

Election Conversations: The School Counselor's Role

All students have the right to attend a safe school environment where views can be discussed with dignity and respect in a manner that is free from abuse and harassment. School counselors play a vital role in helping ensure students learn to have respectful conversations about politically charged issues.

Individual views may differ, but all students deserve to be treated with respect regardless of their political beliefs, socioeconomic background, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, abilities, religion and other factors. During an emotional period like the 2020 election, it is important to remind students to refrain from drastic or risky behaviors that could have long-term consequences. If they feel they've suffered an emotional loss, they must give themselves time to heal.

School counselors have specific training to teach knowledge, attitudes and skills that promote positive student development and create an inclusive, respectful school culture, including:

- Positive and supportive relationships with other students and adults
- Effective communication skills
- Self-discipline and self-control
- Empathy toward others with differing views
- Effective collaboration and cooperation skills
- Effective coping skills when facing a problem
- Social maturity and behaviors appropriate to the situation and environment
- Personal safety skills

How Can School Counselors Address Election Conversations Through a School Counseling Program?

These components from the Deliver chapter of the ASCA National Model (pp. 77–84) articulate the school counselor role.

Direct Student Services

Instruction

Deliver lessons in classroom, small-group or individual settings that teach the ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success. Lessons could include topics that help students:

- Treat each other with respect and dignity
- Demonstrate self-discipline and self-control regardless of election results
- Understand school/district policy related to political statements or activities
- Create a sense of belonging in the school environment for all students regardless of political viewpoint
- Demonstrate empathy for students or adults who have different viewpoints
- Learn skills to create positive relationships with students and adults who have different viewpoints
- Demonstrate appropriate oral and written communication when interacting with or responding to others
- Identify adults who support success and share problems with them
- Exhibit social maturity and behaviors appropriate to the situation and environment
- Use advocacy and assertiveness skills to appropriately stand up for their beliefs and to channel energy into causes important to them

Counseling

Provide support to students as they react to election results and the behaviors of others by helping them:

- Process the events and responses related to the election
- Demonstrate empathy for students with different viewpoints
- Express excitement with self-control, social maturity and appropriate behavior
- Develop strategies to cope with disappointment and respond to reactions of others appropriately
- Learn advocacy strategies to appropriately channel their energy around passionate causes
- Identify adults in the building who can help them if they are experiencing difficulties
- Identify ways to repair any harm caused by inappropriate behavior or responses

Indirect Student Services

Consultation

Share strategies with families and educators that moderate excitement or soothe disappointment for election results. Encourage families and educators to support and align with activities that teach positive and supportive relationship skills.

Seek information from families and educators to learn which students are having difficulty maintaining self-control or coping with election results.

Collaboration

Work to encourage appropriate responses to election results through collaboration such as:

- Partnering with families and educators to teach self-discipline, self-control and/or coping skills
- Teaming with school and district staff to monitor data related to skills such as self-discipline, self-control and effective coping skills
- Serving on school/district committees focused on creating a school environment that promotes a sense of belonging for all students
- Presenting workshops for parents about supporting and encouraging appropriate student behaviors
- Working with administrators, families and community members to organize immediate and follow-up interventions in response to a crisis

Referrals

When student needs extend beyond short-term services or counseling, refer them to school or community resources that reinforce behaviors such as self-discipline and self-control or effective coping skills.

Reporting

Report to parents/guardians, administration and/or appropriate authorities when students disclose a perpetrated or a perceived threat to their own or other students' physical or mental well-being. Follow applicable federal, state and local laws and school district policy.

What ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors Standards Apply to Election Conversations?

School counselors teach the [ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors](#) standards to promote academic achievement, college and career readiness and social/emotional learning. These skills help students develop self-management and social skills that create a school culture where all students feel they belong.

For students enthusiastic about the election results, consider ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors standards such as these.

Category 2: Behaviors Standards

Students will demonstrate the following standards through classroom lessons, activities and/or individual/small-group counseling.

B-SMS 2. Demonstrate self-discipline and self-control

B-SS 1. Use effective oral and written communication skills and listening skills

B-SS 2. Create positive and supportive relationships with other students

B-SS 4. Demonstrate empathy

B-SS 5. Demonstrate ethical decision-making and social responsibility

B-SS 9. Demonstrate social maturity and behaviors appropriate to the situation and environment

For students experiencing anxiety or sadness, consider ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors standards such as these.

