



asca **research report**

New School Counseling Professionals

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New School Counseling Professionals

In November 2024, the American School Counselor Association distributed a survey to a sample of ASCA members designed to gather feedback from school counselors within their first four years of professional practice. The survey asked questions about what respondents learned in their graduate programs, including whether they were trained in accepted standards and best practices and how prepared they felt when they began working in schools.

Methodology

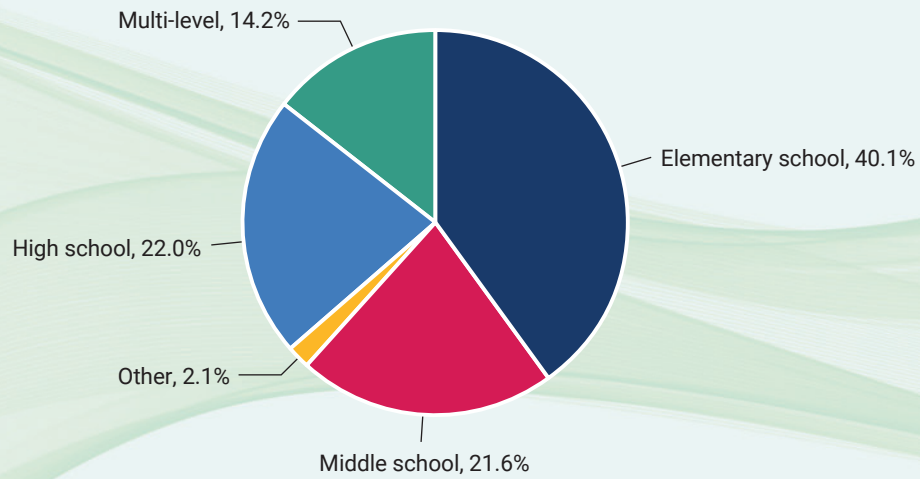
Research was conducted via an electronic survey using the Qualtrics platform. An email invitation with a unique link to the survey site was sent to approximately 7,300 including 1,800 members identified as school counselors in their first year of professional practice. Among the more than 700 respondents were 497 respondents who fit the survey criteria of being in practice for four or fewer years. The statistical universe measured in the survey is derived from a universe of approximately 26,000 school counselors who have been practicing for less than five years (based on [131,230 school counselors in 2023-23](#) and [ASCA research](#) on school counselor tenure). Responses were calculated at the 95% confidence level with a margin of error of +/- 4%, which is in the acceptable range of 95% +/-5%.

Respondent Demographics

Likely due to the oversampling of school counselors in their first year of practice, 35% of respondents indicated they are in their first year as a school counselor, followed by 29% in their second year, 20% in their third year and 12% in their fourth year. Another 5 percent indicated they were in their fifth-plus year and were excluded from the data collection.

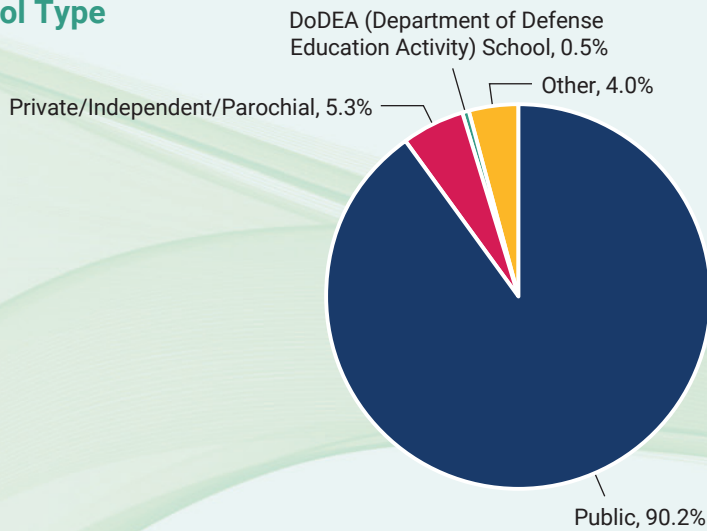
The largest portion of respondents (40%) are elementary school counselors, followed by 22% who are high school counselors, 22% who are middle school counselors, 14% who work in multi-level settings and 2% work in other settings, such as a juvenile detention center.

Work Setting

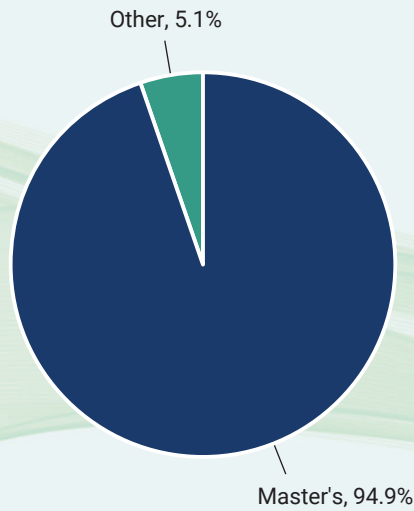


Ninety percent of respondents work at public schools, with the remainder working in other types of schools, including independent schools, Department of Defense Education Activity school or incarcerated school. Ninety-five percent of new professionals hold a master's degree. Others hold a specialist degree or are completing their master's degree.

