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Editorial

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Editorial

Louisiana School Counselors' Voices Matter: Gathering Input for Updating the American School Counselor Association's Code of Ethics

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School counselors must follow ethical guidelines to make informed decisions that are in the best interest of their student clients. To assist in achieving these goals, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) made over 40 new revisions in the Code of Ethics in 2010 (Huey, 2011), and will be revised again and published in July of 2016. The purpose of this study is to highlight what current school counseling professionals believe will be the areas to be addressed by the new revisions to the ASCA Code of Ethics. A survey was disseminated and results are reported. Louisiana school counselors had valuable input into the draft, much of which was included in the updated 2016 Code of Ethics.

Keywords: school counseling, ethics, ASCA, survey research

Every profession has an ethical code that sets guidelines for professional behavior within that profession. Like lawyers and doctors, counselors must follow ethical guidelines to make informed decisions that are in the best interest of their clients. The American Personnel and Guidance Association was established in 1952 and has always had a professional code to guide its members; known subsequently as AACD (American Association of Counseling & Development), and now known as the American Counseling Association (ACA). These codes have

been revised and updated regularly to reflect changes in the field in years 1955, 1961, 1974, 1988, 1995, 2005 and 2014.

The code of ethics is the cornerstone of the counseling profession. The code provides ethical guidelines in which counselors work within their profession. "Though a necessary aid, it is only to be used as a guide as it is not sufficient in exercising ethical responsibility" (Corey, 2010, p. 7). First and foremost the code of ethics does not have solutions to every issue; therefore, counselors are required to

use their own judgement and interpretations to provide best practices for their clients wherever an ethical and/or legal situation is encountered.

Other limitations include: conflicts with the law, institutional policies and practices, and other organizations' codes of ethics, conflicts with counselors' personal values, differing viewpoints of professionals, and the inherent ambiguity or lack of clarity within the code itself (Corey, 2010, p. 7). Despite counselor educators teaching the code, supervisors enforcing and reinforcing the code pre- and post-graduation, and licensing boards regulating the code at the state level, counselors are not being directly monitored. Instead they are being trusted to employ the code when needed and abide by the code where appropriate.

The ACA Code of Ethics is revised approximately every ten years (Kocet, 2009). Some recent revisions include the following: changes to sections pertaining to confidentiality, dual relationships, end-of-life care for terminally ill clients, cultural sensitivity, diagnoses, interventions, practice termination, technology, and deceased clients (Kaplan, 2009). One example of a recent revision is the update in regards to romantic and sexual relationships. Michael Kocet (2009) explained the significance of this change because of the power imbalance between clients and counselors. He explained how counselors must take caution not to take advantage of clients because of the sense of power clients oftentimes believe their counselor possesses. In the school setting, this is essential because of the sensitive nature of working with minors. This would be an example of where there is no conflict between the laws and ethical code since sexual relations with a minor is a violation of both the ethical code and legal laws. Kocet further

explained that because of the power imbalance, the code has been changed from a two-year waiting period after termination of the client relationship before an intimate/sexual relationship can begin to five years after termination. This allows the counselor more time for closure and reflection and less chance that the vulnerability of the client will be exploited. This also allows for the power differential to settle and the client to successfully work through their therapy process and to make confident and autonomous decisions (Kocet, 2009).

The role of school counselors has obviously evolved. Guidance counselors in years past were viewed and employed in receptionist roles and tasked with responsibilities such as testing, scheduling, and other pseudo-administrative duties. Thankfully, and appropriately, school counselors are now valued for their true purpose to guide and counsel students through their academic, social and emotional needs. The ultimate goal of school counselors is to promote academic, career, social and emotional counseling to all students (Huey, 2011). Developing a rapport with their students is imperative for a successful relationship. Essential to success as a counselor is to stay up to date with local and federal laws, and collaborating with school administration, parents, and the community.

Included in this regular updating is the need to revisit the additional ethical guidelines pertinent to the school counseling profession. By staying informed and involved in the profession of school counseling as it evolves, counselors maintain the highest levels of professionalism and are aware of new trends and developments in the field. This all impacts the school counselor's decision-making ability, allowing the professional school counselor to make state of the art best practice decisions.

