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School and District Administrators and the School Counselor Role

Citation Guide

American School Counselor Association. (2023)
*ASCA Research Report: School and District
Administrators and the School Counselor Role*
[https://www.schoolcounselor.org/getmedia/22407831-
42f9-46da-8fe9-f5ffb64ee285/asca-research-report-
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School and District Administrators and the School Counselor Role

In mid-November 2022, the American School Counselor Association developed a survey directed to school and district administrators about their understanding of school counseling, familiarity with the ASCA National Model: A Framework for School Counseling, and other issues. The survey was distributed on ASCA's behalf by AASA: The School Superintendents Association, Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE), National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) and National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), as well as by ASCA members who were asked to share the survey with their school and district administrators.

This is the first national survey of its kind to measure school and district administrators' understanding of the school counselor role and activities.

According to the research results, administrators generally understand the role of school counselors as certified/licensed educators who support students' academic success, career development and social/emotional development through comprehensive school counseling programs. Further, administrators indicate they observe school counselors in their schools and districts fulfilling the main concepts that are the foundation for the ASCA National Model.

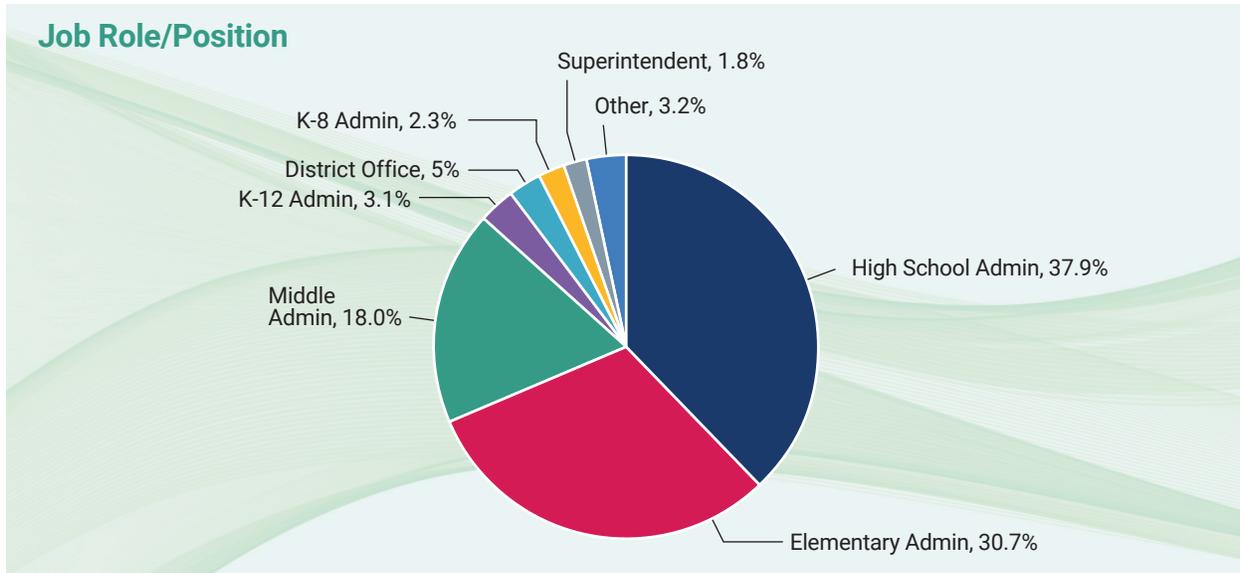
School and district administrators observe school counselors performing most of the specific activities of an ASCA National Model program. However, they are less likely to observe school counselors creating action plans to address equity gaps or sharing the results the school counseling program has made to close equity gaps. Additionally, significant percentages of respondents report that school counselors are responsible for a variety of activities outside their appropriate roles, including developing student schedules and managing 504 plans.

Methodology

The research was conducted via an electronic survey using the Qualtrics platform. ASCA developed an email invitation with an open survey link that was shared with AASA, AMLE, NAESP and NASSP for distribution to their members. In addition, ASCA emailed its members, asking them to share the survey with their school and district administrators. The survey yielded approximately 1,630 responses. All 50 U.S. states are represented as well as two respondents from U.S. territories and 12 respondents who are internationally based. Responses were calculated at the 95% confidence level with a margin of error of 2.4, which is well within the acceptable range of +/- 5%.

