

**Professional School Counselor and Principal Recognition  
of Appropriate and Inappropriate Activities**

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### **Abstract**

This study examined professional school counselor and principal recognition of appropriate and inappropriate activities of professional school counselors. Researchers investigated the differences in recognition between professional school counselors and principals serving at various educational levels. Results showed differences in what professional school counselors see as appropriate and inappropriate as compared to and contrasted with what principals deemed appropriate. There were six items in which principals and school counselors at every level were in clear agreement.

*Keywords:* ASCA National Model, school counseling, principals, appropriate activities, inappropriate activities

## **Professional School Counselor and Principal Recognition of Appropriate and Inappropriate Activities**

According to the American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2019), the roles and activities of professional school counselors (PSC) have changed significantly since the early 1900's when teachers and administrators took on the role of vocational guidance. The profession now has a national organization and a comprehensive program model. The ASCA (2019) model is founded on data, promotes equitable access to all students, identifies the knowledge and skills students should acquire, and is delivered systematically. Although the model was first published in 2003, PSCs are still learning how to implement the model in schools. Cervoni and DeLucia-Waack (2011) explained that although the model has been used for some time, there is still ambiguity when it comes to the school counselor's role. Clemens et al. (2009) expressed the need for PSC advocacy skills because they may influence ASCA program implementation.

One component included in the ASCA National Model since its first publication is a list of the appropriate and inappropriate activities performed in schools by PSCs. ASCA (2012) recommended administrators "eliminate or reassign" (p. 45) the inappropriate tasks so that PSCs can focus on the prevention and intervention aspects of their jobs. Zalaquett and Chatters (2012) expressed that PSCs and principals could collaborate on a common vision for their roles and functions. This alliance could allow PSCs a better opportunity to define their roles and duties (House & Martin, 1998).

## **Knowledge of Inappropriate and Appropriate Activities**

Pérusse et al. (2004), following the first edition of the ASCA National Model, used the national standards for school counseling programs (1998) and found there to be “no clear agreement” between PSCs and principals on appropriate and inappropriate tasks. Furthermore, their research indicated that both principals and PSCs were not aware of the appropriate and inappropriate tasks and principals still believed “clerical tasks such as registration and scheduling, administering cognitive, aptitude, and achievement tests, and maintaining student records” (p. 159) were appropriate for school counselors. Conversely, Chata and Loesch (2007) surveyed principals in training and found that principals in training were able to identify appropriate and inappropriate functions according to the ASCA National Model.

Mason and Perera-Diltz (2010) found a significant percentage of principals in training learned about PSC duties from personal experience, classroom instruction, and/or during their practicum and internship. Even more surprising was that 29.5% of the principals “speculated or guessed” the duties and 4.9% were “unsure or unable to pinpoint the exact method of learning the duties” (p. 10). Of these principals in training, 51% of elementary and 26.7% of middle school principals in training indicated a lack of involvement with PSCs in field placements. The variation in the sources of information provided to principals may be a cause of the discrepancies between principals and school counselors ideas of appropriate activities.

Leuwerke et al (2009) found 51.3% of the principals surveyed had no exposure to the ASCA National Model and 20.2% had little exposure. Zalaquett and Chatters (2012) found only 26.4% of the principals were “not familiar with the national standards,”

(p. 97) although almost all (98.9%) reported their PSCs coordinate or assist with testing (an inappropriate activity). Zalaquett and Chatters explained this was most likely due to financial strain and the lack of a test coordinator to perform the service.

Throughout the literature, it has been evident that counselor and principal knowledge of the ASCA National Model, as well as knowledge of inappropriate and appropriate tasks, fluctuates. As shown in Mason and Perera-Diltz's (2010) study, principals learned about appropriate and inappropriate duties from "personal experience" more than any other source. The importance of PSC knowledge of the appropriateness of PSC activities is essential to PSC advocacy. If PSCs are not able to recognize their own appropriate and inappropriate tasks, then advocating to their principals may be difficult. Thus, the purpose of this study is to answer the following research questions:

- What do PSCs and principals serving at varying educational levels recognize as the appropriate and inappropriate activities according to the ASCA National Model (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.)?
- Does profession and educational level have an influence on individual's knowledge of the appropriate and inappropriate activities of PSCs according to the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of the ASCA National Model?
- To what extent do PSCs and principals agree on the appropriate and inappropriate activities of PSCs according to the ASCA National Model (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.)?

