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The Impact of a Comprehensive School Counseling Plan

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The Impact of a Comprehensive School Counseling Plan

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Abstract

Many attempts have been made to mold the role of the school counselor over the last century. Reviewing the history of the school counselor helps identify the discrepancies within the role of the school counselor and highlights the need for a comprehensive school counseling program. As schools reform to keep up with present day issues and problems, school counselors must also clarify their role to continue to support student's academic, career and personal/social success. The ASCA National Model provides a structured plan for school counselors to implement into their school district to be the most effective. A qualitative research, using the methodology of empirical phenomenology, was conducted to collect the data from a mental health team from a high school setting. Through a focus group and individual one-on-one interviews, the team shared their experiences and the impact of the comprehensive plan that was implemented in their department in 2008.

Key words: school counselor, American School Counselor Association, counseling, comprehensive school counseling program.

The Impact of a Comprehensive School Counseling Plan

The school counselor, in today's school environment, has become the target of discussion when dealing with budget cuts, typically because most stakeholders are unaware of the value of school counselors. The school counselor role has evolved in the last century from "guidance counselor" to "school counselor", and along the way has led to stakeholders' confusion about the role (ASCA, 2010a). The school counselor is the advocate for each student. Some students need more advocacy than others, and without the school counselor, those students would be lost in the masses. There are approximately 275,800 school counselors in the United States today, who are the link between all stakeholders in the school (United States Department of Labor, 2009 ;ASCA, 2010b). School counselors are crucial in the school setting because counseling connects the student to the educational process, influences student behavior and discipline problems, directs instructional support that reduces the rates of bullying and victimization, helps decrease classroom disturbances, manages crisis interventions and peer mediations, and offers group counseling and classroom guidance, all of which result in positive impacts on student achievement and behavior (Panone, & Packman, 2006). With such important roles and responsibilities, why then are school counselors in a position to have to defend their value?

History of the School Counselor

To understand school counseling today, it is important to understand the profession's past. Frank Parsons is known as the founder of vocational guidance (Baker, 2009). During the late 1800's and early 1900's the US was experiencing an industrial revolution (Baker, 2009). Parson's inspiration for vocational guidance was a direct result of the industrial revolution and the increase in child labor in big business (Baker, 2009). Parsons responded by "lecturing to students of all ages on the importance of vocational choice. He was very much interested in how

people made the choice of a life's work, viewing vocational choice as a form of individual and social efficiency, a part of the progressive ideal” (Baker, 2009, p.202). He designed a vocational counseling model in response to the need to place immigrant workers in jobs based on their specific skills and abilities, help young people develop their career plans, and protect against child abuse in the labor force (Niles, & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2005). Since children were being used as labor, the public education system was being viewed as a failure. Parson’s book “Choosing a Vocation” (1909) and his development of the Vocational Bureau at the Civic Service House, were a direct result of the national call for reform in the public schools (Baker, 2009). Frank Parsons was the first to introduce the career development piece of school counseling when he pioneered the Vocational Guidance Bureau (New York State School Counselor Association [NYSSCA], 2008).

Jesse Buttrick Davis was also instrumental in the history of school counseling. He was considered the first school counselor in the United States because of his development and implementation of the first vocational guidance programs in the public schools in the early 1900’s (Pope, 2009). In 1907, as a principal at Grand Rapids High School in Michigan, Davis established a systematic guidance program (Pope, 2009). The program was based on three major steps throughout middle school and high school. Step one focused on self-knowledge, which was introduced in seventh, eighth and ninth grades. Step two was introduced in tenth and eleventh grades focusing on occupational information. Finally, step three was presented in twelfth grade, which concentrated on career choice. The guidance program was introduced through classroom teachers. School counseling was not a recognized profession the first half of the 20th Century (Pope, 2009).

Davis' systematic guidance program acquired national recognition in the early 1900's. He and his team of teachers in Grand Rapids, Michigan introduced the "Grand Rapids Plan" by publishing the book *Vocational and Moral Guidance* (Pope, 2009). The book provided the foundation of implementing guidance programs in public schools up until the late 1950's and early 1960's. Davis was also instrumental in developing the National Vocational Guidance Association (NVGA) in 1914. The NVGA was established to expand the vocational and guidance movement into the public school systems. In 1917, Davis was hired by the United States government to develop a system of junior counselors throughout the federal employment offices to focus students on their future. The NVGA was later termed the National Career Development Association and was "the preeminent career development and career counseling professional association in the world" (Pope, 2009, p. 257). The definition given by Davis laid the foundation for vocational counselors through the 1950's (Pope, 2009). The definition paved the way for school counselors today, but also suggested the administrative role of the school counselor, which has become part of the controversy in today's school counselor role.

While Davis and Parsons focused on career development for students, Carol Rogers introduced the importance of the quality of the interpersonal encounter with the student (Rogers, 1967). He believed that the relationship between the counselor and student was crucial. The development of the person-centered approach required more training of the school counselor. Many school counselors, who began focusing on individual student's adjustment issues, adopted his person-centered approach.

The National Defense Education Act (NDEA) of 1958 had a direct impact on vocational counselor's role (ASCA, 2005). With national pressure to produce scientists to help compete in the international "space race", NDEA required states to test secondary school students so the

academically gifted students would be encouraged to study the more difficult sciences and continue on to post-secondary schools (Erford, 2007). The National Defense Education Act of 1958 also provided funds to prepare large numbers of individuals to become school counselors (ASCA, 2005). Subsequently, the training focused on more clerical/administrative tasks (ASCA, 2005). The new direction of training fostered increased role confusion among school counselors, administrators, teachers, and parents (ASCA, 2005).

