



A Comparison of the 2010 and the 2016 ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors and a Rationale for the Changes

Preamble:

Wording changes: 2016 version includes the following:

- ...supporting school counselors, school counseling students/interns, school counseling program directors/supervisors and school counselor educators
- ...systemic change by providing equitable education access and success by connecting their school counseling programs to the district's mission and improvement plans.

Rationale for change: Additions were made to become more inclusive for whom the standards are applicable. A continuation of emphasis of the 2004 and 2010 codes for the imperative for school counselors to act as systemic change agents, advocates and connect to the school improvement plans.

Purpose statement:

Wording added:

- ...in consultation with state school counseling associations, school counselor educators, school counseling state and district leaders and school counselor across...

In the bulleted purpose statements bolded pieces were changed:

- Provide **support and direction for self-assessment, peer consultation and evaluations** regarding school counselors' responsibilities to students, parents/guardians, colleagues and professional associates, school **district employees**, communities and the school counseling profession.

Rationale for Change: The standards were revised in consultation with dozens of school counseling professionals, a departure from the past in which a small committee did the work. The standards emphasize continuous professional growth.

A. Responsibility to Students

A.1. Supporting student development (new wording)

- b. Aim to provide counseling to students in a brief context and support students and families/guardians in obtaining outside services if the student needs long-term clinical counseling.
- c. Do not diagnose but remain acutely aware of how a student's diagnosis can potentially affect the student's academic success.
- d. Acknowledge the vital role of parents/guardians and families.
- f. (bolded sections are new wording) Respect students' and families' values, beliefs, **sexual orientation, gender identification/expression** and cultural background and **exercise great care to avoid imposing** personal beliefs or values rooted in one's religion, culture or ethnicity
- j. (bolded sections are new wording) Maintain appropriate boundaries and are aware that any sexual or romantic relationship with students whether legal or illegal in the state of practice is considered a grievous breach of ethics and is prohibited regardless of a student's age. This **prohibition applies to both in-person and electronic interactions and relationships.**

Rationale for Change: The standards were revised to emphasize brief counseling and to make clear that school counselors do not diagnose or deliver clinical, therapeutic counseling. The purpose is to also move to curtail and retract the direction some districts are moving when having school counselors tied to IEPs for a small percentage of the population when school counselors are there to deliver interventions and responsive services to all students in their charge.

More information and standards were needed specific to gender expression as research points to the fact that student are coming out earlier.

Court cases have given school counselors guidance in appropriate professional distance in electronic communication.

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. (bolded sections are new wording) Inform students of the purposes, goals, techniques and rules of procedure under which they may receive counseling. Disclosure includes **informed consent and clarification** of the limits of confidentiality. Informed consent requires competence, **voluntariness and knowledge** on the part of the students to understand the limits of confidentiality and, therefore, can be difficult to obtain from students of certain developmental levels, **English-language learners and special-needs populations. If the student is able to give assent/consent before school counselors share confidential information, school counselors attempt to gain the student's assent/consent.**

- m. (New) **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 practices suggest a very limited number of educators would have access to highly sensitive information on a need-to-know basis.**
- n. (New) **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. (New) **Avoid software programs without the technological capabilities to protect student information based upon currently acceptable security standards and the law.**

Rationale for Change: The standards were revised to underscore the difficulty of obtaining informed consent because of the developmental levels of students. The onus is on the school counselor to seek a student's informed consent but realizes that student consent to engage, when impossible, requires the school counselor to recognize the additional responsibility this places on the school counselor.

Confidentiality in electronic communication continues to be a growing and ever-changing concern as electronic communication becomes more prevalent in education.

A.3. Comprehensive Data-Informed Program

This entire section is new to the 2016 Ethical Standards

Rationale for Change: The standards were revised to align the standards with the imperative for data-informed school counseling according the ASCA National Model.

A.4. Academic, Career and Social/Emotional Plans

School counselors:

- a. (New) **Collaborate with administration, teachers, staff and decision makers to create a culture of postsecondary readiness**
- b. (bolded words were added) Provide and advocate for the individual students' **pre-K–postsecondary college and career awareness**, exploration and postsecondary planning and decision making, which supports the students' right to choose from the wide array of options when students complete secondary education.
- c. (New) **Identify gaps in college and career access and the implications of such data for addressing both intentional and unintentional biases related to college and career counseling.**

- d. (New) **Provide opportunities for all students to develop the mindsets and behavior necessary to learn work-related skills, resilience, perseverance and understanding of lifelong learning as a part of long-term career success, a positive attitude toward learning and a strong work ethic.**

Rationale for Change: The standards were revised to underscore the national imperative for all students to receive college and career advising and opportunities to develop the new ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success.