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Participants included 362 practicing kindergarten through twelfth-grade public PSCs and 186 practicing kindergarten through twelfth-grade public school principals. Of the PSC respondents, 34.73% (124) were members of ASCA, 31.93% (114) were non-

members, and 33.33% (119) were past members. Of those respondents indicating grade level, there were a total of 227 PSCs divided among elementary school ( $n = 51$ ), middle school ( $n = 55$ ), and high school ( $n = 121$ ). The principals ( $n = 134$ ) were divided among elementary school ( $n = 56$ ), middle school, ( $n = 35$ ), and high school ( $n = 43$ ).

## **Procedures**

Email addresses were obtained from a Midwestern's state's Department of Education for 1959 practicing PSCs and 2615 school principals. Emails were sent to each of these addresses with a follow-up email to each non-respondent approximately two weeks following the initial email. The email included a link to a Qualtrics webpage containing a demographic questionnaire and a list of appropriate and inappropriate activities for PSCs. Participants were asked to provide informed consent before beginning the questionnaire. Next, respondents were presented with a randomly ordered list of all the 28 appropriate and inappropriate activities listed in ASCA National Model (2012). Upon reading each statement, participants were asked to mark whether or not they felt that the activity was an appropriate or inappropriate task for PSCs.

Responses to items were coded as "correct" (i.e., a score of 1) when participants selected appropriate for an appropriate activity or when participants selected inappropriate for an inappropriate activity. Conversely, if a participant selected appropriate for an inappropriate activity, or vice versa, the response was coded as "incorrect" (i.e., score of 0). Thus, the total scale had a maximum score of 28, half of which were appropriate activities and the other half were inappropriate activities. The responses were then exported into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for data analysis.

## Results

Recognition of PSCs appropriate and inappropriate activities was calculated for each educational level of participants (e.g., elementary PSC, middle school principal). In the appendix, Table A1 displays the percentage of respondents who correctly identified these items as appropriate activities for PSCs according to the ASCA National Model (2012). Table A2 displays the percentage of respondents who correctly identified these items as inappropriate activities for PSCs according to the ASCA National Model. The results for both PSCs and principals are described in detail below.

**Professional School Counselors.** The average score for PSC's identifying appropriate and inappropriate activities was approximately 81.3%, or roughly 23 out of 28 statements. This suggests that about twenty percent of PSCs who were surveyed do not possess a clear understanding of what their job activities should or should not entail. While a vast majority of PSCs at all educational levels correctly agreed on 10 of the 28 statements (appropriate 1, 6, 8, 11, and 13; inappropriate 2, 5, 7, 10, and 11), further examination revealed some distinct differences between educational levels.

For example, consider appropriate task 4, "Providing teachers with suggestions for effective classroom management." Approximately 94% of elementary PSCs correctly identified this statement as an appropriate activity, compared to only 70% and 51% of middle and high school PSCs, respectively. A similar trend can be seen for computing grade point averages (GPAs), inappropriate task 3. In this case, PSCs in the younger grades were able to correctly identify computing GPAs as an inappropriate task more so than their peers in the higher grades. Results such as these suggest that the

educational level in which the PSC works may influence how PSCs think about appropriate and inappropriate tasks.

Finally, PSCs at all educational levels struggled to correctly identify 7 of the 28 statements. Most notably, few PSCs correctly identified the appropriate task of “Ensuring student records are maintained as per state and federal regulations,” as all percentages fell below 50%. While PSCs appeared to agree, more often than not, these results call for a continued discussion among PSCs regarding what tasks they should and should not be performing.

