5 Tips to Advocate for Your School Counseling Program

April Megginson, Ph.D.
Juliette Coatsworth, M.B.A., M.Ed.
Tip 1: Change Your Title
What does that look like?

- Why should you make the switch?
  - Perception of competence
- How do you make the switch?
  - Conversation with principal to support the change through HR
  - Contract renewal discussion
- What if you receive pushback?
  - MA DOE school counselor liaison Lisa Weinstein
    - Licensure changed to “School Counselor” in 2019
  - Continued PD = staying relevant/current with best practices
## Guidance Counselors or School Counselors: How the Name of the Profession Influences Perceptions of Competence

### Foundation of the Research

**IN 1990, ASCA issued an official statement calling on the profession to change the title to “school counselor” rather than the previous title of “guidance counselor.”**

**WHY THE TITLE CHANGE?**
The title “guidance counselor” no longer encompassed the broad scope of work that was done by the professionals in the school.

**RESEARCH PROCEDURE**
Researchers sought to determine if there were significant differences on a measure of perceived competence of school counselors based on job title. About half the participants completed a version of a research survey that used the term “guidance counselor” and half completed a version of a research survey that used the term “school counselor.”

### What are the Findings?

Participants who completed the surveys that used the term “guidance counselor” were statistically significantly less likely to believe individuals with that job title were able to perform the 25 tasks on the survey. The results of this study show the following:

**THE TITLE MATTERS:**
- Using “guidance counselor” versus “school counselor” has an impact on the perceived competence of school counselors.
- School counselors who received the survey using the term “guidance counselor” were statistically significantly more likely to assign lower scores on the survey than their peers who received the version with the term “school counselor.”
- School counselors who saw the term “guidance counselor” used to describe school counselors’ standards and competencies were less likely to believe school counselors were able to perform the tasks of a data-informed comprehensive school counseling program.
- School counselors perceived that guidance counselors are less competent to complete the job roles and tasks described within the ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards & Competencies and CACREP standards.
- School counselors with every level of experience were equally affected by the survey terminology. The years of experience of the school counselor did not affect the perceptions of competence. Because titles are used to describe the nature of the work of the profession, when the terms “guidance counselor” and “school counselor” are used interchangeably, when in fact they are not interchangeable, this results in confusion around the nature of the work completed by school counselors. When school counselors use “guidance counselor” to describe the work they do, it significantly influences their own perception of the competence of members of their profession in a negative way.

### What Can We Learn?

1. Advocate to ensure the use of the title “school counselor” in all areas of your work by all educational stakeholders.
2. Use your title as a form of social capital to advance the recognition and legitimacy of the profession and to ensure all students receive data-informed comprehensive school counseling programming.
3. Adopt the title “school counselor” on all communication media, including business cards, door plaques, and digital communication such as email signatures, social media and websites.

**Source:** “Guidance Counselors or School Counselors: How the Name of the Profession Influences Perceptions of Competence” (Professional School Counseling, Vol. 22, Issue 1). Authors: Brett Zyromski, Ph.D., Tyler D. Hudson, M.A., Emily Baker, M.A., and Darcy Haag Gronello, Ph.D. The Ohio State University. This study used a sample of 276 school counselors who were recruited for participation at a 2018 state counseling association conference in Ohio.
Tip 2: Celebrate Your Work with Families
What does that look like?

- Be active in planning of: school/grade/class orientation, open houses, and “Welcome” days
  - Emphasis how school counselors support students’ academic, social emotional, and college/career development
  - **Handouts:**
    - Develop an FAQ handout from past conversations with families and students
What does that look like?

- Monthly family newsletter
  - Align with core curriculum schedule
  - Include tips and tricks for at home SEL support
  - Include areas of support: academic, college/career, social emotional

- Accessibility - the likelihood of family communication on existing platforms, e.g. Class Dojo, Remind, etc.
  - Google Voice
    - Text “anonymously” with families who won’t respond to email
  - Language comprehension
    - Avoid complex verbiage when possible
    - Does your school have a translator or translation program?
Tip 3: Reinforce your Position with Teachers
What does that look like?

