

Back to School: The School Counselor's Role

As students, staff members and families prepare for the start of a new school year, they'll likely experience a range of emotions from excitement to anxiety. The nervous excitement many students experience at the start of any school year may be heightened as they prepare to reconnect with former friends, meet new classmates and resume learning through virtual, in-person or a hybrid setting.

For some students, the start of the year may prompt feelings of fear and anxiety regarding attending school with large groups of people, resuming classes, coping with challenges of technology, attending a new school and creating new relationships with students and adults in a challenging time.

By focusing on direct student services, school counselors can help students develop skills that will help them navigate changing expectations and environments. By providing indirect student services including consultation and collaboration with families, teachers and other stakeholders, school counselors can partner with others to make this year the best it can be, even with its many uncertainties.

School counselors have specific training to help students successfully transition to a new school year. They also have training to recognize and respond to early-warning signs of potential problems including:

- mood swings
- acting out
- lack of interest/withdrawal
- pushing limits or boundaries
- disrespect for others
- nonparticipation in activities

How Can School Counselors Address Back-to-School Season through a School Counseling Program?

These components from the Deliver chapter of the ASCA National Model (pp. 77–84) articulate the school counselor role.

Direct Student Services

Instruction

Deliver lessons in classroom, small-group or individual settings (in-person or virtual) that teach the ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success. Lessons could include topics that help students:

- Develop coping skills to manage ambiguity
- Demonstrate appropriate behavior in online and in-person settings
- Create positive and supportive relationships with other students and adults
- Recognize and respond to unsafe behavior
- Demonstrate advocacy skills and ability to assert self when experiencing situations that are unsafe or uncomfortable
- Demonstrate empathy for students who have been highly affected by issues including isolation from others and racism or bias
- Identify adults who support success and share problems with them

Appraisal and Advisement

Use valid and reliable assessment instruments that reflect cultural sensitivity and bias to help students analyze their abilities, interests, skills and achievement. Make recommendations to students based on the appraisal of these instruments that inspire students to realize their maximum potential.

Counseling

Provide assistance and support to students in online or in-person settings, including individual or small-group settings by helping them

- Process and respond to incidents involving racism and bias
- Identify coping strategies when feeling challenged or overwhelmed
- Learn advocacy strategies to respond to unsafe or uncomfortable situations when they occur
- Identify adults in the building who can help them if experiencing difficulties

Provide assistance, support, education and guidance in individual settings to students who have made others uncomfortable by helping them

- Understand and identify the problem behavior
- Demonstrate empathy for students different from themselves

- Learn skills to create positive relationships with students different from themselves
- Learn appropriate communication skills
- Identify ways to repair the harm caused by the behavior

Indirect Student Services

Consultation

Share strategies to help teachers and families support student success when working in online settings or readjusting to in-person settings. Encourage families and educators to support and align with lessons and activities designed to help students navigate any setting and challenges that may arise.

Seek information from parents, educators and stakeholders to learn more about what challenges students are facing and to identify strategies that support success.

Collaboration

Work to support student success through collaborations in the following ways:

- Partner with families, educators, businesses and community organizations focused on topics such as online learning, adaptability and resiliency, and student wellness
- Serve on school/district committees focused on student and community wellness
- Present workshops for parents on topics such as how to support learning and how to encourage appropriate student behaviors online or in-person
- Work with administrators, families and community members to organize immediate and follow-up interventions in response to a crisis

Referrals

Some students may have experienced trauma during the past few months. When student needs extend beyond short-term services or counseling, refer students and families to school or community resources that support student mental and physical health. Refer students demonstrating unhealthy or unsafe behavior to school or community resources that teach appropriate health and behaviors.

Reporting

Report to parents/guardians, administration and/or appropriate authorities when a student discloses a perpetrated or a perceived threat to their or other students' physical or mental well-being. Follow applicable federal, state and local laws and school district policy.

What ASCA Student Standards apply to issues of school reentry?

School counselors teach the [ASCA Student Standards: Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success](#) standards to promote academic achievement, college and career readiness and social/emotional learning. Helping students develop these Mindsets and Behaviors helps them make healthy decisions and prepares them for successful lives.

Many Mindsets and Behaviors standards apply to school reentry. Use your school data to prioritize standards that meet your students' needs such as:

Category 1: Mindsets Standards

School counselors encourage the following mindsets for all students.

