

## **The School Counselor and Students with Disabilities**

(Adopted 1999; Revised 2004, 2010, 2013, 2016, 2022)

### **American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Position**

School counselors encourage and support the academic, career and social/emotional development of all students through school counseling programs. School counselors are committed to helping all students realize their potential and meet or exceed academic standards with consideration for both the strengths and challenges resulting from disabilities and other special needs.

### **The Rationale**

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires public schools to provide a free, appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment for all students. Under IDEA, 7.2 million public school students are identified as having a disability and receive special education services (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). IDEA-defined disabilities include:

- autism
- deaf – blind
- developmental delay
- emotional disturbance
- hearing impairments (including deafness)
- intellectual disability
- multiple disabilities
- orthopedic impairments
- other health impairments
- specific learning disabilities
- speech or language impairments
- traumatic brain injury
- visual impairments (including blindness)

In addition, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 protects qualified individuals with disabilities, defined as persons with a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. (For a complete list of major life activities refer to ADA Amendments Act of 2008.) School counselors strive to assist all students in achieving their full potential, including students with disabilities, within the scope of the school counseling program.

School counselors recognize their strengths and limitations in working with students with disabilities. School counselors also are aware of current research and seek to implement best practices in working with students presenting with any disability category who, by reason thereof, need special education and related services.

### **The School Counselor's Role**

School counselors provide direct and indirect services to students with disabilities through the implementation of a school counseling program (Goodman-Scott, et al., 2019). School counselors “recognize the strengths of students with disabilities as well as their challenges and provide best practices and current research in supporting their academic, career and social/emotional needs” (ASCA, 2022, p. 5).

School counselor responsibilities may include, but are not limited to:

- Providing accommodations and culturally responsive school counseling lessons, individual and/or group counseling to students with special needs within the scope of the school counseling program
- providing short-term, goal-focused counseling in instances where it is appropriate to include these strategies as a part of an individualized education program (IEP) or 504 plan
- encouraging family involvement in the educational process
- consulting and collaborating with staff and families to understand a student's special needs and understanding the accommodations and modifications needed to assist the student
- advocating in the school and in the community for students with special needs

- contributing to the school’s multidisciplinary team within the scope and practice of the school counseling program
- identifying students who may need to be assessed to determine special education or 504 plan eligibility
- collaborating with other related specialized instructional support personnel (e.g., school psychologists, physical therapists, occupational therapists, special education staff, speech and language pathologists) in the delivery of services
- providing assistance with developing academic, transition and postsecondary plans for students with IEP’s and 504 plans as appropriate

Inappropriate administrative or supervisory responsibilities for the school counselor include, but are not limited to:

- making singular decisions regarding placement or retention
- serving in any supervisory capacity related to the implementation of IDEA
- serving as the school district representative for the team writing the IEP
- coordinating, writing or supervising a specific plan under Section 504 of Public Law 93-112
- coordinating, writing or supervising IEP implementation
- providing long-term therapy

### Summary

The school counselor takes an active role in student achievement and postsecondary planning by providing a school counseling program for all students. As a part of this program, school counselors advocate for students with special needs and disabilities, encourage family involvement in their child’s education and collaborate with other educational professionals to promote academic achievement, college/career readiness and social/emotional wellness for all.

### References

ADA Amendments Act of 2008, Pub. L. No. 110-325, 122 Stat. 3553 (2008).  
<https://www.congress.gov/110/plaws/publ325/PLAW-110publ325.pdf>.

American School Counselor Association. (2022). *Ethical standards for school counselors*. Alexandria, VA: Author.

Goodman-Scott, E., Bobzien, J. & Milsom, A. (2019). Preparing Preservice School Counselors to Serve Students With Disabilities: A Case Study. *Professional School Counseling*, 22(1), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2156759X19867338>

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Public Law 108-446 108th Congress <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-108publ446/html/PLAW-108publ446.htm>.

U.S. Department of Education (2021). EDFacts Data Warehouse (EDW): “IDEA Part B Child Count and Educational Environments Collection.” Retrieved February 21, 2022, from: <https://data.ed.gov/dataset/idea-section-618-data-products-static-tables-part-b-count-environtable1/resources>