School Type

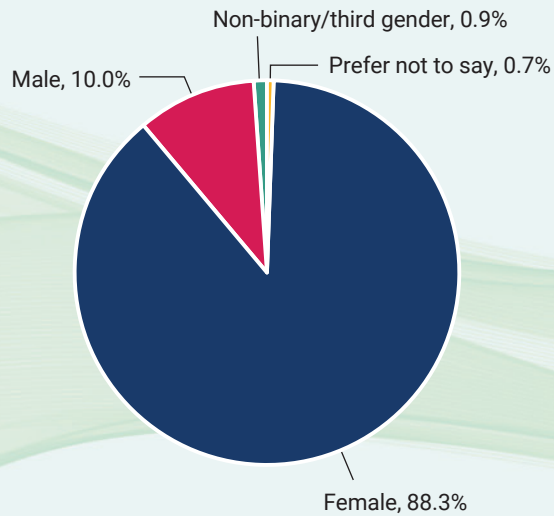


Highest Level of Education

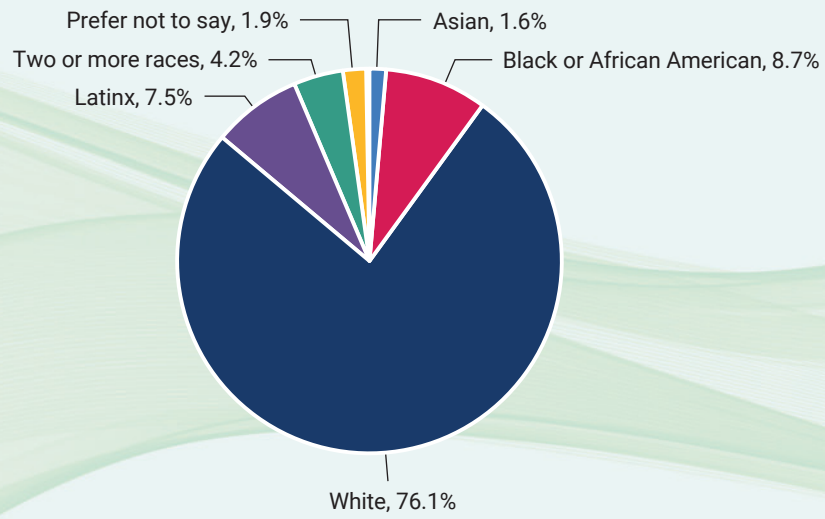


Nearly nine in 10 respondents are female. More than three quarters (76%) are white, 9% are Black, nearly 8% are Latinx, while the remainder represent other races/ethnicities. In terms of sexual orientation, 87% are heterosexual, 5% are bisexual, 3% are gay/lesbian and about 5% say something else or they prefer not to say. These findings are similar to the overall ASCA member demographics where 87% are female, 74% are white, 11% are Black, 10% are Hispanic, 2% are Asian and 2% are two or more races.

