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**TITLE:** The National Standards for School Counseling Programs: A Partnership in Preparing Students for the New Millennium

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**ABSTRACT**

Aligning your school counseling program with national standards requires a rethinking of priorities, time, resources, and outcomes. This requires involving the entire school community to integrate the academic, career, and personal/social development of students into the mission of the school. How can principals and school counselors become partners on behalf of student success?

As schools drive curriculum change, improve instruction and learning, ensure that each student has an equitable opportunity for a quality education, and address accountability issues, it is essential they do not overlook a group of professionals who can have a positive impact on student success--a group of professionals who are neither teachers nor administrators; who can have a significant impact on the teaching and learning environment and help to create a school community that is positive and productive; a group of professionals--school counselors--who are trained to deliver a program that is part of the solution, not part of the problem.

Twenty years ago it was stated that school district administrators determine the role that school counselors play in helping students achieve the maximum benefit from the school experience (Costar 1978). More than 10 years ago, Boyer (1988) stated in his description of the school counselor:

Today, in most high schools, counselors are not only expected to advise students about college, they are also asked to police for drugs, keep records of dropouts, reduce teenage pregnancy, check traffic in the halls, smooth out the tempers of irate parents, and give aid and comfort to battered and neglected children. School counselors are expected to do what our communities, our homes, and our churches have not been able to accomplish, and if they cannot, we condemn them for failing to fulfill our high-minded expectations (p. 3).

Have perceptions altered or do these scenarios continue to dominate the contemporary view of school counseling?

The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) and the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) concur that the success of a school counseling program requires capitalizing on the training, expertise, and skill of school counselors to deliver a program that contributes significantly to the mission of the school and supports the expectations of the new

standards and assessments. A new paradigm cannot take hold, however, without an understanding of the elements of a school counseling program and how school counseling programs promote student success.

#### **HELPING STUDENTS REACH HIGHER EXPECTATIONS**

The purpose of the school counseling program is to impart skills and facilitate learning opportunities in an active and preventive manner that ensures all students can achieve school success through academic, career, and personal/social development experiences. As specialists in child and adolescent development, school counselors coordinate the objectives, strategies, and activities of a comprehensive and developmental school counseling program to meet the personal, social, educational, and career development needs of all students. School counselors advocate for all students as they strive to meet the challenges and demands of the school system and prepare for transition to options after high school. School counselors call attention to situations in schools that are defeating or frustrating students and thereby hindering their success. School counseling programs empower students to overcome obstacles to school achievement and ensure access to appropriate services for students with varying individual needs (Wurtz 1995).

The development of national standards across the academic disciplines continues to direct educational practice: curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The principal orchestrates the process to ensure all students achieve at the standard of expectation. The successful implementation of programs in violence prevention, safe and drug-free schools, academic and attendance intervention, school-to-career, school climate, character education, and access to postsecondary education requires the involvement of school counselors in a programmatic and systematic fashion. Successful implementation also requires the support and commitment of the principal. As partners with principals in the enormous challenge of preparing students to meet the expectations of higher academic standards, school counselors and school counseling programs have assumed an increasingly complex role in contemporary education.

With this in mind, and in response to the educational reform agenda of GOALS 2000, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) aligned itself with the academic disciplines and developed the National Standards for School Counseling Programs to better define the role of U.S. school counseling programs (Campbell and Dahir 1997). The research process included a national survey that:

- a. Examined the attitudes of elementary, middle level, and high school counselors toward the development of national standards for school counseling programs
- b. Clarified the purpose that standards would serve for school counseling programs
- c. Identified the program components that school counselors believe should be contained in national standards.

This research study clearly established that school counselors strongly wished to have national

standards. A representative sample of more than 1,100 ASCA school counselor practitioners identified what they believed was important in their current programs and what was important to include in national standards. ACT served as research consultant and coordinator for collecting information and donated personnel and resources to ensure the survey design, distribution, and data analysis followed universally accepted research practices.

Additionally, school counselors responded that national standards would identify a focal point for practice, articulate a professional mission, and provide a center for aspiration and momentum for the future. National standards would establish similar goals, expectations, support systems, and experiences for all students as a result of participating in school counseling programs and define the vision and goals for the school counseling program in the twenty-first century. The findings further delineated the program priorities of elementary, middle level, and high school counselors.

