



WSCA Position Statement on School Counseling Duties: COVID 19

Wisconsin School Counselor Association (WSCA) Position

Now more than ever our students, families and staff are experiencing trauma and stress related to COVID-19. We can see it in the attendance, academic, and behavior data being collected and the everyday interactions we have with those around us. This is a prime opportunity for school counselors to “provide leadership to create systemic change to enhance the school (ASCA, 2016, B.2)”. When school counselors are assigned roles and responsibilities that do not meet the ethical and legal standards as defined by ASCA and state and federal regulations, it takes away from their time to truly meet the needs of students. **The Wisconsin School Counselor Association (WSCA) encourages school counselors to collaborate with their administration to ensure national best practice guidelines outlining a minimum of 80% of school counselor time is spent on school counseling programs providing direct and indirect services to students.**

The Rationale

Inequalities that our students and families face have become even more apparent with the diverse and often changing learning environment (in person, blended, virtual and students/staff quarantines) of educating students during a pandemic. Families may not have access to computers, internet, food, mental health support, etc. Part of the school counselor role is to “collaborate with parents/guardians to establish communication and to ensure students’ needs are met (ASCA, 2016, A.10)” which can become especially challenging with the additional stress of students and families due to COVID-19. When counselors are able to connect with students and parents/guardians, the conversations often take longer, are more involved, and require additional follow-up as we work to find and connect them with the resources they need. Due to the continued uncertainty and changing guidance on how to keep students and staff safe during COVID-19, it takes even more time for school counselors to provide the classroom lessons, small groups, and individual support to ALL students. Counselors also need to be available to respond to crisis situations as they often involve student safety at school and/or at home. In November 2020, WSCA conducted a survey and found that 2/3 of school counselors reported they have had a change in their assigned responsibilities and are now spending more time on non-counseling duties in their schools.

It is recommended that school counselors spend 80% or more of their time in direct student services and indirect student services combined. The remaining 20% of the time is set aside for program management and school support services, such as school counseling program defining, managing, and assessing tasks. WSCA understands the great strain that schools are under during this time and acknowledges that everyone has a role to support the operations of the school community. A comprehensive counseling model includes a small portion of time allocated for program management and school support services to also be available for time spent on fair-share responsibilities—the routine “running of the school” responsibilities all members of the school staff take equal turns doing to ensure the school’s smooth operation” (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012, p.83).

The Professional School Counselor’s Role

The ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors state that School Counselors provide effective, responsive interventions to address student needs (ASCA, 2016, A1.h). If school counselors assigned duties and responsibilities that make them inaccessible to students, there are legal and ethical implications regarding student safety. Depending on educators without the knowledge, skills, training, and ethical standards to support student mental health leaves the school district more vulnerable in the event of a breach of ethics or law.

Counselors should be available and spend 80% of their time providing direct and indirect school counseling services to students. Direct student services are in person interactions between school counselors and students. Through the direct services of instruction, appraisal, advisement and counseling, school counselors help students develop the knowledge, aptitude and skills outlined in the ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success to help students improve achievement, attendance, and behavior/discipline. Indirect student services are services provided on behalf of students as a result of the school counselors interactions with others. Through indirect services of collaboration, consultation and referrals, school counselors enhance student achievement and promote equity and access for all.

Summary

It is imperative that school counselors and administrators work together to create a plan and determine how to best meet the needs of your students. Create a regular collaboration meeting time to review data and reflect on the biggest concerns in your school and how your school counselor can support those needs through their role. When school counselors are able to support students using their counseling and leadership skills you will see a positive impact on your students emotional and academic well-being.

References

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