Respondent Demographics

The largest portion of respondents are high school administrators (principal, assistant principal, etc.), representing 38% of the sample, followed by elementary school administrators (31%), middle school administrators (18%), K-12 administrators (3%), district office (assistant superintendent, etc.) (3%), K-8 school administrator and superintendents (2% each). Other respondents (3%) are largely administrators in schools that serve some other combination of K-12 school.

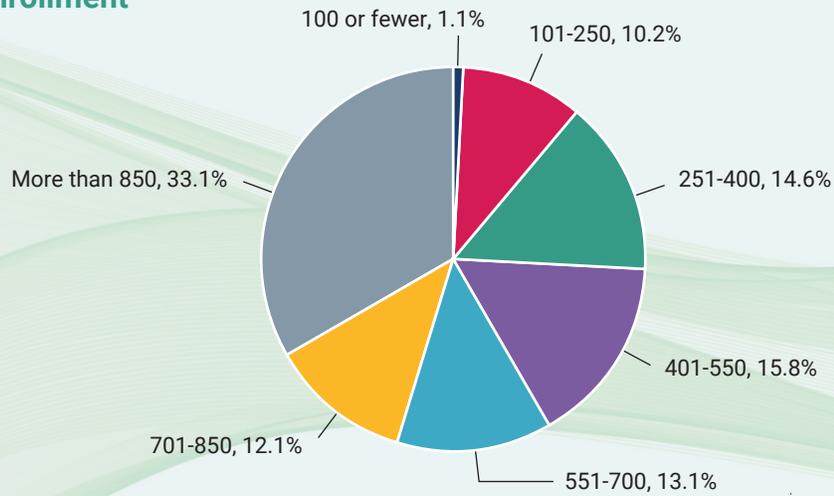


Asked about student-to-school-counselor ratios in their school, nearly one-third of respondents point to 251:1 to 350:1 (32%), followed by 250:1 or less (28%), 351:1 to 450:1 (19%) and more than 450 students per school counselor (19%). At the district level (superintendents and district office), the data is similar with 35% reporting 251:1 to 350:1, 21% reporting 351:1 to 450:1, 20% reporting 250:1 or less and 15% reporting more than 450 students per school counselor. The remaining percentages are unsure of their school or district's student-to-school-counselor ratio.

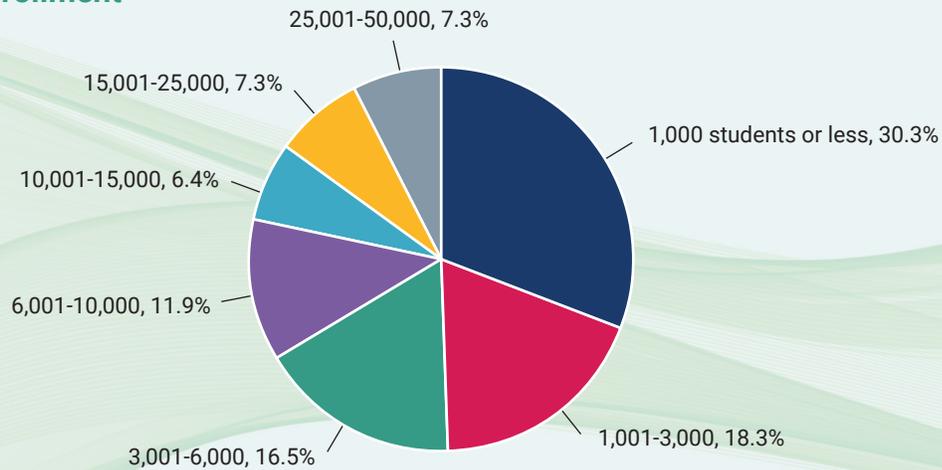
ASCA recommends a student-to-school-counselor ratio of 250:1. Nationally, the average ratio is 408 students per school counselor. The national average for grades K-8 ranges from 613:1 to 787:1, while the average for grades 9-12 ranges from 204:1 to 243:1. (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics)

School sizes vary significantly across the sample. School-level administrators report a range of school sizes, with the largest portion (33%) indicating their school has more than 850 students enrolled. The largest portion of districts (30%) report 1,000 or fewer students in their district.