#### **NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR SCHOOL COUNSELING PROGRAMS**

The national standards are statements of what students should know and be able to do as a result of participating in a school counseling program. The standards represent what a school counseling program should contain and serve as an organizational tool to identify and set priorities among the elements of an effective and accountable school counseling program. They serve as a framework for developing and writing a school counseling program and guide state departments, local districts, and individual schools in planning, developing, implementing, and evaluating a school counseling program that is comprehensive, developmental, and systematic. The national standards:

- \* Establish the school counseling program as an integral component of the mission of your school
- \* Ensure equitable access to school counseling services for all students provided by a credentialed school counselor
- \* Identify the attitudes, knowledge, and skills that all students should acquire as a result of the K-12 school counseling program
- \* Ensure that the school counseling program is comprehensive in design and delivered in a systematic fashion to all students.

The national standards challenge school counselors to provide the advocacy and accountability to improve school achievement for all students and define the role of school counseling as a partner in the mission of school. The emphasis of school counseling is on success for all students, not just those who are motivated, supported, and ready to learn. The school counseling program based on national standards enables all students to achieve success in school and to develop into contributing members of our society. Most important, the National Standards for School Counseling Programs provide the rationale for school counselors, school administrators, faculty, parents, businesses, and the community to engage in conversations about

expectations for students' academic success and the role of counseling programs in enhancing student learning.

The nine national standards are based on the three widely accepted and interrelated areas of student development as described in the counseling, educational literature, and research: academic, career, and personal/social development.

\* The standards for academic development guide the school counseling program to implement strategies and activities to support and maximize student learning. Academic development includes acquiring attitudes, knowledge, and skills that contribute to effective learning in school and throughout life; employing strategies to achieve success in school; and understanding the relationship of academics to the world of work, and to life at home and in the community.

\* The standards for career development guide the school counseling program to provide the foundation for acquiring skills, attitudes, and knowledge that enable students to make a successful transition from school to the world of work, and from job to job. Career development includes employing strategies to achieve future career success and job satisfaction as well as fostering understanding of the relationship between personal qualities, education and training, and the world of work.

\* The standards for personal/social development guide the school counseling program to provide the foundation for personal and social growth, as students progress through school and into adulthood. Personal/social development contributes to academic and career success and includes the acquisition of skills, attitudes, and knowledge that help students understand and respect self and others, acquire effective interpersonal skills, understand safety and survival skills, and develop into contributing members of our society.

#### **ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT**

Standard A. Students will acquire the attitudes, knowledge, and skills that contribute to effective learning in school and across the life span.

Standard B. Students will complete school with the academic preparation essential to choose from a wide variety of substantial postsecondary options, including college.

Standard C. Students will understand the relationship of academics to the world of work, and to life at home and in the community.

#### **CAREER DEVELOPMENT**

Standard A. Students will acquire the skills to investigate the world of work in relation to knowledge of self and to make informed career decisions.

Standard B. Students will employ strategies to achieve future career success and satisfaction.

Standard C. Students will understand the relationship between personal qualities, education and training, and the world of work.

#### **PERSONAL/SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

Standard A. Students will acquire the attitudes, knowledge, and interpersonal skills to help

them understand and respect self and others.

Standard B. Students will make decisions, set goals, and take appropriate action to achieve goals.

Standard C. Students will understand safety and survival skills.

Student competencies that list desired student learning outcomes support each of the nine standards. These lists of competencies are not meant to be all-inclusive but rather represent the knowledge, attitudes, and skills students should obtain or demonstrate as a result of participating in a school counseling program. They provide guidance and direction for program design and should be adapted to local needs.

The national standards are the framework for developing and implementing an effective and accountable comprehensive school counseling program. The national standards and the selected competencies are not a "guidance curriculum." The standards are the content for a comprehensive school counseling program. The model for program delivery lies in individual and group counseling, large and small-group guidance, consultation, case management, coordination of services--the different methods that school counselors use to deliver an effective program. The national standards promote a systematic and collaborative model that becomes part of the fabric of the school. A school counseling program based on national standards necessitates the involvement of the entire school community to integrate academic, career, and personal/social development of students into the mission of each school.