Category 1: Mindsets Standards

School counselors encourage the following mindsets for all students.

M 1. Belief in development of whole self, including a healthy balance of mental, social/emotional and physical well-being

M 2. Self-confidence in ability to succeed

M 3. Sense of belonging in the school environment

Category 2: Behaviors Standards

Students will demonstrate the following standards through classroom lessons, activities and/or individual/small-group counseling.

B-SMS 7. Demonstrate effective coping skills when faced with a problem

B-SMS 9. Demonstrate personal safety skills

B-SMS 10. Demonstrate ability to manage transitions and ability to adapt to changing situations and responsibilities

B-SS 1. Use effective oral and written communication skills and listening skills

B-SS 2. Create positive and supportive relationships with other students

B-SS 3. Create relationships with adults that support success

B-SS 4. Demonstrate empathy

B-SS 6. Use effective collaboration and cooperation skills

B-SS 8. Demonstrate advocacy skills and ability to assert self, when necessary

B-SS 9. Demonstrate social maturity and behaviors appropriate to the situation and environment

What ASCA Ethical Standards Apply to Issues Related Election Conversations?

School counselors help build a respectful, inclusive school environment while following the [ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors](#).

Applicable ASCA Ethical Standards include:

Preamble

All students have the right to:

- Be respected, be treated with dignity and have access to a school counseling program that advocates for and affirms all students from diverse populations including but not limited to: ethnic/racial identity, nationality, age, social class, economic status, abilities/disabilities, language, immigration status, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity/expression, family type, religious/spiritual identity, emancipated minors, wards of the state, homeless youth and incarcerated youth. School counselors as social-justice advocates support students from all backgrounds and circumstances and consult when their competence level requires additional support.
- Receive the information and support needed to move toward self-determination, self-development and affirmation within one's group identities. Special care is given to improve overall educational outcomes for students who have been historically underserved in educational services.
- A safe school environment promoting autonomy and justice and free from abuse, bullying, harassment and other forms of violence.

A. RESPONSIBILITY TO STUDENTS

A.1. Supporting Student Development

School counselors:

- a. Have a primary obligation to the students, who are to be treated with dignity and respect as unique individuals.
- e. Are concerned with students' academic, career and social/emotional needs and encourage each student's maximum development.

f. Respect students' and families' values, beliefs, sexual orientation, gender identification/expression and cultural background and exercise great care to avoid imposing personal beliefs or values rooted in one's religion, culture or ethnicity.

g. Are knowledgeable of laws, regulations and policies affecting students and families and strive to protect and inform students and families regarding their rights.

h. Provide effective, responsive interventions to address student needs.

i. Consider the involvement of support networks, wraparound services and educational teams needed to best serve students.

A.2. Confidentiality

School counselors:

d. Explain the limits of confidentiality in developmentally appropriate terms through multiple methods such as student handbooks, school counselor department websites, school counseling brochures, classroom curriculum and/or verbal notification to individual students.

e. Keep information confidential unless legal requirements demand that confidential information be revealed or a breach is required to prevent serious and foreseeable harm to the student. Serious and foreseeable harm is different for each minor in schools and is determined by students' developmental and chronological age, the setting, parental rights and the nature of the harm. School counselors consult with appropriate professionals when in doubt as to the validity of an exception.

A.3. Comprehensive Data-Informed Program

School counselors:

b. Provide students with a comprehensive school counseling program that ensures equitable academic, career and social/emotional development opportunities for all students.

A.4. Academic, Career and Social/Emotional Plans

School counselors:

d. Provide opportunities for all students to develop the mindsets and behaviors necessary to learn work-related skills, resilience, perseverance, and understanding of lifelong learning as a part of long-term career success, a positive attitude toward learning and a strong work ethic.