A.5. Dual Relationships and (new) Managing Boundaries

- c. **More extensive wording**
- d. **More extensive wording**

Rationale for Change: The standards were revised to better address precautionary measures regarding boundary crossings to avoid boundary violations.

A.6. Appropriate Referrals and (new) Advocacy

- a. (New) **Collaborate with all relevant stakeholders, including students, educators and parents/guardians when student assistance is needed, including the identification of early warning signs of students distress.**
- b. (Addition) **careful not to indicate an endorsement or preference for one counselor or practice.**
- e. (New) **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 diversity. School counselors should pursue additional training and supervision in areas where they are at risk of imposing their values on students, especially when the school counselor's values are discriminatory in nature. 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. (Reworded) **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. (New) **Provide internal and external service providers with accurate, objective, meaningful data necessary to adequately evaluate, counsel and assist the students.**
- h. (New) **Ensure there is not a conflict of interest in providing referral resources. School counselors do not refer or accept a referral to counsel a student from their school if they also work in a private counseling practice.**

Rationale for Change: The standards were revised to underscore the difficulty of obtaining informed consent because of the developmental levels of students. The onus is on the school counselor to seek a student's informed consent but realizes student consent to engage, when impossible, requires the school counselor to recognize the additional responsibility this places on the counselor.

Court cases have increased our awareness of the need to address professional development when a school counselor's values interfere with their ability to offer optimum services to each student in their caseload. The Ward v. Wilbanks case in particular helped the profession understand that referrals cannot be the standard approach when a school counselor's values conflict with a student's needs.

Confidentiality in electronic communication continues to be a growing and ever-changing concern as electronic communication becomes more prevalent in education.

A.7. Group Work

School counselors:

- a. (New) **Facilitate short-term groups to address students' academic, career and/or social/emotional issues.**
- b. (Reworded to include the duty to inform vs. recognize best practice) **Inform parent/guardian(s) of student participation in a small group.**
- c. Less wordy
- d. **Use data to measure member needs to establish well-defined expectation of group members.**
- e. Reworded, but same concept
- f. (More specific – separated from a in 2010 Ethical Standards to stand alone) **Select topics for groups with the clear understanding that some topics are not suitable for groups in schools and accordingly take precautions to protect members from harm as a result of interactions with the group.**
- g. (New) **Facilitate groups from the framework of evidence-based or research-based practices.**
- h. Similar to e in 2010 Ethical Standards – more specific language of **practice with their competence level** instead of saying “develop professional competencies”
- i. (New) **Measure the outcomes of group participation (process, perception and outcome data) – specific to the ASCA National Model**

Rationale for Change: The standards were revised to encourage group work that is brief, data-informed, appropriate for schools, evidence-based, with measurable outcomes.

A.8 Student Peer-Support Program (was A.11 in 2010 Ethical Standards)

- b. (New wording) **Supervise students engaged in peer helping, mediation and other similar peer-support groups. School counselors are responsible for appropriate skill development for students serving as peer support in school counseling programs. School counselors continuously monitor students who are giving peer support and reinforce the confidential nature of their work. School counselors inform peer-support students about the parameter of when students need to report information to responsible adults.**

Rationale for Change: The standards were revised to encourage group work that is brief, data-informed, appropriate for schools, evidence-based, with measurable outcomes.