To assist in achieving these goals, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) made over 40 new revisions in the Code of Ethics in 2010 (Huey, 2011). Topics that were changed or added were in the sections regarding technology, violence and safe schools, multicultural equity, confidentiality, danger to self and others, responsibilities to parents and guardians, referrals, groups work, and responsibilities to colleagues and professional associates. These have become topics of interest because of their significance and pervasiveness in recent years (Huey, 2011). Each of these topics has led to best practice programming changes in schools to address them on a school-wide basis as well as to provide a state of the art decision-making ability for all professional school counselors.

An important issue that almost all school counselors face is the dilemma of confidentiality. There have been numerous instances cited in the literature that could constitute breaching confidentiality with minors or coworkers in the school setting. Lazovsky recently did a study in 2008 in which he distributed and received questionnaires from 195 school counselors with explanations for what ethical dilemmas they deemed appropriate to breach confidentiality. He found that participants were most willing to breach confidentiality in dangerous situations, more likely for unlawful behaviors and least likely to breach confidentiality for personal or family situations. These decisions were based on ethical, legal, procedural, and professional reasons as well as the personal priorities of the counselor (Lazovsky, 2008). Counselors reported that they would breach confidentiality in less than half the cases provided in the study (Lazovsky, 2008).

The findings of Lazovsky's (2008) study demonstrate the commitment

counselors feel towards their clients and the desire not to break confidentiality unless they feel it is absolutely necessary. This information can also be used to help trainees and interns develop ethical awareness and skills regarding the importance of confidentiality and its limitations (Lazovsky, 2008). In light of the research, it seems critical to remain involved in and abreast of the research in the profession as it expands and evolves not only in the area of confidentiality but in areas not even currently addressed by the ASCA Code of Ethics.

One topic that is exemplary of our rapidly changing society involves advances in technology, including both the advantages and challenges such changes bring to the professional school counselor. The ability to counsel clients and students online can be a valuable resource to students who may not have the option of face to face counseling. However, some school counselors are skeptical of online counseling due to lack of knowledge, the acceptance of counseling by students, honesty concerns from the student, and legal, ethical and privacy concerns (Glasheen, Campbell & Shochet, 2013). On the other hand, many counselors agree that if used properly, online counseling could be a useful counseling option for many (Glasheen, Campbell & Shochet, 2013).

Adversely, technology can pose challenges as well such as the trending issue pervasive within schools known as cyberbullying. With the easy access of technology, the use of the Internet, and mobile devices, children of all ages have access to email, websites, text messages, and social media that make it easier to bully others (Bhat, 2008). Additionally, in the last couple years there has been some concern regarding this issue at the federal, state and local levels. This is one particular area that school counselors can

anticipate being addressed in ethical code

Another current topic of concern from school counselors is the need for postsecondary preparation: college and career readiness. According to the U.S. Department of Education, more students are attending U.S. colleges and universities than ever before. Some counselors are concerned that there is not enough preparation for college and career entry for students as well as information regarding graduation plans with the local schools, administration, parents, and students (Glasheen, Campbell & Shochet, 2013). It is the author's contention that this is yet another topic that will likely be addressed during ethical code revisions.

The purpose of this study is to highlight what current school counseling professionals believe will be the areas to be addressed by the new revisions to the ASCA Code of Ethics. The survey is intended to address the concerns of school counseling professionals in the field.

All counselors are driven to guide and aid those in need of their services, in any setting. In addition to abiding by the ethical code, counselors need to respect clients' autonomy, do no harm, do good for the welfare of clients and the community, treat all clients justly and fairly, build a trusting, genuine relationship with clients, and act truthfully and honestly with clients (Corey, 2010). By following these principles and using an updated, relevant code of ethics we can better assist our clients, better serve our communities, and succeed in all our professional endeavors.