A.6. Appropriate Referrals and Advocacy

School counselors:

a. Collaborate with all relevant stakeholders, including students, educators and parents/guardians when student assistance is needed, including the identification of early warning signs of student distress.

b. Provide a list of resources for outside agencies and resources in their community to student(s) and parents/guardians when students need or request additional support. School counselors provide multiple referral options or the district's vetted list and are careful not to indicate an endorsement or preference for one counselor or practice. School counselors encourage parents to interview outside professionals to make a personal decision regarding the best source of assistance for their student.

e. Refrain from referring students based solely on the school counselor's personal beliefs or values rooted in one's religion, culture, ethnicity or personal worldview. School counselors maintain the highest respect for student diversity. School counselors should pursue additional training and supervision in areas where they are at risk of imposing their values on students, especially when the school counselor's values are discriminatory in nature. School counselors do not impose their values on students and/or families when making referrals to outside resources for student and/or family support.

A.9. Serious and Foreseeable Harm to Self and Others

School counselors:

a. Inform parents/guardians and/or appropriate authorities when a student poses a serious and foreseeable risk of harm to self or others. When feasible, this is to be done after careful deliberation and consultation with other appropriate professionals. School counselors inform students of the school counselor's legal and ethical obligations to report the concern to the appropriate authorities unless it is appropriate to withhold this information to protect the student (e.g. student might run away if he/she knows parents are being called). The consequence of the risk of not giving parents/guardians a chance to intervene on behalf of their child is too great. Even if the danger appears relatively remote, parents should be notified.

c. Do not release a student who is a danger to self or others until the student has proper and necessary support. If parents will not provide proper support, the school counselor takes necessary steps to underscore to parents/guardians the necessity to seek help and at times may include a report to child protective services.

d. Report to parents/guardians and/or appropriate authorities when students disclose a perpetrated or a perceived threat to their physical or mental well-being.

This threat may include, but is not limited to, physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, dating violence, bullying or sexual harassment. The school counselor follows applicable federal, state and local laws and school district policy.

A.10. Underserved and At-Risk Populations

School counselors:

a. Strive to contribute to a safe, respectful, nondiscriminatory school environment in which all members of the school community demonstrate respect and civility.

A.14. Technical and Digital Citizenship

School counselors:

c. Promote the safe and responsible use of technology in collaboration with educators and families.

B. RESPONSIBILITIES TO PARENTS/ GUARDIANS, SCHOOL AND SELF

B.1. Responsibilities to Parents/Guardians

School counselors:

b. Respect the rights and responsibilities of custodial and noncustodial parents/guardians and, as appropriate, establish a collaborative relationship with parents/guardians to facilitate students' maximum development.

c. Adhere to laws, local guidelines and ethical practice when assisting parents/guardians experiencing family difficulties interfering with the student's welfare.

d. Are culturally competent and sensitive to diversity among families. Recognize that all parents/guardians, custodial and noncustodial, are vested with certain rights and responsibilities for their children's welfare by virtue of their role and according to law.

B.2. Responsibilities to the School

School counselors:

a. Develop and maintain professional relationships and systems of communication with faculty, staff and administrators to support students.

m. Promote cultural competence to help create a safer more inclusive school environment.

B.3. Responsibilities to Self

School counselors:

i. Monitor and expand personal multicultural and social-justice advocacy awareness, knowledge and skills to be an effective culturally competent school

counselor. Understand how prejudice, privilege and various forms of oppression based on ethnicity, racial identity, age, economic status, abilities/disabilities, language, immigration status, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity expression, family type, religious/spiritual identity, appearance and living situations (e.g., foster care, homelessness, incarceration) affect students and stakeholders.

j. Refrain from refusing services to students based solely on the school counselor's personally held beliefs or values rooted in one's religion, culture or ethnicity. School counselors respect the diversity of students and seek training and supervision when prejudice or biases interfere with providing comprehensive services to all students.

k. Work toward a school climate that embraces diversity and promotes academic, career and social/emotional development for all students.

l. Make clear distinctions between actions and statements (both verbal and written) made as a private individual and those made as a representative of the school counseling profession and of the school district.

What ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards & Competencies Apply to Issues Related to Election Conversations?

School counselors build a respectful, inclusive school environment while following the [ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards & Competencies](#).

Applicable standards and competencies include:

Mindsets

School counselors believe:

M 1. Every student can learn, and every student can succeed.

M 2. Every student should have access to and opportunity for a high-quality education.

M 4. Every student should have access to a comprehensive school counseling program.

M 7. Comprehensive school counseling programs promote and enhance student academic, career and social/emotional outcomes.

