The ASCA National Model Themes

ASCA incorporates the four themes of leadership, advocacy, collaboration and systemic change as part of the framework of the ASCA National Model (The Education Trust, 1997). In the ASCA National Model graphic, the four themes are repeated around the frame to indicate the importance of school counselors’ work within these areas (see page vi). School counselors play a significant part in improving student achievement and are uniquely positioned to be student and systems advocates. Through application of leadership, advocacy and collaboration skills as a part of a comprehensive school counseling program, school counselors promote student achievement and systemic change that ensures equity and access to rigorous education for every student and leads to closing achievement, opportunity and attainment gaps (Dahir & Stone, 2009; Martin & House, 2002).

LEADERSHIP

From providing leadership for the development of a comprehensive school counseling program to solving problems with school and community groups that promote student achievement, school counselors are called to be leaders in a variety of ways.

School counseling leadership:
- supports academic achievement and student development
- advances effective delivery of the comprehensive school counseling program
- promotes professional identity
- overcomes challenges of role inconsistency (Shillingford & Lambie, 2010)

Leadership is an essential skill for school counselors as they develop and manage a comprehensive school counseling program. As the other themes of advocacy, collaboration and systemic change require leadership to some degree, leadership may be the foundation of the other essential skills needed for program implementation (Mason & McMahon, 2009).

Leadership has been defined in many ways, such as:

*Leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal (Northouse, 2007).*

and
The essence of leadership is not commanding, but teaching. It is opening people’s eyes and minds. It is teaching them new ways to see the world and pointing them to new goals. It is giving them the motivation and discipline to achieve those goals. And it is teaching them to share their own knowledge and teach others. (Tichy, 2004)

Regardless of what definition of leadership is used, the design, development and implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program aligned with the ASCA National Model requires school counselors to understand and utilize leadership skills. School counselors can implement a program addressing the academic, career and personal/social needs of all students through the use of leadership practices (Mason, 2010).

After examining effective leadership, Bolman and Deal (2008) identified four leadership situations or contexts: structural, human resource, political and symbolic. When the leadership contexts are applied to comprehensive school counseling programs, school counselors can demonstrate specific activities that demonstrate each of these contexts of leadership through implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program.

The following chart shows examples of how activities within the ASCA National Model promote effective leadership as presented through the lens of four leadership contexts and research in school counseling leadership activities (Dollarhide, 2003).

|------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| **Structural leadership:** Leadership in the building of viable organizations | 1. Build the foundation of an effective school counseling program.  
2. Attain technical mastery of counseling and education.  
3. Design strategies for growth of the school counseling program.  
4. Implement an effective school counseling program. | 1. Define program focus, select appropriate student competencies, and adhere to professional competencies.  
2. Analyze results of school counselor competency assessment to inform areas of growth for professional development.  
3. Analyze results of school counseling program assessment and design strategies to continue to improve the comprehensive school counseling program.  
4. Analyze program results (curriculum, small-group and closing-the-gap results reports), and consider implications about program effectiveness. |
|-----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Human resource leadership:  
Leadership via empowerment and inspiration of followers | 1. Believe in people.  
2. Communicate that belief.  
3. Be visible and accessible.  
4. Empower others. | 1. Discuss and define beliefs about the ability of all students to achieve, including how, with parents, staff and community support.  
2. Publicize vision statement focusing on the preferred future where school counseling goals and strategies are being successfully achieved. Publicize mission statement providing the focus and direction to reach the vision. Publicize program goals defining how the mission and vision will be accomplished.  
3. Publicize annual and weekly calendars with detailed information about school counseling core curriculum, individual student planning, responsive services and collaboration with parents, staff and community.  
4. Provide instruction to students to ensure development of competencies promoting the knowledge, attitudes and skills needed for student achievement, success and development. |

