

A STUDY OF ASCA NATIONAL STANDARDS IN TEXAS SCHOOLS*

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Abstract

The national standards of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) provide for defining the role of the school counselor, evaluating the content of counseling programs, and effectively meeting the needs of students. This study surveyed 495 school counselors in all levels including Kindergarten through 12th grade in Texas public schools to determine levels of inclusion of ASCA's national standards in their school counseling programs. Results indicated that school counselors at all grade levels shared a commitment to providing experiences that support the academic and career development of student competencies. Interestingly, elementary and high school counselors also shared an expressed commitment to providing experiences that support personal and social growth of their students.



NOTE: This module has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and sanctioned by the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) as a scholarly contribution to the knowledge base in educational administration.

Social changes and challenges of the 21st century are placing ever-increasing demands on the schools to provide more than instruction designed to enhance cognitive development (Baker, 2000). Perry (1994) cited the 1991 United States Department of Labor report of the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS), the 1990 National Center on Education and the Economy report, and the 1991 National Education Goals adopted by President Clinton and the nation's governors to emphasize the need to prepare America's students for success. These reports suggest that in addition to one's ability to use high level technical skills and workplace competencies, success relies on a firm foundation of academic skills, adeptness in communicating knowledge, basic thinking skills, the personal qualities (i.e., self-esteem, responsibility, self-management, integrity) and interpersonal skills to relate to colleagues and customers (Baker). Traditionally,

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school curricula have been built around cognitive development and the acquisition of academic skills, thinking skills, and knowledge. If schools are to meet the challenge of preparing students for success after graduation, America's schools must develop plans for helping students acquire the interpersonal skills and personal qualities identified as necessary skills for success in the future.

Most schools have personnel with knowledge and expertise to support students' development of personal qualities and to teach the interpersonal skills needed for success in the 21st century. Among these are professional school counselors who have the necessary process skills to assist students to obtain and practice interpersonal skills (Baker, 2000, Perry 1994). The American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2003) recommends that school counselors take on a leadership position to assess needs to change in school and to implement change strategies that benefit students.

According to Baker (2000) and Myrick (1997) school counselors have been overburdened and underused, inheriting administrative and clerical tasks that are time-consuming and represent a poor use of talents of highly trained professionals. Burgess (1994) found the school counseling profession to be challenged to define and enunciate its roles and functions more clearly. The research of Baker (2000), Burgess (1994), and Myrick (1997) reinforce studies of school counselors in Texas (Texas Education Agency, 2004) in which counselors suggest that in practice, local programs and counselor roles remain at odds with state and national models.

In 1994, the Texas Education Agency began a two-year study of public school counseling and guidance programs. The primary purpose of the 1994 Texas Education Agency study was to assess the availability and quality of counseling in an effort to define a professional identity for the school counselor that better addressed student needs (TEA 2004). The study was prompted by a 1989 study that investigated the effects of various educational reforms on the experiences of Texas high school students at risk of dropping out of school. Students and school staff reported that counselors have limited time available for providing counseling and guidance services for students. They perceived this to be a significant causal factor in the dropout rate of high school students. Additionally, counselors reported that extraneous duties, especially paperwork and test administration, prevented them from performing counseling and guidance activities with students. At the time the Texas Education Agency conducted this study, the American School Counseling Association had not published the National Standards for School Counseling Programs authored by Campbell and Dahir(1997). The American School Counselor Association's decision to develop national standards for school counseling programs provided an opportunity for the school counseling community to implement the goals deemed important by the profession and to promote ASCA's mission to ensure student success in school (Campbell & Dahir). The National Standards for School Counseling Programs are public statements of what students should know and be able to do as a result of participating in a school counseling program. The national standards address program content and the learning opportunities (competencies) that all students should experience as a result of participating in a school counseling program (Campbell & Dahir). The nine national standards are based on the three widely accepted and interrelated areas of student development: academic, career, and personal/social (Dahir, 1998).

According to Dahir and Goldberg (2000), ASCA and the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) joined to integrate the national standards into pre-service education. Perusse, Goodnough and Noel (2001) reported that the national standards were gradually being used by counselor educators in counseling programs to prepare and train school counselors.

National standards provide an opportunity to define the role of the school counselor, to evaluate the content of counseling programs, and to meet the needs of students (Dahir, 2001). Since counseling programs in the state of Texas have not been evaluated according to the national standards, the major focus of this study was to conduct a statewide evaluation of inclusion of national standards for school counseling programs as defined by the American School Counseling Association.