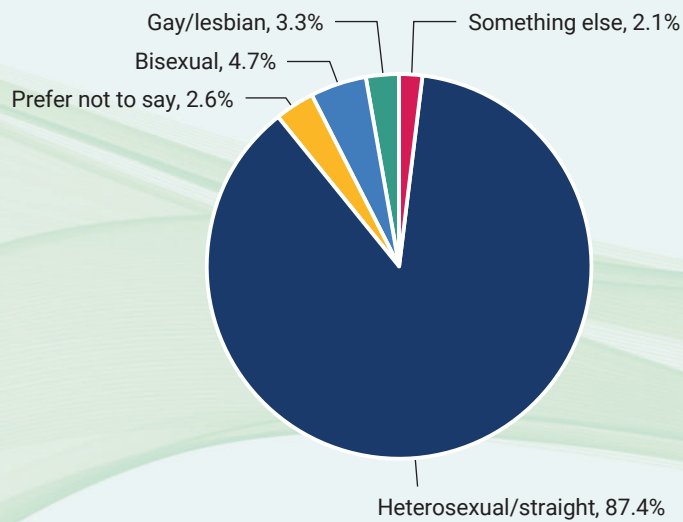
Gender Identity



Race/Ethnicity

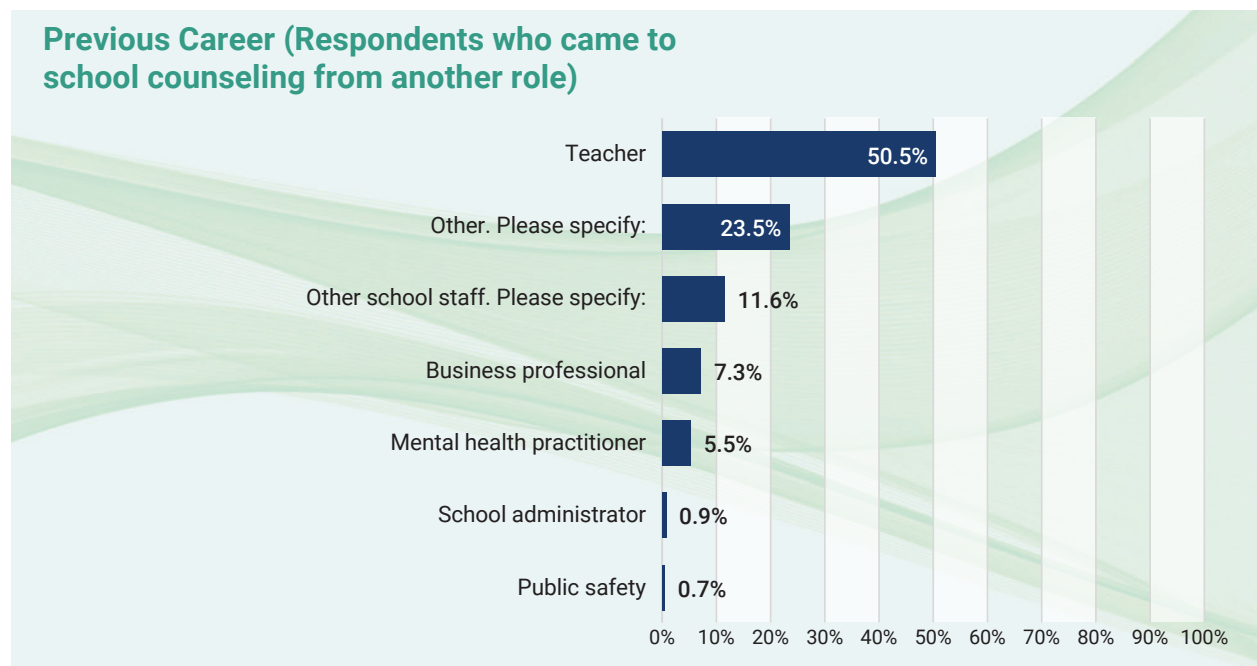
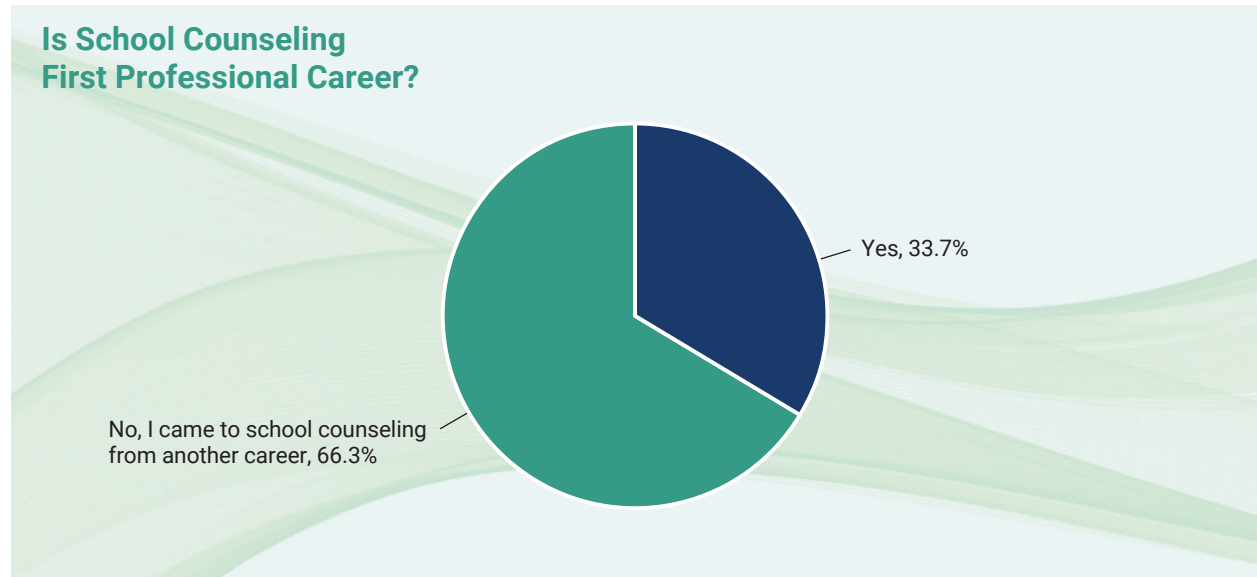


Sexual Orientation



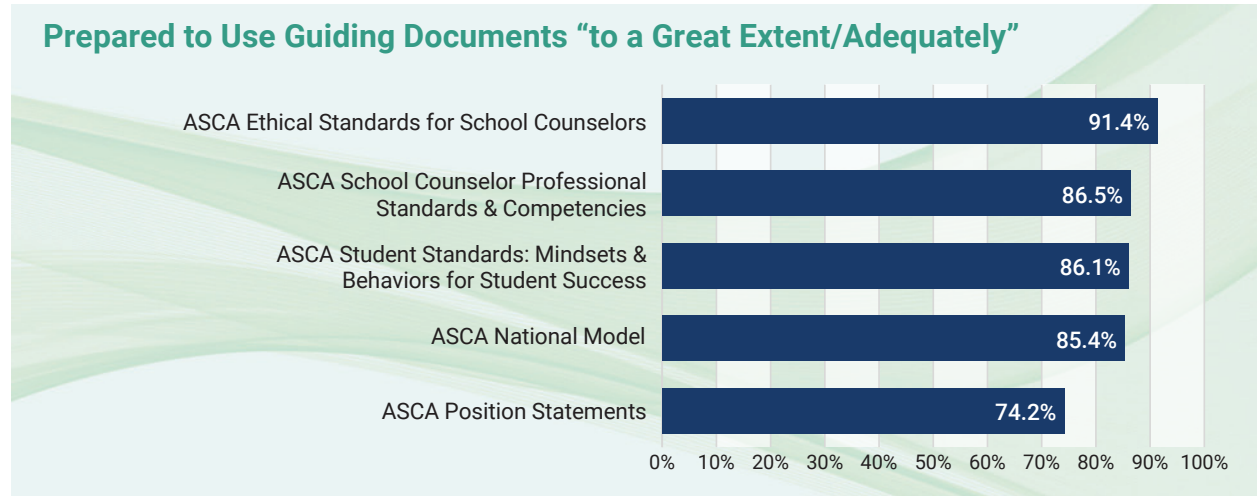
Career Paths

For about one third of respondents (34%), school counseling is their first career. The remaining respondents came to school counseling from a different career, mostly teaching (51%), while 13% worked as paraprofessionals, behavior interventionists, special education teachers and administrators. Another 7% were business professionals and 6% were mental health practitioners before becoming school counselors. Less than one percent came from public safety careers. Other jobs mentioned include military service, child welfare professionals and higher education.