| Political leadership:  
Leadership in the use of interpersonal and organizational power | 1. Understand the distribution of power within the building and district.  
2. Build linkages with important stakeholders (e.g., parents, administrators, teachers, board members).  
3. Use persuasion and negotiation. | 1. Present annual agreement to principal each year, including a formal discussion of the alignment of school and school counseling program mission and goals and detailing specific school counselor responsibilities.  
2. Participate on school and district committees to advocate for student programs and resources. Establish advisory council including representatives of key stakeholders selected to review and advise on the implementation of the school counseling program. Team and partner with staff, parents, businesses and community organizations to support student achievement for all students.  
3. Advocate for student support, equity and access to a rigorous education with education stakeholders. |
As educational leaders, school counselors are ideally situated to serve as advocates for every student in meeting high academic, career and personal/social standards. Advocating for the academic achievement of every student is a key role of school counselors and places them at the forefront of efforts to promote school reform.

To promote student achievement, school counselors advocate for students’ academic, career and personal/social development needs and work to ensure these needs are addressed throughout the K-12 school experience. School counselors believe, support and promote every student’s opportunity to achieve success in school.

The following table shows how school counselors demonstrate advocacy through specific topics from the ASCA National Model. Using the American Counseling Association’s Advocacy Competencies (2003) as a conceptualization of advocacy, the topics of the ASCA National Model are provided as examples of how school counselors can advocate for students, from the micro-level to the macro-level, through the school counseling program.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACA Advocacy Competencies</th>
<th>Advocacy Components of the ASCA National Model</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acting With Students</td>
<td>Direct Student Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Empowerment</strong></td>
<td>1. School counseling core curriculum&lt;br&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Efforts that facilitate</td>
<td>Instruction&lt;br&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the identification of</td>
<td>Group activities&lt;br&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>external barriers and</td>
<td>2. Individual student planning&lt;br&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td>development of self-</td>
<td>Appraisal&lt;br&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td>advocacy skills,</td>
<td>Advisement&lt;br&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td>strategies and resources</td>
<td>3. Responsive services&lt;br&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td>in response to those</td>
<td>Counseling (individual/small group)&lt;br&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td>barriers.</td>
<td>Crisis response&lt;br&gt;</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Acting on Behalf</strong>&lt;br&gt;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>of Students&lt;br&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Micro-level</strong></td>
<td>Indirect Student Services&lt;br&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Student Advocacy</strong></td>
<td>and Program Management&lt;br&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td>– Assessing the need for</td>
<td>Referrals&lt;br&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td>direct intervention</td>
<td>Consultation&lt;br&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td>within the system on</td>
<td>Collaboration&lt;br&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>behalf of the student,</td>
<td>School data profile&lt;br&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>identifying allies</td>
<td>Closing-the-gap and small-group action&lt;br&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and carrying out a plan</td>
<td>plans&lt;br&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of action</td>
<td><strong>School/Community</strong>&lt;br&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collaboration</strong></td>
<td>Advisory council&lt;br&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td>– Actions where the</td>
<td>Program goals&lt;br&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>school counselor</td>
<td>Curriculum action plan&lt;br&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td>and community collaborate</td>
<td>Consultation&lt;br&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td>to address a problem and</td>
<td>Collaboration&lt;br&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td>devise an advocacy plan</td>
<td>Annual agreement&lt;br&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School data profile analysis&lt;br&gt;</td>
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<td>Needs assessments&lt;br&gt;</td>
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<td>Action plans&lt;br&gt;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Results reports analysis&lt;br&gt;</td>
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<td>Program assessment analysis&lt;br&gt;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Program goal analysis&lt;br&gt;</td>
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DATA DRIVEN
**COLLABORATION**

School counselors work with stakeholders, both inside and outside the school, as a part of the comprehensive school counseling program. Through school, family and community collaboration, school counselors can access a vast array of support for student achievement and development that cannot be achieved by an individual, or school, alone.

School counselors collaborate in many ways. Within the school, school counselors build effective teams by encouraging collaboration among students, teachers, administrators and school staff to work toward the common goals of equity, access and academic success for every student. Outside of school, school counselors create effective working relationships with parents, community members and community agencies, tapping into resources that may not be available at the school. By understanding and appreciating the contributions made by others in educating all children, school counselors build a sense of community, which serves as a platform to create an environment encouraging success for every student.