The school counselor role continued to respond to national needs and movements. When Civil Rights legislation banned segregation in public schools in the 1960's, enforcement of educational equality became a school counselor responsibility (Erford, 2007). In the 1980's and 1990's school counselors were called upon to focus on issues of child abuse, drug abuse and prevention, and reduction of student dropout rates (Erford, 2007). The most recent legislation the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, which focused on closing the achievement gap, fostered by ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic differences, brought even more responsibility to the school counselor (Bodenhorn, Wolfe, & Airen, 2010). For the past century, the school counselor's role has become more complex as a variety of responsibilities were added each decade, yet none were removed.

Responses to Organizing A Complex Role.

As school counselor responsibilities grew throughout the 20th century, the overall perception of the profession became clouded. In an attempt to unify school counselors, comprehensive guidance and counseling plans began to appear in the 1970's and the 1980's (ASCA, 2005). Three specific models consulted were from Myrick, Gysbers & Henderson, Johnson & Johnson (ASCA, 2005). Myrick's (1993) model emphasized development based on guidance programs. His model included six interventions, which were individual counseling,

small group counseling, classroom guidance/large group guidance intervention, consultation, coordination, and peer facilitation (Burnham, & Jackson, 2000).

Gysbers and Henderson's (2000) model was titled, *The Comprehensive Career Development Guidance Program* (CCDGP; Burnham, & Jackson, 2000). The CCDGP had four major components. The first component was guidance curriculum. Guidance curriculum included structured groups, consultation and implementation of the curriculum. The second part of the model discussed individual planning. Planning with students incorporated advisement, assessment, placement, planning and follow up. The next component was responsive services, which addressed prevention and intervention services. These services included, but were not limited to, individual counseling, small group counseling, crisis counseling, referrals, and consultation, as needed. The final section of the CCDGP was systems support. Activities that aided program delivery and support were included in the systems support component. Examples of these activities were program evaluation, outcome research, management tasks, coordination, professional and staff development, and supervision.

Johnson and Johnson's *New Guidance Model* introduced a systems approach to a competency based guidance program (Johnson, & Johnson, 1996). The model addressed "guidance program goals, competencies, counselor plans, and monitoring and management, but left both time allocations and processed decisions to the process implementers" (Johnson, & Johnson, 1996, p. 1). The New Guidance Model addressed program elements that produced the results desired of a comprehensive school program (Johnson, & Johnson, 1996). The program elements, mission, philosophy, goals, and competencies, are necessary to achieve desired results. The elements needed for implementation included management, counselor contributions, needs data, counselor plans, monitoring system, advisory council and calendar of events. The school

community became more supportive as a result of the New Guidance Model (Johnson, & Johnson, 1996).

Only a few studies have been conducted to evaluate the actual impact on the school counselor role after implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program (Burnham, & Jackson, 2000). One study used a 19-item questionnaire to research the actual daily tasks the school counselor performed, and compared these roles to Myrick's (1993) comprehensive developmentally based guidance program model and CCDGP developed by Gysbers and Henderson (1988; as cited in Burnham, & Jackson, 2000). The study found that the surveyed school counselors performed a variety of duties both related and unrelated to the role description of the two professional comprehensive models (Burnham, & Jackson, 2000). The related responsibilities they engaged in included individual counseling, small group counseling, classroom guidance, and consultation.

Individual counseling was the primary related responsibility school counselors engaged in because their training, primarily, focused on individual counseling techniques and their application (Burnham, & Jackson, 2000). Individual counseling was considered essential because it also included developing individual plans to better prepare students to complete high school and pursue postsecondary options (Beale, 2004).

Small group effectiveness was confirmed by a research study (Steen & Kaffenberger, 2007). Students increased learning behaviors, improved academic achievement, and also addressed personal/social concerns in families or friendships in small groups. The study supported the findings through pre- and post-assessments, and through communication with students, teachers and parents. Small group counseling enables students to learn to deal with

society's stressors, improves school attendance and school behavior, increases student achievement and increases overall self-esteem and attitudes toward school (Beale, 2004).

A literature study done regarding the school counselor's role of reducing the student dropout rate supported the use of classroom guidance as a an intervention for students (White, & Kelly, 2010). The classroom guidance focused on career exploration, academic survival skills, stress and anger management, interpersonal communication, and social problem solving skills. Implementing classroom guidance within the school curriculum showed positive results in supporting social needs of students and promoting their personal and social skill development (White, & Kelly, 2010).

Consultation was a valued service, as it delivered imperative communication between the counselor and the parents in advocating for the student (Burnham, & Jackson, 2000). Consultation does offer a counseling component with the interaction of the parents, teachers, and stakeholders. Therefore, consultation has spontaneously become a responsibility placed on the counselor. Consultation, however, has been a "catch-all" term used to define many services rendered and one counseling duty that needs to be more defined (Burnham, & Jackson, 2000).

The school counselor role must be more clearly defined to encourage support for the profession, which, in turn, will promote quality school counselors. The end result will be seen in student success. The school counselor role has continued to respond to national needs and movements. Burnaham and Jackson's (2000) study demonstrates the complexity of the school counselor role.

American School Counselor Association (ASCA) - Response: One Vision

Historic milestones have dictated the evolution of school counseling. Inconsistency in the definition, interpretation, and implementation of the role has hindered school counselors in their work. The school counseling profession has become complex and complicated, and therefore, tasks are difficult to accomplish within time limits. As early as 1983, Stockton and Hulse wrote, "The field of school counseling cannot advance if the profession does not assume responsibility for professional inquiry" (p. 304)"(as cited in Sabella, 2006). Connecting the different plans and inspirations about school counseling could lead to more role clarity, hiring of more school counselors, and could have positive effects for the students.