A.9. (New wording on title) SERIOUS AND FORSEEABLE Harm to Self and Others

- a. (More comprehensive with some wording changes – bolded pieces are additions or changes) – Inform parents/guardians and/or appropriate authorities when a student poses a **serious and foreseeable risk of harm** to self or others. **When feasible**, this is to be done after careful deliberation and consultation with other appropriate professionals. **School counselors inform students of the school counselor’s legal and ethical obligations to report the concern to the appropriate authorities unless it is appropriate to withhold this information to protect the student (e.g. student might run away if he/she knows parents are being called). The consequence of the risk of not giving parents/guardians a chance to intervene on behalf of their child is too great. Even if the danger appears relatively remote, parents should be notified.**
- b. (Changes in wording and additions in bold) – **Use risk assessments with caution. If risk assessments are used by the school counselor, an intervention plan should be developed and in place prior to this practice.** When reporting risk-assessment results to parents, school counselors do not negate the risk of harm **even if the assessment reveals a low risk as students may minimize risk** to avoid further scrutiny and/or parental notification. School counselors report risk assessment results to parents to underscore the need to act on behalf of a child at risk; **this is not intended to assure parents their child isn’t at risk, which is something a school counselor cannot know with certainty.**
- c. (Updated language giving school counselors responsibility rather than just “understanding” and more comprehensive) – **Do not release** a student who is a danger to self or others **until the student has proper and necessary support. If parents 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. (New) **Report to parents/guardians and/or appropriate authorities when students disclose a perpetrated or a perceived threat to their physical and mental well-being. This threat may include, but is not limited to, physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, dating violence, bullying or sexual harassment. The school counselor follows applicable federal, state and local laws and school district policy.**

Rationale for Change: The standards were revised to discuss serious and foreseeable harm and how this is a better fit for schools, students and school counselors as the prior approach to breach, clear imminent danger, implied a standard that was too stringent to keep students safe.

Court cases and past experience have informed us about the dangers of risk assessments when used to negate or minimize a risk.

A.10 Underserved and At-Risk Populations

This entire section is new to the 2016 Ethical Standards

Rationale for Change: The standards were revised to underscore the advocacy role school counselors play in identifying and supporting underserved and at-risk populations.

A.11. Bullying, Harassment and Child Abuse

This entire section is new to the 2016 Ethical Standards

Rationale for Change: The standards were revised to place additional emphasis on the school counselor's legal and ethical role in safeguarding students from harassment and abuse.

A.12. Student Records

School counselors:

- a. (Updates and changes in bold) Abide by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), **which defines who has access to students' educational records and allows parents the right to review and challenge perceived inaccuracies in their child's records.**
- b. (New) **Advocate for ethical use of student data and records and inform administration of inappropriate or harmful practices.**
- e. (New) **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. (Updates in language and additions in bold) – 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** (changed from “apply careful discretion and deliberation) 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.**

Rationale for Change: The standards were revised to further the imperative to protect the confidentiality of student educational records especially in light of the increase in electronic communication.

A.13. Evaluation, Assessment and Interpretation

School counselors:

- a. (New) **Use only valid and reliable tests and assessments with concern for bias and cultural sensitivity.**
- c. (Minor language changes) **Are mindful of confidentiality guidelines** when utilizing **paper or electronic** evaluative or assessment **instruments** and programs.
- e. (New) **Use multiple data points when possible to provide students and families with accurate, objective and concise information to promote students' well-being.**
- i. (Addition) **Conduct school counseling program evaluations to determine**

Rationale for Change: The standards were revised to add emphasis to ethical behavior in assessment.

A.14. Technical and Digital Citizenship (title changed from Technology)

(e. in 2010 Ethical Standards referred to cyberbullying, which is not included in this section of the 2016 Ethical Standards)

- a. (Similar to a. of 2010 Ethical Standards but more comprehensive) – **Demonstrate appropriate section and use of technology and software applications to enhance students' academic, career and social/emotional development. Attention is given to the ethical and legal considerations of technological applications, including confidentiality concerns, security issues, potential limitations and benefits and communication practices in electronic media.**
- c. **Promote the safe and responsible use of technology in collaboration with educators and families**
- d. This piece was separated out from a. in 2010 Ethical Standards and made as a stand-alone
- e. (New) **Use established and approved means of communication with students, maintaining appropriate boundaries. School counselors help educate students about appropriate communication and boundaries.**

Rationale for Change: The standards were revised to recognize the need for additional guidance in the growing area of software and technology use by school counselors.

A.15. Virtual/Distance School Counseling – entire section is new

Rationale for Change: The standards were revised to recognize the need for additional guidance in the growing area of virtual school counseling.