Method

Purpose of Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to determine the level of implementation of the national standards in Texas public school counseling programs.

The following questions were addressed:

1. To what extent are the American School Counselor Association National Standards included in Texas public school counseling programs?

1. What is the frequency level of implementation of the national standards at elementary, middle and junior high, and high school grade levels?
2. Is there a positive relationship between the inclusion of national standards and counselor-student ratio, school locale, years of experience as a counselor, age range, gender, and professional memberships?

Participants

The participants in the study were employed as a counselor in Texas public schools. One thousand school counselors were selected from the Texas Education Agency database. A stratified sampling technique was used to make certain that various subgroups were represented equally (Gay & Airasian, 2003). Participants represented the 20 Education Service Center regions in Texas, with 50 counselors selected from each region. The total number of participants surveyed represented one tenth of the 10,000 school counselors currently employed in Texas public schools. Approximately half, 49.5% (n = 495) of the 1,000 surveys were completed and returned (See Table 1 for demographic information of participants).

Table 1

Demographic information of participants

Gender:	n	%
Female	401	81
Male	77	16
Unknown	17	3
Age:		
Younger than 35	68	14
35 to 50+	427	86
Years experience in current position:		
5 - 10	297	60
More than 10	149	30
Not reported	49	10

Table 1

Additional demographic information requested that participants identify location of their school and counselor-student ratio. Most of the counselors, 70% (n = 345), reported working in schools located in urban areas, and 58.6% (n = 290) of the counselors reported a 1:300-600 counselor-student ratio.

Instrument Development

In order to accomplish the purpose of this study, an original survey instrument was developed by the first author. Survey items were based on the three broad areas of academic development, career development, and personal/social development as presented in ASCA's The National Standards for School Counseling Program (1997). Permission to use the national standards in the construction of the survey items was obtained from Dr. Carol Dahir, co-author of The National Standards for School Counseling Programs. To establish content validity, Dr. Carol Dahir, co-author of ASCA's The National Standards for School Counseling Programs and National Standards Project Director for the American School Counselor Association and Pat Harper, former Coordinator of Guidance and Counseling Programs for Texas public schools in Education Service Center Region VI reviewed the instrument. Recommendations offered by the reviewers were of a grammatical

and semantic nature. Revisions as recommended were made to the final survey instrument. In addition, the survey was reviewed and approved by the Human Subjects Review Committee at Sam Houston State University.

Survey Instrument

The instrument consisted of two parts: Section I. General Demographic Information and Section II. Inclusion of National Standards in Texas Public School Counseling Programs (See Appendix A & B). In Section I, demographic information included the counselor's position, grade level, number of students served, location of school, years of experience, age of counselor, gender, professional memberships. The following three questions requiring a yes or no response: a) Are you familiar with the American School Counseling Association National Standards for School Counseling Programs; b) are you familiar with A Model Developmental Guidance and Counseling Program for Texas Public Schools; and c) how similar are ASCA's National Standards for School Counseling Programs and a Model Developmental Guidance and Counseling Program for Texas Public Schools?

This section included 13 items with space at the bottom for comments (See

Appendix A). Items 1-9 were exact statements of standards found in *Sharing the Vision – The National Standards for School Counseling Programs* (Campbell & Dahir, 1997, p.17). Items 1-3 focused on student competencies in the academic area, items 4-6 on student competencies in career development and items 7-9 on personal/social student competencies. Items 10-12 asked respondents to record their perception of the primary focus of the school counseling program as academic development, career development, or personal/social development of students. A final item in this section requested a response to the following statement, "The counseling program in this school is part of the educational curriculum." Responses to survey items in Section I. required participants to select the choice that best described their current counseling position, personal demographics, and knowledge of ASCA's National Standards for School Counseling Programs (1997) and A Model Developmental Guidance and Counseling Program for Texas Public Schools (2004). A 5-point Likert scale (1 = not true to 5 = very true) was provided for recording responses to items in Section II.

Procedure

Participants were mailed a survey, a cover letter on Sam Houston State University letterhead stationery, and a stamped return envelope addressed to the primary researcher. The surveys were coded by Education Service Center Region

(I - XX) and numbered (1-1000). To respect participants' anonymity, personal information (name, school, and school district) were not included in the survey. Participants were requested to complete and return the survey within two weeks. At the end of two weeks, only 118 surveys were completed and returned. The time period for returning surveys was extended to one month in order to secure a larger population for the study.