Discussion among professional scholars, counselor educators, administrators and school counselors in the last decade has begun a movement to clarify a realistic comprehensive school counseling plan, which would address these inconsistencies, while maintaining focus on the advocacy of students (ASCA, 2005). ASCA's vision was to implement a national model of a comprehensive counseling program to position school counselors in the center of education (ASCA, 2005). ASCA's goal was to strengthen the position of the school counselor within the education framework by standardizing the practices of the school counselor (ASCA, 2005). The lack of consistent identity and lack of basic philosophy has hindered the legitimacy of the school counselor profession (ASCA, 2005). The ASCA National Model focused on the achievement of student performances, based on school district guidelines (ASCA, 2005). School counseling programs were designed to be data-driven to create accountability for the program, open communications between parents, students, teachers, and community professionals, and provide a guide for counselors K-12 to "advocate for educational and career planning and to remove barriers to learning" (ASCA, 2005, p.24).

ASCA began promoting a more unified movement to strengthen the profession. In 1990, ASCA's governing board made the first step towards unification by unanimously voting to call the profession "school counseling" and the program "school counseling program" (ASCA, 2005, p. 9). Uniting all the different definitions and names for school counselors into one simplified name was the first step to defining the role of the school counselor. ASCA members agreed that unification would have positive results for the school counselor profession (ASCA, 2005).

History of national standards.

ASCA published the document "Sharing the Vision: The National Standards for School Counseling Programs" in 1997 (ASCA, 2005). National standards for school counseling were outlined to develop educational standards similar to nationalized standards for the specific academic disciplines (Hatch, 2008). The idea behind the National Standards was to build on the comprehensive plans already established to move the profession in the right direction for the success of all students (ASCA, 2005).

The ASCA National Standards for school counselors were endorsed by national educational and professional organizations (ASCA, 2005). The organizational support provided the foundation and cooperation needed to continue moving forward with ASCA's initiative (ASCA, 2005). The Standards were designed to outline specific skills through academic, career, and personal/social development experiences for all students (Campbell, & Dahir, 1997). Similar to Johnson and Johnson's New Guidance Model, the National Standards were developed to create similar goals, expectations, support systems, and experiences for all students as a result of participation in a school counseling program (ASCA, 2005). The student standards were organized under the three developmental domains of academic, career, and personal/social

(ASCA, 2005). Following each standard is a list of student competencies that define the specific knowledge, aptitudes, and skills that student's should obtain as a result of participating in the program. The document was the foundation that moved the organization towards the development of the ASCA National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs (2005).

Multiple models molded into one – the ASCA National Model.

Once the national standards were established, ASCA's agenda was to develop a national comprehensive school counseling program that would begin to provide the framework for the profession to become more cohesive. Although the National Standards were a foundation for the model, the team of experts used many programs and models already established to unite the ideas into one (ASCA, 2005).

In the development of the ASCA model, small group counseling, classroom guidance, and consultation were supported by Myrick's model. ASCA strongly supported the consultation piece, given that one of the ASCA themes is "collaboration and teaming" (ASCA, 2005, p.25). ASCA recommends that school counselors work with students, teachers, parents, administration staff, and community members to build a cohesive school community for the success of all students.

The ASCA model's primary focus was on reaching the most students in the most efficient way (ASCA, 2005). The model was written to switch "school counselor emphasis from service-centered for some students to program-centered for all students" (ASCA, 2005, p.9). These ASCA model beliefs are in conflict with Myrick's (1993) individual counseling intervention belief. Individual counseling is believed to hinder the adjustment of the school counselor focus

from service-centered to program-centered (ASCA, 2005). One reason the ASCA model takes a different vantage point is because it is data-driven. ASCA believes information from assessments is needed to support student successes. The program-centered and data-driven elements parallel Johnson and Johnson's New Guidance Model (Johnson, & Johnson, 1996).

ASCA incorporated all four components of the CCDGP into the delivery system element of the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2005). The delivery system was established to "address how the program was implemented" (ASCA, 2005, p. 22). The New Guidance Model implementation elements influenced, not only the ASCA Models delivery system, but the foundation, management and accountability systems as well (ASCA, 2005; Johnson, & Johnson, 1996).

One position ASCA took from both Myrick's model and the Gysbers and Henderson model, was the elimination or reduction of non-guidance duties (Burnham, & Jackson, 2000). Myrick stated that clerical, administrative, and non-guidance tasks overwhelm counselors and divert them away from direct services for the students. Gysbers and Henderson's model advocated a plan to eliminate all non-guidance activities (Holcomb-McCoy, & Mitchell, 2005). Non-guidance duties included, but are not limited to, scheduling, enrolling students, special education referrals and placement, record keeping, filing paperwork, grades and report cards, scholarship recommendations, and telephone reception (Burnham, & Jackson, 2000). The ASCA National Model stated that the non-guidance activities are "inappropriate school counseling activities, meaning any activity or duty not related to the development, implementation or evaluation of the counseling program" (ASCA, 2005, p.151). ASCA promoted implementing a comprehensive program, which resulted in a consequential reduction, if not elimination, of the inappropriate school counseling activities.

Elements of the ASCA National Model.

Bob Myrick stated “The ASCA model has a long and valued history of helping counselors be more effective and efficient in their work” (ASCA, 2005). The ASCA model also offered the needed bridge between counseling and education (Henry, McNab, & Coker, 2005). The ASCA model incorporated four elements that provide organization for the program: foundation, delivery system, management systems, and accountability (ASCA, 2005).