- M 1. Belief in development of whole self, including a healthy balance of mental, social/emotional and physical well-being
- M 2. Sense of acceptance, respect, support and inclusion for self and others in the school environment
- M 3. Positive attitude toward work and learning
- M 4. Self confidence in ability to succeed
- M 5. Belief in using abilities to their fullest to achieve high-quality results and outcomes

Category 2: Behavior Standards

School counselors provide culturally sustaining instruction, appraisal and advisement, and counseling to help all students demonstrate:

- B-LS 1. Critical-thinking skills to make informed decisions
- B-LS 4. Self-motivation and self-direction for learning
- B-LS 5. Media and technology skills to enhance learning
- B-LS 8. Engagement in challenging coursework
- B-SMS 5. Perseverance to achieve long- and short-term goals
- B-SMS 6. Ability to overcome barriers to learning
- B-SMS 10. Ability to manage transitions and adapt to change
- B-SS 2. Positive, respectful and supportive relationships with students who are similar to and different from themselves
- B-SS 3. Positive relationships with adults to support success

B-SS 4. Empathy

B-SS 5. Ethical decision-making and social responsibility

B-SS 9. Social maturity and behaviors appropriate to the situation and environment

What ASCA Ethical Standards apply to issues related to school reentry?

School counselors help students successfully transition to a new school year while working within the [ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors](#). Additionally, for specific Q&A's associated with school counseling ethics in a virtual environment, [click here](#).

ASCA Ethical Standards that are particularly applicable to school reentry include:

A. RESPONSIBILITY TO STUDENTS

A.1. Supporting Student Development

School counselors:

- a. Have a primary obligation to the students, who are to be treated with dignity and respect as unique individuals.
- c. Do not diagnose but remain acutely aware of how a student's diagnosis can potentially affect the student's academic success.
- e. Are concerned with students' academic, career and social/emotional needs and encourage each student's maximum development.
- g. Are knowledgeable of laws, regulations and policies affecting students and families and strive to protect and inform students and families regarding their rights.
- h. Provide effective, responsive interventions to address student needs.
- i. Consider the involvement of support networks, wraparound services and educational teams needed to best serve students.

A.2. Confidentiality

School counselors:

- a. Promote awareness of school counselors' ethical standards and legal mandates regarding confidentiality and the appropriate rationale and procedures for disclosure of student data and information to school staff.

d. Explain the limits of confidentiality in developmentally appropriate terms through multiple methods such as student handbooks, school counselor department websites, school counseling brochures, classroom curriculum and/or verbal notification to individual students.

e. Keep information confidential unless legal requirements demand that confidential information be revealed or a breach is required to prevent serious and foreseeable harm to the student. Serious and foreseeable harm is different for each minor in schools and is determined by students' developmental and chronological age, the setting, parental rights and the nature of the harm. School counselors consult with appropriate professionals when in doubt as to the validity of an exception.

h. In absence of state legislation expressly forbidding disclosure, consider the ethical responsibility to provide information to an identified third party who, by his/her relationship with the student, is at a high risk of contracting a disease that is commonly known to be communicable and fatal. Disclosure requires satisfaction of all of the following conditions:

- 1) Student identifies partner, or the partner is highly identifiable
- 2) School counselor recommends the student notify partner and refrain from further high-risk behavior
- 3) Student refuses
- 4) School counselor informs the student of the intent to notify the partner
- 5) School counselor seeks legal consultation from the school district's legal representative in writing as to the legalities of informing the partner

k. Recognize the vulnerability of confidentiality in electronic communications and only transmit student information electronically in a way that follows currently accepted security standards and meets federal, state and local laws and board policy.

l. Convey a student's highly sensitive information (e.g., a student's suicidal ideation) through personal contact such as a phone call or visit and not less-secure means such as a notation in the educational record or an e-mail. Adhere to state, federal and school board policy when conveying sensitive information.

n. Advocate with appropriate school officials for acceptable encryption standards to be utilized for stored data and currently acceptable algorithms to be utilized for data in transit.

o. Avoid using software programs without the technological capabilities to protect student information based upon currently acceptable security standards and the law.

A.3. Comprehensive Data-Informed Program

School counselors:

b. Provide students with a comprehensive school counseling program that ensures equitable academic, career and social/ emotional development opportunities for all students.

c. Review school and student data to assess needs including, but not limited to, data on disparities that may exist related to gender, race, ethnicity, socio-economic status and/or other relevant classifications.

d. Use data to determine needed interventions, which are then delivered to help close the information, attainment, achievement and opportunity gaps.

A.4. Academic, Career and Social/Emotional Plans

School counselors:

a. Collaborate with administration, teachers, staff and decision makers to create a culture of postsecondary readiness

d. Provide opportunities for all students to develop the mindsets and behaviors necessary to learn work-related skills, resilience, perseverance, and understanding of lifelong learning as a part of long-term career success, a positive attitude toward learning and a strong work ethic.

