



ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards & Competencies

(Adopted 2007; revised 2012, 2019, 2025)

The ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards & Competencies outline the mindsets and behaviors school counselors need to meet the rigorous demands of the school counseling profession and the needs of pre-K–12 students. These standards and competencies help ensure new and experienced school counselors are equipped to establish, maintain and enhance a school counseling program addressing academic achievement, career planning and social/emotional development. These standards and competencies can be used in a variety of ways including:

School counselors

- Self-assess their own mindsets and behaviors
- Formulate an appropriate professional development plan

School administrators

- Guide the recruitment and selection of competent school counselors
- Develop or inform meaningful school counselor performance appraisal

School counselor education programs

- Establish benchmarks for ensuring school counseling students graduate with the knowledge, attitudes and skills needed to develop a school counseling program.

Organization of the ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards & Competencies

The ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards & Competencies are organized by mindset standards and behavior standards and competencies. The standards are broader topics that describe the knowledge, attitudes and skills school counselors need to implement a school counseling program. The competencies are more specific and measurable indicators of the behavior standards.

Mindsets: The mindset standards include beliefs school counselors hold about student achievement and success. Although it

may be possible to measure these beliefs, the mindsets are more readily recognized through the behaviors a school counselor demonstrates as a result of the implementation of a school counseling program. Therefore, the mindset standards do not have correlating competencies.

Behaviors: The behavior standards include essential behaviors school counselors demonstrate through the implementation of a school counseling program including:

1. Professional foundation – the essential skills that are the basis of a school counselor’s professional orientation
2. Direct and indirect student services – interactions that are provided directly to students or indirectly for students in collaboration with education partners, such as families, staff, administrators, decision-makers, and any other school or community organizations/individuals.
3. Planning and assessment – activities necessary for the design, implementation and assessment of the school counseling program

Each behavior standard has specific competencies that are measurable indicators of the broader standard. These competencies can be used to further define the behaviors necessary for the implementation of a school counseling program.

The mindsets and behaviors standards are found in the following chart, and the behavior competencies are listed afterward.

ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards & Competencies

MINDSETS

School counselors believe:

- M 1.** Each and every student can learn and succeed.
- M 2.** Each and every student deserves access to and opportunity for a high-quality education.
- M 3.** Each and every student should graduate from high school prepared for postsecondary opportunities.
- M 4.** Each and every student deserves access to a school counseling program.
- M 5.** Effective school counseling is a collaborative process involving school counselors, students, families, teachers, administrators and other education partners.
- M 6.** School counselors are leaders in the school, district, state and nation.
- M 7.** School counseling programs promote and enhance student academic, career and social/emotional development.

BEHAVIORS

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

Professional Foundation	Direct and Indirect Student Services	Planning and Assessment
B-PF 1. Apply developmental, learning, counseling and education theories	B-SS 1. Design and implement instruction aligned to the ASCA Student Standards: Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success in classroom, large-group, small-group and individual settings	B-PA 1. Articulate how the school counseling program aligns with the school and district vision and mission
B-PF 2. Apply knowledge of educational systems, legal issues, policies, research and trends in education	B-SS 2. Provide appraisal & advisement in classroom, large-group, small-group and individual settings	B-PA 2. Identify achievement gaps and factors contributing to those gaps
B-PF 3. Apply legal and ethical principles of the school counseling profession	B-SS 3. Provide short-term counseling in small-group and individual settings	B-PA 3. Develop achievement gap plans based on student data annually
B-PF 4. Apply school counseling professional standards and competencies	B-SS 4. Make referrals to appropriate school and community resources	B-PA 4. Assess and report program impact to the school community
B-PF 5. Use the ASCA Student Standards: Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success to inform the implementation of a school counseling program	B-SS 5. Consult to support student achievement and success	B-PA 5. Use time appropriately according to national recommendations and student/school data
B-PF 6. Apply knowledge of cultural, social and environmental influences to enhance student success and opportunities	B-SS 6. Collaborate with families, teachers, administrators and other education partners for student achievement and success	B-PA 6. Establish agreement about the school counseling program with the administrator in charge of the program
B-PF 7. Provide leadership through the development and implementation of a school counseling program		B-PA 7. Establish and convene an advisory council for the school counseling program
B-PF 8. Advocate for a school counseling program		B-PA 8. Use appropriate school counselor performance appraisal process
B-PF 9. Create systemic change through the implementation of a school counseling program		