Lawson (2003) identified 10 varieties of collaboration, six of which relate specifically to the role of the school counselor.

- Interprofessional collaboration: includes school counselors, teachers, administrators, social workers, psychologists, nurses and other helping professionals who comprise sustainable teams.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>ACA Advocacy Competencies</strong></th>
<th><strong>Advocacy Components of the ASCA National Model</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acting on Behalf of Students</td>
<td>Indirect Student Services and Program Management</td>
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</table>
| **Macro-level** | **Public Information** – Collaboration between school counselor and community in efforts to alert the public to macro-level issues regarding human dignity | **Collaboration with community groups**  
**Beliefs**  
**Vision statement**  
**Mission statement**  
**Advisory council**  
**Results reports**  
**School committees**  
**Sharing results** |
| **Social/Political Advocacy** – Recognizing when student problems must be addressed at a policy or legislative level and advocating for change within those areas | **District committees**  
**Board presentations**  
**Involvement with state and national professional associations**  
**Legislative interactions** |
Youth-centered collaboration: viewing youth as experts and partners who share responsibility and accountability for results.

Parent-centered collaboration: viewing parents as experts and partners, sharing accountability for results and whose engagement and well-being influence and determine their children’s well-being.

Family-centered collaboration: viewing family systems as partners sharing accountability for results and whose engagement influences and determines the well-being of children, parents and grandparents as well as the future of the family.

Intra-organizational collaboration: includes people in the same organization, such as collaboration among school professionals, secretaries, custodians, cafeteria workers, bus drivers and community leaders, who may serve on site-based teams.

Inter-organizational collaboration: includes groups of organizations such as community agencies, faith-based organizations, social service agencies and health clinics.

Community collaboration: secures the engagement, mutual accountability and co-production capacities of all of the legitimate stakeholders in a workable geographic area.

The relationship among collaborators is a critical element for effective collaboration. A collaborative report on school principal/school counselor relationship identified characteristics of an effective relationship, and these characteristics can be applied to any collaborative relationship. The following table shows components of the ASCA National Model that promote relationships for effective collaboration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics of Effective Relationships</th>
<th>Collaborative Components of the ASCA National Model</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open communication providing multiple opportunities for input to decision making</td>
<td>▪ Advisory council</td>
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<td>▪ Use of data</td>
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<tr>
<td>▪ Needs assessments</td>
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<tr>
<td>Opportunities to share ideas on teaching, learning and schoolwide educational initiatives</td>
<td>▪ Teaming and partnering</td>
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<tr>
<td>▪ School/district committees</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing information about needs within the school and the community</td>
<td>▪ School data profile analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Sharing program results</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School counselor participation on school leadership teams</td>
<td>▪ Teaming and partnering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ School/district committees</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Joint responsibility in the development of goals and metrics indicating success</td>
<td>▪ Program goals</td>
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<td>▪ Annual agreement</td>
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<tr>
<td>▪ Action plans</td>
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<tr>
<td>▪ Results reports</td>
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</table>
Adapted from *Finding a Way: Practical Examples of How an Effective Principal-Counselor Relationship Can Lead to Success for All Students* (2009).

**SYSTEMIC CHANGE**

Schools are a system, just like a family is a system. When an event occurs that makes an impact on one member of the family or part of the system, it affects other, if not all other, parts of the system. Comprehensive school counseling programs are an important part of the school’s system, and through careful, data-driven implementation, an ASCA National Model program can have a positive impact on many other parts of the school’s system that lead to student achievement and overall success.

With the expectation to serve the needs of every student, school counselors are uniquely positioned to identify systemic barriers to student achievement. School counselors have access to schoolwide achievement, attendance and behavioral data that not only informs the school counseling program but often underscores the need to identify and remove barriers that prevent all students from achieving college and career readiness. School counselors use these data to support leadership, advocacy and collaboration designed to create systemic change.

