



## ASCA Research Grant Program 2023 Call for Proposals

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) is now accepting research project proposals for its 2023 grants. Researchers are invited to submit projects addressing student-to-school counselor ratios that address any of the following:

- Research that establishes research-supported ratios for grades K-8 vs. grades 9-12.
- Research that demonstrates how lower student-to-school-counselor ratios improve student outcomes, especially where students demonstrate significant needs.
- Research that demonstrates how lower student-to-school-counselor ratios improve equity, closing achievement and opportunity gaps.

### BACKGROUND AND EXISTING RESEARCH

Since 1965, ASCA has recommended a student-to-school counselor ratio of 250:1. Although this ratio may be optimal, grade level and socioeconomic factors require close consideration. According to [data](#) from the U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics, the 2021-22 national student-to-school-counselor ratio was 408:1. Average ratios vary dramatically state by state, from a low of 186:1 in Vermont to a high of 694:1 in Illinois.

While the national student-to-school counselor ratio has decreased each [academic school year since the 1987-88 school year](#) (31%), the national ratio remains well above the ASCA recommended ratio of 250:1 at 408:1 (2021-22). One quarter of respondents to the [ASCA State of the Profession 2020](#) survey reported their caseload to be 250 or fewer students, while similar portions of respondents reported 251-350 (26%) and 351-450 (24%) students per school counselor.

National ratios are higher in elementary schools and lower in high schools, based on estimates using the NCES data. However, because some states do not designate school counselors by grade level, average ratios can only be calculated in ranges. The national average for grades K-8 ranges from 613:1 to 787:1. National average for grades 9-12 ranges from 204:1 to 243:1. The ASCA State of the Profession 2020 sees similar results with elementary school counselors more likely to have higher caseloads than high school counselors who have the not insignificant responsibility for supporting students with post-secondary planning.

Data compiled by the U.S. Department of Education's Civil Rights Data Collection (2015-2016) indicates [students of color and students from low-income families are often shortchanged](#), receiving unequal

access to school counselors or attending a school with too few school counselors. More recently, this data is supported by [Donohue et al. \(2022\)](#), which noted similar findings.

### **Existing research**

Research dating to the 1950s indicates the school counseling role was much broader and much more clerical during that time. Analyzing the role of the school counselor, [Hoyt \(1955\)](#) determined that school counselors typically spent more than 55% of their time in counseling and group activities with students. The remaining 45% was spent working with teachers, conducting local research and performing clerical tasks. Based on this assessment, Hoyt concluded that school counselors should have no more than 400 pupils in their caseload. As the role of the school counselor became clarified further, ASCA adopted 250:1 as the optimal ratio, which reflects the goal that school counselors spend 80% of their time in direct and indirect student services. That is largely the case today, according to the ASCA 2020 State of the Profession Study, which found that school counselors currently spend 74% of their time in direct and indirect student services.

Several studies have noted that smaller ratios support increases in standardized test performance ([Parzych et al., 2019](#)), attendance ([Carey et al., 2012](#)), GPA ([Goodman-Scott et al., 2018](#)), and graduation rates ([Lapan & Gysbers, 2012](#)), as well as decreased disciplinary infractions ([Carrell & Carrell, 2016](#); [Lapan et al., 2012](#)). Additional studies have shown that lower ratios also increase the likelihood of students having conversations with school counselors regarding college-going and postsecondary plans ([Bryan et al., 2009](#); [Danos, 2017](#); [Engberg & Gilbert, 2014](#); [Hurwitz & Howell, 2013](#); [Woods & Domina, 2014](#); [Lapan et al., 2019](#)). Further, in an ASCA-grant-funded meta-analysis of student-to-school-counselor ratio outcome studies, [Kearney et al. \(2021\)](#) found that a one standard deviation change in the ratio is likely to result in a 6% standard deviation in student outcomes, especially in terms of improving attendance, decreasing disciplinary infractions and increasing high school graduation.

Recent data from [Donohue et al. \(2022\)](#) reinforces the [Kearney et al. study \(2021\)](#) that “higher student-to-school-counselor ratios lead to worse outcomes for students.” Further, although the ratio continues to improve, districts with more students who are non-white, living in poverty or English language learners are not serving students with school counselors at the same rate ([Donohue et al., 2022](#)).

Submissions for the 2023 ASCA grants should build on this research.

### **DESCRIPTION**

ASCA promotes student success by expanding the image and influence of school counseling through leadership, advocacy, collaboration and systemic change. ASCA helps school counselors guide their students toward academic achievement, career planning and social/emotional development to help today’s students become tomorrow’s productive, contributing members of society. Founded in 1952, ASCA has a network of 51 state and territory associations and a membership of approximately 43,000 school counseling professionals. Since launching the grants program in 2017, ASCA has awarded more than \$160,000 in research grant funding. These projects provide valuable research supporting the

effectiveness of school counselors and comprehensive school counseling programs in improving student outcomes.

## **AWARDS**

ASCA will fund and award approximately \$50,000 in research grants for this grant period. Ideally, research project timelines will be for one year or less. Typical awards range from \$2,500 to \$10,000 each, though larger awards may be considered. Funding will be provided only for expenses directly related to the project and not for institutional indirect costs or overhead unrelated to the grant. Although ASCA does not want to determine the specific use of these awarded funds, the proposed budget outlined in the proposal will be evaluated for efficient and effective use of the awarded funds.

