

(Adopted 1984; revised 1992, 1998, 2004, 2010, 2016, 2022)

## Preamble

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) is a professional organization supporting school counselors, school counseling students/interns, school counseling program directors/supervisors and school counselor educators. These standards are the ethical responsibility of all school counseling professionals.

School counselors have unique qualifications and skills to implement a comprehensive school counseling program that addresses pre-K–12 students' academic, career and social/emotional development needs. School counselors are leaders, advocates, collaborators and consultants who create systemic change to ensure equitable educational outcomes through the school counseling program. School counselors demonstrate the belief that all students have the ability to learn by advocating for and contributing to an education system that provides optimal learning environments for all students.

All students have the right to:

- Be respected and treated with dignity.
- A physically and emotionally safe, inclusive and healthy school environment, both in-person and through digital platforms, free from abuse, bullying, harassment, discrimination and any other forms of violence.
- Equitable access to a school counseling program that promotes academic, career and social/emotional development and improves student outcomes for all students, including students historically and currently marginalized by the education system.
- Equitable access to school counselors who support students from all backgrounds and circumstances and who advocate for and affirm all students regardless of but not limited to ethnic/racial identity; nationality; age; social class; economic status; abilities/disabilities; language; immigration status; sexual orientation; gender identity; gender expression; family type; religious/spiritual identity; and living situations, including emancipated minor status, wards of the state, homelessness or incarceration.
- Information and support needed to enhance self-development and affirmation within one's group identities.
- Critical, timely information, beginning with pre-K through grade 12, on how college/university, career and technical school, military, workforce and other postsecondary options can have an impact on their educational choices and future opportunities.
- Privacy that is honored to the greatest extent possible, which at times may be limited by school counselors' balance of other competing interests (e.g., best interests of students, the safety of others, parental rights) and adherence to laws,

policies and ethical standards pertaining to confidentiality and disclosure in the school setting.

## Purpose

In this document, ASCA specifies the obligation to the principles of ethical behavior necessary to maintain the highest standards of integrity, leadership and professionalism. The ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors were developed in collaboration with school counselors, state school counselor associations, school counseling district and state leaders, and school counselor educators across the nation to clarify the profession's norms, values and beliefs.

The purpose of this document is to:

- Serve as a guide for the ethical practices of all individuals serving in a school counseling capacity, including school counselors, school counseling students/interns, supervisors/directors of school counseling programs and school counselor educators regardless of grade level, geographic area, population served or ASCA membership.
- Provide support and direction for self-assessment, peer consultation and performance appraisal regarding school counselors' responsibilities to students, parents/guardians, colleagues and professional associates, school district and employees, communities and the school counseling profession.
- Inform all educational stakeholders, including but not limited to students, parents/guardians, teachers/staff, administrators, community members, legal professionals and courts of justice, regarding the ethical practices, values and expected behaviors of the school counseling professional.

## A. RESPONSIBILITY TO STUDENTS

### A.1 Supporting Student Development

School counselors:

- a. Have a primary obligation to the students, who are to be treated with dignity and respect as unique individuals.
- b. Foster and affirm all students and their identity and psychosocial development.
- c. Support all students and their development by actively working to eliminate systemic barriers or bias impeding student development.
- d. Provide culturally responsive instruction and appraisal and advisement to students.
- e. Provide culturally responsive counseling to students in a brief context and support students and families/guardians in obtaining outside services if students need long-term clinical/mental health counseling.

- f. Do not diagnose but recognize how a student's diagnosis and environment can potentially affect the student's access, participation and ability to achieve academic, postsecondary and social/emotional success.
  - g. Acknowledge the vital role and rights of parents/guardians, families and tribal communities.
  - h. Respect students' and families' values, beliefs and cultural background, as well as students' sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression, and exercise great care to avoid imposing personal biases, beliefs or values rooted in one's religion, culture or ethnicity.
  - i. Are knowledgeable of local, state and federal laws, as well as school and district policies and procedures affecting students and families and strive to protect and inform students and families regarding their rights.
  - j. Advocate for equitable, anti-oppressive and anti-bias policies and procedures, systems and practices, and provide effective, evidence-based and culturally sustaining interventions to address student needs.
  - k. Involve diverse networks of support, including but not limited to educational teams, community and tribal agencies and partners, wraparound services and vocational rehabilitation services as needed to best serve students.
  - l. Maintain appropriate boundaries and are aware that any sexual or romantic relationship with students (whether legal or illegal in the state of employment) is a grievous breach of ethics and is prohibited regardless of a student's age or consent. This prohibition applies to both in-person and electronic interactions and relationships.
- f. Keep information confidential unless legal requirements demand confidential information be revealed or a breach is required to prevent serious and foreseeable harm to the student or others. Serious and foreseeable harm is different for each minor in schools and is determined by a student's developmental and chronological age, the setting, parental/guardian rights and the nature of the harm. School counselors consult with appropriate professionals when in doubt as to the validity of an exception.
  - g. Recognize their primary ethical obligation for confidentiality is to the students but balance that obligation with an understanding of parents'/guardians' legal and inherent rights to be the guiding voice in their children's lives. School counselors understand the need to balance students' ethical rights to make choices, their capacity to give consent or assent, and parental or familial legal rights and responsibilities to make decisions on their child's behalf.
  - h. Collaborate with and involve students to the extent possible and use the most appropriate and least intrusive method to breach confidentiality if such action is warranted. The child's developmental age and the circumstances requiring the breach are considered and, as appropriate, students are engaged in a discussion about the method and timing of the breach. Consultation with professional peers and/or supervision is recommended.
  - i. Request of the court that disclosure not be required when the school counselor's testimony or case notes are subpoenaed if the release of confidential information may potentially harm a student or the counseling relationship.
  - j. Protect the confidentiality of students' records and release of personal data in accordance with prescribed federal and state laws and district and school policies.
  - k. Recognize the vulnerability of confidentiality in electronic communications and only transmit student information electronically in a way that follows currently accepted security standards and meets federal, state and local laws and school board policy.
  - l. Convey a student's highly sensitive information (e.g., a student's suicidal ideation) through personal contact such as a phone call or visit and not less-secure means such as a notation in the educational record or an email. Adhere to federal, state and local laws and school board policy when conveying sensitive information.
  - m. Advocate for appropriate safeguards and protocols so highly sensitive student information is not disclosed accidentally to individuals who do not have a need to know such information. Best practice suggests a very limited number of educators would have access to highly sensitive information on a need-to-know basis.
  - n. Advocate with appropriate school officials for acceptable encryption standards to be utilized for stored data and currently acceptable algorithms to be utilized for data in transit.
  - o. Avoid using software programs without the technological capabilities to protect student information based upon legal specifications and currently acceptable security standards.
  - p. Advocate for physical and virtual workspaces that are arranged to protect the confidentiality of students' communications and records.

