

Guidance and counseling programs are provided by the school district with the ultimate aim of improving student performance by increasing skills; helping students make adjustments; addressing problems that interfere with learning or the classroom environment; and assisting in career and college planning. Each school is directed to develop a counseling program that will meet the needs of the student population at that school with the objective of improving student performance. The counseling program should operate in collaboration with teachers and others involved in educating students, including those who assist children with special needs or students who are at risk of dropping out of school or not meeting performance expectations. Input from parents and students should be sought in accordance with the school's plan for involvement of the community in school programs. All schools must follow the Parental Involvement Plan (policy 1310/4002) in regard to parental notification/permission for counseling programs.

Counseling may be provided on an individual basis or in small or large groups. School counselors may refer students who have extensive needs or needs that go beyond the purpose of the counseling program to community resources.

Students may seek counseling or be referred by staff or parents. Any staff member who is aware that a student is contemplating suicide or is otherwise suffering from an emotional or psychological crisis must immediately notify the counseling program in accordance with any rules established by the superintendent or principal. Any counselor or other staff member who knows or has cause to suspect child abuse or neglect must report the information as provided in policy 4240 (Child Abuse - Reports and Investigations) and as required by law.

Counseling programs are most effective when voluntarily entered into by a student. School officials and teachers may recommend a counseling program to help a student meet standards of conduct and academic performance established by the board and school district. However, students will not be required to attend individual or small group counseling sessions to address identified significant personal issues unless agreement has been reached with the parent and student in a behavior contract, an intervention plan or, for special education students, in an individualized education plan. (See Student Behavior Policies (4300 series), Student Progression and Placement (policy 3420), Special Education Programs/Rights of Disabled Students (policy 3520).)

Information obtained in a session with a counselor may be privileged and protected from disclosure as provided by law. A counselor cannot be required to testify concerning privileged information unless, as provided by G.S. 8-53.4, the student waives the privilege or the court compels testimony as necessary to the proper administration of justice. The school counselor privilege does not, however, exempt the counselor from reporting child abuse as required by G.S. 7A-544. Any notation made by a counselor for his or her own use is a confidential document

and is neither a public record nor a part of the student's record. Such confidential documents do not have to be shared with parents or others except as required by law, such as G.S. 7A-544. Any document prepared by a counselor that is shared or intended to be shared with other staff is considered an educational record of the student and is available to the parent or eligible student in accordance with board policy on student records, policy 4700.

Legal References: Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, 20 U.S.C. §1232g; G.S. 7A-544, 8-53.4, 115C-401

Cross References: Student Progression and Placement (policy 3420), Special Education Programs/Rights of Disabled Students (policy 3520), Parental Involvement (policy 1310/4002), Child Abuse - Reports and Investigations (policy 4240), Student Behavior Policies (4300 series), Student Records (policy 4700)

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