## **ELIGIBILITY**

This request for proposals is not restricted to any one discipline or tailored to any particular methodology. To be eligible for an ASCA grant, your institution and proposal must meet the following requirements:

- Applicants must be affiliated or employed by an accredited, degree-granting, nonprofit, U.S.-based university or a nonprofit, U.S.-based research.
- Institutions must have access to the knowledge, resources and skills necessary to conduct the proposed research.
- Applicants must provide university institutional review board and school district(s) (where research is conducted) letters of support before grant funds are distributed.
- Applicants cannot be (nor related to) ASCA board members and staff or grant selection committee members.
- Proposals that are incomplete or that do not respond to the request for proposals above will be excluded from the selection process.
- Principal investigators may only participate in a single ASCA grant during the grant cycle.
- 2017–2022 grant recipients are not eligible for this grant cycle. However, exceptions may be granted at the discretion of ASCA and the grants committee to expand an existing project.

## **SUBMISSION GUIDELINES**

Proposals submitted for consideration should contain the following information and be no longer than five pages in length (12-point font), not including appendices (curriculum vitae for each researcher, instrumentation for research methods, letters of support, etc.). Please also submit an anonymous version of your proposal for review by the ASCA grants committee.

**Project title and abstract.** The abstract must contain:

- A *nontechnical* description of the project that states the problem to be studied and explains the project's broader significance and importance.
- A technical description of the project that states the goals and scope of the research, and the methods and approaches to be used.

**Project description:** Describe the set of research questions that will be addressed, research methods that will be used to answer the questions and the significance of the findings for the school counseling profession.

**Biographical information, contact information and letters of support.** This section must contain:

- Brief description of institution and its program to prepare school counselors, including number of graduates in the past five years.
- Brief description of each researcher that includes affiliation, relevant prior research, publications and professional experience, as well as the role of individual researchers on the project and how their skills and knowledge enable them to address the question. proposed (Include researchers' CV in appendix.)
- Contact information for principal investigator.
- Letter of support from Institutional Review Board (if applicable).
- Letter of support from school district(s) (if applicable).

**Research approach.** This section must contain:

- Description of the theoretical framework and methodological approach the researchers will use to address the research question(s), including a discussion of the research methods, data collection instruments and planned data analysis.
- Description of how the researchers will manage any legal and ethical challenges.
- Brief summary of related research, including references where appropriate. Identify the relationship between the literature and the proposed study and what new knowledge the proposed will generate.

**Use of funds and other support.** Provide a detailed budget (U.S. dollars) describing how the award will be used. The budget should be presented as a table with the total budget request clearly indicated. Include other contributions to this project (cash, goods and services), if any, but do not include the use of university facilities that are otherwise provided on an ongoing basis. Grant funds will not provide for institutional indirect costs or overhead, including salaries. (Note: Grant funds may be used to fund the work of research assistants.) Grants may not be used to fund travel to promote or present research. Note that grant recipients will be required to submit an original letter on department letterhead certifying the commitment of any additional or matching support described in the proposal.

**Schedule.** Present a plan for completion of the project, including milestones that will be used to measure progress and when they are expected to be completed. A brief status update is due to

ASCA at the halfway point of the project schedule. If the project proposed is part of a larger ongoing research program, estimate the time for completion of this project only.

### **SELECTION PROCESS AND CRITERIA**

All proposals received by the submission deadline and in compliance with the eligibility criteria will be reviewed by a panel of school counseling and educational professionals appointed by ASCA. Based on evaluations by the review panel, ASCA will select proposals for funding. ASCA reserves the right to fund selected proposals at an amount greater or lower than the amount requested, up to the stated maximum amount.

All proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- Addresses an important research question in school counseling that, if answered, has the potential to have a significant impact on the topic or the field.
- Potential for wide dissemination and use of knowledge, including specific plans for scholarly publication, including publication in ASCA's *Professional School Counseling* journal, as well public presentations and summaries/infographics (The award of a grant does not guarantee publication in ASCA media or acceptance of an ASCA conference session proposal.)
- Ability to complete the project, including adequacy of resources available, reasonableness of timelines and qualifications of identified contributors
- Qualifications of principal investigator, including previous history of work in the area, successful completion of previously funded projects, research or teaching awards, and books published
- Collaboration between researchers and practicing school counselors
- Possible additional information as requested by the review panel, which might be requested after the submission date

### **CONDITIONS**

Grant recipients agree to the following as a condition of this award:

- Researchers agree that ASCA may use their name and likeness to publicize their proposals (including all proposal content) in connection with the promotion of the research awards in all media now known or later developed.
- Researchers agree that ASCA may use their name and likeness to publicize the results of their research.
- Researchers agree to contribute to presentations or publications to describe their project experiences.
- Funded researchers must seek approval of their institution's review board for any work involving human subjects.
- ASCA makes no claims on any of the data collected as a part of this research, but at the completion of the project, requires funded researchers to submit to ASCA a summary report

describing the project and its findings, with recommendations. The grant summary report is the property of ASCA, but the intellectual property is maintained by the researchers.

### **TIMELINE AND SUBMISSION**

**Proposals must be submitted electronically to [ahickman@schoolcounselor.org](mailto:ahickman@schoolcounselor.org) no later than June 1, 2023.** Send questions to the same address. Grant recipients will be notified in July 2022. Funding will be sent to grant recipients no later than 30 days after notification, assuming eligibility requirements have been met.

[Examples](#) of completed grant projects.

*Notes: ASCA shall have no obligation to maintain the confidentiality of any submitted proposals. Therefore, proposals should not contain information that is confidential, restricted or sensitive. ASCA reserves the right to make the selected proposals publicly available, except those portions containing budgetary or personally identifiable information. Because of the anticipated volume of submissions, ASCA cannot provide individual feedback on proposals that are not funded.*