## **A.2. Confidentiality**

### **School counselors:**

- a. Promote awareness of school counselors' ethical standards and legal mandates regarding confidentiality and the appropriate rationale and procedures for disclosure of student data and information to school staff.
- b. Inform students of the purposes, goals, techniques, rules and procedures under which they may receive counseling. Disclosure includes informed consent and clarification of the limits of confidentiality.
- c. Recognize that informed consent requires competence, voluntariness and knowledge on students' part to understand the limits of confidentiality and, therefore, can be difficult to obtain from students of certain developmental levels and special-needs populations. The school counselor should make attempts to gain assent appropriate to the individual student (e.g., in the student's preferred language) prior to disclosure.
- d. Are aware that even though attempts are made to obtain informed consent, it is not always possible. When needed, school counselors make decisions on students' behalf that promote students' welfare.
- e. Explain the limits of confidentiality in developmentally appropriate terms through multiple methods, such as student handbooks; classroom lessons; verbal notification to individual students; and school counseling department websites, brochures and social media accounts.

### **A.3. Comprehensive School Counseling Program**

#### **School counselors:**

- a. Provide students with a culturally responsive school counseling program that promotes academic, career and social/emotional development and equitable opportunity and achievement outcomes for all students.
- b. Collaborate with administration, teachers, staff and stakeholders for equitable school improvement goals.
- c. Use data-collection tools adhering to standards of confidentiality as expressed in A.2.
- d. Review and use school and student data to assess and address needs, including but not limited to data on strengths and disparities that may exist related to gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability and/or other relevant classifications.
- e. Deliver research-based interventions to help close achievement, attainment, information, attendance, discipline, resource and opportunity gaps.
- f. Collect and analyze participation, ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors and outcome data to determine the progress and effectiveness of the school counseling program.
- g. Share data outcomes with stakeholders.

### **A.4. Academic, Career and Social/Emotional Planning**

#### **School counselors:**

- a. Collaborate with a community of stakeholders to create a culture of postsecondary readiness.
- b. Provide and advocate for all students' pre-K–postsecondary career awareness, exploration, and postsecondary planning and decision-making to support students' right to choose from the wide array of career and postsecondary options, including but not limited to college/university, career and technical school, military or workforce.
- c. Identify and examine gaps in college and career access and address both intentional and unintentional biases in postsecondary and career counseling.
- d. Provide opportunities for all students to develop a positive attitude toward learning, effective learning strategies, self-management and social skills and an understanding that lifelong learning is part of long-term career success.
- e. Address their personal biases related to students' postsecondary choices.
- f. Address any inequitable systemic policies and practices related to students' postsecondary choices.

### **A.5. Sustaining Healthy Relationships and Managing Boundaries**

#### **School counselors:**

- a. Engage in professional roles and relationships with students and stakeholders that foster wellness and student success.

- b. Recognize that establishing credibility, rapport and an effective working alliance with some students and stakeholders may be facilitated by developing relationships that extend beyond the school day and building (e.g., attending community events, advocating for community improvement for and with students and stakeholders, joining community enhancement organizations).
- c. Assess potential risks and benefits prior to extending relationships beyond the school building and school hours (e.g., attending students off-site extracurricular activities, celebrations honoring students, hospital visits, funerals).
- d. Document the nature of relationship extensions, including the rationale, potential benefit and possible consequences for the student and school counselor.
- e. Act to eliminate and/or reduce the potential for harm to students and stakeholders in any relationships or interactions by using safeguards, such as informed consent, consultation, supervision and documentation.
- f. Prevent potential harm to students and stakeholders with whom the school counselor's judgment may be compromised (e.g., family members, children of close friends) by helping facilitate the provision of alternative services or resources when available.
- g. Adhere to legal, ethical, district and school policies and guidelines regarding relationships with students and stakeholders.
- h. Refrain from the use of personal social media, text and email accounts to interact with students unless sanctioned by the school district. Adhere to legal, ethical, district and school policies and guidelines when using technology with students and stakeholders.
- i. Avoid inappropriate roles and relationships such as providing direct discipline, teaching courses that involve grading students and accepting administrative duties in the absence of an administrator.
- j. Strive to avoid a conflict of interest through self-promotion that would benefit the school counselor personally and/or financially (e.g., advertising their products and/or services).

### **A.6. Appropriate Collaboration, Advocacy and Referrals for Counseling**

#### **School counselors:**

- a. Collaborate with all relevant stakeholders, including students, school faculty/staff and parents/guardians, when students need assistance, including when early warning signs of student distress are identified.
- b. Provide a list of outside agencies and resources in their community, or the closest available, to students and parents/guardians when students need or request additional support. School counselors provide multiple referral options or the district-vetted list of referrals options and are careful not to indicate an endorsement or preference for one individual or practice. School counselors encourage parents/guardians to research outside professionals' skills/experience to inform their personal decision regarding the best source of assistance for their student.

