates, research suggests educators need to focus on helping all students achieve successful grades in high school coursework. And how do we support strong high school grades? The literature review reveals that the strongest predictors of high school outcomes are GPA and passing courses in the middle grades and in elementary school. In other words, helping students achieve academic success at each grade level throughout K-12 is essential to improving college graduation rates, individual and even national outcomes.

So how do school counselors fit in this equation? To pass courses and earn higher GPAs, students must master and demonstrate content knowledge. School counselors have always provided support to students in academic performance, but school counselors don’t teach content knowledge of any of the GPA-producing courses on a student’s educational transcript.

Although content knowledge is critical for passing courses and higher GPAs, the literature review synthesizes research on a long list of factors beyond content knowledge and academic skills that have a direct impact on student performance. These factors, often referred to as “noncognitive” because they are not measured by IQ tests or academic exams, have been shown in a wide range of studies to have a direct positive relationship to a student’s school performance as well as future academic outcomes.

Noncognitive factors include characteristics such as persistence, goal-setting, self-discipline, work habits, learning strategies, homework completion and study skills, among others. These concepts have long been a focus for school counselors and have been part of student standards that are a foundational component of a comprehensive school counseling program. They are also integral in the newly released ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success.

**Mindsets & Behaviors Overview**

The “ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success: K-12 College- and Career Readiness for Every Student” are built on the literature review of noncognitive factors and a crosswalk of best practices in student achievement from a wide array of educational standards and efforts. The 35 mindset and behavior standards describe the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed for students to achieve academic success, college and career readiness and social/emotional development.

Each standard is supported by grade-level competencies that are specific, measurable expectations students attain as they make progress toward the standards. As the school counseling program’s vision, mission and program goals are aligned with the school’s academic mission, school counseling standards and competencies are also aligned with academic content standards at the state and district level.

ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors align with specific standards from the Common Core State Standards through connections at the competency level. This alignment gives school counselors the opportunity to help students meet noncognitive college- and career-readiness standards in collaboration with academic content standards taught in core areas in the classroom. It also helps school counselors directly align with academic instruction when providing individual and small-group counseling by focusing on standards and competencies addressing a student’s developmental needs.

Grade-level competencies are housed in the ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors database at www.schoolcounselor.org/studentcompetencies. School counselors can search the database to quickly and easily identify competencies designed to meet student developmental needs while aligning with academic content. The database also provides the opportunity for school counselors to share other ways to support and align with a specific standard by submitting new competencies designed to meet their students’ needs.

The competencies are listed by grade range (K-2, 3-5, 6-8 and 9-12), and domain (academic, career, social/emotional). Each competency is aligned to specific standards of the Mindsets & Behaviors, and many competencies are aligned with the Common Core State Standards. Searches can be conducted by a specific standard, grade level, domain and keyword.

**Identifying Competencies**

Using the Mindsets & Behaviors to support college-and career readiness goals isn’t a difficult process. Follow these steps to identify standards and competencies that meet your students’ needs.
Identify student needs using data:
Think about school data that can inform you about student needs. At elementary, middle or high school, student achievement data such as grades, GPA and promotion rates are informative and in alignment with the research on predictors for success in college. In high school, additional data including college application and acceptance rates, FAFSA completion rates and college-going rates can be helpful. In elementary and middle school, additional data could include college and financial aid awareness data from students and parents as well as career interest inventories.

Determine the outcome and goal:
After a review of your data, think about what outcome you want. In most cases, student outcomes can be considered in terms of academics, attendance or behavior and can be written in the SMART goal format. See the ASCA National Model for more information on the SMART goal format. An example of an academic SMART goal could be “By the end of the year, the number of sixth-grade students passing all courses will increase by 25 percent.” A college-focused behavioral SMART goal could be “In the fall of 2015, the college-going rate for the class of 2015 will increase by 10 percent compared with the class of 2014.”

Identify appropriate standards:
Review the ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors database to identify standards that align with your goal. A potential mindset to encourage is “Understanding that postsecondary education and life-long learning are necessary for long-term career success.” Behavior standards could include a learning strategy such as “actively engage in challenging coursework” or a self-management skill such as “demonstrate perseverance to achieve long- and short-term goals.”

Identify a competency:
Consult the ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors database to identify a measurable competency that supports the standard. A search by the learning standard “Actively engage in challenging coursework” produced the following competency for grades 9-12 in the academic domain. The competency is aligned with a speaking and listening standard from the English Language Arts Common Core State Standards.

Grades 9-12: Evaluate a speaker’s point of view, reasoning and use of evidence and rhetoric, assessing the stance, premises, links among idea and points of emphasis about the importance of engaging in challenging coursework.

A search by the keyword “college” for grades 3-5 produced the following competency in the career domain. This competency is aligned with a speaking and listening standard from the English Language Arts Common Core State Standards.

Grades 3-5: Summarize a written text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively and orally about the impact of attending college.

“Understanding that postsecondary education and life-long learning are necessary for long-term career success.”

Design your lesson or approach:
Whether you’re going to work with students in a classroom, small group or individual setting, design your objective, procedures and method of evaluation to support the standard and competency you plan to address. For classroom lessons, consider following the lesson plan template in the ASCA National Model or use a format supported by your school or district. For small groups, consider using the small group action plan in the ASCA National Model.

Writing Your Own Competency
There may be some cases where you don’t find a competency in the database that addresses the unique needs of students in your school. If so, it may be more appropriate to write a new competency. In addition, school counselors working in states that have not adopted the Common Core State Standards are encouraged to create competencies that align with their state’s academic standards and can use the competencies from the ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors database as examples of alignment. New competencies should address your students’ needs and align with one or more of the 35 standards from the ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors.

The first three steps in the process are the same as when searching the database for a competency: identify student needs using data, determine the outcome and goal and identify appropriate standards from the ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors.

The next steps focus on writing a competency that aligns with a standard from the Mindsets & Behaviors as well as an academic curriculum standard, such as the Common Core State Standards.

Choose the domain:
Identify which domain most appropriately addresses the student needs based on the data. You could approach the issue from the academic, career and/or social/emotional domains.

Identify possible strategies:
Think about possible strategies you could use to help your students meet the standard you’ve selected. Depending on the number of students you hope to have an impact on, consider whether classroom, group or individual counseling strategies are most appropriate.

Identify a curriculum standard:
Review Common Core State Standards or your state’s curriculum standards to identify standards that could align with your strategy. You may find it most helpful to review English/language arts, social studies or health curriculum standards first.

Write your competency:
Using language aligned with the ASCA Mindset & Behavior standard, the curriculum standard and your strategy, write your new competency. Use competencies already included in the database as a guide.

Share your new competency:
Let other school counselors and students benefit from your new competency by submitting the competency to the ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors database for review at www.schoolcounselor.org/studentscompetencies. After the competency is approved, anyone using the database
will have access to your competency when searching the database.

College and career readiness is forefront on the minds of educators and education stakeholders across the country. Although it has always been front and center for school counselors, using standards and competencies from the ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success can help you align your school counseling program with the most recent academic curriculum and initiatives while delivering a comprehensive school counseling program that improves college and career readiness for all students.

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