



4 **The School Counselor and the Individualized Education Program** 5 **Process**

6 (Draft Position Statement, 2026)

8 **ASCA Position**

9 School counselors are essential collaborative members of the individualized
10 education program (IEP) team who advocate for students with disabilities.
11 School counselors should not, however, be designated as case managers,
12 administrative designees, local education agency (LEA) representatives or
13 long-term clinical service providers in the IEP process, as these roles
14 compromise delivery of the school counseling program to each and every
15 student.

17 **The Rationale**

18 School counselors' role in the IEP process has become increasingly unclear,
19 leading to inconsistent practices across schools and districts and creating
20 confusion, ethical tension and potential compliance risks (Foxx & Anderson,
21 2019; Stone, 2017). Although school counselors are essential collaborators
22 who support students' academic, career and social/emotional development,
23 school counselors should not be considered as special education case
24 managers or long-term clinical mental health providers.

26 When school counselors are placed in administrative, case management or
27 mandated service provider roles, these roles conflict with their primary
28 function to deliver a school counseling program. This role conflict limits
29 school counselors' ability to deliver Tier 1 services and creates risks related
30 to licensure, ethics and the provision of a free, appropriate public education
31 (Wikoff, 2020; Stone & Dahir, 2016).

33 **The School Counselor's Role**

34 The school counselor should engage in the following functions as a member
35 of the IEP team:

37 **Participate and Collaborate**

- Participate as a member of the IEP team when appropriate,
39 serving as collaborators and consultants within multidisciplinary

40 teams supporting students with disabilities (Reese, 2021; Hines
41 et al., 2019).

42 **Provide Advocacy and Access**

- 43 • Advocate for students in the IEP process by ensuring their voice,
44 strengths and needs are represented, and promote equitable
45 access to rigorous coursework, school programs and
46 postsecondary opportunities (ASCA, 2022b, Geltner & Leibforth,
47 2008).

48 **Provide Social/Emotional and Behavioral Insight**

- 49 • Provide insight into the student's functioning, including peer
50 relationships, coping skills, behavior patterns and emotional
51 regulation, and help connect these factors to academic
52 performance and school success (Buckley & Mahdavi, 2018).
- 53 • Assist the team in identifying student needs and contribute to the
54 development of appropriate, measurable, school-based supports
55 aligned with IEP goals (Barna & Nice, 2021; Frazier et al., 2022).

56 **Provide College, Career and Transition Planning**

- 57 • Support college and career readiness by contributing to
58 transition planning, aligning IEP goals with postsecondary
59 outcomes related to education, employment and independent
60 living (Challenger et al., 2024).

61 **Clarify the Role of Counseling Services in IEPs**

- 62 • Distinguish between school-based counseling and long-term
63 clinical therapy as it pertains to the school environment.
- 64 • Ensure that any counseling services included in an IEP are
65 educationally relevant, time-limited, aligned to measurable
66 school-based goals. If the school counselor is to deliver this
67 counseling, the services should be consistent with the school
68 counselor's training, scope of practice and ethical standards
69 (Stone, 2017).
- 70 • Collaborate with the IEP team to determine when more intensive
71 or clinical mental health services are needed.

72 **Ensure Multitiered System of Supports (MTSS) Alignment**

- 73 • **Tier 1 – Universal supports for each and every student:**
74 Deliver classroom instruction and schoolwide initiatives that
75 promote learning strategies, self-management skills and social
76 skills
- 77 • **Tier 2 – Interventions for some students:** Provide small-
78 group and individual counseling for students, and referrals,
79 consultation and collaboration with education partners
- 80 • **Tier 3 – Indirect services for few students:** Recognize and
81 respond to intensive academic, behavioral and mental health
82 needs through referrals, consultation and collaboration (ASCA,
83 2025)

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85 School counselors maintain clear professional boundaries by focusing on
86 serving each and every student through their school counseling program.
87 (Stone, 2017; Stone & Dahir, 2016). They serve as collaborative team
88 members, ensuring their roles remain aligned with school counseling
89 professional and ethical standards (ASCA, 2022a; ASCA, 2025).

90
91 **Summary**

92 When school counselors operate within their appropriate role, as essential
93 collaborative advocates in the IEP process, students with disabilities receive
94 more equitable access and support for academic, career and
95 social/emotional development. School counselors focus on the inclusion of
96 students with IEPs into their school counseling program rather than serve in
97 administrative or case management roles for the IEP.

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