Foundation provides the clear description of what every student will know and be able to accomplish. Included in the foundation are the beliefs and philosophy of the school, the mission of the counseling department, the three student developmental domains (academics, career, and personal/social), and the ASCA national standards and competencies (ASCA, 2005). The National Standards and competencies can effectively track all students’ progress toward the goals of the three developmental domains (ASCA, 2005).

Delivery system, as mentioned previously, came directly from the CCDGP developed by Gysbers & Henderson (2000). The delivery system described the how of the program through guidance curriculum, individual student planning, responsive services, and systems support (ASCA, 2005).

The next element is described as the management systems (ASCA, 2005). The management systems provided the program with a checks and balances method. The management systems involved management agreements between the school counselor and the administrators. An advisory council reviewed guidance program results and made recommendations by collecting and using data to review the program. The use of action plans

ensure that a student plan is in place, and inform stakeholders of the program goals and time frames.

The final element of the ASCA model is accountability (ASCA, 2005); this element focuses on evaluation and promotion of the program. Results reports, school counselor performance evaluations, and program audits all provided information about the program and reported how students are different as a result of the comprehensive school counseling program.

Education Trust's Transforming School Counseling Initiative (TSCI).

The Education Trust promoted high academic achievement for all students at all levels (pre-kindergarten through college; The Education Trust, 2009). The DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund and The Education Trust collaborated to develop a plan to reshape and transform school counseling. The main consensus, after a national assessment, was that there was little relationship between how school counselors were trained and the services that they provided students (The Education Trust, 2009). The results of the assessment also started a competitive grant process, which resulted in six universities creating a movement known as the Transforming School Counseling Initiative (TSCI). The TSCI fundamentally changed college training programs. School counselor graduates were prepared to work as *leaders* in schools by *collaborating* with all stakeholders, and using data to *advocate for systemic changes*, which would remove barriers that impede student achievement (The Education Trust, 2009).

Themes of the ASCA National Model.

The incorporation of four main TSCI themes; leadership, advocacy, collaboration and systemic change, are significant characteristics to the school counselor role in promoting student achievement and advocating for students and the program (ASCA, 2005). The four themes are

seamlessly interconnected, and used throughout the four main elements. The four themes are incorporated from the Training School Counselors Initiative.

Leadership is the theme that promotes student success by closing the achievement gaps for students who experience more disadvantages. The school counselor's leadership role initiates success for all students and the program through the theme of collaboration and teaming with stakeholders. Leadership moves school counselors to advocate for every student. "Counselors believe, support, and promote every student's goal to achieve success in school" (ASCA, 2005, p.24). Leadership, advocacy, and collaboration put school counselors in the unique position to promote systemic change. Systemic change happens when data is presented to stakeholders so the need to change will be realized and ultimately affect the success of the student.

Implementing the ASCA National Model

When the stakeholders' expectations of the school counselor role mirror those of the counselors, implementing the counseling program is more efficient and supported (ASCA, 2005). ASCA provided literature on implementing the comprehensive school counseling program in an effective manner (ASCA, 2005). The Model first suggested some pre-conditions be put into place before the program is implemented. ASCA stressed that administrative support is imperative for a program to thrive, as administrators set the tone for the school environment regarding the support for the comprehensive program. Collaboration with other stakeholders ensures community policies and priorities, regarding counseling students, are aligned. The counseling staff should be prepared to meet the district and ASCA standards of school counselors. A budget is needed to implement the school counselor program. The budget allows for the necessary materials, supplies, equipment, and facilities for the success of a

comprehensive program. Locked file cabinets for each counselor, private telephone lines for counselors, and appropriate space to conduct confidential individual and group counseling were examples of some of the pre-conditioned items that counselors would need to implement the program. Finally, technology was necessary to implement the ASCA National Model because the program is data-driven. Technology assists in recording, analyzing and reporting data to better collaborate with stakeholders.

ASCA suggested five steps of change to implement the program (ASCA, 2005). The first step was the planning of the program. Planning the program involves securing commitment from counselors and other stakeholders through educating team members on the ASCA national model. Organizing the team members and staff with a timeline and agendas to compare the current counselor program with the ASCA national model also initiate the first step of change.

The second identified step was building the foundation of the comprehensive plan (ASCA, 2005). The foundation includes use of existing data from the district, schools, and surveys taken by stakeholders, writing the program philosophy and mission statement, and selecting the competencies being achieved and those that needed to be addressed. The third step of change is designing the delivery system. The delivery system needs to “develop an action plan, identify the curriculum to be used and the data that will be collected, and distribute the tasks amongst the team” (ASCA, 2005, p. 70).

The fourth step is to work the ASCA program in with the existing school counseling program. “The most important aspect of this phase is to have the official approval from the school district governing board” (ASCA, 2005, p.70). Developing the department calendar, launching the guidance curriculum for each grade level, and developing a brochure and web site

for the school counseling department are all tasks that should be carried out once the approval is finalized (ASCA, 2005). The fifth step in implementation is making the program accountable (ASCA, 2005). The school counselor team monitors program results, counselor's growth and performance, and student's progress.

Challenges of Implementation.

Change creates perceived risk, resulting in apprehension. When making changes to the school counseling program, there will be challenges during implementation (ASCA, 2005). Resistance to implementing the ASCA National Model by the counseling department and stakeholders will be a major challenge (ASCA, 2005). Resistance can be overcome by starting with the individual school counselor. A school counselor can ask the questions "What are my students' needs?", "What do I want to accomplish?", or "What am I doing that can be measured?" Once those questions are asked and answered, a counselor can begin to work towards a more effective program for themselves.