Results

For the first research question, "To what extent are American School Counselor Association national standards included in Texas public school counseling programs?" a frequency analysis of data found a mean range of 3.6 – 4.1 for items 1-9 in survey Section II. Inclusion of academic standards (items 1-3) produced the highest mean value ($M = 4.1$, $SD = 0.9$) for standard I, while three standards for career (items 4-6) produced the lowest mean value ($M = 3.7$, $SD = 0.9 - 1.0$). Additional analysis of data for the first research question appears in Table 2.

Table 2

Frequency Analysis of ASCA's national standards in Texas public school counseling programs

National Standards	M	SD	Variance
Academic Development			
Standard 1	4.1	0.9	0.9301
Standard 2	4.0	0.9	0.9064
Standard 3	3.8	0.9	0.9391
Career Development			
Standard 4	3.7	1.0	1.0233
Standard 5	3.7	1.0	1.0913
Standard 6	3.7	0.9	0.8969
Personal /Social Development			
Standard 7	4.0	0.9	0.8639
Standard 8	3.8	0.9	0.8283
Standard 9	3.8	0.9	0.9006

Table 2

The second research question was, “What is the frequency level of inclusion of national standards at elementary, middle and junior high, and high school grade levels?” This question posed three grade level category options. However, some participants wrote in their own category options which created three new level categories. Although elementary, middle and junior high, and high school were the grade level options on the survey, the three additional grade level categories written by participants included elementary/middle, junior and high school, and all levels. Therefore, six separate grade level categories were included in the data collection and analysis.

To compare the means of the six grade-level groups with inclusion of academic (items 1-3), career (items 4-6) and personal/social (items 7-9) national standards, three analyses of variance were used. There were no statistically significant differences found in the inclusion of academic standards $F(5, 489) = 1.62$ and career standards $F(5, 489) = 0.8$. The ANOVA reflected a significant difference $F(5, 489) = 5.0, p < .0002$ among the means of personal/social standards when compared by grade level groups. Because the F-ratio exceeded the tabled value

($F = 2.10, p = .05$), a post hoc comparison procedure was used to identify which pair or pairs of means are significantly different (Gay & Airasian, 2003). The data in this study meet the basic assumptions for ANOVAs as discussed by Green, Salkind, and Akey (2000); the dependent variables were normally distributed for each of the populations, the variance of the dependent variables was the same for all cells, and the population was a random sample.

A Tukey-Kramer post hoc multiple comparison test was used to analyze the mean differences by grade level for the six groups. The Tukey-Kramer procedure identified a strong relationship ($q = 20.6, p < .01$) between inclusion of personal/social standards at elementary and high school levels. No correlation was found at the $p < .05$ or $p < .01$ level for other grade level groups (elementary, middle, elementary/middle, middle and high school, and all levels).

The third research question was, “Is there a positive relationship between inclusion of national standards and counselor-student ratio, school locale, years of experience as a counselor, age range, gender, and professional memberships?” There was no relationship between implementation of national standards and demographic variables.

Discussion

While 52.3% ($n = 259$) of the participants surveyed were not familiar with ASCA’s national standards, the results of this study nonetheless indicated that Texas public school counseling programs include student

competencies similar to national standards in the areas of academic development, career development, and personal/social development. Participant responses ranged from “somewhat true” ($M = 3.7$) to “moderately true” ($M = 4.1$) to inclusion of student competencies in academic, career, and personal/social development in Texas public school counseling programs.

The consistency in responses to academic and career standards among school counselors at the six grade levels (elementary, middle and junior high, elementary/middle, high school, middle and high school, and all levels) expresses a shared commitment to providing experiences that support the development of student competencies in these areas. When comparing the inclusion of personal/social standards, results of the study identified a significant relationship between elementary and high school grade levels. Further research efforts may explore what factors influence the strong emphasis of personal/social at elementary and high schools over middle and junior high, combined levels and all levels. Therefore, additional research investigating the relationship between elementary and high school grade levels concerning the inclusion of personal/social standard is recommended.

Conclusion and Implications

Research has demonstrated (Baker, 2000; Borders & Drury, 1992; Campbell & Dahir, 1997; & Myrick, 1997,) that school counseling is an integral component of the programs and services that can best serve students' current needs and in their preparation for success in the 21st century (Perry, 1994). To serve students most effectively, a quality school counseling program must be available to all students at every grade level. National standards for school counseling programs are what the professional members of American School Counselor Association promote to be the essential elements of a quality school counseling program. Based on results of this research, school counseling standards according to The National Standards for School Counseling Programs (Campbell & Dahir, 1997) and A Model Developmental Guidance and Counseling Program for Texas Public Schools (TEA, 2004) are similar. Infusing the two models will provide a stronger statement of what students should know and be able to do as a result of participation in the school counseling program. National standards reinforce Texas Education Agency's school counseling program goal of ensuring school counseling program quality and effectiveness. Ensuring that school counseling programs are meeting this goal has important implications for educational leaders whose responsibility for successful schools encompasses all programming including counseling programs. Additionally, school counselors, themselves, are increasingly perceived as leaders as they serve in key roles that contribute to the systemic success of schools (Ritter & Serres, 2006). Through their leadership roles in providing quality counseling programs, school counselors encourage success for all students attending Texas public schools.