- c. Connect students with services provided through the local school district and community agencies and remain aware of state laws and local district policies related to students with special needs, including limits to confidentiality and notification to authorities as appropriate.
  - d. Develop a plan for the transitioning of primary counseling services with minimal interruption of services. Students retain the right for the referred services to be conducted in coordination with the school counselor or to discontinue counseling services with the school counselor while maintaining an appropriate relationship that may include participation in other school support services.
  - e. Refrain from referring students based solely on the school counselor's personal beliefs or values rooted in one's religion, culture, ethnicity or personal worldview. School counselors maintain the highest respect for student cultural identities and worldviews. School counselors pursue additional training and supervision when their values are discriminatory in nature (e.g., sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, reproductive rights, race, religion, ability status). School counselors do not impose their values on students and/or families when making referrals to outside resources for student and/or family support.
  - f. Attempt to establish a collaborative relationship with outside service providers to best serve students. Request a release of information signed by the student and/or parents/guardians before attempting to collaborate with the student's external provider.
  - g. Provide internal and external service providers with accurate and meaningful data necessary to adequately assess, counsel and assist students.
  - h. Ensure there is not a conflict of interest in providing referral resources. School counselors do not refer or accept a referral to counsel students from their school if they also work in a private counseling practice.
- h. Communicate the aspiration of confidentiality as a group norm, while recognizing and working from the protective posture that confidentiality for students in small groups cannot be guaranteed.
  - i. Select topics for groups with the clear understanding that some topics are not suitable for groups in schools (e.g., incest survivorship, eating disorders, dating violence) and accordingly take precautions to protect members from harm as a result of interactions with the group.
  - j. Facilitate culturally sustaining groups from the framework of evidence-based or research-based practices.
  - k. Practice within their competence level and develop professional competence through training and supervision.
  - l. Provide necessary follow-up and/or referrals to additional resources for group members.

### **A.8. Student Peer-Support Program**

#### **School counselors:**

- a. Share the student peer-support program's goal and purpose with stakeholders.
- b. Safeguard the welfare of students participating in peer-to-peer programs under their direction.
- c. Strive to protect the confidentiality of students receiving peer support services by not sharing or disclosing personal information (e.g., special education services, academic information).
- d. Work to select peer helpers who reflect the diversity of the population to be served.
- e. Facilitate equitable access, representation and cultural sustainability in peer-support programs.
- f. Develop, train and supervise students in school counseling peer-support programs, using culturally relevant frameworks that promote inclusion and belonging.
- g. Inform peer-support students about when students need to report information to a responsible adult at school.

### **A.7. Group Work**

#### **School counselors:**

- a. Offer culturally sustaining small-group counseling services based on individual student, school and community needs; student data; a referral process; and/or other relevant data.
- b. Provide equitable access to participation in groups, including alleviating physical, language and other obstacles.
- c. Assess student needs to determine if participating in the group is appropriate for the student.
- d. Inform parents/guardians of student participation in and the purpose of the small group.
- e. Facilitate short-term groups to address students' academic achievement, postsecondary and career exploration, and social/emotional well-being.
- f. Use data to inform group topics, establish well-defined expectations and measure the outcomes of group participation.
- g. Reflect on group outcomes and determine adjustments that may improve future group interventions.

### **A.9. Serious and Foreseeable Harm to Self and Others**

#### **School counselors:**

- a. Inform parents/guardians and school administration when a student poses a serious and foreseeable risk of harm to self or others. This notification is to be done after careful deliberation and consultation with appropriate professionals, such as other school counselors, the school nurse, school psychologist, school social worker, school resource officer or child protective services. Even if the danger appears relatively remote, parents/guardians must be notified. The consequence of the risk of not giving parents/guardians a chance to intervene on behalf of their child is too great.
- b. Recognize the level of suicide risk (e.g., low, medium, high) is difficult to accurately quantify. If required to use a risk assessment, it must be completed with the realization that it is an information-gathering tool and only one element in the risk-assessment process. When reporting risk-assessment



results to parents/guardians, school counselors do not negate the risk of students' potential harm to self even if the assessment reveals a low risk, as students may minimize risk to avoid further scrutiny and/or parental/guardian notification. The purpose of reporting any risk-assessment results to parents/guardians is to underscore the need for parents/guardians to act, not to report a judgment of risk.

- c. Collaborate with school administration to ensure a student has proper supervision and support. If parents/guardians will not provide proper support, the school counselor takes necessary steps to underscore to parents/guardians the necessity to seek help and, at times, may include a report to child protective services.
- d. Provide culturally responsive mental health resources to parents/guardians.
- e. Report to administration and/or appropriate authorities (e.g., law enforcement) when a student discloses a perpetrated or a perceived threat to another person's physical or mental well-being. This threat may include but is not limited to verbal abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, dating violence, bullying or harassment. The school counselor follows applicable federal and state laws and school and district policy.

## **A.10. Marginalized Populations**

**School counselors:**

- a. Advocate with and on behalf of students to ensure they remain safe at home, in their communities and at school. A high standard of care includes determining what information is shared with parents/guardians and when information creates an unsafe environment for students.
- b. Actively work to establish a safe, equitable, affirming school environment in which all members of the school community demonstrate respect, inclusion and acceptance.
- c. Identify and advocate for resources needed to optimize and support academic, career and social/emotional development opportunities.
- d. Collaborate with parents/guardians when appropriate and strive to establish consistent, constructive two-way communication in their preferred language to ensure students' needs are met.
- e. Understand and advocate for all students' right to be treated in a manner that honors and respects their identity and expression, including but not limited to race, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, language and ability status, and to be free from any form of discipline, harassment or discrimination based on their identity or expression.
- f. Advocate for the equitable right and access to free, appropriate public education for all youth in which students are not stigmatized or isolated based on race, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, language, immigration status, juvenile justice/court involvement, housing, socioeconomic status, ability, foster care, transportation, special education, mental health and/or any other exceptionality or special need.
- g. Advocate for access to and inclusion in opportunities (e.g., Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, gifted and talented, honors, dual enrollment) in which students are

not stigmatized, isolated or excluded based on race, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, language, immigration status, juvenile justice/court involvement, housing, socioeconomic status, ability, foster care, transportation, special education, mental health and/or any other exceptionality or special need.

