

The School Counselor and Equity for All Students

(Adopted 2006, revised 2012, 2018)

American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Position

School counselors recognize and distinguish individual and group differences and strive to equally value all students and groups. School counselors are advocates for the equitable treatment of all students in school and in the community.

The Rationale

According to the U.S. Department of Education, in 2014, the number of students of color in U.S. public schools surpassed that of white students (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). However, white students continue to graduate from high school at higher rates than black and Hispanic students (Kena et al., 2015). In addition, an achievement gap exists along socioeconomic lines.

Many students of color, first-generation and low-income students aspire to college; however, the college application process can present significant obstacles (Page & Scott, 2016). Some students in schools report there is no adult in the school with whom they feel they can discuss these issues, and many of these students come from underrepresented social or cultural groups. These students cannot always rely on their parents for college information and must instead turn to their high schools, where school counselors are in a position proven to increase access for students. School counselors can also play a role in assisting students in identity development contributing to their success (Maxwell & Henriksen, 2012).

Historically, underrepresented populations have faced barriers to participating in a rigorous curriculum and higher-level classes (Vazquez & Altshuler, 2017). School counselors, teachers, administrators and other school staff can be involuntary gatekeepers of access to these classrooms. Research finds that when students and school counselors are able to connect, school counselors have the potential to become empowering agents (Emde, 2015). When students feel like they are being treated in a biased or negative manner, they often exhibit self-destructive behaviors such as truancy, withdrawal, acting out and nonparticipation in class activities. Conversely, when students believe they are treated fairly, they are more likely to be engaged in school, talk about pressing issues and participate in class activities.

Family participation in the college-going decision-making process is critical (Bryan et al., 2011). School counselors are in a position to seek family engagement in the college-going process to ensure students from diverse backgrounds are included. The ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors (2016) supports this concept, stating that all students have the right to a school counselor who acts as a social-justice advocate, supporting students from all backgrounds and circumstances and consulting when the school counselor's competence level requires additional support.

The School Counselor's Role

School counselors develop and implement a school counseling program promoting equity and access for students. School counselors work to help close achievement, opportunity, attainment and funding gaps in their schools, districts and communities. School counselors are mindful of school and community perceptions of the treatment of underrepresented groups and understand the importance of collaborating with school and community groups to help all students succeed. School counselors demonstrate cultural competence.

School counselors promote equitable treatment of all students by:

- Using data to identify gaps in achievement, opportunity and attainment
- Advocating for rigorous course and higher education for underrepresented groups.
- Maintaining professional knowledge of the ever-changing and complex world of students' culture
- Maintaining knowledge and skills for working in a diverse and multicultural work setting
- Informing school staff of changes regarding different groups within the community
- Promoting the development of school policies leading to equitable treatment of all students and opposing school policies hindering equitable treatment of any student

- Promoting access to rigorous standards-based curriculum, academic courses and learning paths for college and career for all students
- Developing plans to address over- or underrepresentation of specific groups in programs such as special education, honors, Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate
- Creating an environment that encourages any student or group to feel comfortable to come forward with problems
- Collaborating with families in seeking assistance services for financial literacy, job skills and placement and free services (such as childcare assistance) as well as providing parents educational opportunities to assist them in supporting their students' education
- Acting as a liaison between home and school promoting an understanding and encouraging creative solutions for students handling multiple responsibilities beyond a typical load

Summary

School counselors recognize and distinguish individual and group differences and strive to value all students and groups equally. School counselors promote the equitable treatment of all students in school and the community.

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