PROFESSIONAL FOUNDATION

B-PF 1. Apply developmental, learning, counseling and education theories

- a. Use human development theories to have an impact on developmental issues affecting student success
- b. Use learning theory to support student achievement and success, including students with diverse learning needs
- c. Use established and emerging evidence-based counseling theories and techniques that are effective in a school setting to promote academic, career and social/emotional development, including but not limited to rational emotive behavior therapy, reality therapy, cognitive-behavioral therapy, Adlerian, solution-focused brief counseling, person-centered counseling and family systems
- d. Use counseling theories and techniques in individual, small-group, classroom and large-group settings to promote academic, career and social/emotional development
- e. Use career development theories to promote and support postsecondary planning
- f. Use principles of a multitiered system of supports within the context of a school counseling program to provide instruction and interventions matched to student need

B-PF 2. Apply knowledge of educational systems, legal issues, policies, research and trends in education

- a. Explain the organizational structure and governance of the American educational system as well as cultural, political and social influences on current educational practices
- b. Explain educational systems, philosophies and theories and current trends in education, including federal and state legislation
- c. Explain and/or inform the process for development of policy and procedures at the building, district, state and national levels
- d. Explain the history of school counseling to create a context for the current state of the profession and school counseling programs
- e. Explain the nature of academic, career and social/emotional counseling in schools and the similarities and differences between school counseling and other fields of counseling, such as mental health, marriage and family, substance abuse counseling, social work and psychology, within a continuum of care
- f. Delineate the roles of student service providers, such as school social worker, school psychologist or school nurse, and identify best practices for collaborating to have an impact on student success
- g. Articulate a rationale for a school counseling program
- h. Use education research to inform decisions and programming
- i. Use current trends in technology to promote student success

B-PF 3. Apply legal and ethical principles of the school counseling profession

- a. Practice within the ethical principles of the school counseling profession in accordance with the ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors
- b. Adhere to the legal responsibilities of the role of the school counselor including the unique legal and ethical principles of working with minor students in a school setting
- c. Adhere to the ethical and statutory limits of confidentiality
- d. Fulfill legal and ethical obligations to families, teachers, administrators and other school staff
- e. Consult with school counselors and other education, counseling and legal professionals when legal and ethical questions arise
- f. Resolve ethical dilemmas by employing an ethical decision-making model in accordance with the ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors
- g. Model ethical behavior
- h. Engage in continual professional development to inform and guide ethical and legal work

B-PF 4. Apply school counseling professional standards and competencies

- a. Stay current with school counseling research and best practices
- b. Conduct and analyze self-appraisal and assessment related to school counseling professional standards and competencies
- c. Use personal reflection, consultation and supervision to promote professional growth and development
- d. Develop a yearly professional development plan to ensure engagement in professional growth opportunities related to relevant professional standards and competencies and personal limitations

B-PF 5. Use the ASCA Student Standards: Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success to inform the implementation of a school counseling program

- a. Select ASCA Student Standards: Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success to address student needs demonstrated in data
- b. Use the ASCA Student Standards to guide the focus of strategies in classroom, large-group, small-group and individual settings to improve life-readiness and achievement for each and every student
- c. Prioritize ASCA Student Standards: Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success aligned with school improvement goals
- d. Select or create learning objectives aligned with the ASCA Student Standards: Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success or other state-specific standards
- e. Articulate how the ASCA Student Standards promote positive mental health development

PROFESSIONAL FOUNDATION, cont.