- h. Actively advocate for systemic and other changes needed for equitable participation and outcomes in educational programs when disproportionality exists regarding enrollment in such programs by race, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, language, immigration status, juvenile justice/court involvement, housing, socioeconomic status, ability, foster care, transportation, special education, mental health and/or any other exceptionality or special need.
- i. Recognize the strengths of students with disabilities as well as their challenges and provide best practices in supporting their academic, career and social/emotional needs.

## **A.11. Bullying, Harassment, Discrimination, Bias and Hate Incidents**

**School counselors:**

- a. Recognize that bullying, discrimination, bias and hate incidents rooted in race, gender, sexual orientation and ethnicity are violations of federal law and many state and local laws and district policies.
- b. Advocate for schoolwide policies, protocols and training for response to bullying, harassment and bias incidents centered in safety, belonging and justice.
- c. Advocate for accessible, effective tools for students or community to report incidents of bullying, hate or bias.
- d. Report all incidents of bullying, dating violence or harassment to the administration, recognizing these behaviors may fall under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 or other federal and state laws as illegal and require administrator intervention.
- e. Recognize that bias incidents are not only potentially traumatizing for students but can lead to significant damage and disruption of the school environment. Facilitate and monitor schoolwide prevention of bullying, harassment, discrimination, hate and bias through active practices that support a positive school climate, culture and belonging.
- f. In response to a hate or bias incident (e.g. discrimination, explicit bias, hate speech), collaborate with administrative teams to ensure safety, provide support for targeted students, facilitate effective communication, provide education, connect students to resources and promote healing and recovery within the school community.
- g. In developmentally appropriate ways and in the context of the incident, support victims, and encourage growth and provide tools for accountability and change (e.g. restorative practices) in perpetrators, and promote healing in the school community while deferring to administration for all discipline issues or any other violation of federal and state laws or district and school policies.
- h. Actively respond to incidents of bias or hate, demonstrating a commitment to equity and promoting a safe, inclusive school community.

## **A.12 Child Abuse**

School counselors:

- a. Report to the proper authorities, as mandated by the state, all suspected cases of child abuse and neglect, recognizing that certainty is not required, only reasonable suspicion. School counselors are held to a higher standard regarding their absolute duty as a mandated reporter to report suspected child abuse and neglect.
- b. Develop and maintain the expertise to recognize the signs of child abuse and neglect. Advocate for training to enable students and staff to have the knowledge and skills needed to recognize the signs and to whom they should report suspected child abuse and neglect.
- c. Take reasonable precautions to protect the privacy of students for whom abuse or neglect is suspected from those who do not have a legitimate need to know.
- d. Know current state laws and the school system's procedures for reporting child abuse and neglect and methods to advocate for students' physical and emotional safety following abuse/neglect reports.
- e. Connect students who have experienced abuse and neglect with services provided through the local school district and community agencies.

## **A.13. Student Records**

School counselors:

- a. Abide by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), which defines who has access to students' educational records and allows parents/guardians the right to review the records and challenge perceived inaccuracies in their child's records.
- b. Advocate for the ethical use of student data and records and inform administration of inappropriate or harmful practices.
- c. Recognize the difficulty in adhering to FERPA's definition of sole-possession records.
- d. Recognize that sole-possession records and case notes can be subpoenaed unless there is a specific state statute for privileged communication expressly protecting student/school counselor communication.
- e. Recognize that electronic communications with school officials regarding individual students, even without using student names, are likely to create student records that must be addressed in accordance with FERPA and state laws.
- f. Establish a reasonable timeline for purging sole-possession records or case notes. Suggested guidelines include shredding paper sole-possession records or deleting electronic sole-possession records when a student transitions to the next level, transfers to another school or graduates. School counselors do not destroy sole-possession records that may be needed by a court of law, such as notes on child abuse, suicide, sexual harassment or violence, without prior review and approval by school district legal counsel. School counselors follow district policies and procedures when contacting legal counsel.

## **A.14. Evaluation, Assessment and Interpretation**

School counselors:

- a. Use only valid and reliable research-based tests and assessments that are culturally sensitive, in the student's preferred language and free of bias.
- b. Adhere to all professional standards and regulations when selecting, administering and interpreting standardized assessment tools, and only use assessment instruments that are within the scope of practice for school counselors and for which they are licensed, certified, competent and trained to use.
- c. Follow confidentiality guidelines when using paper or electronic assessment instruments and programs.
- d. Consider the student's developmental age, language skills, home language and competence level when determining an assessment's appropriateness.
- e. Use multiple data points, both quantitative and qualitative whenever possible, to provide students and families with complete and accurate information to promote students' well-being.
- f. Provide interpretation, in the student's preferred language, of the nature, purpose, results and potential impact of assessment/evaluation measures in terms students and parents/ guardians can understand.
- g. Monitor the use of assessment results and interpretation, and take reasonable steps to prevent others from misusing the information.
- h. Use caution when selecting or using assessment techniques, making evaluations and interpreting the performance of populations not represented in the norm group on which an instrument is standardized.
- i. Conduct and disseminate the results of school counseling program assessments to determine the effectiveness of activities supporting students' academic, college/career and social/ emotional development through accountability measures, especially examining efforts to close opportunity gaps.

