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The School Counselor and Peer Support Programs

(Adopted 1978; Revised 1984, 1993, 1999, 2002, 2008, 2015, 2021, 2026 draft)

ASCA Position

Peer support programs help students develop a belief in self, provide a sense of community and improve social/emotional well-being. The informed implementation of peer support programs enhances the effectiveness of school counseling programs and provides a collaborative approach to positive mental health development that targets a healthy social/emotional development.

The Rationale

Peer support programs can be defined as peer-to-peer interactions in which individuals of approximately the same age take on a helping role, assisting students who may share similar experiences. Peer support programs include activities such as assisting with one-to-one and group interventions, providing academic support, acclimating new students and other activities. In addition, peer support programs improve academic achievement and social networks through restorative justice initiatives and social/emotional learning (Roberts, 2022; Williams et al., 2018).

School counselors are aware that students often communicate more readily with peers than with adults. Peer support programs can enhance the effectiveness of school counseling programs by increasing outreach and raising student awareness of services. Through proper selection, training and supervision, peer support can be a positive influence within the school and community. Research indicates peer support programs are helpful when focused on assisting students with academic or social/emotional problems (Logsdon, et al., 2018), while promoting protective factors (Search Institute, 2006). Peer support programs can also help create a positive school culture and connectedness to the school community for both mentors and mentees (Voight & Nation, 2016; Roberts, 2020) as well as safer schools (Walker, 2019).

The School Counselor’s Role

School counselors use best practices to determine the needs of the school population and to implement interventions designed to meet those needs,

41 such as peer support programs. In collaboration with school staff, school
42 counselors:

- 43 • follow the ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors as they relate
44 to peer support programs, including safeguarding the welfare of
45 students participating in peer support programs and providing
46 appropriate training and supervision for peer helpers (ASCA, 2022;
47 QPR, 2019)
- 48 • develop a recruitment process that meets a specific peer leader criteria
49 (Crist, 2024) and is representative of the student body
- 50 • Train students to be well-versed in the mandated reporter laws to
51 know when to refer their peers or mentees to the school counselor
52 (Roberts, 2020) according to the school site’s reporting protocol
- 53 • communicate program goals and purpose, then supervise, assess and
54 adjust the program on a continual basis to meet the needs of the
55 school population the program serves
- 56 • report results to students and education partners (e.g., teachers,
57 administrators, families, community)

59 **Summary**

60 School counselors understand and build upon the positive effects of peer
61 support programs on students, the school climate and culture, as well as the
62 school connectedness of students involved. School counselors also
63 understand their unique responsibilities when peer-support programs are
64 implemented, including ensuring students are properly trained, supervised
65 and supported in their role.

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