The School Counselor and Virtual School Counseling
(Adopted 2017)

American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Position
School counselors working in a virtual setting provide a comprehensive school counseling program through the use of technology and distance (virtual/online/e-learning) counseling with the same standards and adherence to ethics as school counselors working in traditional school settings. School counselors work collaboratively with all stakeholders to ensure equity, access and success of all students.

The Rationale
Online learning is becoming increasingly relied upon in the United States (Setzer & Lewis, 2005) as students ranging from kindergarten to the postsecondary level are enrolling in virtual schools and online distance-education programs (Holmes & Kozlowski, 2016). Clark (2001) defined a virtual school as “an educational organization that offers K–12 courses through Internet or web-based methods” (p. 1). Students can be involved in online programs, ranging from a part-time, hybrid model in which they take some components of their education in a face-to-face environment and some in a fully digital environment, to fully online programs and degrees (Holmes & Kozlowski, 2016).

Many states have approved virtual academies or virtual charter public schools to serve as state-funded educational environments; data have shown that enrollment in online or virtual learning is rapidly increasing. Within this new environment, school counselors provide programming to promote engagement in the virtual school counseling platform to ensure students can gain access to the tools required to reach their potential. “Counselors understand the additional concerns related to the use of distance counseling, technology and social media and make every attempt to protect confidentiality and meet any legal and ethical requirements for the use of such resources” (Corey, Schneider Corey, Corey & Callanan, 2015, p. 545).

School counselors should ensure they continue to follow ethical standards in their virtual school counseling program (Wilczenski & Coomey, 2006). Osborn, Peterson and Hale (2014) found that the experiences of school counselors can provide new frames of reference to unique experiences of those who service as virtual school counselors.

The School Counselor’s Role
Within this new environment, school counselors provide programming to encourage engagement in the virtual school counseling platform to ensure students can gain access to the tools required to reach their potential. Students enroll in virtual schools for myriad reasons and come from diverse backgrounds. These students have unique reasons for choosing to attend a virtual school to remove barriers that keep them from achieving success in school. These unique reasons include but are not limited to:

- Dealing with mental health issues that lead to them needing to be in a smaller environment
- Being medically unable to attend a physical school
- Preferring a smaller environment, smaller class size or being able to be on their own
- Dealing with bullying in a traditional school setting
Wanting a more rigorous school curriculum
Wanting more individualized instructional support
Requiring gifted and/or accelerated courses
Developing asynchronously, such as being gifted in some courses and behind in others

School counselors working with students in a virtual setting should:
• Adhere to the same ethical guidelines in a virtual setting as school counselors in a face-to-face setting
• Recognize and acknowledge the challenges and limitations of virtual school counseling
• Implement procedures for students to follow in both emergency and nonemergency situations when the school counselor is not available
• Recognize and mitigate the limitation of virtual school counselor confidentiality, which may include unintended viewers or recipients
• Inform both the student and parent/guardian of the benefits and limitations of virtual counseling
• Educate students on how to participate in the electronic school counseling relationship to minimize and prevent potential misunderstandings that could occur due to lack of verbal cues and inability to read body language or other visual cues that provide contextual meaning to the school counseling process and school counseling relationship
• Educate students about appropriate conduct in the online setting and using digital literacy as a tool to have an impact on students

Summary
School counselors understand the expectations and limitations of providing virtual school counseling. School counselors have the responsibility to provide a comprehensive school counseling program and develop programs to support all students in academic, career and social/emotional development that would emulate school counseling that would take place in a face-to-face environment. Virtual school counseling is a way to reach a diverse student set, to help students meet their potential and have an impact on their learning in a way that they may not receive in a traditional face-to-face school environment.

References