## **A.15. Technical and Digital Citizenship**

School counselors:

- a. Advocate for equitable access to technology for all students.
- b. Demonstrate appropriate selection and equitable use of culturally sustaining technology and software applications to enhance students' academic, career and social/emotional development. Attention is given to the legal and ethical considerations of technological applications, including confidentiality concerns, security issues, potential limitations and benefits, and communication practices in electronic media.
- c. Take appropriate and reasonable measures to maintain the confidentiality of student information and educational records stored or transmitted through the use of computers, social media, facsimile machines, telephones, voicemail, answering machines and other electronic technology.
- d. Promote the safe and responsible use of technology in collaboration with educators and families.

- e. Promote the benefits and clarify the limitations of various appropriate technological applications.
  - f. Use established and approved means of communication with students, maintaining appropriate boundaries, and help educate students about appropriate communication and boundaries.
  - g. Understand challenges with confidentiality when using email and establish protocols and boundaries for responding to emails.
  - h. Advocate for the use of virtual learning tools that include safeguards and protocols protecting highly sensitive student information.
  - i. Advocate against alert tools or apps requiring constant monitoring by school personnel. These tools are not aligned with the nature and function of school counseling.
- b. Respect the rights and responsibilities of custodial and noncustodial parents/guardians and, as appropriate, establish a collaborative relationship to facilitate and advocate for students' maximum growth in the areas of academic, career and social/emotional development.
  - c. Promote equity and inclusion through culturally affirming and sustaining practices honoring the diversity of families. Recognize that all parents/guardians, custodial and noncustodial, are vested with certain rights and responsibilities for their children's welfare by virtue of their role and according to law.
  - d. Inform parents of the school counseling program's mission and standards in academic, career and social/emotional domains that promote and enhance the learning process and outcomes for all students.
  - e. Adhere to the Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment when using universal screeners, surveys or needs assessments by informing parents/guardians prior to their use in accordance with school district policies and local, state and federal law.
  - f. Engage a diverse sample of parents/guardians and caregivers to provide opportunities for meaningful contributions to the school counseling program.
  - g. Adhere to federal, state and local laws; district policy; and ethical practice when assisting parents/guardians experiencing family difficulties interfering with their student's welfare.
  - h. Inform parents/guardians of the confidential nature of the school counseling relationship between the school counselor and student, while recognizing parents/guardians have inherent legal rights to student information.
  - i. Respect the privacy of parents/guardians in accordance with the student's best interests.
  - j. Provide parents/guardians with accurate, comprehensive and relevant information in a caring manner as appropriate and consistent with legal and ethical responsibilities to the students and parents/guardians. Exercise due diligence in a timely, efficient manner to communicate concerns that affect the students' safety and welfare.
  - k. Follow the directions and stipulations of the legal documentation in divorce, separation or custody cases, maintaining focus on the student. Adhere to clear boundaries and a position of neutrality when working with parents/guardians.

## **A.16. Virtual/Distance School Counseling**

### **School counselors:**

- a. Adhere to the same legal and ethical standards in a virtual/distance/hybrid setting as in face-to-face settings.
- b. Recognize, acknowledge and problem-solve the unique challenges and limitations of virtual/distance/hybrid school counseling.
- c. Establish procedures, in collaboration with school administrators and other support staff, for students to follow in both emergency and nonemergency situations when the school counselor is not available.
- d. Recognize and address the limitation of virtual/distance/hybrid school counseling confidentiality, which may include unintended viewers or recipients.
- e. Inform both students and parents/guardians of the benefits and limitations of virtual/distance/hybrid school counseling.
- f. Educate students on how to participate in the electronic school counseling relationship to minimize and prevent potential misunderstandings that could occur due to lack of verbal cues and inability to read body language or other visual cues that provide contextual meaning to the school counseling process and relationship.
- g. Recognize the challenges in virtual/distance/hybrid settings of assisting students considering suicide, including but not limited to identifying their physical location, keeping them engaged on the call or device, contacting their parents/guardians and getting help to their location.

## **B. RESPONSIBILITIES TO PARENTS/GUARDIANS, SCHOOL AND SELF**

### **B.1. Responsibilities to Parents/Guardians**

#### **School counselors:**

- a. Recognize, honor and respect the importance of parents/guardians when providing services to students in a school setting and collaborate with students' parents/guardians as appropriate.

### **B.2. Responsibilities to the School**

#### **School counselors:**

- a. Develop and maintain professional relationships and systems of communication with faculty, staff and administrators to support students.
- b. Design and deliver comprehensive school counseling programs that are integral to the school's academic mission, informed by analysis of student data, based on the ASCA National Model.
- c. Advocate for a school counseling program free of non-school-counseling assignments identified by "The ASCA National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs."

- d. Exercise leadership to create systemic change to create a safe and supportive environment and equitable outcomes for all students.
- e. Collaborate with appropriate officials to remove barriers that may impede the effectiveness of the school and/or the school counseling program in promoting equitable student outcomes.
- f. Provide support, consultation and mentoring to professionals in need of assistance when appropriate to enhance school climate and student outcomes.
- g. Inform appropriate officials, in accordance with federal and state law and school and district policy, of conditions that may be potentially disruptive or damaging to the school's mission, personnel and property, while honoring the confidentiality between students and school counselors to the extent possible.
- h. Advocate for administrators to place licensed/certified school counselors who are competent, qualified and hold a master's degree or higher in school counseling from an accredited institution.
- i. Advocate for equitable school counseling program policies and practices for all students and stakeholders.
- j. Advocate for the use of vetted, bilingual/multilingual translators to represent languages used by families in the school community and support broader cultural communication and engagement.
- k. Affirm the abilities of all students and advocate for their learning needs, supporting the provision of appropriate accommodations and accessibility.
- l. Provide culturally responsive information to families to increase understanding, improve communication, promote engagement and improve student outcomes.
- m. Promote culturally sustaining practices to help create a safe and inclusive school environment with equitable outcomes for all students.
- n. Adhere to educational/psychological research practices, confidentiality safeguards, security practices and school district policies when conducting research.
- o. Use school and community resources to promote equity and access for all students.
- p. Use inclusive language in all forms of communication and ensure students and stakeholders have access to materials in their preferred languages when possible.
- q. Collaborate as needed to provide optimum services with other school and community professionals with legitimate educational interests (e.g., school nurse, school psychologist, school social worker, speech-language pathologist), following all local, state and federal laws.
- r. Strive to address and remedy the work environment and conditions that do not reflect the school counseling profession's ethics, using advocacy and problem-solving skills.