A.5. Dual Relationships and Managing Boundaries

School counselors:

d. Do not use personal social media, personal e-mail accounts or personal texts to interact with students unless specifically encouraged and sanctioned by the school district. School counselors adhere to professional boundaries and legal, ethical and school district guidelines when using technology with students, parents/guardians or school staff. The technology utilized, including, but not limited to, social networking sites or apps, should be endorsed by the school district and used for professional communication and the distribution of vital information.

A.6. Appropriate Referrals and Advocacy

School counselors:

a. Collaborate with all relevant stakeholders, including students, educators and parents/guardians when student assistance is needed, including the identification of early warning signs of student distress.

b. Provide a list of resources for outside agencies and resources in their community to student(s) and parents/guardians when students need or request additional support. School counselors provide

multiple referral options or the district’s vetted list and are careful not to indicate an endorsement or preference for one counselor or practice. School counselors encourage parents to interview outside professionals to make a personal decision regarding the best source of assistance for their student.

A.9. Serious and Foreseeable Harm to Self and Others

School counselors:

a. Inform parents/guardians and/or appropriate authorities when a student poses a serious and foreseeable risk of harm to self or others. When feasible, this is to be done after careful deliberation and consultation with other appropriate professionals. School counselors inform students of the school counselor’s legal and ethical obligations to report the concern to the appropriate authorities unless it is appropriate to withhold this information to protect the student (e.g. student might run away if he/she knows parents are being called). The consequence of the risk of not giving parents/guardians a chance to intervene on behalf of their child is too great. Even if the danger appears relatively remote, parents should be notified

d. Report to parents/guardians and/or appropriate authorities when students disclose a perpetrated or a perceived threat to their physical or mental well-being. This threat may include, but is not limited to, physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, dating violence, bullying or sexual harassment. The school counselor follows applicable federal, state and local laws and school district policy.

A.10. Underserved and At-Risk Populations

School counselors:

a. Strive to contribute to a safe, respectful, nondiscriminatory school environment in which all members of the school community demonstrate respect and civility.

b. Advocate for and collaborate with students to ensure students remain safe at home and at school. A high standard of care includes determining what information is shared with parents/ guardians and when information creates an unsafe environment for students.

A.14. Technical and Digital Citizenship

School counselors:

a. Demonstrate appropriate selection and use of technology and software applications to enhance students’ academic, career and social/emotional development. Attention is given to the ethical and legal considerations of technological applications, including confidentiality concerns, security issues, potential limitations and benefits and communication practices in electronic media.

b. Take appropriate and reasonable measures for maintaining confidentiality of student information and educational records stored or transmitted through the use of computers, social media, facsimile machines, telephones, voicemail, answering machines and other electronic technology.

c. Promote the safe and responsible use of technology in collaboration with educators and families.

d. Promote the benefits and clarify the limitations of various appropriate technological applications.

e. Use established and approved means of communication with students, maintaining appropriate boundaries. School counselors help educate students about appropriate communication and boundaries

f. Advocate for equal access to technology for all students.

A.15. Virtual/Distance School Counseling

School counselors:

a. Adhere to the same ethical guidelines in a virtual/distance setting as school counselors in face-to-face settings.

b. Recognize and acknowledge the challenges and limitations of virtual/distance school counseling.

c. Implement procedures for students to follow in both emergency and nonemergency situations when the school counselor is not available.

d. Recognize and mitigate the limitation of virtual/distance school counseling confidentiality, which may include unintended viewers or recipients.

e. Inform both the student and parent/guardian of the benefits and limitations of virtual/distance counseling.

f. Educate students on how to participate in the electronic school counseling relationship to minimize and prevent potential misunderstandings that could occur due to lack of verbal cues and inability to read body language or other visual cues that provide contextual meaning to the school counseling process and school counseling relationship.

B. RESPONSIBILITIES TO PARENTS/ GUARDIANS, SCHOOL AND SELF

B.1. Responsibilities to Parents/Guardians

School counselors:

b. Respect the rights and responsibilities of custodial and noncustodial parents/guardians and, as appropriate, establish a collaborative relationship with parents/guardians to facilitate students’ maximum development.

h. Provide parents/guardians with accurate, comprehensive and relevant information in an objective and caring manner, as is appropriate and consistent with ethical and legal responsibilities to the student and parent.

B.3. Responsibilities to Self

School counselors:

f. Monitor their emotional and physical health and practice wellness to ensure optimal professional effectiveness. School counselors seek physical or mental health support when needed to ensure professional competence.

What ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards & Competencies apply to issues related to back to school?