Another challenge of implementation is the fear of failure (ASCA, 2005). The fear of failure could stem from any of the new ideas that the ASCA National Model suggests. One example comes from the fact that many school counselors have never written or taught a classroom curriculum (ASCA, 2005). Collaboration with professionals, such as teachers or counselor educators, can help ease the fear of standing in front of the students and teaching a new lesson.

Importance of Stakeholders in the ASCA National Model

The ASCA model stated that comprehensive school counseling programs are based on assumptions, which give the program its shape, direction, nature and structure (ASCA, 2005). One assumption given by ASCA was that "school counseling programs are conducted in

collaboration with all stakeholders” (ASCA, 2005, p. 28). Without support and direct communication with all stakeholders in the school system, any program struggles to succeed. Therefore, an essential question to ask is “What are the stakeholder’s perceptions of school counselors?” The method begins by aligning counselor perceptions with stakeholder’s perceptions of the school counselor and then implementing a comprehensive school counseling plan to support the perceptions and focus of the school counselor’s role.

Administration perceptions of school counselors.

A rapport between administration and school counselors is needed to establish the mutual understanding of the role of the school counselor. The school principal is ultimately responsible for the appropriate and effective utilization of all school employees within a school building (Dodson, 2009). There are such inconsistencies in the definition of the school counselor role that school principals often do not use school counselors to their full potential. Principals may view school counselors as free agents if counselors do not advocate for themselves and their role within the school environment (Dodson, 2009).

ASCA started the movement towards defining the role of the school counselor in an attempt to unite perceptions between counselors, administrators, and all stakeholders. Once school districts implement the National ASCA model program, they are eligible to apply for the Recognized ASCA Model Program (RAMP) designation (ASCA, 2005). A RAMP designation provides counseling programs with confidence that their program is consistent with a nationally accepted and recognized model. Dodson’s (2009) study compared administrator’s perceptions of school counselors from schools with RAMP designation versus those administrator’s perceptions of school counselors from non-RAMP designated schools. The questionnaire of 35 Likert-scale

statements was completed by 19 administrators from RAMP schools, and 41 from non-RAMP schools.

The researcher found the major difference in the administrator's perceptions was that the RAMP administrators recognized that school counselors were presenting more guidance curriculum than the non-RAMP schools (Dodson, 2009). RAMP administrators also perceived school counselors as better able to counsel students and teachers. School administrators, of RAMP designated programs, perceived counselors as better able to interpret student records than non-RAMP. The study found that all administrators recognized that counselors worked in the academic, career development and personal/social areas with students (Dodson, 2009). The study highlighted that even though schools may not have been identified as having a RAMP school counseling program, that non-RAMP school counseling departments may be aligning with the ASCA National Model.

Another study of administrative perceptions of the school counseling profession examined future school principals (Bringman, Mueller, & Lee, 2010). Graduate students enrolled in educational administration programs were asked to identify the appropriate and inappropriate school counselor activities. Thirty-one students were participants in the study; 18 were in an experimental group, and 13 in a controlled group. The experimental group was given a pre and post-test, with a presentation about the ASCA National Model shown after the pre-test and before the post-test. The control group just took the pre-and post-test without seeing the presentation.

The student administrators in the experimental group rated the inappropriate school counselor activities of registration, enforcement of school policies, discipline and administrative duties as less appropriate after the presentation (Bringman, et al., 2010). The control group's

results stayed approximately the same for all the questions asked. The reduction in the rating of these activities by the participants in the experimental group showed that educating administration about the comprehensive school counselor program began to clarify the role of the school counselor. Appropriate activities for school counselors, which included but are not limited to, individual counseling, consultation with stakeholders, group counseling, and crisis management were recognized as appropriate activities by the future principals.

In summary, these two studies show that ASCA's movement towards a unified definition of the role of the school counselor was having a positive effect on the perceptions of administrators. Principals, however, remained confused about the appropriate and inappropriate responsibilities of the school counselors. Administrators can help strengthen the comprehensive school counseling program as they become more familiar with the ASCA definition of the school counselor role.

Teachers perceptions of school counselors.

Teachers are placed on the front lines in education. The daily interactions with students are in the classroom and teachers have a front row seat in observing a student's academics, behavior change, and social interactions with others. Counselors can get a more comprehensive view of a student, and can better advocate for the student with the teacher's information. The communication between teachers and counselors is critical and essential.

Because of the critical nature of the relationship between counselors and teachers, the teacher's perception of a counselor's responsibilities is imperative and necessary. A national study asked teachers to rate school counselor appropriate responsibilities and inappropriate activities, as defined in the ASCA National Model (Reiner, Colbert, & Perusse, 2009).

The appropriate responsibilities rated the highest by teachers were assisting students with academic planning, career planning, and personal/social development; interpreting student records and ensuring that records are maintained in accordance to laws; and working with administration to identify and resolve student issues, needs, and problems (Reiner, et al., 2009). The inappropriate responsibilities that the teachers rated the highest were registering and scheduling all new students; administering cognitive, aptitude and achievement tests; computing grade point averages and maintaining student records; and working with students one-on-one in therapeutic sessions (Reiner, et al., 2009).

The results of the national study suggested that high school teachers would support the school counselor duties listed as appropriate responsibilities by ASCA (Reiner, et al., 2009). Teachers believed to some extent that counselors already performed these duties. Yet the study highlighted the activities, which ASCA defined as inappropriate, that teachers valued. The study revealed that teachers believe counselors should provide one-on-one counseling. School counselors have specialized training in individual counseling. A concern was raised that if school counselors do not provide individual counseling to students, other professionals, perhaps under-prepared individuals, will provide it (Reiner, et al., 2009).