2010 ASCA Ethical Standards Revision

ASCA sent a brief to the leadership of School Counseling Associations. They informed leadership of the following
 "The revised Ethical Standards will carry a 2016 date and will reflect an

revisions.

effort to include more voices and cast a nationwide net prior to the March 2016 public comment period. The leaders here today are being asked to start the process for revision by involving their state's SCA leadership to develop a process for suggesting revisions at the state level, and appointing a point person to relay state level suggestions for changes to the ASCA Ethical Standards Revision Committee.

Annotated Timeline

June 27, 2015 to September 1, 2015. Develop a State Plan

LDI participants contact state SCA's leadership and/or state ethics chair and develop a plan as to how your particular state will proceed to provide feedback for the standards revision. The approach and structure should meet your individual state's needs but the focus is on revising the ethical standards from the national perspective. There is not an ideal or prescriptive approach to the way of work by the states. The only requirement is that the leaders involve their state SCA leadership in determining the approach you want to use for state level revision suggestions. The approach to suggest revisions at the state level could be by committee, accomplished just by the appointment of one or two people, could involve state experts on particular subjects, or could include an invitation to all the state's school counselors. State participation at this level is optional but it is the hope that all 50 state SCAs will participate.

September 15, 2015. Identify a Point Person and a Brief Description of your state SCA's plan.

Identify the Ethical Standards Revision Point Person for the state through whom changes will be submitted to ASCA. Provide your point

person's name to ASCA at the link found on the first page of the ASCA website address www.schoolcounselor.org entitled *2016 Ethical Standards Revisions*. Provide a one-paragraph description of how you propose to tackle the revisions. This is a tentative plan as we recognize that sometimes when you get into the work your plan has to be adjusted.

September 25, 2015. ASCA will Host a Webinar on the Revisions.

Once your state's revision plan is in place, primary players identified by the state SCA are invited to participate in an ASCA webinar discussing the current standards, and the gaps, omissions, expansions, additions and deletions needed. The ASCA webinar entitled *2016 Ethical Standards Revisions* will discuss in depth areas of focus, expansion, and/or creation. The webinar will be recorded for those who were identified as needing the webinar but were unable to attend.

January 15, 2015. Final SCA Submissions Due

A word document of the ethical standards can be found on the ASCA website at *2016 Ethical Standards Revisions*. *The point person from each SCA* submits their suggestions on this word document by using the tracking feature in word processing programs to show the changes.

March 15, 2016 and April 15, 2016. Public Comment Period

The *ASCA Ethical Standards Revision Committee* and ASCA Staff Liaisons will consider all state suggestions and post a draft for public comment available on the ASCA website between March 1, 2016 and March 30, 2016. All school counselors are invited to submit comments whether an ASCA or state association member.

June, 2016. The 2016 ASCA Ethical Standards are Finalized

The *ASCA Ethical Standards Revision Committee* ASCA Ethics Committee and ASCA Staff Liaisons will carefully consider all comments for possible inclusion and will submit the final draft at LDI during the 2016 ASCA Annual Conference.

Louisiana School Counselors' Voices Matter Survey and Results

The authors sent a survey to all members of the Louisiana School Counseling Association and asked for specific feedback in particular areas that ASCA requested pertaining to the creation of new standards or strengthening of old standards. Below is the survey disseminated to LSCA members.

***** Please note that the original survey is printed in black typeface, and the results are printed in black italics for your review.***

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this review and revision of the ASCA Code of Ethics. All school counselor's voices matter. In order to ensure that the code of ethics provides complete guidelines to members of the school counseling profession, your participation assures that ASCA will consider your recommendations for inclusion or expansion of the various areas of the code of ethics that are essential to your practice as a school counselor.

Below are links to the current code of ethics, as well as the various position statements formulated from the national ethics committee. Please review both documents before responding to the following questions.

ASCA Code of Ethics Link

<https://wvde.state.wv.us/institutional/Counselors/ASCAEthicalStandards.pdf>

ASCA Position Statements Link

[https://www.schoolcounselor.org/school-counselors-members/about-asca-\(1\)/position-statements](https://www.schoolcounselor.org/school-counselors-members/about-asca-(1)/position-statements)

35 total participants

Sections A.2.a. and A.2.b.