School counselors help identify and address student success while working within the [ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards & Competencies](#) for School Counselors. Competencies that may be particularly relevant to reentry include:

Mindsets

School counselors believe:

M 1. Every student can learn, and every student can succeed.

M 2. Every student should have access to and opportunity for a high-quality education.

M 3. Every student should graduate from high school prepared for postsecondary opportunities.

M 4. Every student should have access to a comprehensive school counseling program

Behaviors

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

B-PF 1 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

B-PF 2 c. Explain and/or inform the process for development of policy and procedures at the building, district, state and national levels

g. Articulate a rationale for a school counseling program

i. Use current trends in technology to promote student success

B-PF 5 a. Select ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success standards to address student needs demonstrated in data

B-PF 6a. 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

c. Maintain and communicate high expectations for every student, regardless of cultural, social or economic background

e. Collaborate with administrators, teachers and other staff in the school and district to ensure culturally responsive curricula and student-centered instruction

B-PF 7 d. Create the organizational structure and components of an effective school counseling program aligned with the ASCA National Model

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

B-PF 8 b. Advocate responsibly for school board policy and local, state and federal statutory requirements in students' best interests

d. Articulate and provide rationale for appropriate activities for school counselors

B-PF 9 a. Act as a systems change agent to create an environment promoting and supporting student success

b. Use data to identify how school, district and state educational policies, procedures and practices support and/or impede student success

d. Develop and implement a plan to address personal and/or institutional resistance to change that better supports student success

B-SS 1 a. Use student, school and district data to identify achievement, attendance and discipline issues to be addressed through instruction

f. Use a variety of technologies in the delivery of lessons and activities

B-SS 3 a. Use data to identify students in need of counseling intervention

b. Provide support for students, including individual and small-group counseling, during times of transition, heightened stress, critical change or other situations impeding student success

c. Explain the difference between appropriate short-term counseling and inappropriate long-term therapy

d. Explain the impact of adverse childhood experiences and trauma, and demonstrate techniques to support students who have experienced trauma

e. 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 a. 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

b. Communicate the limits of school counseling and the continuum of mental health services

c. Articulate why diagnoses and long-term therapy are outside the scope of school counseling

B-SS 5 a. Gather information on student needs from families, teachers, administrators, other school staff and community organizations to inform the selection of strategies for student success

b. Share strategies that support student achievement with families, teachers, administrators, teachers, school staff and community organizations

d. Facilitate in-service training or workshops for families, administrators, other school staff, teachers or other stakeholders to share school counseling expertise

B-SS 6 c. Identify and involve appropriate school and community professionals as well as the family in a crisis situation

B-PA 2 b. Review, disaggregate and interpret student achievement, attendance and discipline data to identify and implement interventions as needed

c. Create goals based on student, school and/or district data to close the achievement, opportunity and/or information gaps

B-PA 4 a. Design and implement school counseling action plans aligned with school and annual student outcome goals and student data

b. Determine appropriate students for the target group of action plans based on student, school and district data

c. Identify appropriate ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success standards addressing needs identified in action plans

d. 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

e. Identify appropriate resources needed to implement action plans

f. Identify intended impact on academics, attendance and discipline as result of action plan implementation

B-PA 7 b. Discuss school counseling with the principal and/or supervising administrator to formalize delivering, managing 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

What ASCA Standards for School Counselor Preparation Programs (ASCA CAEP SPA) apply to issues related to back-to-school season?

School counselor education programs prepare school counselors-in-training to promote student success. Virtual settings create many of the same challenges for course instruction in higher education as in the K–12 setting and create particular challenges for completion of practicum and internship.

Standards from the [ASCA Standards for School Counselor Preparation Programs](#) that may be particularly relevant to school-counselors-in-training, particularly for those completing practicum and internships include:

Standard 1. Foundational Knowledge

1.1 Describe the organizational structure, governance, and evolution of the American education system as well as cultural, political, and social influences on current educational practices and on individual and collective learning environments.

1.3 Describe aspects of human development, such as cognitive, language, social/emotional, and physical development, as well as the impact of environmental stressors and societal inequities on learning and life outcomes.

Standard 2. Core Theories and Concepts

2.2 Demonstrate strengths-based counseling and relationship-building skills to support student growth and promote equity and inclusion.

2.3 Describe established and emerging counseling theories and evidence-based techniques that are effective in a school setting, 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.

Standard 3. Instructional and School Counseling Interventions

3.1 Use multiple data points, including student interviews, direct observation, educational records, consultation with parents/families/staff, and test results to

systematically identify student needs and collaboratively establish goals.

3.2 Identify research-based individual counseling, group counseling, and classroom instruction techniques to promote academic achievement, college/career readiness, and social/emotional development for every student.