### **B.3. Responsibilities to Self**

#### **School counselors:**

- a. Have earned a master's degree or higher in school counseling or the substantial equivalent from an accredited institution.
- b. Maintain membership in school counselor professional organizations to stay up to date on current research and to maintain professional competence in current school counseling issues and topics.
- c. Accept employment only for positions for which they are qualified by education, training, supervised experience and state/national professional credentials.
- d. Adhere to the profession's ethical standards and other official policy statements such as ASCA position statements and role statements, school board policies and relevant laws. When laws and ethical codes are in conflict, school counselors work to adhere to both as much as possible.
- e. Engage in routine, content-applicable professional development to stay up to date on trends and needs of students and other stakeholders, and regularly attend training on current legal and ethical responsibilities.
- f. Explore and examine implicit biases and the impact on practice and interaction with students; apply learning to program practice and development.
- g. Develop knowledge and understanding of historic and systemic oppression, social justice and cultural models (e.g., multicultural counseling, anti-racism, culturally sustaining practices) to further develop skills for systemic change and equitable outcomes for all students.
- h. Recognize the potential for stress and secondary trauma. Practice wellness and self-care through monitoring mental, emotional and physical health, while seeking consultation from an experienced school counseling practitioner and/or others when needed.
- i. Monitor personal behaviors and recognize the high standard of care a professional in this critical position of trust must maintain on and off the job. School counselors are cognizant of and refrain from activity that may diminish their effectiveness within the school community.
- j. Apply an ethical decision-making model and seek consultation and supervision from colleagues and other professionals who are knowledgeable of the profession's practices when ethical questions arise.
- k. Honor the diversity and identities of students and seek training/supervision when prejudice or biases interfere with providing comprehensive school counseling services to all pre-K–12 students. School counselors will not refuse services to students based solely on personally held beliefs/values rooted in one's religion, culture or ethnicity. School counselors work toward a school climate that embraces diverse identities and promotes equitable outcomes in academic, career and social/emotional development for all students.
- l. Have an awareness of and make clear distinctions between actions and statements (verbal or written) made as a private individual versus those made as a representative of the school counseling profession and of the school district/school entity.
- m. Respect the intellectual property of others and adhere to copyright laws and correctly cite others' work when using it.



### **C. SCHOOL COUNSELOR DIRECTORS/ ADMINISTRATORS/SUPERVISORS**

School counselor directors/administrators/supervisors support school counselors in their charge by:

- a. Advocating both within and outside of their schools or districts for adequate resources to implement a school counseling program and meet students' needs and the school community's needs.
  - b. Advocating for fair and open distribution of resources among programs supervised, using an allocation procedure that is nondiscriminatory, equitable, informed by comprehensive data and consistently applied.
  - c. Taking reasonable steps to ensure school and other resources are available to provide staff supervision and training.
  - d. Providing opportunities for professional development in current research related to school counseling practices, competencies and ethics.
  - e. Taking steps to eliminate conditions or practices in their schools or organizations that may violate, discourage or interfere with compliance with the laws and ethics related to the school counseling profession or equitable outcomes for students.
  - f. Monitoring school and organizational policies, regulations and procedures to ensure practices are consistent with the ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors.
  - g. Using and/or advocating for a performance appraisal instrument aligned with the ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards & Competencies that assesses school counselors' knowledge, skills and attitudes.
  - h. Understanding the ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors, the ASCA National Model and the ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards & Competencies.
  - i. Providing staff with opportunities and support to develop knowledge and understanding of historic and systemic oppression, social justice and cultural models (e.g., multicultural counseling, anti-racism, culturally sustaining practices) to further develop skills for systemic change and equitable outcomes for all students.
  - j. Collaborating and consulting with school counseling graduate programs to support appropriate site placement for supervisees and ensure high-quality training that is essential for school counselor preparation.
- c. Use a model of supervision that is developmental, ongoing and includes but is not limited to promoting professional growth, supporting best practices and ethical practice, assessing supervisee performance and developing plans for improvement, consulting on specific cases and assisting in the development of a course of action.
  - d. Engage in culturally affirming supervision, maintain cultural competence and consider cultural and historic factors and power dynamics that may have an impact on the supervisory relationship.
  - e. Avoid supervisory relationships with individuals with whom they have the inability to remain objective (e.g., family members or close friends).
  - f. Are competent with technology used to perform supervisory responsibilities and online supervision, if applicable. Supervisors protect all electronically transmitted confidential information.
  - g. Understand there are differences in face-to face and virtual communication (e.g., absence of verbal and nonverbal cues) that may have an impact on virtual supervision. Supervisors educate supervisees on how to communicate electronically to prevent and avoid potential problems and negative outcomes.
  - h. Provide information about how and when virtual supervisory services will be utilized, and provide school counselors with reasonable access to pertinent applications.
  - i. Ensure performance evaluations are completed in a timely, fair and considerate manner; base evaluations on clearly stated criteria; and use data when available.
  - j. Ensure supervisees are aware of policies and procedures related to supervision and evaluation and provide due-process procedures if supervisees appeal their evaluations.
  - k. Understand supervisee limitations and communicate concerns to the university/college supervisor in a timely manner.
  - l. Help supervisees select appropriate professional development based on identified needs.
  - m. Contact university/college supervisors and consult with school administrators to recommend assistance or dismissal when supervisees are unable to demonstrate competence as a school counselor as defined by the ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards & Competencies. Document recommendations and ensure supervisees are aware of such decisions and the resources available to them.
  - n. Recognize and acknowledge the specific roles of school counselor educators, site supervisors and the practicum/internship student. Supervisors ensure that supervisees are able to participate in a variety of academic, college/career and social/emotional activities through individual, group and classroom interventions.

