

## Scope of Practice and Role Statement Regarding School Counselors Trained at SMC

Students in the School Counseling specialization in the Counseling Department at Saint Mary's College earn a master's degree in Counseling and a Pupil Personnel Services (PPS) credential. The PPS credential is given by the Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC), and allows the individual to work in any preK-12 public school in California. Our focus is on preparing students with the knowledge and skills to become competent school-based mental health practitioners and social justice advocates through a program of study aligned with the American School Counselor Association's (ASCA) National Standards, which focus on the academic, career, and social/emotional development of preK-12 students. Our students learn about the history, theories, and research behind the field of counseling and specifically professional school counseling, and gain a variety of tools to support the success of public and private school students from diverse populations and contexts; these tools include academic advising, college and career planning and development, and counseling services at individual, group, classroom, and school-wide levels on relevant social/emotional issues affecting preK-12 students and their families.

School counselors are expected to take on leadership roles within school systems, to work from a strengths-based perspective, to develop and manage comprehensive school counseling programs, to be knowledgeable about legal and ethical standards in their field, and to focus on both prevention and intervention efforts. They engage in evidence-based practice and provide counseling, consultation, and collaboration to other individuals and groups in their school settings and in the larger community. A recent area of focus is trauma-informed practice, which has become a popular topic at state and national conferences, as school counselors are called upon to take an active role in developing trauma-sensitive schools.

The field of school counseling emerged from the fields of psychology, vocational guidance, and education. Because of this blended history, there has been fairly consistent role confusion and multiple, ongoing attempts to achieve a standard definition of the role. As a result of this confusion, various myths and stereotypes have persisted. Some common myths and stereotypes about school counseling are that school counselors: 1. function solely as academic advisors, or as school personnel who assist students with scheduling; 2. do not provide ongoing counseling for students; 3. always have very high caseloads; 4. do not handle trauma or crises; and/or 5. act as "gatekeepers," inhibiting student progress or post-secondary options.

Part of the purpose of this scope of practice and role statement is to dispel these myths and stereotypes. Here is some information that might help:

1. Per the ASCA National Standards, school counselors are equally responsible for the academic, career, and social/emotional development of preK-12 students. This means that their work encompasses much more than academic advising or scheduling. In some schools, the school counselors focus more heavily on academic and college/career planning, but they are trained to work with students on a wide range of issues.
2. Many school counselors run weekly groups or have a caseload of students whom they see for counseling on a regular basis. The likelihood of a school counselor engaging in this type of ongoing counseling work sometimes depends on whether or not the principal is supportive of counseling, and therefore awareness-raising is a crucial part of the school counselor's role and an area of focus in their training.
3. The recommended caseload is 250:1 per ASCA guidelines, and California's average tends to be much higher than this; nonetheless, there are many models for school counseling, and some school counselors have a lower caseload.

4. School counselors are trained to assess for and support students dealing with child abuse, suicide, depression, grief and loss, non-suicidal self-injury, sexual orientation and gender identity development, healthy relationships and dating/relationship violence, school-based and community violence, immigration-related crises, deployment of family members, and a wide range of other causes of potential trauma. They tend to handle crises on a daily basis.
5. Per the ASCA National Model, school counselors are trained to be advocates for social justice, to promote equity, and to recognize and address institutionalized forms of oppression. These themes are key throughout their training.

The scope of practice for a school counselor does not include: data entry or clerical work, management of student records, "yard duty" or supervision of students on school grounds, developing Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) for students (though school counselors often attend these meetings and provide support, consultation, and coordination of services), administering certain cognitive or aptitude tests (though they often need to read and interpret the results of these tests, and they may administer a range of other assessments), handling student discipline, or writing official DSM-V diagnoses (though some may have the MFT/PCC training and competence to consider diagnoses as part of their treatment plan for the student). Nonetheless, because of role confusion, school counselors are sometimes called upon to perform some of these tasks. The school counseling program of study heavily emphasizes the need for raising awareness in school systems about the advanced training of school counseling students and their role as school-based mental health professionals with graduate degrees and credentials. Because there is no single agreed upon definition of the role of a school counselor and variation exists across districts and states, there is a good deal of room for creativity in developing one's role. This is an exciting dimension of the field of school counseling in California!

Sources:

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