1. I feel like there is adequate information regarding confidentiality in the current code of ethics. (1-5 Likert-Type scale; 1=completely disagree, 2=disagree, 3=not sure, 4=somewhat agree, 5=agree).

N=34

1 Completely Disagreed; 3 Disagreed; 5 Were Not Sure; 9 Somewhat Agreed; and 15 Agreed. 1 did not respond.

2. What do you think should be added in sections A.2.a. and A.2.b. with respect to the following:

- a. Informed consent regarding confidentiality (5 responses)

“how should confidentiality be handled when parents are separated or divorced, specifically with respect to the domiciliary parent; at what age is a person old enough to give consent”

“maybe something which covers electronic messages”

“parent section”

“Informed consent is so fuzzy in most schools. I would like more clarity on the laws as well as the ethics of having students/parents sign in regards to their knowledge of confidentiality when working with a school counselor.”

“Each state should have guidelines according to state with specifics on disclosure of HIV/AIDS”

- b. Cultural competence regarding confidentiality (3 responses)

“address special concerns that may arise due to cultural differences”

“Disclosing a person's religious affiliations”

“parent section”

- c. Limitations of confidentiality (2 responses)

“what is the law with respect to teenagers having sex”

“parent section”

- d. Special concerns with the developmental level of students with confidentiality (3 responses)

“Guidelines to assist in determining adequate level of understanding”

“what if a child is 18 years old but not able to make decisions independently”

“parent section”

- e. Making decisions on a student's behalf (2 responses)

“who can make decisions on behalf of a student”

“parent section”

- f. Responsibilities to parents concerning confidentiality (3 responses)

“do both parents have to give consent for counseling and do both parents have to be informed about the process if one is unavailable”

“more specific guidelines”

“parent section”

- g. Responsibilities to others involved in the child's education process (2 responses)

“address the need to inform teachers and other staff members of information that may assist in certain classroom/ school situations”

“parent section”

3. Do you have any further suggestions for inclusion in sections A.2.a. and A.2.b. that is not currently covered? (1 response)

“spell out the responsibilities of the parents in the child' education”

Section A.5.

4. I feel like there is adequate information regarding referrals to outside counseling agencies in the current code of ethics. (1-5 Likert-Type scale; 1=completely

disagree, 2= disagree, 3=not sure, 4=somewhat agree, 5=agree).

N=28

0 Completely Disagreed; 3 Disagreed; 9 Were Not Sure; 8 Somewhat Agreed; and 8 Agreed. 7 did not respond.

5. What do you think should be added in sections A.5. with respect to the following:

a. Cautions (1 response)

“discontinue the counseling relationship with in a specific number of sessions”

b. Best practices (1 response)

“data base of updated referrals resources”

6. Do you have any further suggestions for inclusion in sections A.5. that is not currently covered? (0 Responses)

Section A.3.b.

7. I feel like there is adequate information regarding the use of data in the current code of ethics. (1-5 Likert-Type scale; 1=completely disagree, 2= disagree, 3=not sure, 4=somewhat agree, 5=agree).

N=29

0 Completely Disagreed; 0 Disagreed; 10 Were Not Sure; 8 Somewhat Agreed; and 11 Agreed. 6 did not respond.

8. Do you have any further suggestions for inclusion in sections A.3.b. that is not currently covered? (1 response)

“with recommendation from the counselor”

Sections A.3. and Preamble

9. I feel like there is adequate information regarding college and career readiness in the current code of ethics. (1-5 Likert-Type scale; 1=completely disagree, 2= disagree, 3=not sure, 4=somewhat agree, 5=agree).

N=28

0 Completely Disagreed; 2 Disagreed; 8 Were Not Sure; 7 Somewhat Agreed; and 11 Agreed. 7 did not respond.

10. Do you have any further suggestions for inclusion in sections A.3. and the preamble that is not currently covered? (2 responses)

“THERE SHOULD BE MORE PREP FOR COLLEGE AND CAREER ENTRY”

“align with the individual graduation plan developed by parents, counselor, and student”

Section A.4.c.