B-PF 6. Apply knowledge of cultural, social and environmental influences to enhance student success and opportunities

- a. 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
- b. Explain how students' cultural, social and economic background may affect their academic achievement, behavior, relationships and overall performance in school
- c. Maintain and communicate high expectations for each and every student, regardless of cultural, social or economic background
- d. Explain the dynamics of cross-cultural communications and demonstrate the ability to communicate with persons of other cultures effectively
- e. Collaborate with administrators, teachers and other staff in the school and district to ensure culturally sustaining curricula and student-centered instruction
- f. Understand personal limitations and biases, and articulate how they may affect the school counselor's work

B-PF 7. Provide leadership through the development and implementation of a school counseling program

- a. Identify sources of power and authority and formal and informal leadership
- b. Identify and demonstrate professional and personal qualities and skills of effective leaders
- c. Apply a model of leadership to a school counseling program
- d. Create the organizational structure and components of an effective school counseling program aligned with the ASCA National Model®
- e. Apply the results of a school counseling program assessment to inform the design and implementation of the school counseling program
- f. Use leadership skills to facilitate positive change for the school counseling program
- g. Define the role of the school counselor and the school counseling program in the school crisis plan
- h. Serve as a leader in the school and community to promote and support student success

- i. Participate in the school improvement process to bring the school counseling perspective to the development of school goals

B-PF 8. Demonstrate advocacy for a school counseling program

- a. Model school counselor advocacy competencies to promote school counseling program development and student success
- b. Advocate responsibly for school board policy and local, state and federal statutory requirements in students' best interests
- c. Explain the benefits of a school counseling program for students, families, teachers, administrators and other school staff, school boards, department of education, school counselors, school counselor educators, community partners and business leaders
- d. Articulate and provide rationale for appropriate activities for school counselors
- e. Articulate and provide rationale for discontinuation of inappropriate activities for school counselors
- f. Use data (e.g., achievement gap, lesson plan and small-group data reports) to promote reduction in student-to-school-counselor ratios and reduction of inappropriate non-school-counseling-related tasks
- g. Participate in school counseling and education-related professional organizations

B-PF 9. Create systemic change through the implementation of a school counseling program

- a. Create an environment promoting and supporting student success using leadership, advocacy and collaboration
- b. Use data to identify how school, district and state educational policies, procedures and practices support and/or impede student success
- c. Use data to demonstrate a need to address systemic barriers in areas such as course enrollment patterns; access; achievement, opportunity and/or information gaps
- d. Develop and implement a plan to address personal and/or institutional resistance to change to better support student success

DIRECT AND INDIRECT STUDENT SERVICES

B-SS 1. Design and implement instruction aligned to the ASCA Student Standards: Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success in classroom, large-group, small-group and individual settings

- Use student, school and district achievement and contributing-factors data (e.g. attendance, discipline, systemic barriers, student perspectives and education partner perspectives) to identify issues to be addressed through instruction
- Identify appropriate evidence-based curricula aligned to the ASCA Student Standards: Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success or select/develop other materials informed by research and best practice if evidence-based materials do not exist
- Assess cultural and social trends when developing and choosing curricula
- Create lesson plans identifying standards to be addressed, activities to be delivered, to whom activities will be delivered, how they will be delivered and how data will be assessed to support access to the school counseling program and life-readiness for each and every student
- Demonstrate pedagogical skills, including culturally sustaining classroom management strategies, lesson planning and personalized instruction
- Use a variety of technologies in the delivery of lessons and activities
- Engage with school administrators, teachers and other staff to ensure the effective implementation of instruction
- Analyze data from lessons and strategies to determine impact on student access and life-readiness

B-SS 2. Provide appraisal & advisement in classroom, large-group, small-group and individual settings