**School Principals.** The average score for identifying appropriate and inappropriate activities among school principals was about 73.6%, or approximately 21 out of 28 statements correct. This value indicates that just over a quarter of the principals surveyed had a limited understanding of what a PSC should or should not be doing. Overall, a large majority of school principals serving various educational levels correctly agreed on 6 of the 28 total statements (appropriate 6, 8, 11, and 13; inappropriate 2 and 5). Like the results for PSCs, the responses from school principals appear to differ depending on the educational level they serve.

One noticeable difference can be seen with appropriate task 10, “Analyzing grade point averages [GPAs] in relationship to achievement.” As to be expected, school principals at the elementary level were less likely to correctly identify this statement as an appropriate activity, since GPAs are generally not calculated until middle school. Conversely, school principals at the middle and high school levels had difficulty recognizing the appropriate task of “Providing teachers with suggestions for effective classroom management.” Again, results such as these suggest that knowledge of



appropriate and inappropriate tasks for PSCs may be influenced by the educational level that the participant serves.

### **Factorial ANOVA**

A factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to compare the main effects of profession (i.e., counselor or principal) and educational level (i.e., elementary, middle, or high school) and the interaction between profession and educational level on the composite totals of the activities list. All statistical assumptions were tenable, including homogeneity of variance with  $F_{(5, 355)} = 1.372, p = .234$ . The main effect for participant profession (PSC or principal) yielded an  $F$  ratio of  $F_{(1, 355)} = 152.084, p < .01$ , indicating a significant difference between the composite scores of PSCs ( $M = 23.043, SD = .164$ ) and school principals ( $M = 20.95, SD = .202$ ). Both the main effect for educational level and the interaction effect were not found to be statistically significant with  $F_{(2, 355)} = 6.516, p = .133$  and  $F_{(2, 355)} = .419, p = .658$ , respectively. Therefore, participant profession was the only variable found to have an influence on the knowledge of the appropriate and inappropriate activities of PSCs according to the ASCA National Model.

### **Comparison of Mean Differences**

Based on the results from the factorial ANOVA, a comparison of mean differences between all PSCs and all school principals, regardless of educational level, was conducted. The results from each of the 28 statements were further examined to explore the extent to which the two groups differed in correctly identifying the appropriate and inappropriate activities for PSCs. Additionally, the means and standard

deviations for each item and group (i.e., PSC or principal) are shown in Table A3 (appropriate tasks) and Table A4 (inappropriate tasks).

As can be seen in Tables A3 and A4, PSCs and principals significantly differed on a total of 14 items, five of which were appropriate activities (1, 3, 5, 7, and 10), with the other nine being inappropriate activities (1, 6, and 8-14). Except for two items (appropriate tasks 5 and 7), the PSCs scored significantly higher than school principals, as expected. Appropriate task 5, "Ensuring student records are maintained as per state and federal regulations," appeared to be the hardest task to identify within the ASCA National Model. Furthermore, except for high school principals (81.8% correct), all other groups fell below 60% correct for appropriate task 5. The lowest percentage of correct responses were elementary PSCs at 28.9%.

Results from this study demonstrated numerous differences between what PSCs and school principals recognize as appropriate and inappropriate activities for PSCs. While some discrepancies occurred between individuals serving the same grades, it was determined that educational level did not have an influence on participants' knowledge of appropriate and inappropriate activities. However, the reported profession (i.e., PSC or principal) did have a significant influence on respondents' understanding of the professional competencies of the ASCA National Model.

### **Discussion**

Several important findings emerged from the data regarding the knowledge of the appropriateness of activities by PSCs as determined by the ASCA National Model (2012). The most important findings were related to the differences that continue to exist

between what PSCs and ASCA hold as appropriate and inappropriate activities contrasted with what principals believe are appropriate and inappropriate.

There has been a record of disagreement between what principals and PSCs believe to be appropriate and inappropriate activities for many years (Pérusse et al., 2004). Our study indicated that there has been little to no change in this concern. Agreeing with Clemens et al. (2009), the need for school counselor self-advocacy and principal education warrants continued attention and more emphasis. One of the original objectives of the ASCA National Model (2003) was to “eliminate non-school-counseling program activities” (p. 19). It is clear that continued efforts need to be made in this area.