- Send out a Staff Program Evaluation and Needs Assessment: do we actually know what they know or need?
  - Google Forms (GSuite)
  - Excel Forms (Office 365)
  - SurveyMonkey

- Provide PD for teachers: we are a resource!
  - Speak to shared goals
    - MASCA Model 2.0
    - MA DESE Educator Evaluation Rubrics - Classroom Teacher: I.A.2.; II.A.2.; II.B.1.; II.B.2; II.B.3; II.D.1.; III.A.1.; III.C.1.; IV.C.1.; IV.E.1.
    - MA DESE Frameworks
  - MA Career Development Education and 2005 Guide for The Developed Self
  - ASCA Ethics/Competencies: A.3.a; A.4.a; B.2.a; M 5; B-SS 6
  - CASEL SEL Competencies
  - Common Core Standards
What does that look like?

- Attend grade/team meetings
- Clear visual reminders: repetition, familiarity, trust
  - The fewer and more frequent, the better
    - “Tagline” in email signature
    - Putting School Counseling handouts in staff mailboxes
    - Bulletin boards
    - Handouts / posters around office
  - www.canva.com

- Show specific appreciation
  - We all know teachers do a great job - but do they know why we appreciate them?

ASCA Certificate of Appreciation
Tip 4: Share Your Work with Administration & School Boards
Sharing Your Work with Administration

- Includes School Administration and District Administration
- An effective principal-school counselor relationship can lead to better educational outcomes for all students
- Research has shown that Communication, Shared Vision, Respect and Trust noted as the most important aspects of this relationship
What does that look like?

- Complete the [ASCA Annual Agreement](#)
- Create a vision and mission statement for the SC Department that aligns with school
- Plan for administrative meetings
- Make sure to communicate the positive SC efforts during Administrative Meetings
- Invite administration to come to important school counseling events or department meetings
- Read through the [Enhancing the Principal School Counselor Toolkit](#) if you would like to foster a better relationship

---

ENHANCING THE PRINCIPAL-SCHOOL COUNSELOR RELATIONSHIP

>Toolkit
Provide support and relevant data

- Offer to provide PD for teachers on various subjects
- Develop an end of the year report to highlight the awesome work of the SC Department and submit it to your administrators and superintendent
- Share relevant research data with principal about the value of school counseling
What does that look like for School Boards?

- Invite the School Board members to events hosted by the school counseling department
- Ask School Board members to be on your Advisory Committee*
- Present at School Board Meetings*
- Develop an end of the year report to highlight the awesome work of the SC Department and submit it to your school board
- Share relevant [research data](#) with school board

*ASCA School Counselor Magazine article: [Sharpen Your Influence](#)
Examples of End of the Year SC Reports

Elementary School Example

High School Example
Tip 5: Develop a Relationship with your State Legislators
What does that look like?

- **Know who your local state legislators are**
  - For you
  - For your school
- **Reach out and introduce yourself**
  - Email
  - Personal Meeting at State House
  - Meet & greets
- **Connect with them virtually**
  - Instagram
  - Facebook
  - Twitter
- **Invite them to Special Events that showcase your SC program**
- **Share the needs of your school and community with them**
Resources

- ASCA Careers/Role page: infographics, role descriptions, empirical study summaries, guidance v. school counselors, competencies, appropriate v. inappropriate duties
- US News & World Report article: How High School Counselors Can Help Students, Parents
- ASCA Role of the School Counselor page: infographics, why school counselors are needed, videos
- ASCA School Counselor-Principal Relationship page: survey results, articles, videos
- NYU Steinhardt school counselor infographic
- Edutopia article: School Administrator's Guide to Supporting the Role of School Counselors
- MASCA NSCW 2020: samples of newspaper editorials, family newsletters, infographics
- ASCA School Counselor Magazine article: Sharpen Your Influence
- ASCA School Counselor Magazine article: Expand Your Reach by Marketing Your Program
- MASCA Newsletter article: MASCA and You: Advocacy at Every Level
- MASCA Model 2.0 page: templates, guidelines, advocacy “toolkits”
- College Board National Office for School Counselor Advocacy: guidelines, templates, planning tools, curriculum plans, toolkits
- The School Counseling Analysis, Leadership and Evaluation Center archive
Contact

Dr. April Megginson
School Counseling Program Director
Bridgewater State University
amegginson@bridgew.edu
www.aprilmegginson.com

Juliette Coatsworth
School Counselor Grades 7 & 8
Foxborough Regional Charter School
jcoatsworth@foxboroughrcs.org
https://www.linkedin.com/in/juliettenori/