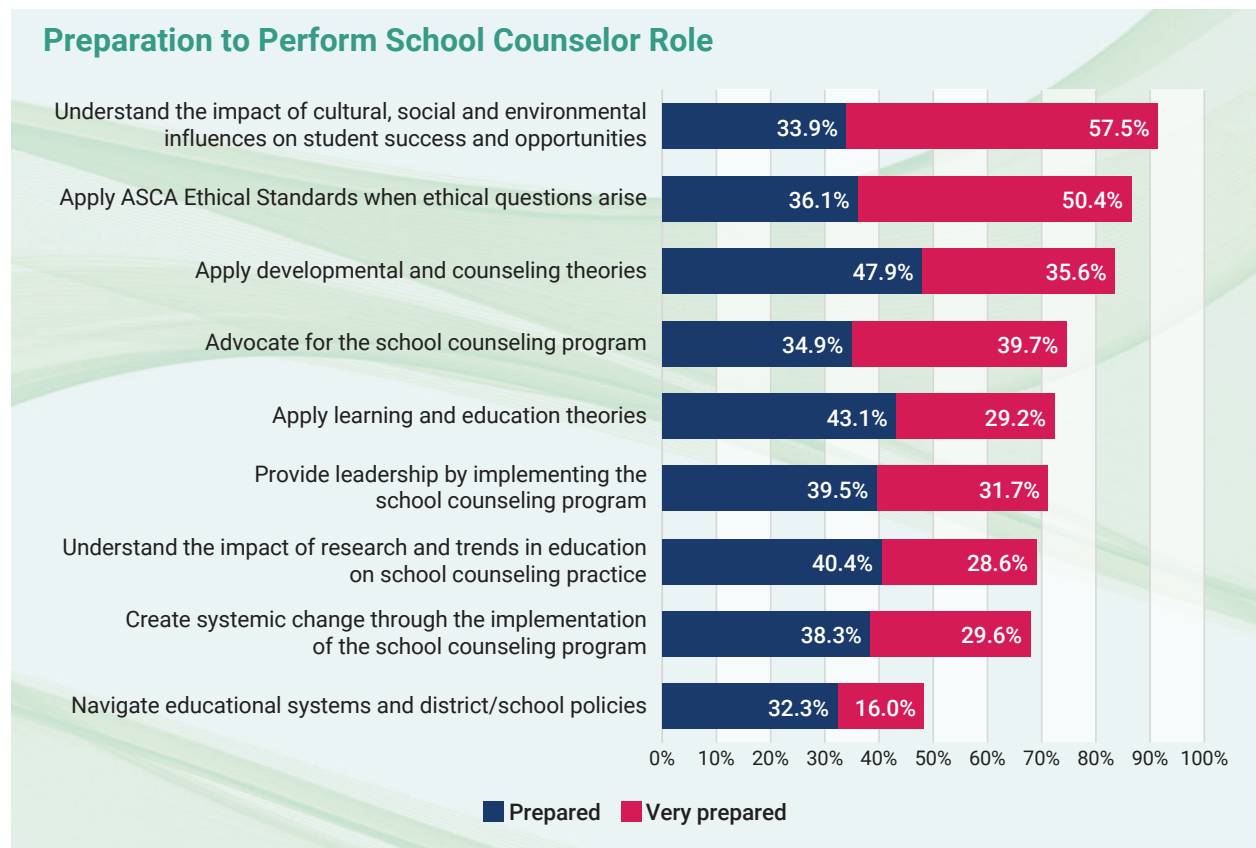
Preparation in Standards and Concepts

New professionals indicated their graduate programs largely prepared them to use ASCA’s guiding documents and standards, especially the ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors (91% to a great extent/adequately), followed by ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards & Competencies (87%), ASCA Student Standards (86%) and the ASCA National Model (85%). Nearly three quarters indicate their graduate program prepared them in the ASCA position statements to a great extent or adequately.



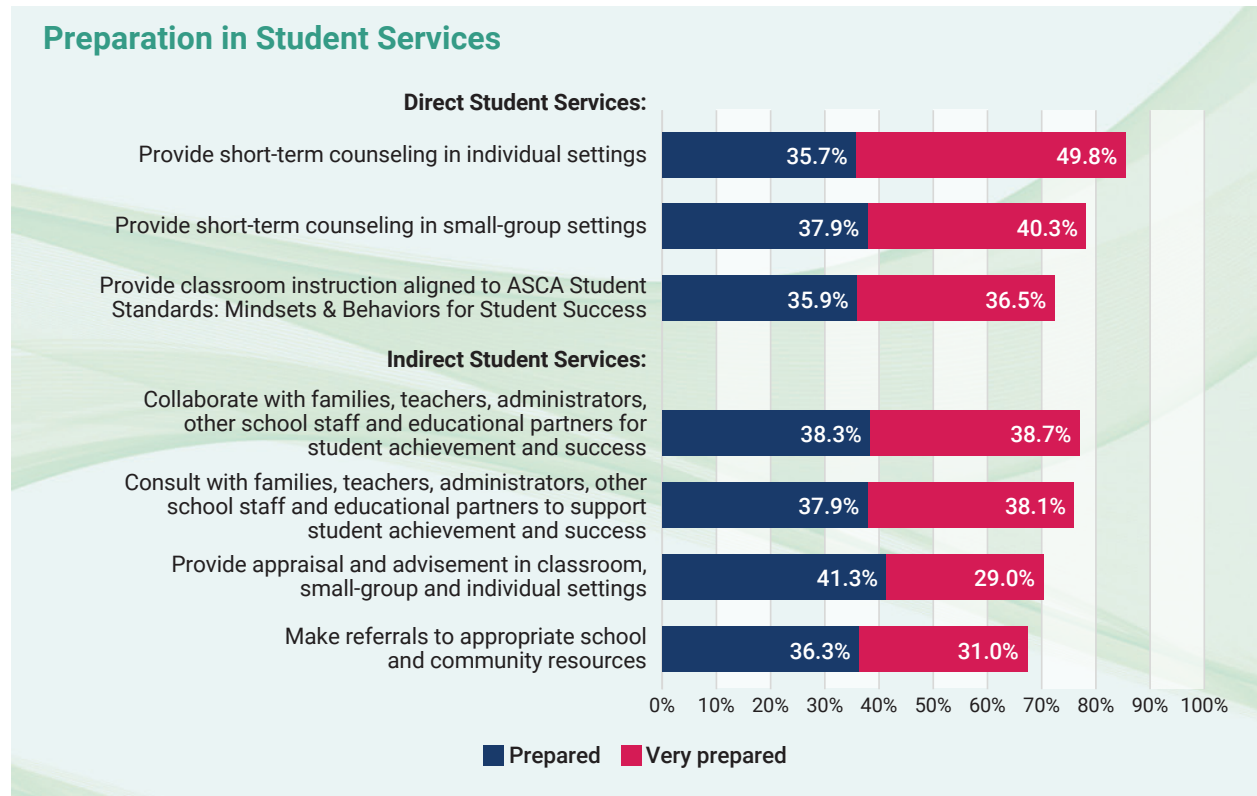
In all areas, new professionals working as high school counselors indicate they were more prepared in the ASCA documents and standards, especially the ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards & Competencies (93% to a great extent/adequately) and the ASCA National Model (91%). Says one respondent, “It would have been beneficial to spend more time discussing FAFSA, college application process, searching for scholarships, and aligning [school counseling] lessons to ASCA and state counseling standards.”