Although there were still many principals who believed PSCs should help with things such as performing discipline and supervising classrooms and common areas, the bulk of the changes needs to be focused on removing PSCs from clerical duties. Five of the nine items where principals and PSCs differ are clerical in nature. PSCs must do something to change principals’ understanding of this or PSCs will have to continue this type of work. The development of advocacy skills and methods are important. It is incumbent on counselor education programs and continuing education programs to train in the area of advocacy skills and strategies.

The one area principals have embraced more so than PSCs is in the use of data. The ASCA National Model (2012) purports that it is *data driven* and *results oriented*. Our results showed that principals believe PSCs should analyze and disaggregate data, whereas PSCs continue to resist this. It could be that principal preparation programs put more emphasis on the use of data than PSC preparation programs. The average years of experience for PSCs in the study was 11.7 years. Because the ASCA National Model

has only been published since 2003, many of our participants may not have been trained on the model or in the use of data. Again, more emphasis on this in counselor education and continuing education programs is essential.

A final discussion point is that our participants were from a cross-section of PSCs related to membership in ASCA. Approximately one third of participants were ASCA members, one third were former members, and one third were non-members. A large majority of reported research on PSCs has exclusively had ASCA members (or state branches of ASCA) as participants. We interpret this to mean that our findings are more representative of PSCs in general, rather than just those who are members of their professional organization. A lack of progress compared to previous studies (Péruce et al., 2004) in PSCs knowledge of appropriate and inappropriate activities may be explained by our broader cross-section of practicing school counselors.

### **Limitations**

This study was limited to PSCs and principals in public schools in a midwestern state. The participants also included only those PSCs and principals who answered the survey. Given the cross section of PSC participants, (1/3 ASCA members, 1/3 non-members, and 1/3 former members), it is possible that the results are influenced by lack of knowledge about appropriate/inappropriate activities or resistance to the respective lists of activities/duties. Another possible limitation is the wording of some of the items in the list. Also, some of the items seemed appropriate for one grade level and not another. An example of this would be the activity, “calculation of GPA.” It seems one could do this at the high school level and possibly at the middle school level, but it

would not be done at the elementary level. Further complicating this item, many schools now use computers to calculate GPAs. Few people actually compute the calculations.

The study was conducted based on the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of the ASCA National Model, published in 2012. Since conducting the study, the 4<sup>th</sup> edition was published in 2019. While the 4<sup>th</sup> edition still includes a list of appropriate and inappropriate activities, the wording and content has changed slightly.

### **Implications for Future Research**

As this study was conducted in a midwestern state, further research can be conducted to generalize results on a national level. It would also be beneficial to study the specific causes of discrepancies between PSCs and principals. For example, do principal preparation programs include instruction on PSCs? Beyond the differences between PSCs and principals, it would also be beneficial to research the reasons why PSCs' recognition of appropriate and inappropriate activities differs from those of ASCA.

Because of the wording of some items, it would be useful to conduct an item analysis on the ASCA National Model's lists of appropriate and inappropriate activities to determine whether or not each item is based on the beliefs of the participants or simply on the interpretation of the wording of the items. The list of appropriate and inappropriate activities has not significantly changed over the past twenty years and may need to be updated and include explanations for each activity so that counselors and principals might have a more clear and consistent understanding of the activities.

### **Conclusion**

ASCA (2012) defined appropriate activities for PSCs in schools as well as inappropriate activities that should not be performed. Although stated in the model, the

research suggests there is still disagreement among PSCs and principals as to what is and is not appropriate. Further research may be conducted to explore why there is disagreement between PSCs and principals on appropriate and inappropriate activities. When PSCs and principals have a consistent and clear understanding of appropriate school counselor activities, PSCs may become increasingly effective in delivering a comprehensive school counseling program to their students.

