

1 **The School Counselor and the Prevention of School-Related Gun Violence**

2 (Adopted 2018; revised 2019)

4 **American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Position**

5 School counselors collaborate with school staff and the community to ensure students attend
6 schools where the environment is conducive to teaching and learning. To support the work of
7 school counselors and school staff, schools and communities should be free from gun violence
8 and threats.

10 **The Rationale**

11 Gun violence is the leading cause of premature death in the United States. The Centers for
12 Disease Control and Prevention (2018) reported that an average of seven children and teens are
13 killed with guns in the United States every day. The Interdisciplinary Group on Preventing
14 School and Community Violence in a Call for Action to Prevent Gun Violence in the United
15 States of America (2018) outlines three levels of prevention. Those recommendations related to
16 school counseling include:

17 **Level 1.** Universal approaches promoting safety and well-being, including requirement
18 for all schools to assess school climate and maintain physically and emotionally safe
19 conditions and positive school environments that protect all students and adults from
20 bullying, discrimination, harassment and assault (e.g., Donohue, Goodman-Scott, &
21 Betters-Bubon, 2015).

22 **Level 2.** Practices for reducing risk and promoting protective factors for persons
23 experiencing social/emotional challenges, including adequate staffing of school
24 counselors, psychologists and social workers to provide coordinated school- and
25 community-based mental health services for individuals with risk factors for violence,
26 recognizing violence is not intrinsically a product of mental illness (e.g., Levine &
27 Tamburrino, 2014) and reformation of school discipline policies to reduce
28 exclusionary practices and foster positive social, behavioral, emotional and academic
29 success for students (e.g., Goodman-Scott, Betters-Bubon & Donohue, 2015).

30 **Level 3.** Interventions for individuals where violence is present or appears imminent,
31 including training and maintaining school- and community-based threat assessment
32 teams that include mental health and law enforcement partners with channels of
33 communication for persons to report potential threats as well as interventions to
34 resolve conflicts and assist troubled individuals (e.g., Helgeson & Schneider, 2015).

35
36 Research has shown that positive school climate is linked to higher or improved attendance rates,
37 test scores, promotion rates and graduation rates. Conversely, a negative school climate can harm
38 students and raise liability issues for schools and districts. A negative school climate is linked to
39 lower student achievement and graduation rates, and it creates opportunities for violence,
40 bullying and even suicide (NCSSL, 2018). Research on the increasing trend calling for armed
41 school personnel has demonstrated that armed personnel may create a negative school climate
42 (Rajan & Branas, 2018; Swartz, Osborne, Dawson-Edwards, & Higgins, 2016; Weiler &
43 Armenta, 2014).

44

45

46

47 **The School Counselor's Role**

48 School counselors are educational leaders and advocates of safe-school initiatives and are a vital
49 resource in the creation, development and implementation of best-practice strategies designed to
50 improve school climate fostering engagement, support and acceptance of all students (MacNeil,
51 Prater & Busch, 2009). Consequently, school counselors should advocate for comprehensive
52 school counseling programs fostering all students' social/emotional and academic well-being.
53 According to Cowan, Vaillancourt, Rossen and Pollitt (2013), school counselors support a
54 comprehensive approach to safe schools by:

- 55 • supporting proactive principal leadership
- 56 • allowing school leaders to deploy human and financial resources in a manner that best
57 meets school and community needs
- 58 • providing a team-based framework to facilitate effective coordination of services and
59 interventions
- 60 • balancing the needs for physical and psychological safety
- 61 • employing the necessary and appropriately trained school-employed mental health and
62 safety personnel
- 63 • providing relevant and ongoing professional development for all staff
- 64 • integrating a continuum of mental health supports within multitiered systems of support
- 65 • engaging families and community providers as meaningful partners
- 66 • remaining grounded in teaching and learning (the mission and purpose of schools)

67
68 Additionally, the ASCA National Model (2012) includes advocacy competencies (Lewis,
69 Arnold, House & Toporek, 2003) published by the American Counseling Association. These
70 competencies range from micro-level to macro-level. Social/political advocacy is one example of
71 a macro-level competency guiding school counselors who are skilled at "recognizing when
72 student problems must be addressed at a policy or legislative level and advocating for change
73 within those areas" (p. 6).

