



The Role of the Professional School Counselor

Professional school counselors are certified/licensed educators with a minimum of a master's degree in school counseling making them uniquely qualified to address all students' academic, personal/social and career development needs by designing, implementing, evaluating and enhancing a comprehensive school counseling program that promotes and enhances student success. Professional school counselors are employed in elementary, middle/junior high and high schools; in district supervisory positions; and counselor education positions.

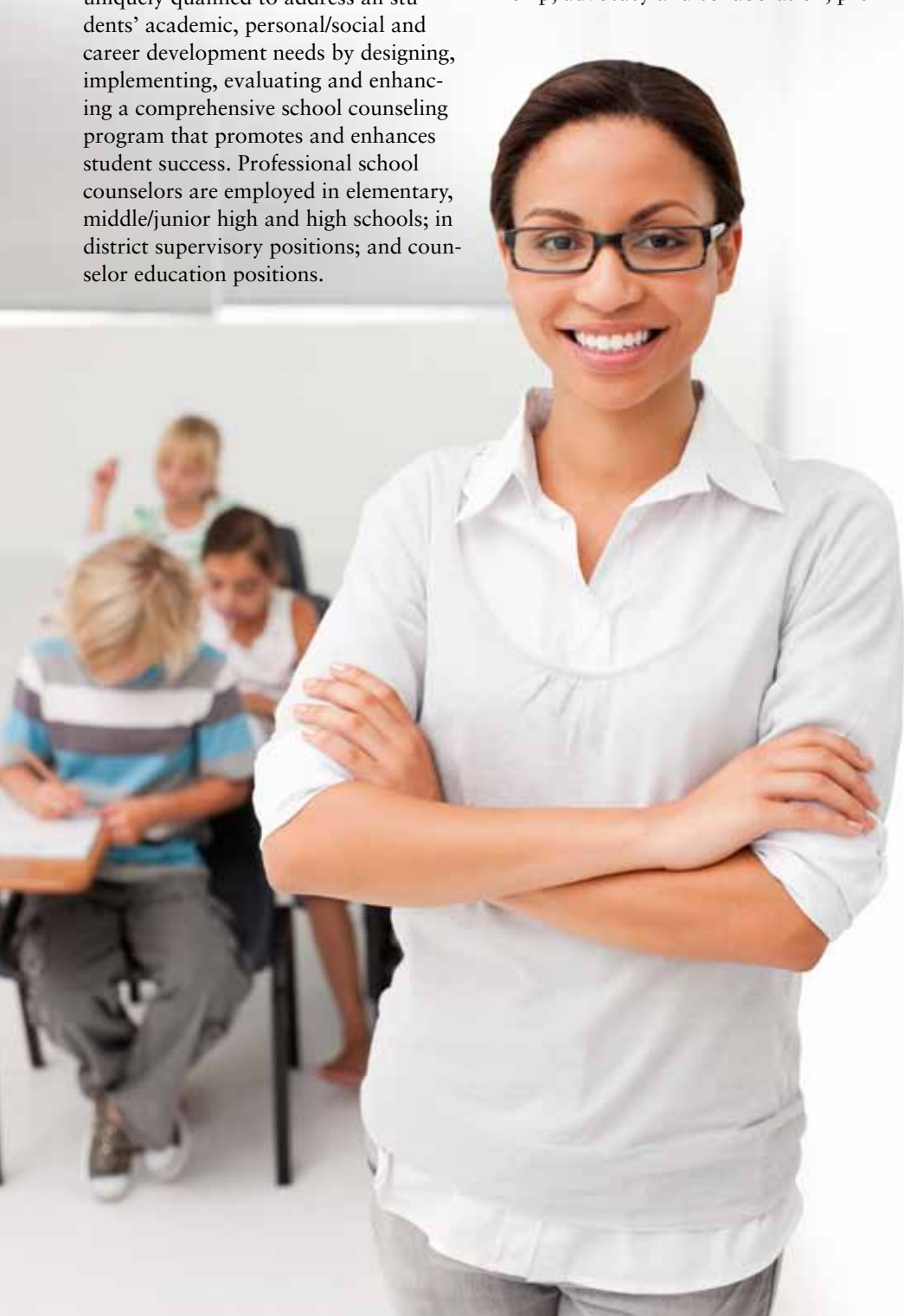
Professional school counselors serve a vital role in maximizing student success (Lapan, Gysbers, & Kayson, 2007; Stone & Dahir, 2006). Through leadership, advocacy and collaboration, pro-

fessional school counselors promote equity and access to rigorous educational experiences for all students. Professional school counselors support a safe learning environment and work to safeguard the human rights of all members of the school community (Sandhu, 2000), and address the needs of all students through culturally relevant prevention and intervention programs that are a part of a comprehensive school counseling program (Lee, 2001). The American School Counselor Association recommends a counselor-to-student ratio of 1:250.