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## Appendix

**Table A1**

*Percent Who Indicated That the Following Activities Were Appropriate for School Counselors*

Appropriate School Counseling Activities	<u>School Counselors</u>			<u>School Principals</u>		
	Elem.	Middle	High	Elem.	Middle	High
1 Individual student academic program planning	94.2	100.0	100.0	76.7	97.2	100.0
2 Interpreting cognitive, aptitude and achievement tests	59.6	75.0	76.0	56.7	77.8	79.6
3 Providing counseling to students who are tardy or absent	98.1	92.9	71.1	73.3	75.0	59.1
4 Providing teachers with suggestions for effective classroom management	94.2	69.6	51.2	81.7	44.4	38.6
5 Ensuring student records are maintained as per state and federal regulations	28.9	37.5	48.8	45.0	58.3	81.8
6 Providing individual and small-group counseling services to students	98.1	100.0	99.2	98.3	100.0	100.0
7 Analyzing disaggregated data	57.7	60.7	56.2	63.3	75.0	86.4
8 Collaborating with teachers to present school counseling core curriculum lessons	96.2	98.2	99.2	93.3	94.4	95.5
9 Providing counseling to students as to appropriate school dress	67.3	58.9	53.7	61.7	69.4	63.6
10 Analyzing grade-point averages in relationship to achievement	67.3	82.1	87.6	40.0	72.2	77.3
11 Helping the school principal identify and resolve student issues, needs and problems	96.2	96.4	97.5	93.3	94.4	95.5
12 Advocating for students at individual education plan meetings, student study teams and school attendance review boards	92.3	89.3	92.6	81.7	94.4	86.4
13 Providing counseling to students who have disciplinary problems	98.1	94.6	91.7	91.7	94.4	97.7
14 Interpreting student records	71.2	76.8	90.1	73.3	80.6	90.9

**Table A2**

*Percent Who Indicated That the Following Activities Were Inappropriate for School Counselors*

<b>Inappropriate School Counseling Activities</b>	<b><u>School Counselors</u></b>			<b><u>School Principals</u></b>		
	<b>Elem.</b>	<b>Middle</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>Elem.</b>	<b>Middle</b>	<b>High</b>
1 Coordinating paperwork and data entry of all new students	90.4	80.4	76.0	78.3	44.4	52.3
2 Signing excuses for students who are tardy or absent	98.1	92.9	96.7	96.7	97.2	95.5
3 Computing grade-point averages	86.5	60.7	54.6	88.3	58.3	38.6
4 Keeping clerical records	82.7	78.6	77.7	70.0	72.2	68.2
5 Sending students home who are not appropriately dressed	96.2	94.6	99.2	95.0	100.0	95.5
6 Assisting with duties in the principal's office	82.7	82.1	91.7	70.0	55.6	56.8
7 Serving as a data entry clerk	98.1	94.6	98.4	93.3	94.4	88.6
8 Providing therapy or long-term counseling in schools to address psychological disorders	78.9	91.1	86.8	53.3	66.7	54.6
9 Supervising classrooms or common areas	86.5	80.4	92.6	56.7	61.1	65.9
10 Performing disciplinary actions or assigning discipline consequences	98.1	98.2	99.2	83.3	97.2	93.2
11 Teaching classes when teachers are absent	98.1	98.2	98.4	85.0	88.9	88.6
12 Maintaining student records	69.2	67.9	47.1	51.7	44.4	25.0
13 Coordinating cognitive, aptitude and achievement testing programs	73.1	64.3	56.2	33.3	27.8	20.5
14 Coordinating schoolwide individual education plans, student study teams and school attendance review boards	55.8	71.4	66.9	41.7	52.8	43.2

