**Social Justice and Advocacy Statement**

The role of the professional school counselor has become more focused on advocacy and social justice. According to the American School Counselor’s Association’s (ASCA) National Model, the role According to the ASCA National Model (2016), the role of the school counselor includes being a leader, an advocate, a collaborator, and a systemic change agent. To this end, the professional school counselor utilizes data-driven practices geared at closing gaps in the student population and promoting educational equity. My professional identity as a leader, a change agent, and an advocate is central to my daily practice as a school counselor and my overall comprehensive counseling program (Mason & Ockerman, n.d.). I advocate for students not only in my school building, but also on a district level, a community level, a state level, and a national level.

As a professional school counselor, I advocate for students by eliminating barriers to student success and development, creating opportunities for all students to learn and grow, advocating for a quality rigorous learning for all students, collaborating with important stakeholders, and taking a leadership role in facilitating systemic change for equitable practices (ASCA, 2016). I maintain a knowledge of important information, including school and district policies, important education laws such as the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, laws regarding Child Protective Services, relevant state laws, and student support team processes (Trusty & Brown, 2005). I use data, such as information on student achievement and student and staff perception, to identify and assess equity problems and collaborate with stakeholders to find solutions.

**Cultural Competence**

In order to serve all students and to promote equity, I must first tend to my own cultural competence. This learning will never end and it begins with and understanding of my own background. I must consider and be aware of the ways in which I am privileged and oppressed. I will also explore the broad systemic forces which are advantaging some and disadvantaging others. Although this knowledge will serve as a foundation, I will be mindful that each individual has her own personal experiences and I will maintain a stance of curiosity as I connect with students, parents and community members. In enhancing my cultural competence, I will focus on the groups with which I am directly working. I will pursue literature and art to further my understanding. I will also forge relationships with community leaders.

**Collaboration**

In accordance with the Change Agent for Equity (CAFE) model, I collaborate with stakeholders to increase awareness, underscore the importance of systemic change, and garner support for positive change (Mason & Ockerman, n.d.). These stakeholders include students, colleagues, co-workers, families of students, community members, and school board members.

 As a Professional School Counselor, I hold an important role in my school building and district. I advocate for an improved comprehensive counseling program, more effective educational practices, and increased access to needed community resources (Trusty & Brown, 2005). In addition, I connect the school counseling program to district and school mission and improvement plans (ASCA, 2016). I also act as a leader in staff cultural competence and best practices, by offering consultation services and professional development opportunities.

 Importantly, this change and advocacy must come from students themselves. In my work as a school counselor, I will promote student’s understanding of systems of oppression and privilege. Through this understanding, I will help students understand ways in which they can be self-advocates and advocates for those in their school and community.

**Working to Close Gaps**

As I explore the systems and get to know the cultural make-up of my community, I will inevitably notice systems of oppression. This oppression might be reflected in achievement and attainment gaps, behavior referrals and consequences, and special education enrollment. When I notice these gaps, I will be a proactive advocate, working to increase school and district awareness and then to influence the dispersion of resources, so that they can be better used in the name of equity. In gathering information on student achievement, attainment, and access gaps, I will examine the data that I gather as a counselor and the data that is reflected among my collaborators, including students, other co-workers, and colleagues (Mason & Ockerman, n.d.))

**References**

American School Counselor’s Association (2016). *ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors.* Alexandria, VA.

Mason, E.C.M, Ockerman, M.S., and Chen-Hayes, S.F. (n.d.) *Change-Agent-for-Equity (CAFE) Model: A Framework for School Counselor Identity.* DePaul University & Lehman College of the City University of New York

Trusty, J., and Brown, D. (2005). Advocacy Competencies for Professional School Counselors. *American School Counselors Association (ASCA), 8*(3), 259-265.