New professionals also noted that they were very prepared/prepared by their graduate programs to understand the impact of cultural, social and environmental influences on student success and opportunities (91%), apply ASCA Ethical Standards when ethical questions arise (87%), and apply developmental and counseling theories (84%). Roughly seven in 10 were very prepared/prepared to advocate for the school counseling program (75%), apply learning and education theories (72%), provide leadership by implementing the school counseling program (71%), understand the impact of research and trends in education on school counseling practice (69%) and create systemic change through the implementation of the school counseling program (68%). However, only 48% were very prepared/prepared by their programs to navigate educational systems and district/school policies.



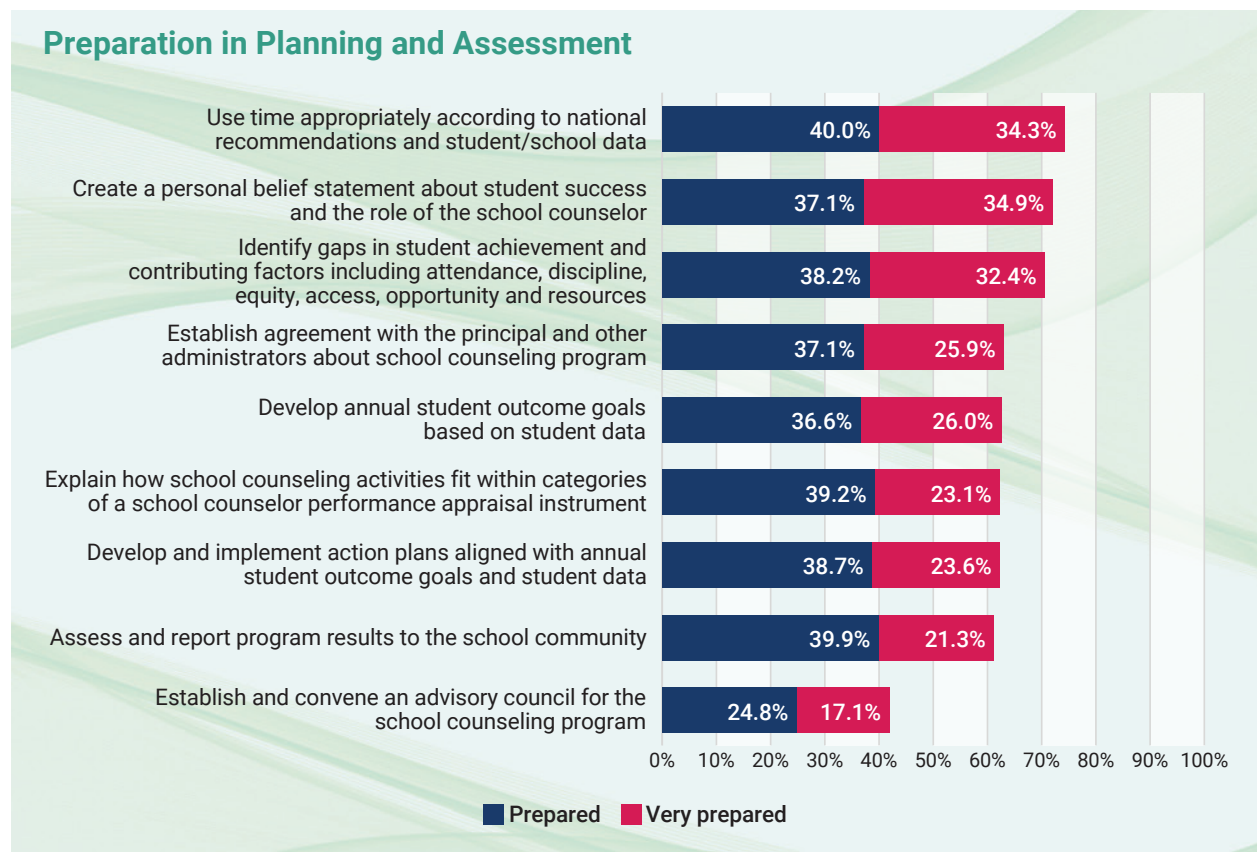
Direct and Indirect Student Services

New school counseling professionals indicate their master’s programs prepared them to provide a range of student services, especially, provide short-term counseling in individual settings (86% very prepared/prepared), provide short-term counseling in small-group settings (78%), collaborate with families, teachers, administrators, other school staff and educational partners for student achievement and success (77%), and consult with families teachers, administrators, other school staff and educational partners to support student achievement and success (76%).