- Develop strategies to provide appraisal & advisement to students and families about attaining the ASCA Student Standards: Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success
- Use assessments to help students understand their abilities, values and career interests
- Include career opportunities, labor market trends and global economics to help students develop immediate and long-range plans
- Help students cross reference individual assessment results (e.g. MBTI, Holland Code, ASVAB, O*Net) with occupational/career goals and universal screeners with wellness and life-readiness
- Help students understand how academic performance relates to the world of work, family life and community service
- Help students understand the importance of postsecondary education and/or training as a pathway to a career
- Help students and families understand and explore postsecondary options, including admissions and financial aid processes
- Connect students to workplace experiences to deepen understandings and explore career interests

B-SS 3. Provide short-term counseling in small-group and individual settings

- Use data to identify students in need of counseling intervention
- Provide support for students through individual and small-group counseling that promotes life-readiness and positive mental health during times of transition, heightened stress, critical change or other situations impeding student success
- Use the ASCA Student Standards to guide the focus of individual and small-group counseling
- Explain why providing short-term counseling is appropriate for a school counselor and providing long-term therapy is inappropriate
- Explain the impact of adverse childhood experiences and trauma, and demonstrate techniques to support students who have experienced trauma
- Respond with appropriate intervention strategies to meet the needs of the individual, group or school community before, during and after crisis response

B-SS 4. Make referrals to appropriate school and community resources

- Maintain a list of current referral resources, consistent with school and district policies, for students, staff and families to effectively address academic, career and social/emotional issues
- Communicate the limits of school counseling and the continuum of mental health services
- Articulate why diagnoses and long-term therapy are outside the scope of school counseling

B-SS 5. Consult to support student achievement and success

- Gather information on student needs from families, teachers, administrators, other school staff and community organizations to inform the selection of strategies for student success
- Share strategies that support student life-readiness and achievement with education partners
- Consult with school counselors and other education and counseling professionals when questions of school counseling practice arise
- Facilitate in-service training or workshops for families, administrators, other school staff, teachers or other education partners to share school counseling expertise

B-SS 6. Collaborate with families, teachers, administrators and other education partners for student achievement and success

- Partner with others to advocate for student achievement and educational opportunities for each and every student
- Explain the potential for dual roles with families/caretakers
- Identify and involve appropriate school and community professionals as well as the family in a crisis situation
- Supervise school counseling interns consistent with the principles of these Professional Standards & Competencies

PLANNING AND ASSESSMENT

B-PA 1. Articulate how the school counseling program aligns with the school and district vision and mission

- a. Analyze personal, school, district and state beliefs, assumptions and philosophies about student success
- b. Compose a personal beliefs statement about students, families, teachers, school counseling programs and the educational process consistent with the mindsets of the ASCA Professional Standards & Competencies
- c. Analyze the school and district vision and mission statements
- d. Articulate to administrators, teachers, school staff and other education partners how the school counseling program aligns with the school and district vision and mission

B-PA 2. Identify achievement gaps and factors contributing to those gaps

- a. Collect and analyze data to identify areas of success or achievement gaps between and among groups of students
- b. Review, disaggregate and interpret student achievement data to inform selection and implementation of strategies and interventions as needed
- c. Identify, review, disaggregate and interpret data of contributing factors to achievement, including attendance, discipline, systemic barriers, student perspectives and education partner perspectives to inform selection and implementation of strategies and interventions as needed
- d. Create goals based on student, school and/or district data to close achievement gaps