Systemic barriers may exist on any level, ranging from state or federal law, to district policies, to school and classroom procedures. These barriers are often identified after a review of data reveals gaps between student groups in achievement, opportunities and attainment. Through implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program, school counselors work proactively with students, parents, teachers, administrators and the community.
to remove systemic barriers to learning and to promote systemic change that will create a learning environment where all students succeed.

Systemic change does not occur overnight. But one small change can lead to another, which can lead to even larger and more impactful changes in the future. The following describes six stages of systemic change based on experiences in systemic change from across the United States and at all levels of education (Anderson, 1994).

**Maintenance of the old system:** Educators focus on maintaining the system as originally designed. They do not recognize that the system is fundamentally out of sync with the conditions of today’s world. New knowledge about teaching, learning and organizational structures has not been incorporated into the present structure.

**Awareness:** Multiple stakeholders become aware that the current system is not working as well as it should, but they are unclear about what is needed instead.

**Exploration:** Educators and policymakers study and visit places that are trying new approaches. They try new ways of teaching and managing, generally in low-risk situations.

**Transition:** The scales tip toward the new system; a critical number of opinion leaders and groups commit themselves to the new system and take more risks to make changes in crucial places.

**Emergence of new infrastructure:** Some elements of the system are operated in keeping with the desired new system. These new ways are generally accepted.

**Predominance of the new system:** The more powerful elements of the system operate as defined by the new system. Key leaders begin envisioning even better systems.

Systemic change occurs when inequitable policies, procedures and attitudes are changed, promoting equity and access to educational opportunities for all students. Such change happens through the sustained involvement of all critical players in the school setting, including and often led by school counselors. Leadership, advocacy and collaboration are key strategies that are needed to create systemic change.

Examples of systemic change that promote equitable treatment of all students include changes in policies, procedures and attitudes that:

- Remove barriers to access to rigorous courses and learning paths for college and career readiness for all students
- Increase access to educational opportunities
- Create clear guidelines for addressing inappropriate behavior such as bullying and harassment
- Increase awareness of school safety issues
- Promote knowledge and skills for working in a diverse and multicultural work setting
- Address over- or underrepresentation of specific groups in programs such as special education, honors, Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate
- Model inclusive language
Create an environment that encourages any student or group to feel comfortable to come forward with problems (ASCA, 2006)

Success resulting from systemic change can be measured by the closing of achievement, opportunity and attainment gaps. Examples of success in changes for all student groups such as:
- Increased promotion and graduation rates
- Decreased discipline or suspension rates
- Increased attendance at school
- Increased attendance in educational opportunities
- Increased numbers of students completing high school college and career ready

School counseling programs can create change. School counseling programs that promote data-driven change designed to meet the needs of students can be the initiator of systemic change that has a positive impact on all students in the school – and the academic outcomes of all students in the school.
Now more than ever before, school counselors have the opportunity – and the responsibility – to assume leadership roles in their schools that positively affect student outcomes. Once thought to be the job of administrators, advancing academic achievement, reducing barriers to learning and creating equitable learning environments are central priorities for school counselors. As one of the four major ASCA National Model themes, leadership enhances school counselors’ ability to implement and sustain data-driven comprehensive school counseling programs and is an essential element of all four components of the ASCA National Model.

School counselor leaders are culturally responsive change agents who integrate instructional and school counseling best practices to initiate, develop and implement equitable services and programs for all students. They are skilled at counseling, advocating, teaming and collaborating and using data to promote student success. School counselor leaders are also able to construct meaning from their personal and professional experiences to bring about substantive change for all students. Whether at the elementary, middle or high school level, all school counselors have the ability lead. While there are many leadership characteristics and practices, utilizing effective school counselor leadership requires:
- visionary thinking
- challenging inequities
- shared decision making
- collaborative processing
- modeling excellence
- a courageous stance

**Leadership and foundation:** The first order of business for school counselor leaders is to create a school counseling vision and mission aligned with the school’s vision and mission, which grounds the development of a data-driven comprehensive school counseling pro-
gram and underscores the impact of leadership. An effective school counselor leader drives discussions about high expectations for all students, assumes responsibility to facilitate professional development activities pertaining to beliefs about student learning and ensures the student standards are used as a measure to assess students’ progress. Leading the vision also necessitates the ability to articulate the school counseling vision and mission and influence others to develop compelling program goals.