#### **SUPPORTING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT**

Standards are public statements of what students should know and be able to do as a result of participating in a school counseling program. The national standards for school counseling programs are also statements of what students should know and be able to do as a result of participating in a school counseling program. The three academic standards serve as a guide to implementing strategies and activities that support and maximize student learning. The three standards for career development serve as a guide to providing the foundation for acquiring the attitudes, skills, and knowledge that enable students to make a successful transition from school to the world of work. The three personal/social development standards provide the foundation for personal and social growth that contribute to academic and career success. A national standards-based school counseling program supports students as they strive to achieve academic success, plan for their futures, and develop into contributing members of the world of the 21st century.

Accountability is the key to determining the effectiveness of a school counseling program and its impact on student performance. The nine national standards by themselves are not intended to be "measurable performance objectives." The competencies, either the representative list or locally derived, are the basis for developing measurable indicators of student progress and for evaluating a school's program. Decisions at the building and system levels will determine the degree to which students have acquired the skills and knowledge as defined by the standards.

Thus, evaluation becomes the reality check. It answers the question "What progress have your students made in realizing your vision of student accomplishment?" Program effectiveness is determined by student progress toward the competencies. Activities are designed or selected to support specific competencies. Evaluation is based on the question of what your students have learned. How is the school counseling program making a difference? Evaluating a program helps principals assess their school counseling program's progress toward student achievement of the national standards as they learn from mistakes and adjust the program.

Measurable success resulting from this effort can be documented by an increased number of students completing school with the academic preparation, the career awareness, and the personal/social growth essential to choose from a wide range of substantial postsecondary options, including college. Most important, as the principal, you can convey these successes to students, parents, teachers, district administration, and the community and demonstrate tangible evidence by using data to illustrate your program's impact on students.

#### **VISION FOR STUDENTS = COMMITMENT TO SCHOOL COUNSELING**

The goal of education is to produce a community of learners and workers who can successfully and effectively contribute to society. Student success is the basis for the school counseling program. The national standards serve as an organization tool to identify and set priorities among the elements of an effective school counseling program that support student success. Adopting and implementing national standards is changing the way school counseling programs are designed and delivered across the country. The emphasis is on academic success for all students, not only those students who are motivated, supported, and ready to learn. A commitment to the national standards ensures equitable access to school counseling programs for all students, not only those in crisis and those going to prestigious four-year colleges. The school counseling program based on national standards enables all students to achieve success in school and to develop into contributing members of society.

Aligning the school counseling program with national standards requires a rethinking of priorities, time, resources, and outcomes. This necessitates the involvement of the entire school community to integrate academic, career, and personal/social development of students into the mission of the school. No longer are school counselors perceived as highly paid "schedulers" or administrative clerks but as partners in the teaching and learning process. English, social studies, math, and science are supported by the "fifth discipline," the school counseling program. We seek solutions on a daily basis to improve academic achievement, eliminate senseless acts of violence, create a positive school atmosphere, connect disenfranchised youth, personalize the school experience, and help young people realize their dreams.

The principals' vision for their students and their commitment to student success are motivations to tap the talent and training of school counselors, their partners in preparing students to meet the challenges of the new millennium.

## ADDED MATERIAL

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Author Note: *Vision into Action: Implementing the National Standards for School Counseling Programs* (November 1998) is the companion workbook to *Sharing the Vision: The National Standards for School Counseling Programs*, published by ASCA in fall 1997. Publication sales have exceeded 15,000 copies and 100,000 Executive Summaries are in the hands of counseling and educational professional across our nation. The National Standards guide state departments, school systems, and individual schools in the design, implementation, and evaluation of a school counseling program that is comprehensive, systematic, and affects all students. Since fall 1998, the implementation process continues to affect state education departments, school counselor associations in the states, small and large school systems throughout the country, and major national counseling and/or educational associations such as ACT, American Counseling Association, Association of Counselor Educators and Supervisors, Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development, Association for Career and Technical Education, College Board, Education Trust, National Association of Elementary School Principals, National Association of Secondary School Principals, National Career Development Association, National Occupational Information Coordinating Council, National PTA, National Tech Prep Network, and National Association of College Admission Counseling.

For more information about either of the National Standards publications, to request complimentary executive Summaries for your school counselors, or to find out more about the National Standards implementation model, call the American School Counselor Association at (800) 306-4722. To order the National Standards publications call (800) 401-2404.

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