B-PA 3. Develop achievement gap plans based on student data annually

- a. Identify goals/priorities found in the school improvement plan, strategic plan, and district and state initiatives that could be addressed through school counseling program strategies
- b. Use goals from the school improvement plan and other student data to inform and establish school counseling data priorities
- c. Create achievement gap plans annually based on school counseling data priorities and student achievement data
- d. Determine appropriate students for the focus of achievement gap plans based on student, school and district data
- e. Identify intended impact on achievement as a result of achievement gap plan implementation
- f. Write goals in a measurable format and include baseline and projected final data within the goal statement
- g. Identify contributing-factors data (e.g. attendance, discipline, systemic barriers, etc.) that may inform the selection of strategies to reach the goal
- h. Identify student and education partner perspectives to gain insight on possible factors contributing to achievement issues
- i. Identify appropriate standards from the ASCA Student Standards: Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success that address needs identified in achievement gap plans

- j. Select evidence-based curricula and activities to accomplish objectives, or select/develop other materials informed by research and best practice if evidence-based materials do not exist
- k. Identify appropriate resources needed to implement plans
- l. Communicate achievement gap plans to administrators, teachers, school staff and other education partners
- m. Explain basic research sampling, methodology and analysis concepts as they relate to research outcomes and action research
- n. Use student data and feedback from students and education partners to monitor and refine achievement gap plans and strategies

B-PA 4. Assess and report program impact to the school community

- a. Explain concepts related to the assessment of access, life-readiness and achievement data within a school counseling program
- b. Review impact of the achievement gap plan's strategies and goals
- c. Analyze data to assess school counseling program effectiveness and to inform program development
- d. Collaborate with members of the school counseling team and with administration to decide how school counseling programs are assessed and how program impact is shared
- e. Use data to demonstrate the value the school counseling program adds to improvement in life-readiness skills and student achievement
- f. Use presentation skills to share the impact of the school counseling program with education partners

B-PA 5. Use time appropriately according to national recommendations and student/school data

- a. Articulate the distinction between direct and indirect student services
- b. Assess use of time in direct and indirect student services and program management and school support to determine how much time is spent in each school counseling program component
- c. Articulate the best use of a school counselor's time to meet student needs as identified through student data and school counseling program data priorities
- d. Organize and manage time to effectively implement a school counseling program using skills including scheduling, publicizing and prioritizing time
- e. Create annual and weekly calendars to plan activities reflecting school counseling program priorities
- f. Identify, evaluate and participate in fair-share responsibilities (i.e. the routine running of school responsibilities that all members of the school staff take equal turns doing to ensure the school's smooth operation)

PLANNING AND ASSESSMENT, cont.

B-PA 6. Establish agreement about the school counseling program with the administrator in charge of the program

- a. Complete ASCA National Model® templates for the school counseling program with other members of the school counseling staff
- b. Meet with the principal and/or administrator in charge of school counseling to formalize managing, delivery and assessing the school counseling program
- c. Explain and model the appropriate role of the school counselor and the organization of the school counseling program
- d. Explain achievement gap goals, their basis in student data and their alignment with the school improvement plan
- e. Advocate for the appropriate use of school counselor time based on national recommendations and student needs
- f. Finalize the Annual Administrator Conference Template after presentation to and discussion with the principal and/or administrator in charge of school counseling

B-PA 7. Establish and convene an advisory council for the school counseling program

- a. Determine appropriate education partners for representation on the advisory council
- b. Develop effective and efficient advisory council meeting agendas

- c. Explain how the school counseling program aligns with the school and district mission
- d. Explain and discuss school data, school counseling data priorities, school counseling plans (e.g., achievement gap, ASCA Student Standards delivery plan, lesson plans and small-group plans) and program assessment
- e. Record advisory council meeting notes, and distribute as appropriate
- f. Analyze and incorporate feedback from the advisory council related to school counseling data priorities and plans as appropriate

B-PA 8. Use appropriate school counselor performance appraisal process

- a. Explain and advocate for appropriate school counselor performance appraisal process based on school counselor standards and implementation of the school counseling program
- b. Explain how school counseling activities fit within categories of a performance appraisal instrument
- c. Utilize components of the ASCA National Model® to document data-informed, student-focused activities that demonstrate evidence of meeting standards of performance appraisal instruments

Citation Guide

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