B. Responsibilities to Parents/Guardians, School and Self (this section is a combination of Sections B, C, D and E from the 2010 Ethical Standards)

B.1. Responsibilities to Parents/Guardians

School counselors:

- e. (More comprehensive than B.1.d) with the addition of **the mission of the school counseling program and program standards in academic, career and social/emotional domains that promote and enhance the learning process for all students**

B.2. Responsibilities to the School (this is a combination of Section C.3, D.1, D.2 and E.2 of the 2010 Ethical Standards. There is some overlap, and the wording is different in several of the points within this section. Concepts are similar, but wording isn't a direct reflection of the 2010 Ethical Standards in most points)

School counselors:

- a. (New) **Develop and maintain professional relationships and systems of communication with faculty, staff and administrators to support students.**
- d. (New) **Provide leadership to create systemic change to enhance the school.**
- j. (New) **Strive to use translators who have been vetted or reviewed and bilingual/multilingual school counseling program materials representing languages used by families in the school community.**
- m. (New) **Promote cultural competence to help create a safer more inclusive school environment.**

B.3. Responsibilities to Self (also covered as E.1. professional competence in 2010 Ethical Standards and as F.1. professionalism)

School counselors:

- a. (New) **Have completed a counselor education program at an accredited institution and earned a master's degree in school counseling.**
- j. (New) **Refrain from refusing services to students based solely on the school counselor's personally held beliefs or values rooted in one's religion, culture or ethnicity. School counselors respect the diversity of students and seek training and supervision when prejudice or biases interfere with providing comprehensive services to all students.**

- k. (Not stated the same in 2010 Ethical Standards but similar to C.3.b) **Work toward a school climate that embraces diversity and promotes academic, career and social/emotional development for all students**
- l. (Similar to F.1.f just reworded) **Make clear distinction between actions and statements (both verbal and written) made as a private individual and those made as a representative of the school counseling profession and of the school district.**
- m. (New) **Respect the intellectual property of others and adhere to copyright laws and correctly cite other's work when using it.**

Rationale for Change: The standards were revised to address the need for continual professional development in cultural competence and diversity.

C. School Counselor Administrators/Supervisors (new title and focus)

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

- a. Similar to D.2.b in 2010 code with some rewording
- b. (New) **Advocating for fair and open distribution of resources among programs supervised. An allocation procedure should be developed that is nondiscriminatory, informed by data and consistently applied.**
- c. (New) **Taking reasonable steps to ensure school and other resources are available to provide appropriate staff supervision and training.**
- d. (Similar to E.1.d but new wording) **Providing opportunities for professional development in current research related to school counseling practice and ethics.**
- e. (New) **Taking steps to eliminate condition or practices in their schools or organizations that may violate, discourage or interfere with compliance with the ethics and laws related to the profession.**
- f. (New) **Monitoring school and organization policies, regulations and procedures to ensure practices are consistent with the ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors.**

Rationale for Change: The standards were revised to include more on the role the school counselor administrator can play in supporting school counselors.

D. School Counseling Intern Site Supervisors (change in section wording from 2010 Ethical Standards)

Field/intern site supervisors: (new title for the competencies)

All competencies are new and much more focused than those in the 2010 Ethical Standards. The 2010 Ethical Standards focused on the experience, maintaining appropriate insurance and site visits.

The 2016 Ethical Standards are laid out to ensure site supervisors have adequate training, are using a collaborative model, and are competent with technology and policies and procedures. It also focuses on evaluation tools, remediation plans and recommendation of dismissal when interns are unable to demonstrate competence.

Rationale for Change: The standards were revised to include more on the role site supervisors can play in supporting candidates for school counseling.

E. Maintenance of Standards (this section existed with a single statement in the 2010 Ethical Standards. In the 2016 Ethical Standards it's much more extensive and lays out procedures that serve as a guide for ethical behavior. This is similar to what was laid out in G.1. of the 2010 Standards.

- a. Highlights the understanding of mandatory reporting in the respective district and states
- b. Lays out what do when the behavior in question is unlawful, abusive, egregious or dangerous, in which case proper school or community authorities are contacted.
- c. Specifies steps to take when the matter remains unresolved

Rationale for Change: The standards were revised to provide additional guidance in the responsibilities of school counselors in maintaining standards.

ASCA thanks the following people for their work on this document: Haley Wikoff, doctoral student, counselor education and supervision, University of Iowa; and Carolyn Stone, Ed.D., professor, University of North Florida, and chair, ASCA Ethics Committee