Parent perceptions of school counselors.

Parents' and guardians' perceptions of the school counselor are also valued when defining the counselor role. Students showed increased success in school and were better adjusted socially and emotionally when parents were involved and supportive in their child's life (Erford, 2007). As advocates for students, counselors and parents need to be on the same page as to what the counselor's role is in assisting in their child's success.

One study questioned parents of elementary students to determine how parent's perceived the importance of school counselors. The literature revealed that parents were divided between having interaction with their child's school counselor and having no interaction (Kirchofer, Telljohann, Price, Dake, & Ritchie, 2007). Over half of those parents indicated that their child never visited the school counselor (Kirchofer, et al., 2007). The study also defined what parents believed a school counselor should provide. Parents believed that counselors should provide detection and early intervention of children's academic and personal/social problems (Kirchofer, et al., 2007). Parents thought counselors should serve as part of a team to make sure the learning environment promotes academic and personal success. The study also found that the parents held an expectation of counselors to work with parents, school staff and community agencies to help students succeed. Counselors were believed to provide counseling to help solve children's concerns and problems, and to help parents when special community services were needed for their children. Parents stated that counselors should work with outside agencies, as well as, internal school staff to protect the welfare of the children. Finally, parents thought counselors needed to develop activities that helped with academic and personal/social development (Kirchofer, et al., 2007).

Although more than half of the parents in the study had never visited the school counselor, parents ranked, all the previously listed services, as important or very important (Kirchofer, et al., 2007). The American School Counselor Association maintained that elementary school counselors are trained to identify and intervene in the challenges of a child's life and serve as a fundamental part of a student's academic team (Kirchofer, et al., 2007). The study supported that counselors are an important part in developing a student's academic competency and confidence level.

The study drew attention to the need for continued partnership and communication between the parent/caregiver and the school counselor. The study reinforced that parents need to be better educated about the role of the school counselor and the services they provide. Once the school counselor responsibilities are clearly defined, parents will be able to successfully utilize the school counselor to ensure their child's academic and personal/social success.

School Counselor perceptions.

The ambiguity in the definition of the role of the school counselor is also found among school counselors themselves (Vaughn, Bynum, & Hooten, 2007). If there is uncertainty within the profession itself, answering the question "what is the value of the school counselor?" would be challenging to all stakeholders involved in the school improvement process. School counselors must be unified in their definition and role identity to survive.

In 21 school districts in Alabama, a study was conducted to determine 31 school counselors' perceptions of their roles and identity (Vaughn, et al., 2007). The study also gathered information about the responsibilities school counselors actually performed versus the responsibilities counselors preferred to carry out. Counselors preferred to spend more time providing individual and small group counseling that focused on critical academic and personal issues. The counselors also preferred spending more time consulting with community and school counseling agencies, and working with parents involving student developmental issues (Vaughn, et al., 2007). The results showed participants recognized and preferred to inform stakeholders about "the role, training, program and interventions of a school counselor within the context of their school" (Vaughn, et al., 2007, p. 14).

The results, however, revealed that counselors believed they were not “actually spending enough time on essential counseling activities that contributed to student development and academic success” (Vaughn, et al., 2007, p.13). Counselors were spending inadequate amounts of time on guidance curriculum topics related to student’s career development, personal/social growth, and academic performance. Participants’ responses also revealed that counselors only occasionally consulted with administrators. The results indicated that “twelve respondents had never provided leadership in identifying and resolving issues facing education on a local, state, regional and national level” (p. 13). Furthermore, the results indicated that counselors were not spending enough time on coordinating referrals for their students, which suggested, “school counselors aren’t fulfilling their roles as advocates for their students” (p.13).

Another important study was done to examine the variables that maybe related to discrepancies between the way that school counselors actually spend their time and the way that they prefer to spend their time (Scarborough, & Culbreth, 2008). The study also examined if the “preferred time” activities aligned with the comprehensive school counseling framework of the ASCA National Model. A total of 361 school counselors were surveyed in two southern states.

First, the study found that there were differences in how school counselors spend their time depending on the school level of employment (i.e., elementary, middle, high; Scarborough, & Culbreth, 2008). Elementary school counselors were more likely to be practicing the activities they preferred, unlike the high school counselors. The variable of school level of employment would therefore be related to the discrepancy between how school counselors actually spend their time versus how they prefer to spend their time.

Second, results of this study also indicated that school counselors who were attempting to incorporate the National Standards for school counseling into their practice were functioning as they preferred. The study would then support ASCA's plan of "a structural framework for more consistent school counseling practices across schools" (Scarborough, & Culbreth, 2008, p.456).

A third area studied the variable of efficiency and effectiveness of the school counselor, as it compares to actual activities and preferred activities (Scarborough, & Culbreth, 2008). The results found that participants were more likely to be engaged in actual and/or preferred activities if tasks led to particular outcomes, and were supported by other stakeholders within the school community. Administrators, teachers, and parents must be supportive of the school counselors' role in order to positively "impact the efficiency and effectiveness of the school counselor" (Scarborough, & Culbreth, 2008, p.456). These results also indicate that self-efficacy as a school counselor is necessary to be successful counselors, consultants, coordinators, and leaders (Scarborough, & Culbreth, 2008). Scarborough & Culbreth's (2008) findings support the fundamental ideas of a comprehensive school counseling model. The school counselor role can effectively and efficiently be successful when school counselors adopt a consistent role identity, such as the role described in the ASCA National Model.

