The School Counselor and Cultural Diversity

(Adopted 1988; revised 1993, 1999, 2004, 2009, 2015)

American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Position

School counselors demonstrate cultural responsiveness by collaborating with stakeholders to create a school and community climate that embraces cultural diversity and helps to promote the academic, career and social/emotional success for all students.

The Rationale

Culture is a powerful and pervasive influence on students, stakeholders and school counselors' attitudes and behaviors. "Professional school counselors have tremendous challenges and also terrific opportunities presented to them by the increasing diversity in our schools and communities" (Grothaus, 2012, p. 37). The ASCA Ethical Standards (2016) states in its preamble that "school counselors are advocates, leaders, collaborators and consultants who create systemic change by providing equitable educational access and success by connecting their school counseling programs to the district's mission and improvement plans" (p. 1). School counselors develop awareness, knowledge and skills in how prejudice, power and various forms of oppression…affect self, students and all stakeholders (ASCA Ethical Standards, B.3.i, 2016). It is essential that school counselors be more globally responsive and culturally competent in the current educational and social environment.

The School Counselor's Role

School counselors are in a position to advocate for students regarding equity and access…to help students and their families navigate systems of oppression and injustice, and act as agents of change within their school settings (Parikh, Post, & Flowers, 2011, p. 59). Portman (2009) stated that a school counselor, in the role of cultural mediator, engages in prevention, intervention and/or remediation activities that facilitate communication and understanding between culturally diverse human systems…that aid the educational progress of all students (p. 23). School counselors are expected to "specifically address the needs of every student, particularly students of culturally diverse, low social-economic status, and other underserved or underperforming populations" (ASCA, 2005, p. 77). Dahir and Stone (2012) stated that school counselors can provide culturally responsive counseling by:

- exploring their personal beliefs, attitudes and knowledge about working with diverse student populations
- ensuring each student has access to a school counseling program that advocates for all students in diverse cultural groups
- addressing the impact that poverty and social class has on student achievement
- identifying the impact of family culture upon student performance
- using data to close the gap among diverse student populations
- practicing culturally sensitive advising and counseling
- ensuring all students' rights are respected and all students' needs are met
- consulting and collaborating with stakeholders to create a school climate that welcomes and appreciates the strengths and gifts of culturally diverse students
- enhancing their own cultural competence and facilitating the cultural awareness, knowledge and skills of all school personnel

Summary

School counselors foster increased awareness, understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity in the school and community through advocacy, networking and resource utilization to ensure a welcoming school environment. Through the curriculum of a school counseling program, school counselors can teach tolerance and address the issues of nonviolence and social justice on a regular basis. School counselors, collaborating with students and stakeholders, promote the success of all students by supporting "access, equity and educational justice" (Lee, 2001, p. 261).

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