Behaviors

School counselors demonstrate the following standards in the design, implementation and assessment of a comprehensive school counseling program

B-PF 2 a. Explain the organizational structure and governance of the American educational system as well as cultural, political and social influences on current educational practices

c. Explain and/or inform the process for development of policy and procedures at the building, district, state and national levels

B-PF 3a. Practice within the ethical principles of the school counseling profession in accordance with the ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors

B-PF 6a. Demonstrate basic knowledge and respect of differences in customs, communications, traditions, values and other traits among students based on race, religion, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, gender identity, physical or intellectual ability and other factors

d. c. Maintain and communicate high expectations for every student, regardless of cultural, social or economic background

e. Understand personal limitations and biases, and articulate how they may affect the school counselor's work

B-PF 7 a. Identify sources of power and authority and formal and informal leadership

h. Serve as a leader in the school and community to promote and support student success

B-PF 9 a. Act as a systems change agent to create an environment promoting and supporting student success

b. Use data to identify how school, district and state educational policies, procedures and practices support and/or impede student success

B-SS 1b. Assess cultural and social trends when developing and choosing curricula

B-SS 3 b Provide support for students, including individual and small-group counseling, during times of transition, heightened stress, critical change or other situations impeding student success

B-SS 6 a. Partner with others to advocate for student achievement and educational equity and opportunities

B-PA 2 b. Review, disaggregate and interpret student achievement, attendance and discipline data to identify and implement interventions as needed

What ASCA Standards for School Counselor Preparation Programs (ASCA CAEP SPA) Apply to Issues Related to Election Conversations?

School counselor education programs prepare school counselors-in-training to create inclusive school environments. Instruction for school counselors in training includes an emphasis on advocacy, social justice, multiculturalism and preparation to work with a diverse population.

Applicable standards from the [ASCA Standards for School Counselor Preparation Programs](#) include:

Standard 1. Foundational Knowledge

0.1 Describe the organizational structure, governance, and evolution of the American education system as well as cultural, political, and social influences on current educational practices and on individual and collective learning environments.

0.2 Describe the evolution of the school counseling profession, the basis for a comprehensive school counseling program, and the school counselor's role in supporting growth and learning for all students.

0.3 Describe aspects of human development, such as cognitive, language, social/emotional, and physical development, as well as the impact of environmental stressors and societal inequities on learning and life outcomes.

Standard 2. Core Theories and Concepts

1.1 Describe established and emerging counseling and educational methods, including but not limited to childhood and adolescent development, learning theories, behavior modification and classroom management, social justice, multiculturalism, group counseling, college/career readiness, and crisis response.

1.2 Demonstrate strengths-based counseling and relationship-building skills to support student growth and promote equity and inclusion.

Standard 3. Instructional and School Counseling Interventions

2.2 Identify research-based individual counseling, group counseling, and classroom instruction techniques to promote academic achievement, college/career readiness, and social/emotional development for every student.

Standard 4. Student Learning Outcomes

4.2 Collaborate with stakeholders such as families, teachers, support personnel, administrators, and community partners to create learning environments that promote educational equity, and support success and well-being for every student.

Standard 5. Designing, Implementing, and Evaluating Comprehensive School Counseling Programs.

5.3 Use school-wide data to promote systemic change within the school so every student is prepared for post-secondary success.

Standard 6. Professional Practice

6.2 Demonstrate leadership, advocacy and collaboration for the promotion of student learning and achievement, the school counseling program, and the profession.

Standard 7. Ethical Practice

Candidates demonstrate ethical and culturally responsive behavior, maintain the highest standard of professionalism and legal obligation, and use consultation and ongoing critical reflection to prevent ethical lapses.

6.1 Engage in professional behavior that reflects ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors and relevant federal and state laws and district policies.

6.2 Describe the impact of federal and state laws and regulations, as well as district policies, on schools, students, families, and school counseling practice.

6.3 Seek consultation and supervision to support ongoing critical reflection in an effort to identify cultural blind spots and prevent ethical lapses.

What ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselor Education Faculty Apply to Issues Related to Election Conversations?

School counselor education programs help prepare school counselors in training to create respectful, inclusive school environments.

Applicable standards from the [ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselor Education Faculty](#) include:

A. Content Knowledge

A-1. Are knowledgeable about, follow and teach the current version of the ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors, the ASCA National Model, the ASCA Mindsets and Behaviors and the ASCA position statements.