11. I feel like there is adequate information regarding social networking in the current code of ethics. (1-5 Likert-Type scale; 1=completely disagree, 2= disagree, 3=not sure, 4=somewhat agree, 5=agree).

N=28

1 Completely Disagreed; 6 Disagreed; 5 Were Not Sure; 6 Somewhat Agreed; and 10 Agreed. 7 did not respond.

12. What do you think should be added in sections A.4.c. with respect to the following:

a. Cautions (1 response)

“A completely new section should be created to address this. School counselors should be cautioned that any use of social media (professional or private) should follow all ethical guidelines.”

13. Do you have any further suggestions for inclusion in sections A.4.c. that is not currently covered? (1 response)

“PREPARING FOR SOCIAL ISSUES”

Section A.1.a.

14. I feel like there is adequate information included in the preamble in the current code of ethics. (1-5 Likert-Type scale; 1=completely disagree, 2= disagree, 3=not sure, 4=somewhat agree, 5=agree).

N=25

0 Completely Disagreed; 2 Disagreed; 7 Were Not Sure; 3 Somewhat Agreed; and 13 Agreed. 10 did not respond.

15. What do you think should be added in the preamble with respect to the following:
- Responsibilities to students (0 responses)
 - Responsibilities to parents (0 responses)

16. Do you have any further suggestions for inclusion in the preamble that is not currently covered? (0 responses)

Section A.10.

17. I feel like there is adequate information regarding technology in the current code of ethics. (1-5 Likert-Type scale; 1=completely disagree, 2= disagree, 3=not sure, 4=somewhat agree, 5=agree).

N=25

0 Completely Disagreed; 4 Disagreed; 5 Were Not Sure; 7 Somewhat Agreed; and 9 Agreed. 10 did not respond.

18. What do you think should be added in section A.10. with respect to the following:
- Managing boundaries (1 Response)

“additional information concerning the relationship between FERPA and the ASCA code of ethics”

- Documenting boundary crossings, considering role, time, and place (0 Responses)

19. Do you have any further suggestions for inclusion in section A.10. that is not currently covered? (0 responses)

Non-existent categories

20. Currently, there is no mention of the following topics in the current code. Please provide suggestions for inclusion in these areas for the future.

- Counseling in lieu of discipline (5 responses)
“clarification on how this should work; cautions”
“outline specifying special populations and related concerns”
“counselors are counselors not disciplinary”
“Counseling should be in addition to discipline”
“YES!!! Definitely need more guidance on this topic.”

- Homeless youth (3 responses)
“legal expectations concerning referrals and other methods of assistance”
“Mckinney Vento Act should be included”
“Informed Consent and disclosure”

- Victims and perpetrators of dating violence, and sexual harassment (1 response)
“I would mention something about not blaming the victims of different types of assaults.”

- Child abuse (2 responses)
“what to do after it's been reported; next steps”
“yes, it should be explained”

- Referrals and values (2 responses)
“Must be made to a facility that has been in existence for 5 years or more”
“included on initial contact”

21. Are there any topics not currently covered or proposed for inclusion in the next code of ethics that you feel should be considered? (1 response)
“Case files and mandatory paperwork”

ASCA Code of Ethics Draft

The results of the Louisiana survey were combined with the input from all of the other states and as a result, the following draft was created.

<https://www.schoolcounselor.org/asca/media/asca/Ethics/EthicalStandards2016Draft.pdf>

Louisiana had valuable input into the draft, much of which was included. However, there were some relevant issues that were discussed among LSCA members that were added but not recommended from the survey results. Conversely, there was some wording that changed, but was not recommended by Louisiana School Counselors. For example, A.1.b. was

added to include the following: “Counselors counsel but do not diagnose or provide clinical therapeutic services.” The authors are encouraged by the responses from the LSCA members. Our hope is that all members will continue to provide feedback to the LSCA leadership, and ASCA, expressing the ideals of Louisiana school counselors.

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