School Enrollment



District Enrollment

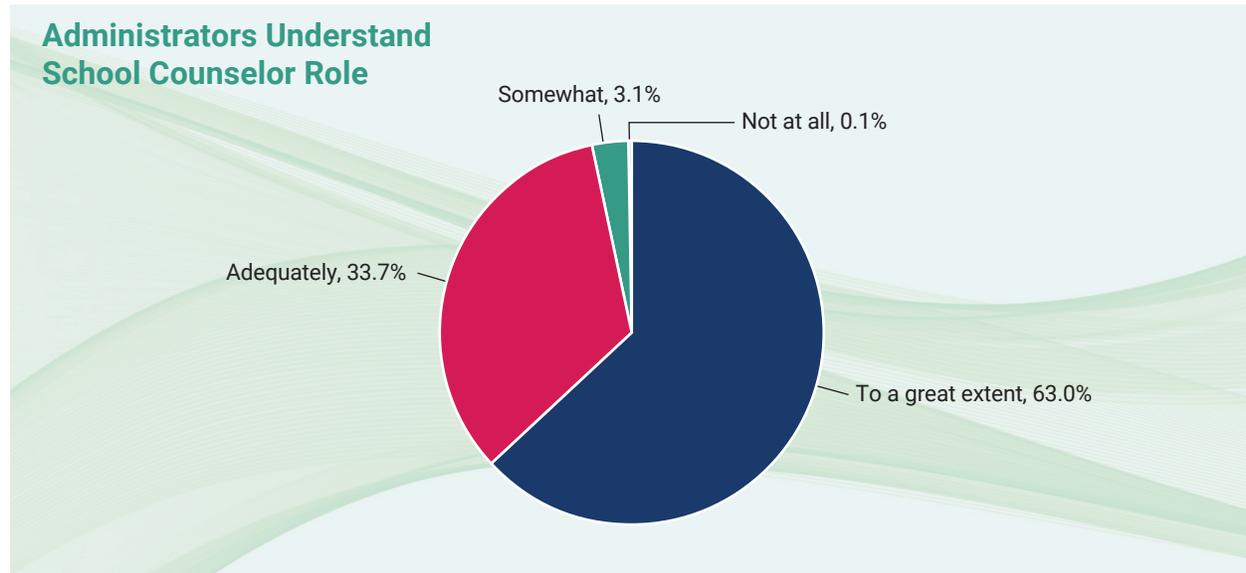


Respondents' schools are largely in suburban (36%) and rural areas (32%), followed by urban areas (15%). Sixteen percent say their school is in a combination urban, suburban and/or rural area. About 1% work in virtual schools.

Among districts, findings show 36% are in rural areas, 25% in suburban, 22% in urban and 16% in some combination of urban, suburban and/or rural. About 1% are virtual-only districts.

Understanding of the school counselor role

Nearly two-thirds of respondents (63%) say they understand to a great extent that school counselors are certified/licensed educators who support students' academic success, career development and social/emotional development through comprehensive school counseling programs.



Almost three-fourths of respondents reported some familiarity with the ASCA National Model. About 44% of administrators indicate they are extremely familiar/familiar with the ASCA National Model, 29% are somewhat familiar and 28% are not familiar with the ASCA National Model.

School counseling programs

Respondents were asked to what extent school counselors implement a comprehensive school counseling program that includes a variety of critical factors. Administrators assigned the strongest scores to delivering the school counseling program to all students systematically (84%) and making decisions informed by school data (81%), followed by implementing a developmentally appropriate curriculum focused on the mindsets and behaviors all students need for postsecondary readiness and success (77%), focusing on improved student achievement, attendance and discipline rates (75%) and identifying and addressing equity gaps (72%).