**Leadership and management:** The assessments and tools of the management component help school counselor leaders create equitable services for all students. Leadership within the management component is demonstrated by training colleagues to collect, organize and target data that will lead to meaningful data analysis of program outcomes desired in the accountability component. These data may lead to rethinking current processes to mobilize more efficient services needed for students and to advocate for system change.

School counselor leaders are effective managers of resources and programs. Leadership capacity is demonstrated within the management component by accepting ownership of school counseling programs, encouraging others to lead and sharing resources. School counselor leaders understand the big picture of organizational processes and value collaborative outcomes. Espousing leadership means giving voice to the benefits of school counseling interventions and ensuring the need for school counselor presence on leadership teams is clearly articulated. For example, a school counselor leader might assume responsibility for the development of the program calendar, create the annual agreement, organize and facilitate advisory council meetings, develop action plans or simply ensure there is representation on the school improvement plan, faculty advisory committee and parent-teacher-student association.

**Leadership and delivery:** Effective school counselors are skilled at delivering direct academic, career and personal/social services to students including curriculum, providing individual student planning and responsive services. Effective school counselor leaders ensure the core school counseling curriculum is data-driven and are champions in articulating outcomes to stakeholders.

School counselor leaders have a profound impact on systemic change through indirect services to students such as collaborating and consulting with stakeholders. The magnitude of school counselor engagement and commitment to lead is often exhibited through a willingness to collaborate with others. The process of identifying program goals, improving learning and meeting the needs of all students can occur through collaborative dialogue with parents and guardians, administrators, teachers and community members. School counselor leadership means forming relationships and acquiring mutual respect for stakeholder opinions to support all students’ academic success. The presence of collaborative processes, partnerships and practices can also contribute to sustained learning outcomes that help students achieve at higher levels.

School counselor leaders use data to determine how to maximize the amount of time spent in direct and indirect student services to produce the greatest impact on student achievement and success, thus keeping program management tasks and unrelated responsibilities
at minimum. Examples of school counselors building leadership capacity that promotes direct and indirect services are listed but not limited to the suggestions below:

- develop programs promoting college, career and citizenship readiness
- evaluate existing preventive counseling services
- use data as a guide to tell the story about student needs
- inspire and motivate others to lead data-driven responsive services
- launch a schoolwide crisis response plan
- multitask and create multiple opportunities to execute the mission
- initiate collaborative business and community partnerships

**Leadership and accountability:** The accountability component links curriculum, small-group and closing-the-gap results to systemic change for all students. School counselor leaders can use the results analyses to demonstrate the effectiveness of school counseling program interventions and to guide program improvement. Additionally, school counselor leaders can use the school counselor performance appraisal template to inform supervisors of an evaluative tool appropriate for school counselors. Critical to an accountable school counselor leader is the ability to chart the direction for continuous personal and professional improvement. Reflective statements a school counselor leader might contemplate are:

- Persuasive strategies that I use to gain buy-in are....
- I respond to social justice inequities by ..... 
- My vision for the school counseling program is ....
- I consider myself a leader because ..... 
- I consistently use and analyze data to....
- When I encounter barriers that might impede student success, I ....
- I am proficient in the use of data and share my expertise by ....

