

Article 60

Promoting School Counseling Through Marketing Programs and Roles

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Donna J. Dockery

Dockery, Donna J., is an Assistant Professor of Counselor Education at Virginia Commonwealth University in the school counselor and college student development and counseling tracks. Her research interests are in the areas of multicultural counseling and issues of social justice, service learning, psychosocial needs of gifted adolescents, and effective instructional interventions for counselor educators.

Schools today face a myriad of challenges, such as increasing student achievement, reducing dropout rates, and assisting students in preparing for and making a successful transition to postsecondary education. Effectively meeting these and other current needs requires professional school counselors to collaborate with other educators and families in support of common goals (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2005; Wagner, 1998). Research indicates that effective schools are characterized by staff members who support a guiding mission, purpose, and goals, and understand the importance of colleagues' specialized roles in reaching school goals (Lieberman, 2004). Professional school counselors are important members of school teams, but they face challenges when fellow educators and other stakeholders are unclear about their current position in schools (Dotson, 2009). The purpose of this manuscript is to promote ways in which school counselors can more effectively market their programs and services to others as an important step in clarifying their important role in schools.

Historically there has been confusion regarding the role of school counselors, in part because responsibilities of school counseling programs have shifted over the years to reflect emerging school, societal, and student needs and expectations (Herr, 2001; Burnham & Jackson, 2000). Perhaps in part due to ongoing historical changes, school counselors, teachers, and administrators frequently have different understandings of the role of school counselors (Dotson, 2009; Beesley, 2004; Fitch, Newby, Ballestro, & Marshall, 2001; Herr, 2001; Lieberman, 2004). If school counselors and leaders in the field of school counseling report a number of differing roles for counseling programs over time (Burnham & Jackson, 2000; Herr, 2001), it should not be surprising when educators and other stakeholders are unclear about the services expected from a comprehensive school counseling program. When school counselors don't make their

current role clear in schools, they are subject to differing expectations and demands of principals, colleagues, parents, and others, which too often results in neglect of appropriate counseling programs and services (Whiston, 2002).

The emergence and dissemination of recommended standards and role expectations from professional organizations, such as the American School Counselor Association (ASCA), have helped to clarify appropriate roles for school counselors. The ASCA National Standards (Campbell & Dahir, 1997) and the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2005) clearly describe the functions of school counselors. ASCA outlines the skills and knowledge professional school counselors need in order to offer effective services for all students. School counselors are expected to play leadership roles and to work as change agents and advocates, in addition to their roles in collaboration, consultation, and providing direct services to students and their families (ASCA, 2005). School counselors frequently consult with fellow educators in efforts to solve increasingly complex issues (Shoffner & Briggs, 2001) and are expected to work collegially with all members of the educational team.

Too frequently, however, existing school counselor job descriptions are broad in scope, ill-defined, and are incompatible with professional standards (Zalaquett, 2005). In addition, not all school counselors have embraced the ASCA National Model and national standards and too many educators are unaware of the model and recommended roles for professional school counselors (Dotson, 2009). A widespread lack of understanding by administrators and classroom teachers about the role of the school counselor seems to persist (Johnson, 2000). Thus, it is increasingly important to help other educators better understand the current, recommended role of school counselors. Whiston (2002) urged school counselors to increase their efforts to inform colleagues and other stakeholders about the national standards. Without carefully designed programs, clear missions, and identified roles and visions, counselors function at the direction of others rather than from well-conceived efforts that address the needs of all students.

One important role of school counselors is in the area of advocacy. According to the ASCA ethical guidelines (ASCA, 2010), school counselors are expected to advocate for students and their needs in schools, and to promote the skills needed for self-advocacy with students. In addition, school counselors are charged with supporting the profession at the local, state, and national levels. An important part of advocacy efforts should include promoting appropriate roles and responsibilities as recommended by professional organizations, and advocating for the reduction of clerical, administrative, and other responsibilities that do not make the best use of school counselors' training and skill set in schools.

There have been several studies regarding administrator and/or teacher expectations of the roles and responsibilities of school counselor based on the recommendations of the ASCA National Model, often completed in conjunction with surveys of professional school counselors regarding their expectations and current tasks. Results indicate that while there is positive support for many of the recommended responsibilities as described in the ASCA National Model, many inappropriate roles for school counselors are seen as appropriate activities for school counselors (Fitch et al., 2001; Kirchner & Setchfield, 2005; Pérusse, Goodnough, Donegan, & Jones, 2004). For example, registering and enrolling all students, designing and implementing the school's master schedule, assisting with disciplinary actions, administering the school testing

program, and clerical duties such as maintaining student records, are frequently described as appropriate activities for school counselors. These authors note that inappropriate activities may be viewed as appropriate by fellow educators because school counselors are often seen performing these tasks, and administrators and other educators uphold the status quo by requesting that school counselors complete these responsibilities.

The counseling literature urges school counselors to promote their effective programs and services (ASCA, 2005; Brott, 2006). School counselors are encouraged to assess school and student needs, provide services, evaluate results using a variety of data, and publicize results so that various stakeholders will understand how students are impacted by the school counseling program and counselors' services (Brott, 2006). School counselors can present results at parent gatherings, faculty or school board meetings, and on school websites, newsletters, and in other publications.

