

At some point during our initial Counseling Department meeting of the year I began my usual spiel about the ASCA standards. Immediately, eyes glazed over and exasperation filled the room. But this is so critically important I thought to myself for the umpteenth time. Why doesn't everyone jump on board with broad smiles and willing hearts or at least not look at me that way?

And it dawned on me, "Why should we?" The ASCA Standards loom large, like a thundercloud covering up our meager Western PA sunshine. There are documents, charts, audits, definitions, toolkits, and so on and so on. The theory, the shoulds, the oughts all seem so intangible. Counselors are alternately energetic and exhausted human beings. We hustle from morning to night doing things for students, parents, schools, and community that not many people understand, acknowledge, or appreciate. We are committing random acts of guidance at a frenetic pace; to what avail?

Mike Thompson, PA Toolkit co-author, and trainer extraordinaire, points out that we, School Counselors, are not mandated. And as a result, we, School Counselors, have witnessed one another being reassigned and furloughed in the name of tight budgets. That is the "Why." We need to define ourselves, focus our efforts, and demonstrate that the services we provide to our students, parents, schools, and community are invaluable. School Counseling programs are about results. We need to answer the question: How are students different (read: better) as a result of the school counseling program?

Of course, dear WSCA member, that is why you are here. I'm assuming that if you bothered to read this letter it is because you care about developing a comprehensive School Counseling program that delivers results. If you need some concrete action steps to get you started, try the following: on your own or, ideally, with your colleagues, perform a program audit (available in the ASCA toolkit – contact me if you need a copy), complete the Monthly Counseling Calendar (available at the October and December meetings; Mike suggests starting with the Career Domain), and prepare mission and vision statements in addition to program goals. Lastly, if your district is participating in the United Way "Counseling for Career Success" program, make plans to attend the December 6<sup>th</sup> meeting. That should keep us all busy until the snow flies.

Until next time,

Sarah M. Switala