A-2. Have the knowledge and skills to support social justice and advocacy efforts and to teach graduate students to become culturally competent school counselors and leaders.

B. Andragogy and Educational Methodology

Faculty members who teach in school counselor education programs:

B-1. Promote the use of techniques supported by empirical research and appropriate for a diverse population (as defined by the preamble of the ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors). If instructors teach about developing techniques, they clarify the research base for the techniques and any potential risks related to the techniques.

C. Career Preparation

Faculty members who teach in school counselor education programs:

C-2. Provide graduate students with an orientation to the profession including: ethical responsibilities, the values of the profession (including counseling a diverse population), program preparation goals, training components (e.g., information on coursework and supervised practice), knowledge and skills assessment, dispositional expectations, university requirements, dismissal policies and current job trends

F. School Counselor Curriculum

The curriculum for school counselor preparation programs:

F-4. Emphasizes social justice, advocacy, multiculturalism and preparation to work with a diverse population (as defined in the preamble to the ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors).

What Do School Staff Members, Parents and Students Need to Know About Issues Related to Election Conversations?

- Words matter – We have all been exposed to harsh political rhetoric, particularly through television and social media. Talk about how this rhetoric can damage relationships and cause unnecessary stress on others. Work with students to develop language that expresses their opinion in a manner that is respectful of others' views.
- Social media may be part of the issue – Consider limiting access to social media when individuals are having problems interacting with others regarding political issues. Excessive exposure to social media may worsen the issue.
- Help students process information or images they find inflammatory in print, television and social media. Often, simply discussing current events can help students develop a better understanding of the issues, and expressing themselves emotions can help students deal with their emotions more effectively.
- Check in with students who may be at risk for bullying and harassment, recognizing that all students have the right to be treated equally and fairly, with dignity and respect as unique individuals, free from discrimination, harassment and bullying. Reassure them there are adults who can help, work with them to identify individuals who can help in a time of need, and encourage them to seek out a trusted adult they are comfortable talking to.
- Don't provide platitudes or assurances you can't fulfill. If students are fearful, don't tell them, "Everything will be okay." For some students, the dangers they fear are very real. However, you can help them find positive ways to address their fears.
- Know where to go for help – Ensure school staff, families and students know to which school staff they should report concerns about harassment or inappropriate behaviors. Warning signs of emotional distress include behaviors such as
 - acting out
 - withdrawal
 - sleeping too much or too little
 - feelings of hopelessness
 - excessive worrying
 - nonparticipation in regular activities
- Share school resources – Let school staff, families and students know that administrators, school counselors and other school staff are always a resource to address student concerns and help students achieve success.
- Share community resources – Publicize community resources for additional assistance, including individuals and organizations focused on celebrating differences.

Additional Resources

ASCA Resources

[The Role of the School Counselor](#)
[ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success](#)
[ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors](#)

ASCA Position Statements:

[The School Counselor and Equity for All Students](#)

ASCA Magazine Articles:

[Live Love, Teach Peace Address](#)
[Student Anxiety](#)

ASCA Webinars:

[Working With Undocumented Secondary-Level Students](#)
[Infusing a Caring Climate in Your School Alleviating Anxiety Through School Counseling Interventions](#)

Publication:

[A Framework for Safe and Successful Schools](#)

[Teaching Tolerance](#)
[Speak Up for Civility](#)
[Voting and Election Resources for a Civil Classroom](#)

[Facing History and Ourselves](#)

[Fostering Civil Discourse: A Guide for Classroom Conversations](#)

[Post-election Support for Facilitating Difficult Conversations](#)

[Educator Resources](#)

[The New York Times](#)

[Civil Conversation for Teens Challenge: Voting and Democracy](#)

[Johns Hopkins University](#)

[Engaging Students in Civic Discourse](#)

[Anti-Defamation League](#)

[11 Ways Schools Can Help Students Feel Safe in Challenging Times](#)

[The National Association of School Psychologists](#)

[Guidance for Reinforcing Safe, Supportive and Positive School Environments for All Students](#)

[The Child Mind Institute](#)

[How to Help Children Cope With Frightening News](#)

[PBS.org](#)

[Talking With Kids About the News](#)