Summary

The ASCA National Standards represent the essential elements that school counselors believe to be important for best serving the needs of Texas public school students. The study is significant because the results indicated that Texas school counselors are indeed implementing the essential services determined to be most important as identified by the ASCA National Standards, even when the counselors were not aware of those Standards. This appears to be contrary to previous studies that indicated local programs and counselor roles are at odds with state and national models and warrants further investigation due to the discrepancy between these findings and previous studies. In addition, it is important for the development of professional identity that school counselors recognize they are meeting specific standards as outlined by ASCA and thereby fulfilling important leadership roles.

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Appendix A

Please complete entire survey, including Section II on reverse side.

SURVEY

Impact of National Standards Counselors in Texas: A Statewide Review

Section I. General and Demographic Information

Position: <input type="checkbox"/> Counselor and <input type="checkbox"/> Other Counselor (specify) <input type="checkbox"/> other Counselor be- <input type="checkbox"/> low	Grade Level(s): <input type="checkbox"/> Elementary <input type="checkbox"/> Middle and Junior high. <input type="checkbox"/> High School <input type="checkbox"/> High School
Number of students you are responsible for: <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 150 <input type="checkbox"/> 150 – 300 <input type="checkbox"/> 300 – 600 <input type="checkbox"/> More than 600	Location of School District: <input type="checkbox"/> Rural <input type="checkbox"/> Urban
Your age: <input type="checkbox"/> 20 – 25 <input type="checkbox"/> 26 – 35 <input type="checkbox"/> 36 – 50 <input type="checkbox"/> over 50	Gender: <input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female
Professional Membership: <input type="checkbox"/> American Counseling Association (ACA) <input type="checkbox"/> Texas Counseling Association (TCA) <input type="checkbox"/> American School Counselor Association (ASCA) <input type="checkbox"/> Others (indicate below)	Years experience in current position: <input type="checkbox"/> Less than one <input type="checkbox"/> 1 – 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 – 5 <input type="checkbox"/> 5 – 10 <input type="checkbox"/> More than 10
<i>continued on next page</i>	

Are you familiar with the National Standards for School Counselors? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Are you familiar with A Model Developmental Guidance and Counseling Program for Texas Public Schools? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
How similar are National Standards and A Model Developmental Guidance and Counseling Program for Texas Public Schools? <input type="checkbox"/> Very similar <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat similar <input type="checkbox"/> Not similar <input type="checkbox"/> No opinion

Table 3

Appendix B

Click Here to access Appendix B¹

Section II. Inclusion of National Standards in Texas public school counseling programs

Please circle the number 1 – 5 that best represents the degree to which the following standards are currently included in your school counseling program.

NATIONAL STANDARDS:

COMMENTS:

Thank you so much for taking the time to complete and return this survey.

Mary Nichter is an associate professor in the department of Educational Leadership and Counseling at Sam Houston State University in Huntsville, Texas. Her Ph.D. degree was in Family Counseling. She is currently the coordinator of the master's programs for school counselors and community counselors. She is a Licensed Professional Counselor Supervisor and a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist Supervisor in the State of Texas. Mary is also a certified school counselor in the state of Texas.

Chi-Sing Li is an assistant professor in the department of Educational Leadership and Counseling at Sam Houston State University in Huntsville, Texas. His Ph.D. degree was in Counselor Education. He is a Licensed Professional Counselor Supervisor and a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist Supervisor in the State of Texas. Having had over 15 years of experience in counseling and psychotherapy, Li is currently the coordinator of the clinical internship of the counseling programs for school counselors and community counselors.

Sheryl Serres is clinical Professor in the department of Educational Leadership and Counseling at Sam Houston State University in Huntsville, Texas. She is a Licensed Professional Counselor Supervisor and a certified school counselor in the State of Texas. She has been an internship supervisor for school counselor cohorts in the master's program for three years.

¹<http://cnx.org/content/m16613/latest/Document3.pdf>