The researchers of these studies concluded: school counselors need to truly understand their roles, as defined by ASCA. Furthermore, counselors must be able to effectively communicate their role and identity to administrators, parents and teachers. The result of clear communication will enhance the counselor position within the school system and they will become integral leaders in achieving the mission of their school. School counselors cannot expect to reach their goals, as defined by The ASCA National Model, if stakeholders are unclear

about the comprehensive school counseling program and the identity of the school counselor (Vaughn, et al., 2007).

Summary

The ASCA Model suggests a national framework for a comprehensive school counseling program. The model provides direction and more clarity for the school counselor profession. Studies show that the role of the school counselor is changing, but is often still undefined for school counselors, administrators, parents and teachers.

In order for the school counselor to excel at her or his profession, it is imperative that the role of the school counselor be clearly defined. Administrators, parents and teachers have differing role expectations of school counselors. The end result of not having a consensual definition of the school counselor profession will continue to hamper school counselors in their efforts to serve students. School counselors play a critical role in the school, and yet they are challenged to ensure that every student achieves success in school.

The ASCA National Model was developed to provide school counselors with the tools to define their role and serve each and every student. Overcoming the challenges and politics within the school system can be trying during a period of change. "History shows that unless the role of a school counselor is clearly established, the whims of the times can threaten the very existence of the counselor position" (ASCA, 2005, p.6). School counselors will have to lead other stakeholders within the school environment towards an agreement about the specific role of today's counselor. Before school counselors can lead others, it is important to learn about school counselors' understanding of the Model and how implementing it can impact the perceptions of stakeholders.

Research Questions

A comprehensive school counseling program at a suburban high school in Rochester, New York was implemented in 2008. The purpose of this research is to study the implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program, based on the ASCA Model, and its perceived impact on the stakeholders by means of school counselor's perceptions. The following questions will be focused on throughout the research paper. School counselors are asked, from the counselor or mental health team member's point of view:

1. How do counselors define the role of the school counselor?
2. What is the purpose of the comprehensive school counseling plan?
3. How do comprehensive school counseling plans impact school counselors?
4. How do comprehensive school counseling plans impact students?
5. How do comprehensive school counseling plans impact the high school community, i.e.: teachers and administrators?

Method

The research conducted was qualitative, using the specific methodology of empirical phenomenology. The purpose behind empirical phenomenological methodology is to focus on the individual's perspective of his or her experiences through observation (Depoy & Gitlin, 1998). This phenomenological line of questions was able to provide direct verbal thoughts and opinions of school counselors and mental health team members, as it pertained to the districts K-12 comprehensive school counseling plan. Interview data illuminated information about how the comprehensive school counselor plan at a suburban high school of Rochester, New York has impacted the school counselors since its implementation in 2008. The research was used to compare the experience of school counselors to the purported benefits, as outlined in literature,

of working within the framework of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Comprehensive School Counseling Model.

Participants

The target population included the high school mental health team; 6 school counselors, 1 drug and alcohol counselor, 1 school psychologist, and 1 transition coordinator. The sample was comprised of 5 Caucasian female, 3 Caucasian male, and 1 African American male. The average age of the sample was approximately 47 years of age, ranging from 38 years of age to 58 years of age. The participants were chosen due to the accessibility in researcher's internship. Data was collected from a suburban high school from Rochester, New York.

Procedures

Nine members of the mental health team were invited to participate in a focus group that lasted approximately one and a half hours during the regular school day. A total of 8 members of the mental health team actually participated in the focus group. 1 transition coordinator, white female in her early 50's, was unable to attend due to other obligations in her schedule.

Each participant was given a consent form to participate in the focus group and consent to be audio taped (see appendix forms). The 6 school counselors were given these consent forms, plus consent forms to be interviewed one on one. These forms ensured the researchers actions to maintain participant confidentiality and participant protection. All participants agreed to conditions stated in the consent forms. Once forms were signed and collected, the researcher scheduled a meeting with all participants during a department meeting and a time during a future work day was agreed upon. The individual interviews were scheduled separately between the researcher and the school counselor for a separate occasion.

The researcher's role was to keep the focus group and interviews on task and focus on the questions provided to the participants. The questions asked of the focus group were :

1. Tell me about your comprehensive counseling.
2. How has the plan impacted your work?
3. How has the plan impacted your students?
4. How has the plan impacted the high school community, ie: teachers and administrators?

The individual interviews were more focused on the experiences of the high school counselors in relationship the comprehensive counseling plan. Twenty to thirty minute individual interviews were scheduled as it was convenient to the individual school counselor. The questions of each individual school counselor were:

1. What is your understanding of what a comprehensive counseling plan should be?
2. Have you worked in a counseling department without a comprehensive counseling plan?
What has been your experience with and without it?
3. What impact has the comprehensive plan had on you as a counselor here at Brighton high school?
4. How would you like to see the comprehensive counseling program evolve?

After audio recording was completed in the focus group and the individual interviews, the researcher then transcribed the audio recordings through the computer software Express Scribe, designed by NCH software. This software enabled the researcher to manipulate the audio recordings to written form. Once the audio recordings were transcribed, the transcription was transferred to a word document. The researcher was then, able to code the transcription and identify themes throughout the recordings. The codes and themes presented themselves as the interviews and focus groups unfolded, and discussed in the results section.