THE PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL COUNSELOR'S ROLE

Professional school counselors have a minimum of a master's degree in school counseling, meet the state certification/licensure standards, and abide by the laws of the states in which they are employed. They uphold the ethical and professional standards of ASCA and other applicable professional counseling associations, and promote the development of the school counseling program based on the following areas of the ASCA National Model: Foundation, delivery, management and accountability.

Foundation Professional school counselors identify a philosophy based on school counseling theory and research/evidence-based practice that recognizes the need for all students to benefit from the school counseling program. Professional school counselors act on these philosophies to guide the development, implementation and evaluation of a culturally relevant and comprehensive school counseling programs. Professional school counselors create a mission statement supporting the school's mission and collaborate with other individuals and organizations to promote all students' academic, career and personal/social development.



Delivery

Professional school counselors provide culturally competent services to students, parents/guardians, school staff and the community in the following areas:

- **School Guidance Curriculum** – This curriculum consists of structured lessons designed to help students achieve the desired competencies and to provide all students with the knowledge and skills appropriate for their developmental level. The school guidance curriculum is delivered throughout the school's overall curriculum and is systematically presented by professional school counselors in collaboration with other professional educators in K-12 classroom and group activities.
- **Individual Student Planning** – Professional school counselors coordinate ongoing systemic activities designed to help students establish personal goals and develop future plans.
- **Responsive Services** – Responsive services consist of prevention and/or intervention activities to meet students' immediate and future needs. These needs can be necessitated by events and conditions in students' lives and the school climate and culture, and may require any of the following:
 - individual or group counseling
 - consultation with parents, teachers and other educators
 - referrals to other school support services or community resources
 - peer helping
 - psycho-education
 - intervention and advocacy at the systemic level

Professional school counselors develop confidential relationships with students to help them resolve and/or cope with problems and developmental concerns.

- **System Support** – System support consists of management activities establishing, maintaining, and enhancing the total school counseling program. These activities include professional development, consultation, collaboration, supervision, program management and operations. Professional school counselors are committed to continual personal and professional development and are proactively involved in professional organizations promoting school counseling at the local, state and national levels.

Management

Professional school counselors incorporate organizational processes and tools that are concrete, clearly delineated, and reflective of the school's needs. Processes and tools include:

- agreements developed with and approved by administrators for each school year addressing how the school counseling program is organized and what goals will be accomplished
- advisory councils include: students, parents/guardians, teachers, counselors, administrators and community members to review school counseling program goals and results and to make recommendations
- the use of student data to effect systemic change within the school system so every student receives the benefit of the school counseling program
- action plans for prevention and intervention services defining the desired student competencies and achievement results
- allotment of the professional school counselor's time in direct service with students as recommended in the ASCA National Model

- the use of annual and weekly calendars to keep students, parents/guardians, teachers, administrators, and community stakeholders informed and to encourage active participation in the school counseling program.

Accountability

Professional school counselors develop and implement data/needs-driven, standards-based and research-supported programs, and engage in continuous program evaluation activities. They also create results reports that demonstrate immediate, intermediate, and long-range effectiveness of comprehensive school counseling programs. Professional school counselors analyze outcome data to guide future action and improve future results for all students. The performance of the professional school counselor is evaluated using an instrument based on the School Counselor Performance Standards found in the ASCA National Model, and the ASCA School Counselor Competencies. These standards of practice are expected of professional school counselors when implementing a school counseling program.

Summary

Professional school counselors are certified/licensed educators with the minimum of a master's degree in school counseling and are uniquely qualified to address the developmental needs of all students through a comprehensive school counseling program addressing the academic, career and personal/social development of all students.

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References

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- Lee, C. (2001). Culturally responsive school counselors and programs: Addressing the needs of all students. *Professional School Counseling, 4*, 163-171.
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- Stone, C. B. & Dahir, C. A. (2006). *The transformed school counselor*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company.