Implementing a Comprehensive School Counseling Program

To a great extent/adequately	Full Sample	School Administrators	District Administrators
Delivering the school counseling program to all students systematically	84.2%	85.2%	73.4%
Making decisions informed by school data	80.5%	81.6%	68.5%
Implementing a developmentally appropriate curriculum focused on the mindsets and behaviors all students need for postsecondary readiness and success	77.2%	78.3%	64.5%
Focusing on improved student achievement, attendance and discipline rates	75.3%	75.6%	70.6%
Identifying and addressing equity gaps (e.g., achievement, attainment, information, attendance, discipline, resource and opportunity)	72.3%	72.7%	67.9%

Among school administrators, 57% say their school counseling program is aligned with the ASCA National Model to a great extent/adequately. At the district level, 44% say their program is aligned with the ASCA National Model to a great extent/adequately. However, 31% of school administrators indicate they are unsure, as do 28% of district administrators.

Just 6% of respondents have been administrators at a school that has earned Recognized ASCA Model Program (RAMP) status, though 20% are unsure. Eight percent of district administrators say they have schools in their district that have earned RAMP at some point, though 61% are unsure.

School counseling services provided

Majorities of school-level administrators affirm that school counselors provide all the necessary professional responsibilities, as the chart below indicates, especially providing individual counseling/advisement (95%); consulting, collaborating and engaging with families (91%); and providing referrals to students and families for more intensive support (91%). Findings among district-level administrators are similar, with 94% indicating their school counselors provide individual counseling/advisement, followed by providing referrals to students and families for more intensive support (90%); providing small group counseling/advisement (88%); and consulting, collaborating and engaging with families (87%).

School Counseling Responsibilities

Activity	School Administrators	District Administrators
1. Provide individual counseling/advisement	94.8%	93.8%
2. Consult, collaborate and engage with families	90.9%	86.6%
3. Provide referrals to students and families for more intensive support	90.9%	89.7%
4. Meet with administrators to update them on school counseling program, goals and activities	88.3%	81.4%
5. Articulate beliefs that all students can learn and succeed	86.1%	80.4%
6. Consult and collaborate with school staff and community organizations	85.0%	82.5%
7. Provide small-group counseling/advisement	80.9%	87.6%
8. Create action plans to organize school counseling activities in classroom and group settings	77.4%	78.4%
9. Provide instruction/advisement in classrooms	73.7%	71.1%
10. Analyze school data to create goals and inform general decision-making	65.7%	62.9%
11. Analyze school data to identify equity gaps (e.g., achievement, attainment, information, attendance, discipline, resource and opportunity)	50.2%	51.5%
12. Use ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors as principles of ethical behavior necessary to maintain the highest standards of professionalism	47.4%	43.3%
13. Use ASCA Student Standards: Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success to guide their work to improve student attitudes and behaviors for success	46.6%	45.4%
14. Assess and share the results the school counseling program has made on student outcomes	46.3%	42.3%
15. Create action plans to address equity gaps (e.g., achievement, attainment, information, attendance, discipline, resource and opportunity)	43.5%	49.5%
16. Assess and share reports showing results the school counseling program has made on equity gaps (e.g., achievement, attainment, information, attendance, discipline, resource and opportunity)	29.8%	30.9%
None of these	0.1%	0.0%
Unsure	0.6%	3.1%

