

Why High School Counselors?

High school years are full of growth, promise, excitement, frustration, disappointment and hope. It is the time when students begin to discover what the future holds for them. Secondary school counselors enhance the learning process and promote academic achievement. School counseling programs are essential for students to achieve optimal personal growth, acquire positive social skills and values, set appropriate career goals and realize full academic potential to become productive contributing members of the world community. The professional high school counselor holds a master's degree and **required state certification in school counseling**. **Maintaining certification includes on-going** professional development to stay current with educational reforms and challenges facing today's students. Professional association membership is encouraged as it enhances the school counselor's knowledge and effectiveness.

Secondary School Students' Development Needs

High school is the final transition into adulthood and the world of work as students begin separating from parents and exploring and defining their independence. Students are deciding who they are, what they do well, and what they will do when they graduate. During these adolescent years, students are evaluating their strengths, skills and abilities. The biggest influence is their peer group. They are searching for a place to belong and rely on peer acceptance and feedback. They face increased pressures regarding risk behaviors involving sex, alcohol and drugs while exploring the boundaries of more acceptable behavior and mature, meaningful relationships. They need guidance in making concrete and compounded decisions. They must deal with academic pressures as they face high-stakes testing, the challenges of college admissions, the scholarship and financial aid application process and entrance into a competitive job market.

Meeting the Challenge

Secondary school counselors are professional educators with a mental health perspective who understand and respond to the challenges presented by today's diverse student population. Secondary school counselors do not work in isolation; rather they are integral to the total educational program. They provide proactive leadership that engages all stakeholders in the delivery of programs and services to help the student achieve success in school. Professional school counselors align and work with the school's mission to support the academic achievement of all students as they prepare for the ever changing world of the 21st century. This mission is accomplished through the design, development, implementation and evaluation of a comprehensive, developmental and systematic school-counseling program. The ASCA National Standards in the academic, career, and personal/social domains are the foundation for this work. The ASCA National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs (2) with its data-driven and results-based focus serves as a guide for today's school counselor who is uniquely trained to implement this program.