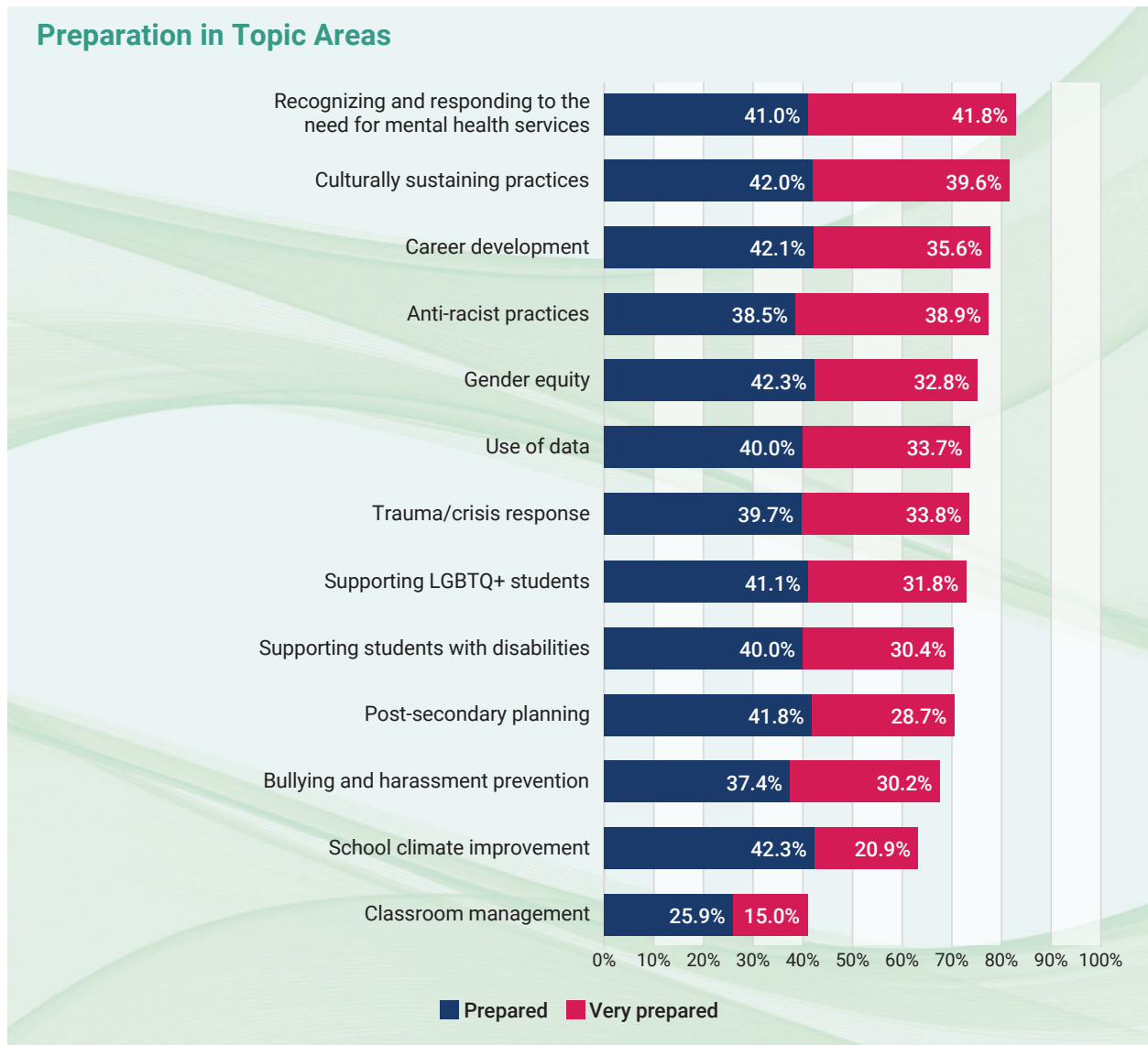
Preparation in Planning and Assessment

New professionals also noted that they were very prepared/prepared by their school counseling graduate programs to use time appropriately according to national recommendations and student/school data (74%), create a personal belief statement about student success and the role of the school counselor (72%), identify gaps in student achievement and contributing factors to achievement, including attendance, discipline, equity, access, opportunity and resources (71%). To a somewhat lesser extent, they were prepared to discuss and educate the principal/administrator about the school counseling program (63% very prepared/prepared), develop goals based on student data (63%), explain how school counseling activities fit within categories of a school counselor performance appraisal instrument (62%) and other factors, as the chart shows.



