

The Professional School Counselor and LGBTQ Youth

(Adopted 1995, Revised 2000, 2005, 2007, 2013, 2014)

American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Position

Professional school counselors promote equal opportunity and respect for all individuals regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. Professional school counselors work to eliminate barriers that impede student development and achievement and are committed to the academic, personal/social and career development of all students.

The Rationale

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) youth often experience challenges to their academic and personal/social development related to a negative school climate. Students report feeling unsafe in school due to their sexual orientation, perceived orientation, gender identity or gender expression and report experiencing homophobic remarks, harassment and bullying (GLSEN, 2011). LGBTQ individuals often face multiple risk factors that may place them at greater risk for suicidal behavior (SPRC, 2008). Professional school counselors realize these issues impact healthy student development and psychological well-being.

The Professional School Counselor's Role

The professional school counselor works with all students through the stages of identity development and understands this may be more difficult for LGBTQ youth. It is not the role of the professional school counselor to attempt to change a student's sexual orientation or gender identity. Professional school counselors do not support efforts by licensed mental health professionals to change a student's sexual orientation or gender as these practices have been proven ineffective and harmful (APA, 2009). School counselors provide support to LGBTQ students to promote academic achievement and personal/social development. Professional school counselors are committed to the affirmation of all youth regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression and work to create safe and affirming schools. School counselors:

- assist students with feelings about their sexual orientation and gender identity as well as the identity of others in an accepting and nonjudgmental manner
- advocate for equitable educational and extracurricular opportunities for all students regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression
- promote policies that denounce the use of offensive language, harassment, and bullying that lead to a hostile school environment
- address absenteeism, lowered educational aspirations and academic achievement, and low psychological well-being as a result of victimization and feeling unsafe at school (GLSEN, 2012)
- provide a safe space for LGBTQ students and allies such as Gay and Straight Alliance Clubs
- promote sensitivity and acceptance of diversity among all students and staff to include LGBTQ students and diverse family systems
- advocate for the rights of families to access and participate in their student's education and school activities without discrimination (GLSEN, 2001)
- support an inclusive curriculum at all grade levels
- model language that is inclusive of sexual orientation and gender identity
- advocate for adoption of school policies that address discrimination and promote safe and supportive school environments (Robinson & Espelage, 2012)
- promote violence-prevention programs to create a safe school environment
- encourage staff training on inclusive practices, creating an affirming school environment, accurate information and risk factors for LGBTQ students (Russell, et.al. 2010)
- identify LGBTQ community resources for students and families

Summary

Professional school counselors promote affirmation, respect and equal opportunity for all individuals regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. Professional school counselors promote awareness of and education on issues related to LGBTQ students and encourage a safe and affirming school environment. Professional school counselors work to eliminate barriers that impede student development and achievement and are committed to the academic, career and personal/social development of all students.

References

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