In summary, the acceptance and demonstration of effective leadership practices can contribute to a school counselor’s self-efficacy and professional identity. School counselor leadership is visible at all levels, and its transformative power cannot be underestimated.
School counselors implementing the ASCA National Model work toward socially just outcomes by acting on the themes of the ASCA National Model as leaders, advocates, collaborators and systemic change agents. They ensure equity and access for all students to reach their full potential in K-12 schools and beyond. The ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors call on school counselors to advocate for, lead and create equity-based school counseling programs that help close achievement, opportunity and attainment gaps. These gaps deny students access and opportunities to pursue career and college goals. Ethical school counselors are advocates ensuring access to rigorous college- and career-readiness curriculum and have high expectations for every student. As motivated agents of change, they utilize data to prevent and remove environmental and institutional barriers that deny students high-level academic, career and college access and personal/social opportunities.

School counselors are advocates for socially just outcomes when they:

- Actively seek to expand their cultural competence and commitment to social justice advocacy, knowledge and skills
- Develop their cultural proficiency as educational leaders who acknowledge how prejudice, power and various forms of oppression affect students
- Disaggregate attendance, behavior, grades, course-taking patterns and other types of achievement data with a special focus on diverse populations
- Address inequitable policies, procedures or instructional conditions that may impede the academic achievement, college access, career readiness or personal/social development of students
- Contribute to creating systemic change and necessary educational reform that promotes equitable access to rigorous educational opportunities, family engagement and school and community relationships.

Through the foundation of the ASCA National Model, socially just school counseling programs include advocacy for equity and access for all students to achieve at high levels.
through their mission and vision statements. School counselors disaggregate academic and behavioral data to uncover any discrepancies and then set program goals to close achievement, opportunity and attainment gaps with data-driven interventions. Program goals include delivering the school counseling core curriculum to every student with particular attention to ensuring competency attainment for underrepresented, underserved and underperforming students.

Through the delivery system, socially just school counseling programs include a focus on equity, not equality. In addition to ensuring each student receives the school counseling core curriculum, special consideration is given to students who may benefit from additional curriculum, group or individual counseling to master student competencies. Other equity-focused curriculum delivery examples include scheduling additional college nights for first-generation college-going families, ensuring translation for bilingual students, providing information on LGBTQ-friendly campuses and featuring diverse alumni to answer career and college access questions. Individual student planning includes an annual guaranteed time to support the students’ and parents’ understanding of the full magnitude of their educational choices, future opportunities, access to rigorous academics and learning paths for career and college.

Through program management, socially just school counseling programs include action plans that help close achievement, opportunity and attainment gaps. School counselors use data to determine which students require academic or behavioral interventions and ensure interventions for high-needs students and underrepresented groups. They manage their time by limiting non-school-counseling activities; they ensure the annual agreement with their administrator includes calendared activities for interventions and regular professional development to improve their cultural proficiency. School counselors ensure there is culturally diverse representation on the advisory council and advocate for funding to support access to necessary resources such as technology for students who can’t afford computers and multiple-language documents for bilingual students and families.

Through accountability, socially just school counseling programs demonstrate results in closing achievement, opportunity and attainment gaps through closing-the-gap results reports and program improvement decisions. School counselors self-evaluate their performance in light of how equitable their professional practices have been. They celebrate success for all, not for few. They advocate for the system to change in response to student needs, rather than assuming students will change or limit their goals and dreams. When analyzing data, school counselors may realize the “intervention” students need is not a small group or individual counseling but rather the school counselor’s advocacy to change an existing educational policy, procedure or practice that may be contributing to student inequities and denying students access to opportunities. These system change issues include addressing the following concerns:

- Disproportionate discipline rates for boys, students of color, students with disabilities
- Low percentages of poor/working class students taking college placement exams
- Students assigned lunch and recess detention for lack of homework completion
- Disproportionate numbers of students of color or males suspended or expelled
- High numbers of bilingual students scoring low on state exams
- Boys of color overrepresented in special education
- Underrepresentation of students of color in advanced courses
- Race/ethnicity, social class, ability/disability and gender gaps in students graduating college-eligible
- Lack of multiple measures or school counselor voice in student course placement decisions
- Limited Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate and honors course availability and course prerequisite barriers
- Lack of bilingual college and career preparation materials
- Retention policies that offer little remediation or support opportunities
- Summer school availability only for those who can fund it themselves
- Attendance policies that assign an “F” to students with 10 or more absences (without remedial opportunities)

Socially just interventions for system change can have a greater impact on students than individual or group counseling alone. By using data to tell their story, school counselors can speak to the current condition, provide students examples and advocate for programs, policies and practices promoting achievement and success for all students.