**Table A3***Mean Scores of Appropriate Activities for School Counselors*

Appropriate School Counseling Activities	School Counselors		School Principals	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1 Individual student academic program planning**	0.99	(0.114)	0.90	(0.297)
2 Interpreting cognitive, aptitude and achievement tests	0.72	(0.449)	0.69	(0.466)
3 Providing counseling to students who are tardy or absent*	0.83	(0.378)	0.69	(0.466)
4 Providing teachers with suggestions for effective classroom management	0.66	(0.476)	0.60	(0.492)
5 Ensuring student records are maintained as per state and federal regulations*	0.42	(0.494)	0.60	(0.492)
6 Providing individual and small-group counseling services to students	1.00	(0.066)	1.00	(0.000)
7 Analyzing disaggregated data*	0.58	(0.495)	0.75	(0.432)
8 Collaborating with teachers to present school counseling core curriculum lessons	0.99	(0.114)	0.97	(0.171)
9 Providing counseling to students as to appropriate school dress	0.59	(0.494)	0.67	(0.471)
10 Analyzing grade-point averages in relationship to achievement**	0.82	(0.382)	0.63	(0.485)
11 Helping the school principal identify and resolve student issues, needs and problems	0.98	(0.147)	0.99	(0.122)
12 Advocating for students at individual education plan meetings, student study teams and school attendance review boards	0.93	(0.264)	0.90	(0.297)
13 Providing counseling to students who have disciplinary problems	0.95	(0.224)	0.99	(0.122)
14 Interpreting student records	0.95	(0.224)	0.99	(0.122)

\* $p < .01$ . \*\* $p < .001$

**Table A4***Mean Scores of Inappropriate Activities for School Counselors*

<b>Inappropriate School Counseling Activities</b>	<b>School Counselors</b>		<b>School Principals</b>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1 Coordinating paperwork and data entry of all new students**	0.81	(0.396)	0.61	(0.489)
2 Signing excuses for students who are tardy or absent	0.96	(0.196)	0.97	(0.171)
3 Computing grade-point averages	0.64	(0.481)	0.66	(0.477)
4 Keeping clerical records	0.79	(0.406)	0.72	(0.452)
5 Sending students home who are not appropriately dressed	0.98	(0.147)	0.98	(0.148)
6 Assisting with duties in the principal's office**	0.88	(0.330)	0.63	(0.483)
7 Serving as a data entry clerk	0.98	(0.147)	0.95	(0.223)
8 Providing therapy or long-term counseling in schools to address psychological disorders**	0.86	(0.344)	0.59	(0.494)
9 Supervising classrooms or common areas**	0.89	(0.314)	0.62	(0.487)
10 Performing disciplinary actions or assigning discipline consequences*	0.99	(0.094)	0.93	(0.264)
11 Teaching classes when teachers are absent**	0.99	(0.094)	0.91	(0.287)
12 Maintaining student records*	0.58	(0.495)	0.43	(0.497)
13 Coordinating cognitive, aptitude and achievement testing programs**	0.63	(0.485)	0.29	(0.456)
14 Coordinating schoolwide individual education plans, student study teams and school attendance review boards**	0.66	(0.474)	0.47	(0.501)

\* $p < .01$ . \*\* $p < .001$

## **Biographical Statements**

Dana L. Unger is an assistant professor in the Department of Counseling at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke. She serves as the Wilmington Initiative Coordinator for the department. Dr. Unger earned her PhD in counselor education and supervision from Kent State University. Before attending Kent State, Dr. Unger was both an elementary and secondary school counselor in Nevada. Her research interests include school counselor identity, advocacy, and job satisfaction as well as the relationship between school counselors and administrators. Dr. Unger is a member of the American School Counselor Association, American Counseling Association, and the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision.

Steve Rainey began his work at Kent State University in the fall of 2002. He is currently the master's practicum and internship coordinator, and a member of the Kent State University Institutional Review Board (IRB). His research interests are in the areas of school counselor preparation, school counselor identity, school counseling program implementation assessment, and counseling sexual minority youth.

Hannah R. Anderson is the Institutional Research Associate at the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy, a residential high school for academically talented students. She received her doctorate in evaluation and measurement (2020) from Kent State University, where she also served as a graduate research assistant. A former instructor of mathematics, Dr. Anderson earned her B.A. in mathematics with teacher certification (2011) and her M.A. in mathematics (2012) from Eastern Illinois University. Her research interests include educational assessment, teacher preparation, and STEM education with technical areas of interest in factor analysis and item response theory.