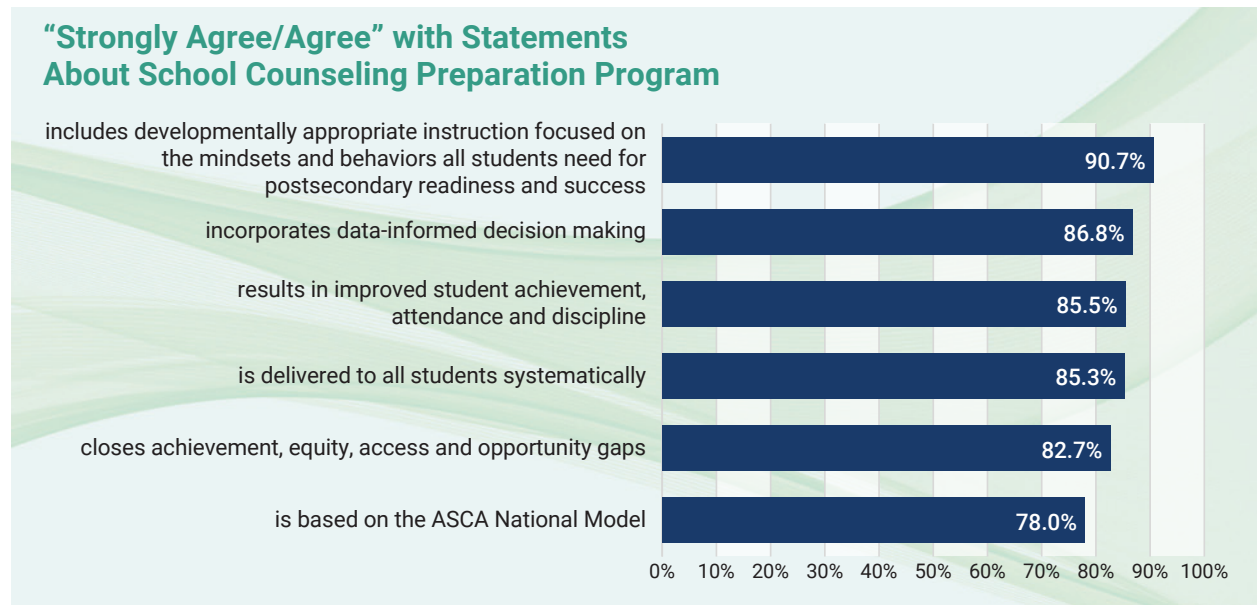
Preparation for Addressing Topics

New professionals were asked how well their master’s program prepared them to address a number of key topic areas. Respondents indicated they were most prepared to recognize and respond to the need for mental health services (83% very prepared/prepared), followed by culturally sustaining practices (82%), career development (78%), anti-racist practices (77%), gender equity (75%), use of data (74%), trauma/crisis response (74%), supporting LGBTQ+ students (73%), post-secondary planning (71%), supporting students with disabilities (70%), bullying and harassment prevention (68%), school climate improvement (63%) and classroom management (41%).



Current School Counseling Program

Respondents agree that their school counseling program in their current school includes developmentally appropriate instruction focused on the mindsets and behaviors all students need for postsecondary readiness and success (91% strongly agree/agree), incorporates data-informed decision-making (87%), results in improved student achievement, and contributing factors to achievement – attendance and discipline (86%), is delivered to all students systematically (85%), closes achievement, equity, access and opportunity gaps (83%) and is based on the ASCA National Model (78%). These findings are similar to the 2025 ASCA State of the Profession Study, which also found that 74% of respondents agreed their school counseling programs were based on the ASCA National Model. However, new school counseling professionals are more likely to incorporate data-informed decision-making (82% vs. 81% of 2025 State of the Profession respondents).

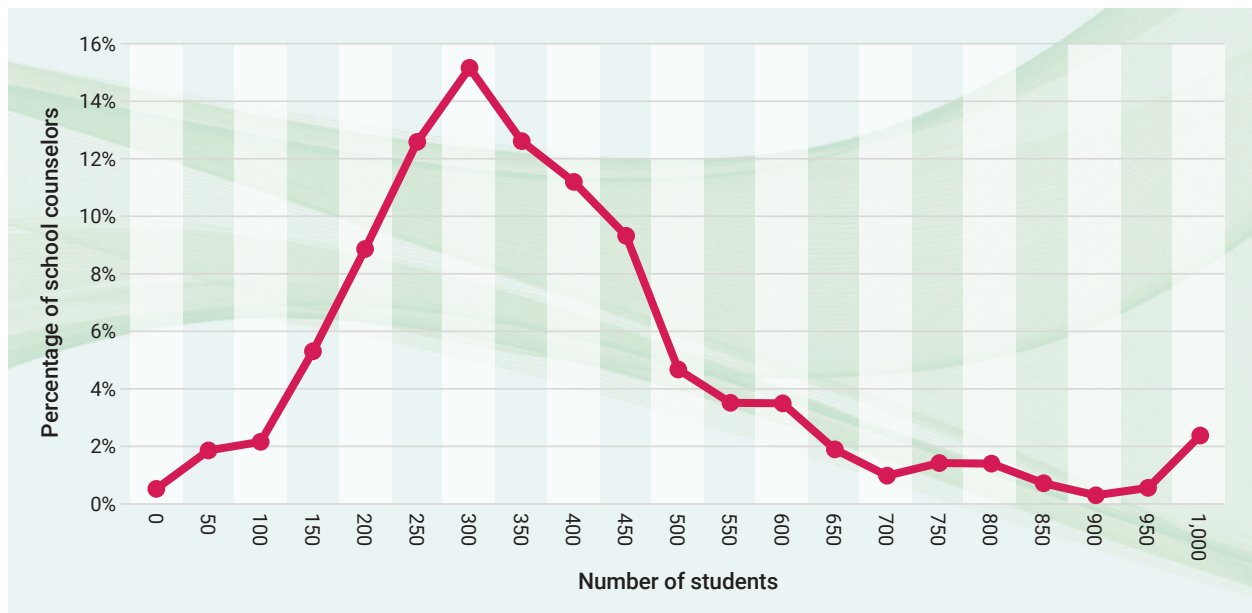


Respondents typically spend an average of 47% of their time in direct services, which is significantly less than what was observed in the 2025 ASCA State of the Profession Survey (57%), though the standard deviation (the amount of variation around the average) is significant, meaning some may spend much more. Additionally, on average, they spend 19% in indirect services, 11% in non-school counseling tasks, 10% defining, managing and assessing the school counseling program, and 7% in fair-share responsibility activities. They are responsible for an average of 374 students.

