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The School Counselor and High-Stakes Testing

(Adopted 2002, Revised 2007, 2014, 2017, 2024)

American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Position

School counselors advocate for the use of multiple criteria when educational decisions based on student performance are made, including academic placement, intervention and areas pertaining to students’ postsecondary plans, and they oppose the use of a single test to make important educational decisions affecting students, teachers and schools. To prevent students from losing access to their school counselor for essential academic, career and social/emotional support, school counselors should not be tasked with the time-consuming role of test coordination.

The Rationale

High-stakes tests are assessments “used for grade advancement, as barriers to graduation, and for rewarding or punishing students, teachers, principals, schools, districts and states based on test performance” (NASSP, 2024). The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), enacted in 2015, represents a legislative move toward identifying multiple measures to assess student performance. This legislation encourages an approach to testing that moves away from exclusively using high-stakes tests to inform decisions (White House, 2015). Single test results can provide valuable information related to student learning and performance, but using the results of multiple measures in a comprehensive manner provides a deeper understanding of a student’s abilities.

Testing and test scores have a significant impact on college admissions, industry credentialing and other areas pertaining to students’ plans and goals. When results from testing are the only factors used to make educational decisions, these decisions may not accurately measure quality of knowledge, may be biased and may disincentivize culturally responsive pedagogy (Stembridge, 2023). It is important to consider all factors that can provide additional information related to student performance. School counselors understand that some students struggle with testing, which can prevent high-stakes test data from providing an accurate reflection of the students’ capabilities and knowledge (Stembridge, 2023).

The School Counselor’s Role

School counselors have an integral role in promoting equitable measures of student performance including:

- Advocating for culturally responsive assessments and multiple measures of student performance
- Collaborating with teachers and other school staff to coordinate and provide information on integrating test-taking strategies, content and practice tests

45 into regular classroom instruction

- 46 • Educating students and their families about postsecondary opportunities and
- 47 how high-stakes testing may relate to postsecondary planning
- 48 • Supporting students and their families as they navigate testing concerns
- 49 (test anxiety, test accommodation plans, test preparation programs, etc.)
- 50 • Interpreting cognitive, aptitude and achievement tests (ASCA, 2019b)

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52 The school counselor's role does not include coordinating cognitive, aptitude and
53 achievement testing programs (ASCA, 2019b). When these roles are
54 inappropriately assigned, school counselors should employ advocacy skills
55 respectfully to help administrators understand that school counselors' time
56 should be invested in working with students and staff on issues promoting
57 academic, career and social/emotional development as outlined in the ASCA
58 National Model.

59 **Summary**

60 School counselors recognize that high-stakes test results are one of many
61 measures that can be used to assess student performance. School counselors have
62 an integral role in promoting equitable and culturally responsive measures of
63 student performance. Therefore, school counselors advocate for using multiple
64 measures when life-influencing decisions are being made.

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