

The School Counselor and Gender Equity

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

American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Position

School counselors are committed to creating an emotionally, intellectually and physically safe environment for all students and to use inclusive language and positive modeling of gender equity, facilitating and promoting 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., the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009, the Equal Pay Act of 1963, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Vocational Amendments of 1976, the Women’s Educational Equity Act of 1974, Affirmative Action and Executive Orders, and Title IX, Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967). 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 in overcoming barriers to learning positions them to teach children healthy interpersonal skills, to make strong connections with educational opportunities in schools and to ensure that every child learns in a safe, healthy and supportive environment. The school counselor uses inclusive language and has equitable expectations of all students, is sensitive to those aspects of interpersonal communication and organization that provide working models of gender equity and equality and promotes gender equity through large- and small-group presentations. School counselors must become vigilant to the negative effects of stereotypical gender-role expectations. As an example, research indicates that young children (ages 3 to 5) demonstrate basic knowledge about occupations and occupational status and have attitudes, often stereotyped, about appropriate occupations (career awareness) (Hartung, 2005). 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). School counselors proactively seek to counter negative or limiting messages. The school counselor emphasizes a person’s competence and models positive gender equity while assisting students in positive gender identity as the student currently identifies. The school counselor becomes sensitive to ways in which interpersonal attitudes and behaviors can have negative effects on others and provides 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 including modeling of inclusive language and equal opportunity for all to break through stereotypical gender-based behaviors and expectations. School counselors actively advocate for equitable policies, procedures, practices and attitudes that embrace equity in opportunities and access to resources for all students and colleagues.

References

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