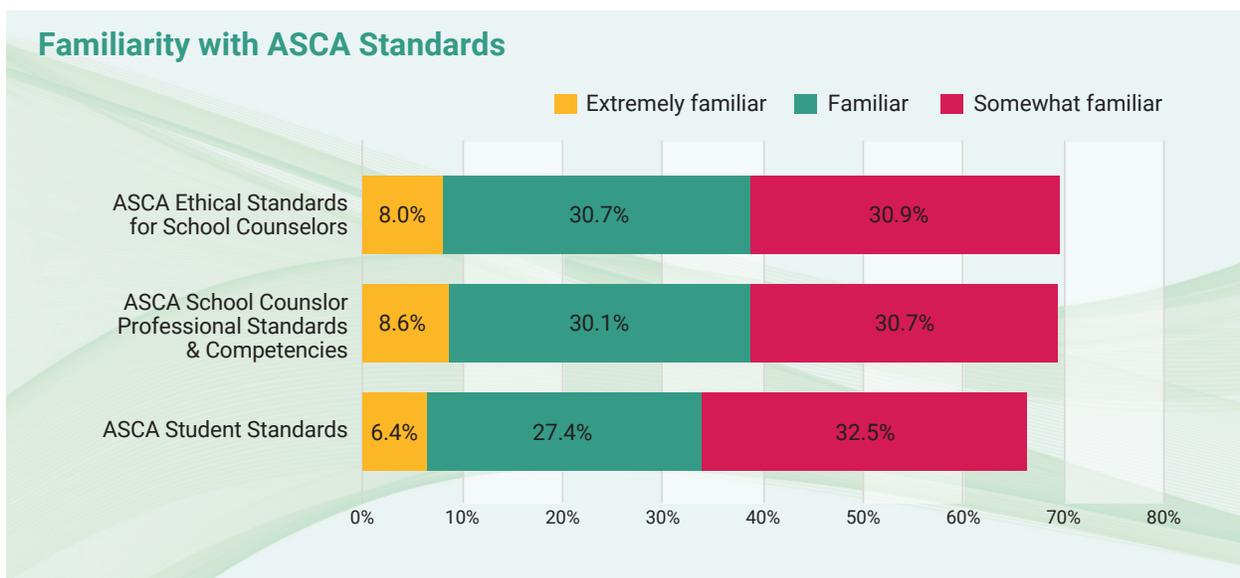
Administrators were also asked if school counselors provide services outside the scope of their role. As the following chart indicates, significant portions of school counselors fulfill these roles, including building student schedules and coordinating 504 plans, for example.

Inappropriate School Counseling Duties

Activity	School Administrators	District Administrators
Coordinating 504 plans	55.9%	52.1%
Building the master schedule for students' classes	31.1%	50.0%
Coordinating statewide testing programs	29.0%	37.5%
Coordinating paperwork and data entry of all new students	23.6%	24.0%
Providing ongoing individual counseling as part of an IEP	17.9%	18.8%
Maintaining student cumulative files	17.2%	24.0%
Covering classes when teachers are absent or to create teacher planning time	16.2%	25.0%
Computing grade-point averages	15.2%	24.0%
Providing long-term counseling/therapy	12.1%	17.7%
Disproportionate time supervising common areas (lunch, hall, bus, etc.) compared with other staff in the building	6.9%	17.7%
Coordinating schoolwide individual education plans (IEP)	6.9%	7.3%
Performing disciplinary actions or assigning discipline consequences	3.8%	5.2%
None of these	15.3%	7.3%
Unsure	10.0%	4.2%

Familiarity with ASCA Standards

Majorities of administrators have some level of familiarity with ASCA standards, including ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards & Competencies (38% extremely familiar/familiar and 31% somewhat familiar), ASCA Student Standards: Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success (33% extremely familiar/familiar and 33% somewhat familiar), and ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors (38% extremely familiar/familiar and 31% somewhat familiar).



School counselor evaluation

At the school level, the largest percentage of administrators (43%) use a district-/school-developed performance appraisal specific to school counseling to evaluate their school counselors. At the district level, administrators are evenly split between using a district-/school-developed appraisal specific to school counseling (36%) or a state-developed performance appraisal specific to school counseling (36%).

School Counselor Performance Appraisals

Evaluation Tool	School Administrators	District Administrators
1. District-/school-developed performance appraisal specific to school counseling	42.5%	35.6%
2. State-developed performance appraisal specific to school counseling	27.9%	35.6%
3. District-/school-developed performance appraisal NOT specific to school counseling role	11.8%	11.1%
4. State-developed performance appraisal NOT specific to school counseling role	6.7%	3.3%
5. ASCA school counselor performance appraisal	2.9%	3.3%
6. Other	8.2%	11.1%

Among the other evaluation tools used are school-designed appraisals, 5D+ Model, Charlotte Danielson Model for SSW and the Marzano Focused Non-Classroom Instructional Support Personnel Evaluation, among others. Others indicated they do not have a formal evaluation tool.

Addressing the job shortage

The majority of administrators say they are not hiring individuals to fulfill school counseling responsibilities who are not licensed as school counselors. However, 21% of district administrators and 6% of school administrators are hiring non-licensed professionals in school counseling roles. In comments, several respondents indicated these non-licensed hires are not-yet certified individuals who are completing school counseling programs. Others mentioned school social workers, school psychologists and substance abuse counselors filling these roles, as well as a teacher coordinator, MTSS interventionist, college and career advocate, long-term substitutes and outside mental health counselors, including licensed therapists.