### **D. SCHOOL COUNSELING PRACTICUM/ INTERNSHIP SITE SUPERVISORS**

Practicum/internship site supervisors:

- a. Are licensed or certified school counselors with an understanding of school counseling programs and school counselors' ethical practices.
- b. Have the education and training to provide school counseling supervision and regularly pursue continuing education activities on both counseling and supervision topics and skills.

### **E. MAINTENANCE OF STANDARDS**

When the absence of a settled opinion or conviction exists as to the ethical behavior of a colleague(s), the following procedures may serve as a guide:

- a. School counselors confidentially consult with professional colleagues to discuss the potentially unethical behavior and determine if the situation is an ethical violation.

- b. School counselors discuss and seek resolution directly with the colleague whose behavior is in question unless the behavior is unlawful, abusive, egregious or dangerous, in which case proper school or community authorities are contacted.
- c. School counselors understand mandatory reporting responsibilities in their respective districts and states.
- d. School counselors take appropriate action in the following sequence if the matter remains unresolved at the school, school district, state department of education and/or professional practice/standards commission level:
  1. Contact the state school counselor association's ethics committee if applicable.
    - i. If no such committee exists, contact the state school counselor association leadership.
    - ii. If the issue remains unresolved, proceed to step 2.
  2. Contact the American School Counselor Association. Formal documentation of the steps taken and the response of the complainant and respondent should be submitted in hard copy to the ASCA Ethics Committee, c/o the Executive Director, American School Counselor Association, 1101 King St., Suite 310, Alexandria, VA 22314.

## F. ETHICAL DECISION-MAKING

When faced with an ethical dilemma, school counselors and school counseling program directors/supervisors use an ethical decision-making model.

- a. Define the ethical dilemma.
- b. Identify potential cultural, religious and worldview factors and power dynamics that are present within a potential ethical dilemma.
- c. Apply the ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors and the relevant district policies and procedures.
- d. Consult with appropriate professionals (e.g., supervisors, other student service professionals, school counseling peers, cultural experts).
- e. Consider the student's chronological age and developmental level.
- f. Consider parental/guardian and student rights
- g. Apply the ethical principles of:
  - **Beneficence:** working for the good of the individual and society by promoting mental health and well-being
  - **Autonomy:** fostering the right to control the direction of one's life
  - **Nonmaleficence:** avoiding actions that cause harm
  - **Justice:** treating individuals equitably and fostering fairness and equality
  - **Fidelity:** honoring commitments and keeping promises, including fulfilling one's responsibilities of trust in professional relationships

- **Veracity:** dealing truthfully with individuals with whom school counselors come into professional contact
- h. Determine potential courses of action and their consequences.
  - i. Evaluate the selected action.
  - j. Implement the course of action and analyze the outcome.
  - k. Identify any inconsistencies in school/district policy for potential revision.
  - l. See other ethical decision-making models:
    - **Intercultural Model of Ethical Decision Making**, Luke et al., (2013)
    - **Solutions to Ethical Problems in Schools (STEPS)**, Stone (2003)
    - **Ethical Justification Model**, Kitchener (1984)

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

### Advocate

a person who speaks, writes or acts to promote the well-being of students, parents/guardians, school and community stakeholders, and the school counseling profession. School counselors advocate to create and maintain equitable systems, policies and practices.

### Anti-Racist

one who expresses the idea that race is a social construct and does not biologically exist while supporting policy that eliminates racial inequity and fighting against racism.

### Assent

to demonstrate agreement when a student is not competent to give informed consent to counseling or other services the school counselor is providing.

### Assessment

collecting in-depth information about a person to develop a comprehensive plan that will guide the collaborative counseling and service provision process.

### Bias Incident

use of hateful imagery, language or acts that are often noncriminal in nature motivated by bigotry, prejudice or hate toward individuals because of the targets' perceived disability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, nationality, race, sex or sexual orientation.

### Boundaries

something that indicates or affixes an extent or limits.

### Breach

disclosure of information given in private or confidential communication such as information given during counseling.

### Bullying

intentional, repeated harmful acts, words or other behavior such as name calling, threatening and/or shunning committed by one or more children against another. These negative acts are not intentionally provoked by the victims, and for such acts to be defined as bullying, an imbalance in real or perceived power must exist between the bully and the victim. Bullying may be physical, verbal, emotional or sexual in nature.

**Competence**

the quality of being competent; adequacy; possession of required skill, knowledge, qualification or capacity.

**Confidentiality**

the ethical duty of school counselors to responsibly protect a student's private communications shared in counseling.

**Conflict of Interest**

a situation in which a school counselor stands to personally profit from a decision involving a student.

**Consent**

permission, approval or agreement; compliance.

**Consultation**

a professional relationship in which individuals meet to seek advice, information and/or deliberation to address a student's need.

**Conventional Parameters**

general agreement or accepted standards regarding limits, boundaries or guidelines.

