

The School Counselor and Gender Equity

(Adopted 1983; revised 1993, 1999, 2002, 2008, 2014, 2020)

American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Position

School counselors are committed to creating an emotionally, intellectually and physically safe environment for all students and to using inclusive language and positive modeling of gender equity. Creating this environment facilitates and promotes the development of each individual by removing bias and stereotypes for all students in school.

The Rationale

To expand the range of options available to students, it is important that school counselors become acutely aware of ways in which language, organizational structures, leader selection, expectations of individuals and activity implementation affect opportunities based on gender. Many federal and state laws have been passed protecting individuals from gender discrimination in education and work (e.g., Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967; Civil Rights Act of 1964; Equal Pay Act of 1963; Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009; Taylor, 1989; Title IX, 2018; Vocational Amendments of 1976; Women’s Educational Equity Act of 1974). These important legal mandates ensure equal treatment under the law but do not necessarily change ingrained attitudes and behaviors.

The School Counselor’s Role

School counselors’ knowledge of human development and skills in assisting students and families in overcoming barriers to learning positions them to teach children healthy interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, to make strong connections with educational opportunities in schools and to ensure every child learns in a safe, healthy and supportive environment. School counselors use inclusive language to reflect identities across the gender spectrum and have equitable expectations of all students. School counselors are sensitive to those aspects of interpersonal communication and organization that provide working models of gender equity and equality. They also promote gender equity through large- and small-group instruction.

School counselors are vigilant to the harmful effects of stereotypical gender-role expectations. As an example, research indicates young children demonstrate basic knowledge about gender stereotypes as they engage in gender segregation as early as preschool in their play and activities that guide their preferences for occupations and career goals (Mulvey & Killen, 2015). Also, school counselors are aware that as children develop their self-concept, they begin to rule out occupations considered incompatible and usually never reconsider them unless they are encouraged to pursue them (Gottfredson, 1996; Gottfredson & Lapan, 1997; Oliveira et al., 2020).

School counselors proactively seek to counter negative or limiting messages and work to prevent bullying and discrimination through direct and indirect student services. Consequently, school counselors emphasize a person’s competence and model positive gender equity while assisting students in positive gender identity as each student currently identifies. In regard to gender expression, Anderson (2020) notes the importance of autonomy of adolescents in developing healthy familial relationships; thus, the school counselor works with families to support the autonomy of the student while recognizing the rights of parents/guardians to guide their children. School counselors become sensitive to ways in which interpersonal attitudes and behaviors can have negative effects on others and provide constructive feedback on negative and positive use of inclusive language and organizational structure.

Summary

School counselors are committed to equity and support consciousness-raising within their profession. School counselors support equal opportunity for all to break through stereotypical gender-based behaviors and expectations. School counselors model inclusive language reflecting identities across the gender spectrum. School counselors actively advocate for equitable policies, procedures, practices and attitudes embracing equity in opportunities and access to resources for all students and colleagues.

References

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Resources

Human Rights Campaign Welcoming Schools

www.welcomingschools.org/