To effectively partner in student achievement, school counselors must possess the knowledge, attitudes and skills to demonstrate leadership in diverse schools. School counselors must use culturally proficient skills to challenge the status quo and existing belief systems and discuss challenging issues of equity and access with school stakeholders. This may require recruiting like-minded professionals to create data teams that commit to reviewing disaggregated data and school policies regularly. School counselors as advocates use their voice to address institutional oppressions and systems that have historically disenfranchised certain students. Every interaction is an equity-focused change agent opportunity.
Probably few jobs in education have evolved as much in terms of duties and responsibilities as that of the school counselor. In the past, school counselors, especially in upper grade levels, have often been relegated to “administrivia” duties, responsible for record keeping, report writing, test administration, scheduling and other “duties as assigned.” In today’s world, it’s critical that schools look beyond these tasks, take advantage of a school counselor’s expertise and work collaboratively to build a school culture that promotes the success of each student served by the school.

Although the school principal may serve as the head of the school and ultimately be responsible for student success, the school counselor plays a critical role in making student success a reality. Principals need school counselors’ perspective and leadership in working together on behalf of the students in the school. Teachers need school counselors’ skills and specific knowledge to work effectively with students, especially ones with special needs such as learning disabilities, family issues, emotional and social difficulties and/or health problems. School counselors must be the ever-present voice to ensure student needs are recognized and the staff knows how to access additional help or resources when needed.

Additionally, the entire school community must work together to create schools that are physically and emotionally safe for all. Teachers must feel safe to express opinions, take initiative in solving problems and continually try to find more effective ways to help students be successful. Parents must feel welcomed at the school and that their voice is valued. Anonymity must be banished, and students must feel safe to question, explore and achieve. Who better to help with this than the school counselor?

School counselors should ask themselves:
- Are you collaborating with teachers to help improve student behavior?
- Are you leading the way to find, create and implement anti-bullying and harassment programs?
Have you helped establish a conflict resolution curriculum? An advisory program?
Do you provide support to staff on working effectively with students with special needs?
Do you run small groups to help students cope with specific issues?

The list goes on and on. School counselors must take responsibility to let the school know what they are capable of doing and work together to set these types of programs in place. The success of students depends on it.

There should be no stronger student advocate than school counselors. They must be the heart and soul of the school and lead the charge in creating a school culture that promotes an equitable education for every student. Being able to access the data and look at it from a larger viewpoint puts school counselors in an excellent position to help the school determine if its programs, practices and policies ensure social and programmatic equity for all. School counselors can begin this examination by asking:
- To what extent is the enrollment in courses or programs for gifted and talented, special education, English language learners, etc. reflective of the school’s demographics?
- Does the percentage of students achieving at a proficient or higher level of performance reflect the demographics of the entire school?
- Does the school’s recognition system value diversity, service and academic achievement?
- Does the percentage of students receiving recognition reflect the demographics of the student body?
- Do the school’s discipline statistics reflect the demographics of the student body, or are some subgroups over- or underrepresented?

Although the role of the school counselor may have changed over the years, one thing has remained steady – the vast majority of school counselors are in their role because they care for children. In today’s world, school counselors are in the perfect position to both support and lead the collaboration needed to achieve student success and to ensure student needs remain in the center of all decisions. They should serve as the school’s conscience by continually asking:
- Is this good for kids?
- Will this help our students succeed?
- Are we doing this for students or for ourselves?

Sitting Bull, a wise Native American chief, understood the power of collaborating on behalf of youth when he said, “We must put our minds together and see what life we can make for our children.” Principals can’t do it alone, school counselors can’t, staff can’t, parents can’t, community services can’t. It’s only by working together that a school community will make a better life for the students it serves.
We know the ingredients of successful schools: A strong instructional leader; a caring, committed, and knowledgeable staff; an engaged community; and high expectations for all students. Thanks to a growing body of research, we also are learning more about what makes an effective school board and how that results in high-achieving districts.