3.3 Demonstrate digital literacy and appropriate use of technology to track student progress, communicate effectively to stakeholders, analyze data, and assess student outcomes.

Standard 4. Student Learning Outcomes

4.1 Plan, organize, and implement a variety of instructional and counseling strategies as part of a comprehensive school counseling program (direct and indirect student services) to improve preK-12 student attitudes, knowledge, and skills.

4.2 Collaborate with stakeholders such as families, teachers, support personnel, administrators, and community partners to create learning environments that promote educational equity, and support success and well-being for every student.

4.3 Describe how to access school and community resources to make appropriate referrals based on the needs of students.

4.4 Demonstrate pedagogical skills, including culturally responsive classroom management strategies, lesson planning, and personalized instruction.

Standard 5. Designing, Implementing, and Evaluating Comprehensive School Counseling Programs.

5.1 Use data and student standards, such as the ASCA Mindsets and Behaviors for Student Success and appropriate state standards, to create school counseling program goals and action plans aligned with school improvement plans.

5.2 Use participation, mindsets & behaviors, and outcome data, program and needs assessments, and other survey tools to monitor and refine the school counseling program.

5.3 Use school-wide data to promote systemic change within the school so every student is prepared for post-secondary success.

Standard 6. Professional Practice

6.1 Explain appropriate scope of practice for school counselors defined as the overall delivery of the comprehensive school counseling program, providing education, prevention, intervention, and referral services to students and their families.

6.2 Demonstrate leadership, advocacy and collaboration for the promotion of student learning and achievement, the school counseling program, and the profession.

Standard 7. Ethical Practice

7.1 Engage in professional behavior that reflects ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors and relevant federal and state laws and district policies.

7.2 Describe the impact of federal and state laws and regulations, as well as district policies, on schools, students, families, and school counseling practice.

What ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselor Education Faculty apply to issues related to back-to-school season?

School counselor education programs help prepare school-counselors-in-training to promote student success. Counselor educators and school-counselors-in-training follow university and district guidelines as they fulfill requirements for graduation and licensure.

Standards from the [ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselor Education Faculty](#) that may be particularly relevant to school reentry include:

A. Content Knowledge

A-2. Have the knowledge and skills to support social justice and advocacy efforts and to teach graduate students to become culturally competent school counselors and leaders.

B. Andragogy and Educational Methodology

Faculty members who teach in school counselor education programs:

B-1. Promote the use of techniques supported by empirical research and appropriate for a diverse population (as defined by the preamble of the ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors). If instructors teach about developing techniques, they clarify the research base for the techniques and any potential risks related to the techniques.

B-2. Use a variety of teaching methods to support a diverse student body and provide reasonable accommodations to graduate students in accordance with university policy and state and federal laws.

C. Career Preparation

Faculty members who teach in school counselor education programs:

C-1. Provide prospective graduate students with information about the school counseling profession, including program training components, professional values related to counseling a diverse population and current job market statistics for graduates.

F. School Counselor Curriculum

The curriculum for school counselor preparation programs:

F-2. Addresses ways to use ethical guidelines (e.g., ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors), ethical decision-making models and ASCA position statements.

F-3. Prepares graduate students to follow legal mandates, including mandates related to confidentiality, suicidal ideation, danger to others, reporting suspected child abuse, privileged communication, FERPA and recordkeeping.

F-4. Emphasizes social justice, advocacy, multiculturalism and preparation to work with a diverse population (as defined in the preamble to the ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors).

F-5. Teaches professional best practices such as current versions of the ASCA National Model, the ASCA School Counselor Competencies and the ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success.

F-8. Emphasizes school counselor wellness and self-care.

What do school staff members, parents and students need to know about back-to-school season?

- **Students may have trouble adjusting to online settings or readjusting to in-person settings** – Take time to listen to students' concerns. Contact the school counselor or other school staff if you have concerns about student wellness or success.
- **Changes in behavior may indicate a problem** – Educate school staff, parents and students about warning signs that may indicate a student is having difficulty adjusting to the new school year. Early warning signs include:
 - mood swings
 - acting out
 - lack of interest/withdrawal
 - pushing limits or boundaries
 - disrespect for others
 - nonparticipation in activities
- **Where to go for help** – Ensure school staff, parents and students know to which school staff they can express concerns about racist and biased policies, procedures and behaviors.
- **School resources** – Let school staff, parents and students know that administrators, school counselors and other school staff are always a resource to address student concerns and help their students achieve success.
- **Community resources** – Publicize community resources for additional assistance, including individuals and organizations that promote family well-being, student success and community health.