Less attention, however, has been given to the importance of publicizing the professional standards and the ASCA National Model with colleagues and other stakeholders. This is an important task in advocacy for professional school counselors. It is not that individual counselors don't wish to complete routine clerical tasks such as maintaining records, calculating grade point averages, and counting test booklets. Rather, the ASCA National Model (2005) reminds school counselors of their training to perform more appropriate roles which make better use of time, are more in line with skill sets, and are more likely to have a greater impact on positive student development and achievement. Also, in order for teachers to collaborate with school counselors in designing and implementing appropriate classroom guidance units or to develop positive classroom climates that are conducive to learning, teachers need to know that counselors are prepared for and comfortable with these roles. If school counselors are trained to collaborate with colleagues who are not aware of this expectation, then how will these collaborations be developed?

There is limited research, however, regarding whether exposing teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders to the ASCA National Model and professional standards impacts their perceptions of appropriate roles for school counselors. In one study, pre-service principals who were trained in one class with pre-service school counselors were surveyed several years after completing their programs. Principals trained with school counselors supported appropriate roles to a higher degree than their colleagues and this support persisted over time (Kirchner & Setchfield, 2005).

In a second study, principals were surveyed about their perceptions of school counselors' roles and functions after being exposed to a variety of training formats, or to none at all (Leuwerke, Walker, & Shi, 2009). Although school counselors are frequently encouraged to demonstrate their program's effectiveness by using data to show how students are positively impacted, this study found the approach to be less effective in impacting administrative support for appropriate counselor roles. The administrators who expressed the most support for appropriate school counseling activities viewed an overview of the ASCA National Model. Despite this finding, little mention is made in the school counseling literature of the importance of explaining the ASCA National Model and promoting recommended roles and responsibilities of school counselors to various audiences.

In another study, pre-service teachers who viewed a brief training module on the ASCA National Model had significant differences in their expectations for school

counselors, compared to pre-service teachers who were not trained regarding the ASCA National Model. Although both groups were generally supportive of appropriate counselor roles, those with the training were significantly less supportive of inappropriate roles, even when controlling for earlier experiences with school counselors (Dockery & McKelvey, 2011). Additional research is called for; however, even these initial studies may have implications for professional school counselors, counseling supervisors, and counselor educators.

Professional school counselors are encouraged to continue to use data to indicate ways in which students are positively impacted by counseling programs and activities. This information should be augmented by efforts to more clearly articulate the appropriate roles and activities outlined by the ASCA National Model and standards. School counselors frequently address students to describe school counseling programs and services and explain how to access their counselor. Similarly, school counselors can inform colleagues, administrators, parents, and other stakeholders about the ASCA National Model and recommended counselor roles in a variety of settings. Parent-teacher organization and back-to-school meetings, school or district pre-service and professional development sessions, faculty meetings, grade level or team meetings, and meetings with administrators are some of the various options that school counselors might use to introduce national recommendations and demonstrate how their school counseling program incorporates these guidelines.

School counseling supervisors should also seek opportunities to train central office personnel and all administrators about recommended counseling roles and standards in district level professional development sessions. One counseling supervisor worked with counselor educators to revise the school counselor annual performance evaluation to better reflect the ASCA National Model and counseling standards. This change in evaluation criteria, coupled with training school principals and other administrators regarding recommended roles for school counselors and the ASCA National Model has had several positive effects (R. Brown, personal communication, April, 2008). School counselors report receiving greater administrative support and encouragement for offering counseling and support groups as a result of the training. In addition, the district has responded by placing test coordinators in all of the high schools in order that school counselors might spend more time providing the services they were trained to provide, rather than coordinating the school testing program.

Counselor educators can also advocate for informing other stakeholders about current expectations for school counselors, and can model skills in advocacy and collaboration with university colleagues. Pre-service teachers and principals can benefit from learning about the role of the school counselor, in preparation for future collaboration, consultation, and teamwork recommended for addressing issues in today's schools. In addition to faculty presentations, pre-service school counselors can be tasked with designing and presenting overviews of the ASCA National Model, models of school counseling programs, and recommended performance standards to pre-service teachers, administrators, and other educators. This may help pre-service counselors consider how to best present information to a variety of adult audiences. Counselor educators may also collaborate with other faculty to offer joint curricula, classes, or other experiences that provide pre-service educators with opportunities to solve scenarios, address needs, and explore problems collegially. Shoffner and Briggs (2001) described one simulation that

allowed pre-service teachers, administrators, and counselors to better understand each others' roles and perspectives while collaborating to address school and student issues. Counselor educators should also consider conducting research to indicate what types of training modules and formats have the greatest impact on educators' expectations of school counseling roles.

There are a variety of excellent opportunities for professional school counselors, counseling supervisors, and counselor educators to promote the ASCA National Model; explain their specialized background, training, and expertise; and describe appropriate and inappropriate roles and responsibilities of school counselors. Certainly counseling professionals should continue to design and promote a plan of services to meet the needs of all students and market effective results, but it is also imperative to inform all stakeholders of school counselors' skill sets and the ASCA National Model and Standards. No longer can or should school counselors sit back and allow other stakeholders to determine what counselor roles should be and how time should be spent in schools. This advocacy role is an important expectation for today's counselors as counseling program efforts may be stifled when recommended models and standards aren't shared with stakeholders. Coupled with data that documents the school counseling program's impact on students, school counselors can promote the ASCA National Model and expectations for school counselors. Armed with this knowledge, colleagues may more effectively collaborate and problem-solve with school counselors in efforts to address the social and emotional, career, and academic needs of all students.

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