**Cultural Sensitivity**

a set of skills enabling you to know, understand and value the similarities and differences in people; modify your behavior to be most effective and respectful of students and families; and deliver programs that fit diverse learners' needs.

**Culturally Sustaining School Counseling**

policies and practices that affirm and embrace cultural pluralism, promote cultural dexterity and actively advocate for equitable systems and outcomes.

**Custodial and Noncustodial**

physical custody: a phrase used to determine which parent a minor student lives with as a result of a court order. A custodial parent has physical custody of the minor child while a noncustodial parent does not have physical custody of the minor child, as the result of a court order.

Legal custody: both custodial and noncustodial parents have educational rights to their child's records unless noted by court documentation.

**Data Dialogues**

inquiry with others around student information to uncover inequities, promote informed investigations and assist in understanding the meaning of data and the next steps to have an impact on data.

**Data Informed**

accessing data, applying meaning to it and using data to have an impact on student success.

**Developmental Level/Age**

the age of an individual determined by degree of emotional, mental and physiological maturity as compared with typical behaviors and characteristics of that chronological age.

**Disclosure**

the act or an instance of exposure or revelation.

**Diversity**

the inclusion of individuals representing more than one national origin, gender identity, gender expression, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic stratum, sexual orientation and the intersection of cultural and social identities.

**Dual Relationship**

a relationship in which a school counselor is concurrently participating in two or more roles with a student.

**Empathy**

the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts and experience of another without having the feelings, thoughts and experience fully communicated in an objectively explicit manner.

**Emancipated Minors**

minors who are legally freed from control by their parents/guardians, and the parents/guardians are freed from any and all responsibility toward the children.

**Encryption**

process of putting information into a coded form to control and limit access to authorized users.

**Equity**

treated fairly; educational equity occurs when educators provide all students with the high-quality instruction and support they need to reach and exceed a common standard.

**Ethics**

the norms and principles of conduct and philosophy governing the profession.

**Ethical Behavior**

actions defined by standards of conduct for the profession.

**Ethical Obligation**

a standard or set of standards defining the course of action for the profession.

**Ethical Rights**

the fundamental normative rules about what is allowed of people or owed to people, according to some legal system, social convention or ethical theory.

**Feasible**

capable of being done, affected or accomplished easily or conveniently.

**Gender Expression**

the ways in which students manifest masculinity or femininity in terms of clothing, communication patterns and interests, which may or may not reflect the student's gender identity.

**Gender Identity**

one's personal experience of one's own gender. When one's gender identity and biological sex are not congruent, the student may identify as transgender.

**Guardian Ad Litem**

a guardian appointed by a court to watch after someone during a case.

**Harassment**

the act of systematic and/or continued unwanted disturbing or troubling persecution.

**Informed Consent**

assisting students in acquiring an understanding of the limits of confidentiality, the benefits, facts and risks of entering into a counseling relationship.

**Intervention**

to provide modifications, materials, advice, aids, services or other forms of support to have a positive impact on the outcome or course of a condition.

**Legal Mandates**

a judicial command or precept issued by a court or magistrate, directing proper behavior to enforce a judgment, sentence or decree.

**Legal Rights**

those rights bestowed onto a person by a given legal system.

**Mandatory Reporting**

the legal requirement to report to authorities.

**Minors**

persons under the age of 18 years unless otherwise designated by statute or regulation.

**Oppression**

unjust or cruel exercise of authority or power.

**Perception**

a mental image or awareness of environment through a physical sensation; a capacity for understanding or a result of an observation.

**Peer Helper**

peer-to-peer interaction in which individuals who are of approximately the same age take on a helping role assisting students who may share related values, experiences and lifestyles.

**Peer Support**

programs enhancing the effectiveness of the school counseling program while increasing outreach and raising student awareness of services.

**Privacy**

the right of an individual to keep oneself and one's personal information free from unauthorized disclosure.

**Privileged Communication**

conversation that takes place within the context of a protected relationship, such as that between an attorney and client, spouses, a priest and penitent, a doctor and patient and, in some states, a school counselor and student.

**Professional Development**

the process of improving and increasing capabilities through access to education and training opportunities.

**Racial Bias**

a personal and unreasoned judgment made solely on an individual's race.

**Racism**

when individuals, systems or institutions show more favorable evaluation or treatment of an individual or group based on race or ethnicity.

**Relationship**

a connection, association or involvement.

**Risk Assessment**

a systematic process of evaluating potential risks.

**School Counseling Supervisor**

a qualified professional who provides guidance, teaching and support for the professional development of school counselors and school counseling candidates.

**Serious and Foreseeable Harm**

when a reasonable person can anticipate significant and harmful possible consequences.

**Sole-Possession Records**

records used only as a personal memory aid that are kept in the sole possession of the maker of the record and are not accessible or revealed to any other person except a temporary substitute for the maker of the record and provide only professional opinion or personal observations. Sole-possession records are exempted from the definition of educational records and FERPA protection.

**Stakeholder**

a person or group sharing an investment or interest in the students and/or school community (e.g., parents/guardians, school staff, administrators, business and community interest groups, school board members, etc.).

**Systemic Change**

change affecting the entire system; transformational; change affecting more than an individual or series of individuals; focused upon the dynamic of the environment, not the individual.

**Supervision**

a collaborative relationship in which one person promotes and/or evaluates the development of another.

**Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972**

a law that demands that no person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.

**Universal Screener**

gathers information regarding behavioral and mental health issues by either reviewing existing data/input from educators or by asking questions directly of students. Schools receiving federal funding that use a universal screener asking even one question from one of the eight protected areas under the Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (PPRA) must obtain active consent from parents/guardians if a student is required to complete the screening and passive consent if the screening is voluntary (U.S. Department of Education, PPRA, 2022).

**Virtual/Distance Counseling**

counseling by electronic means.