Not surprisingly, the use of data is important on both counts to create systemic change.

School counselors who are focused on systemic change know how individual students are performing. They know, through data analysis and collaborative work with other facets of the school leadership team, what is necessary to improve the achievement of individual students.

For school boards, data serve as a leadership tool that helps its members answer larger, broader questions. Board members don’t need to know specific test scores or instructional needs of individual students. However, they must know the right questions to ask to ensure all students have equal access to a rigorous curriculum and the support necessary to succeed.

Data-savvy school boards also know this fact: Comprehensive school counseling programs that advocate for every student can prevent dropouts and maximize access to education options beyond high school. A 2011 Center for Public Education report notes that dropout prevention programs work when school counselors “build sustained relationships with students, closely monitor each student’s attendance and performance, intervene rapidly at the first sign of trouble, help students and families overcome obstacles to educational success and teach students how to solve problems.”

Like the ASCA National Model, the National School Boards Association’s Key Work of School Boards provides a framework for local boards to effect systemic change, improve
student achievement and engage their communities. Eight interrelated action areas help focus the board’s work at the local level:

- **Vision**: Statements identifying the school district’s future, intermediate and short-term goals, associated objectives and supporting tasks. Developing a shared vision for student achievement is the starting point for a school board and its community.
- **Standards**: Statements that define and explain educational expectations for all grade levels and that support the district’s vision statements. Standards form the foundation for a school district’s learning system.
- **Assessment**: Identified tools and processes that measure educational outcomes against stated standards. A sound local assessment system incorporates multiple assessments, alignment with academic standards, coordination with state assessment programs and both “lagging” and “leading” indicators.
- **Accountability**: Assigned responsibility for educational outcomes. A strong accountability process focuses on improved student achievement as measured by comprehensive data collection and analysis.
- **Alignment**: Resource allocation, communication, planning and program implementation all work together to support the district’s vision, goals and priorities.
- **Climate**: The educational environment that creates the conditions for successful teaching and learning.
- **Collaboration and community engagement**: Established trust and confidence among all educational stakeholders. Necessary partners for school districts include parents, business and political leaders, media representatives and other citizens in the community.
- **Continuous improvement**: Constantly seeking and planning new ways to improve the system. Good data empower the board and staff to refine, strengthen, modify, correct and/or eliminate existing programs and practices to get better results.

For more information, visit [www.nsba.org/Board-Leadership/Governance/KeyWork.aspx](http://www.nsba.org/Board-Leadership/Governance/KeyWork.aspx)

It is tempting, in a data-driven world, to ignore the outside forces – emotional, social, physical and economic – that can become barriers to increased student achievement. That is one reason school counseling is so important. Working together collaboratively, using data mixed with common sense, is necessary to create systemic change and improve achievement for all.
Introduction
The school counseling program’s foundation serves as the solid ground upon which the rest of the comprehensive school counseling program is built. The decisions made as the foundation is being developed or modified become the “what” of the program. The “what” is defined as the student knowledge, attitudes and skills that are learned because of a school counseling program.

Designing a strong foundation requires a collaborative effort with staff, parents/guardians and the community to determine what every student will receive as a benefit of a school counseling program.

The purpose of this component of the ASCA National Model is to establish the focus of the comprehensive school counseling program based on the academic, career and personal/social needs of the students in the school. Elements of the foundation include three sections:
- Program Focus
- Student Competencies
- Professional Competencies

PROGRAM FOCUS
Beliefs
Everyone has beliefs. Beliefs are personal and individual and are derived from our backgrounds and experiences. But most importantly, our beliefs drive our behavior.

Beliefs are discussed early in the process of developing a school counseling program. It is clear that school counselors’ beliefs about students, families, teachers and the educational process are crucial in supporting