Conclusion

The results of this survey provide valuable insights to enhance school counselor/administrator relationships to better serve students, schools and districts. Consider several key takeaways and opportunities, as follows.

- 1. Administrators largely understand the role of school counselors.** Nearly two-thirds of school and district administrators understand that school counselors are certified/licensed educators who support students' academic success, career development and social/emotional learning through comprehensive school counseling programs. Further, they observe school counselors delivering school counseling programs that include delivering the program to all students systematically; making decisions informed by school data; implementing a developmentally appropriate curriculum; focusing on improved student achievement, attendance and discipline rates; and identifying and addressing equity gaps.

Opportunity: School counselors and administrators can build on this level of knowledge to develop a more collaborative relationship designed to serve students and meet school goals.

- 2. Administrators report observing school counselors engaged in a significant number of activities incorporated in a school counseling program aligned with the ASCA National Model.** When provided with a list of 16 specific functions of an ASCA National Model-aligned school counseling program, more than 70% of school and district administrators observed nine out of the 16 functions, including the areas of:
 - delivering direct and indirect student services; and
 - managing a school counseling program (administrative conference, action plans and articulating beliefs that all students can learn and succeed).

More than 50% observed 11 of the 16, including analyzing school data to create goals and inform general decision-making and analyzing school data to identify equity gaps.

Opportunity: School counselors must be more vigilant in sharing their work and activities to improve student success. ASCA National Model templates can help guide those efforts and provide documentation.

- 3. Administrators report understanding the general work of school counselors related to equity but lack awareness of school counselors' specific actions to address existing gaps.** Although 72% of administrators report that school counselors identify and address equity gaps, they were less likely to observe specific school counseling activities like analyzing data to identify equity gaps (50%), creating action plans to address equity gaps (44%), and assessing and sharing reports showing results the school counseling program has made on equity gaps (30%).

Opportunity: School counselors must better communicate with administrators their efforts to set student outcome goals and address gaps in achievement, attainment, information, attendance, discipline, resource and opportunity.

- 4. Significant percentages of school counselors continue to be assigned inappropriate duties, such as managing students' 504 plans or coordinating testing programs.** Although only small portions of administrators indicate their school or

district school counselors undertake such inappropriate duties as performing disciplinary actions or spending disproportionate time supervising common areas, larger percentages continue to be assigned other duties outside the school counselor's role. Such duties detract from their essential responsibility to ensure all students succeed.

Opportunity: School counselors, state school counselor associations and ASCA can continue to educate administrators about the appropriate role, as detailed in ASCA's [The Essential Role of School Counselors documents](#), the [ASCA National Model Executive Summary](#) and other materials.

- 5. Too many school counselors are evaluated on a performance appraisal instrument that does not align with the school counselor role.** More than 10% of respondents reported using a performance appraisal instrument that is not specific to the school counseling role. Schools and districts largely use district-/school-developed or state-developed performance appraisals specific to school counseling to evaluate their school counselors.

Opportunity: School counselors can collaborate with education leaders at the school, district and state level to create a performance appraisal that aligns with the appropriate role of the school counselor. The ASCA National Model performance appraisal template provides language and artifacts that can guide the creation of an appropriate evaluation tool.

- 6. Schools and districts are hiring other personnel to fill school counselor roles.** According to the data, 21% of district administrators and 6% of school administrators who are hiring social workers and college advisors, among others, to fill school counselor roles. More research is needed to understand why this is happening, but some respondents reported a lack of school counselors available to fill positions.

Opportunity: Districts and states can create innovative solutions to attract candidates to school counseling through Grow Your Own programs (partnerships between school districts, community-based organizations and colleges to prepare educators), tuition grants, paid internships in high-need areas and more. Likewise, college/university programs preparing school counseling candidates must explore new approaches to reduce barriers while maintaining educational standards.

Given school counselors' role in supporting both student success and school goals, a collaborative relationship between school counselors and administrators is essential. School counselors can improve their administrators' understanding of the components of a school counseling program by increasing awareness, primarily, that decisions are informed by ethical standards established by the profession, and research-based student standards are used to help students develop mindsets and behaviors for college, career and life readiness.