74
75 ASCA joins more than 75 national education, medical, health, public health and research
76 organizations in a call to action to address the epidemic of gun violence in our communities. All
77 school counselors are encouraged to advocate for recommendations adopted by other national
78 organizations representing education stakeholders and the safety of all students.

79 80 **Summary**

81 Through the implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program, school counselors
82 promote school safety through advocacy efforts. Advocating for schools that are free from gun
83 violence and threats can assist school counselors in supporting safe schools.

84 85 **References**

86 AASA Position Paper on School Safety. (2013). A response to the tragedy at Sandy Hook
87 Elementary, Approved by the AASA Governing Board.

88
89 American School Counselor Association. (2012). *The ASCA National Model: A framework for*
90 *school counseling programs* (3rd ed.). Alexandria, VA: Author.

91

92 Call for Action to Prevent Gun Violence in the United States of America. (2018). Retrieved from
93 <https://curry.virginia.edu/prevent-gun-violence>
94

95 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2018). Fatal injury data. Retrieved from
96 <https://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/fatal.html>
97

98 Cowan, K. C., Vaillancourt, K., Rossen, E., & Pollitt, K. (2013). A framework for safe and
99 successful schools [Brief]. Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.
100

101 Donohue, P., Goodman-Scott, E., & Betters-Bubon, J. (2015). Using universal screening for
102 early identification of students at risk: A case example from the field. *Professional School*
103 *Counseling, 19*(1), 133–143. <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.gvsu.edu/10.5330/1096-2409-19.1.133>
104

105 Goodman-Scott, E., Betters-Bubon, J., & Donohue, P. (2015). Aligning comprehensive school
106 counseling programs and positive behavioral interventions and supports to maximize school
107 counselors' efforts. *Professional School Counseling, 19*(1), 57–67.
108 <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.gvsu.edu/10.5330/1096-2409-19.1.57>
109

110 Helgeson, S., & Schneider D. (2015). Authentic community-based youth engagement: Lessons
111 from across the nation and through the lens of violence prevention. *National Civic Review,*
112 *104*(3), 16–23. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ncr.21234>
113

114 Levine, E., & Tamburrino, M. (2014). Bullying among young children: Strategies for prevention.
115 *Early Childhood Education Journal, 42*(4), 271–278.
116 <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.gvsu.edu/10.1007/s10643-013-0600-y>
117

118 Lewis, Arnold, House, & Toporek. (2003). Advocacy Competencies. Approved by the ACA
119 Governing Council. Retrieved from
120 https://www.counseling.org/Resources/Competencies/Advocacy_Competencies.pdf
121

122 MacNeil, A. J., Prater, D. L., & Busch, S. (2009). The effects of school culture and climate on
123 student achievement. *International Journal of Leadership in Education, 12*(1), 73–84.
124

125 Miller, T. W., & Kraus, R. F. (2008). School-related violence: Definition, scope, and prevention
126 goals. In *School Violence and Primary Prevention* (pp. 15–24). Springer, New York, NY.
127 https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-387-77119-9_2
128

129 National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments. (2018). Retrieved from:
130 <https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/safe-and-healthy-students/school-climate>
131

132 Rajan, S., & Branas, C. C. (2018). Arming school teachers: What do we know? Where do we
133 go from here? *American Journal of Public Health, 108*(7), 860–862. Retrieved January 18,
134 2019 from <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2018.304464>
135

136 Swartz, K., Osborne, D. L., Dawson-Edwards, C., & Higgins, G. E. (2016). Policing schools:
137 Examining the impact of place management activities on school violence. *American Journal of*

138 *Criminal Justice*, 41(3), 465–483. Retrieved January 18, 2019 from
139 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12103-015-9306-6>

140

141 Weiler, S. C., & Armenta, A. D. (2014). The fourth r—revolvers: Principal perceptions related
142 to armed school personnel and related legal issues. Retrieved January 18, 2019 from *Clearing*
143 *House*, 87(3), 115–118. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00098655.2014.891891>

DRAFT