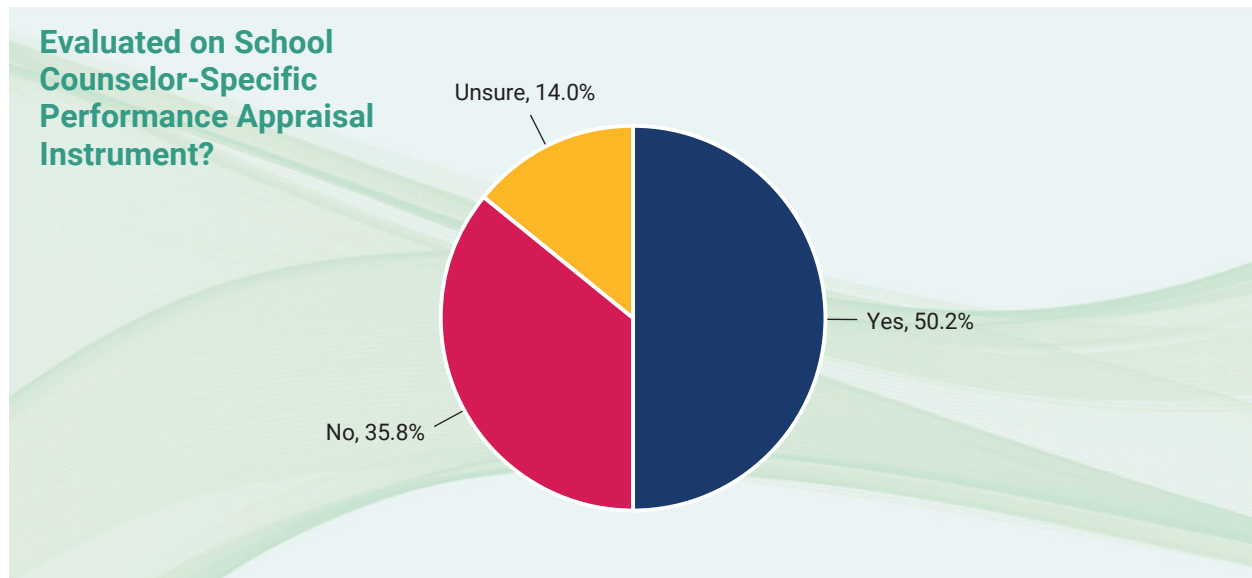
Time spent in each area during a school year:

	Average	Std Deviation
Direct student services: instruction, appraisal and advisement, and counseling	46.8	23.1
Indirect student services: referrals, consultation, collaboration	18.5	12.1
Defining, managing and assessing the school counseling program (e.g., analyzing data, creating school counseling action plans and results reports)	9.8	8.6
Fair-share responsibility activities (e.g., duties in rotation with all school staff)	7.1	8.3
Non-school-counseling tasks (e.g., test coordination, 504 coordination, extensive lunch or bus duty beyond fair share)	10.9	11.7

Average number of students in caseload:



Half of new school counselors (50%) are evaluated on a school counselor-specific performance appraisal instrument, 36% are not and the remainder are unsure. According to ASCA data collected from its state/territory school counselor associations (50 states, plus Washington, D.C., Guam, and U.S.V.I.), 57% of states/territories use a school counseling-specific appraisal instrument.



Insights and Implications

The results of the New School Counseling Professionals Study indicate that beginning school counselors are largely prepared in ASCA standards and key topics during their school counseling graduate programs, in particular the ASCA Ethical Standards, as well as the ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards & Competencies, ASCA Student Standards and the ASCA National Model. They also are well trained in school counseling concepts and the tenets of the ASCA National Model.

However, the quantitative data, as well as comments from respondents demonstrate they may be less prepared for some day-to-day tasks. Additionally, although respondents were very prepared/prepared by their graduate programs to understand the impact of cultural, social and environmental influences on student success and opportunities (91%), only 48% were very prepared/prepared by their programs to navigate educational systems and district/school policies. Or, while they were most prepared to recognize and respond to the need for mental health services (83% very prepared/prepared), scores were less strong for school climate improvement (63%) and classroom management (41%). As one respondent noted, “I do not think my school counseling program prepared me to understand common encounters as a high school counselor like juvenile officers, working alongside case workers, supporting students and families with poor attendance, dealing with students that struggle with truancy, managing small groups in a high school setting, and how to handle individual counseling/when to refer out at the high school level.” Another respondent commented, “While my education has provided a strong foundation, the most valuable preparation has been the opportunity to work in this role while pursuing my degree. This experience allowed me to apply what I was learning in real-time, bridging theory and practice seamlessly.”

When discussing their current school counseling programs, data indicates programs are largely based on the components of the ASCA National Model. As one respondent said, “The counseling and advisement department in our district is amazing. All things based on the ASCA model and standards, very supportive and advocate for our roles and ratios, and consistently provide opportunities for professional development.”

Findings suggest that while new school counselors enter the field well-prepared in ASCA standards and core counseling concepts, gaps remain in practical, day-to-day responsibilities and navigating systemic processes. These insights highlight the need for targeted training in real-world tasks such as policy navigation, college readiness support and managing diverse student needs