Results

The audio recordings were transcribed by the researcher using Express Scribe Pro by NCH Software. The software allowed the researcher to manipulate the sound to better transcribe the audio recordings. Once transcription was completed, themes were highlighted by pulling common ideas, responses, and words, or coded, from the transcription. Codes were then tallied by charting those topics that were addressed most throughout the focus group and the individual interviews (appendix A). After identifying the most discussed topics, the researcher was better able to categorize the main themes discussed. The process continued by utilizing a reflective journal, offering a tool to begin organizing themes and processing results. Three main themes emerged out of the focus group and individual interviews which specifically address the research questions. The Big Picture begins to answer the purpose of the Comprehensive Plan, The Role of the School Counselor addresses the definition of the school counselor, and Importance of the Stakeholders reflects the impact of a comprehensive plan on each contributor to the school experience. Quotes from the focus group and individual interviews are used to support each theme.

Time Assessment

One topic participants continued to discuss in the focus group and the individual interviews was the data that was collected from a needs assessment that was conducted during the development of their comprehensive plan. K-12 counselors participated in a time assessment, which last for one year, and counselors tracked their activities in 15 minute intervals. The mental health team reported that there were many positive results that came out of the data from the time assessment. Multiple supports mushroomed from this time assessment to support

the counseling department and the students. The advantages of having support from all stakeholders were clearly reported by the focus group and individual interviews.

Students One result of the assessment found that counselors were “spending a significant amount of time in responsive services.” Although attending to students immediate issues to help them through a difficult moment is a skill that is integral to the position, the process by which the department as a whole deals with responsive services directly impacts the students. By focusing specifically on those students with immediate issues and crisis, many times, this is when the “average” student falls between the cracks. The counselors were able to see clearly from the assessment that a different approach to responsive services would better assist all students. Collaborating together began to introduce different resources which could be available to those students in need. Implementing these resources would also enhance the counselor role to better advocate for all students. The counselors concurred that the support groups and TAG were a direct result of the time assessment data.

The team explained that the support groups were based on the needs of students identified by the counselors, and on an “as needed” basis. These groups might include a girls group, focusing on eating disorders, or a men’s group focusing on loss and grief due to the increase of students dealing with divorce issues. TAG was defined by the participants as a freshman “Teen Advisory Group”, which developed to assist with the transition of freshman students from middle school to high school. The group was described as a mandatory group that freshman attended year round, once per six day cycle.

Another area that changed as a result of the time assessment was an awareness of a percentage of students who were “falling through the cracks” due to the inefficiency of the current “plan”. Veteran counselors with twenty plus years reported changes due to the findings

in the studies. The counselors reported that in order to better service students and families with career and academic information, a common curriculum with lesson plans was needed. A cohesive more consistent curriculum was developed for each of the grade levels during a seminar, or classroom time period. Prior to the comprehensive plan, counselors were giving general information to each of their students, but there was inconsistency as to when it was being delivered and how. While developing the plan, counselors collaborated and discovered counselors were using different curriculum.

Parents Families also recognized a difference in the information their students were receiving. Parents became annoyed if their child received different curriculum about post-graduation options compared to other students. The parent response would then cause additional criticism of the department, and counselors lost their credibility with all stakeholders.

Preparing a curriculum and lesson plans that counselors would each use to teach their students offered consistency in what the students were learning, unity among the department, and assurance that each student was receiving the same curriculum. Developing a common curriculum provided the assurance to parents that their child was getting what they needed to be prepared post high school. The comprehensive plan brought counselors and parents together as a team to advocate for the student together. As a team, counselors were able to support what the students were learning in seminars, and parents were able to offer more support at home. The seminars were 6 week classes that students were assigned to as a class grade throughout the year. For example, seniors meet for six weeks in a row with their counselor in a class room setting. All seniors learn about the college application process and other post high school opportunities to allow students to have a plan after graduation. The sophomore and junior classes also meet in six week increments over the school year to learn about personal interests and introduce

standardized testing and begin the post-graduation planning process, respectively. The mental health team all agreed when counselors are giving the same curriculum, counselors can ensure all students are receiving the necessary information to be fully informed about their post high school options.

Building Staff The time study also was able to tell administrators and teachers what the counselor was actually doing, rather than guessing or going on the basis of their personal experiences with school counselors. The participants agreed that the ability for counselors to deliver the services to students directly comes from the support of the building administrators and teachers. The counselors gave credit to the administration several times during the focus group. They reported that without the support of the building administration, the counseling department would not be as effective. The focus group acknowledged their building administrators “allowed groups, because in many other schools, they don’t want that to happen. Groups usually happen over lunch time, before or after school, because they see it as interfering with their academic time and they can’t justify that.”

The time spent on responsive services was not allowing counselors to build quality relationships with students in order to advocate better for them. Mental health groups were designed collaboratively with counselors and administrators. “There was good foresight on the part of administration because without groups we would need many more individual meetings.” All participants agreed that the group process offered a more preventive approach, rather than a reactive action. Groups allow the counselors to get a pulse on the whole student body and the building environment. “In groups, we were hearing about student situations. We were able to meet, address, and sometimes intervene in some cases that really could have escalated to the point where kids could have gotten themselves into legal trouble.”

The comprehensive plan has also opened the door of communication between counselors and teachers. One counselor reported that “It’s really valuable for the teachers to get on board. Four or five years ago, I think I got feedback maybe once or twice.” Teachers are more aware of issues that students are struggling with outside of the classroom. Because of this awareness, teachers are able to give feedback to counselors about changes in students, either positive or negative. Feedback from teachers enables the counselor to be more effective and to be able to advocate better for the student. Teachers have the day-to-day contact with students, and they are better able to gauge differences in student’s behavior and attitude. The awareness of the whole student by the teachers allows the student to have more meaningful relationships with teachers and counselors because the student then has a safe and trusting adult to turn to when they are in a crisis.

Community Counselors agreed that the time assessment was a huge help in connecting the department and the school to the community at large. First, counselors reported that because they had a better awareness of the “whole” student, they were better able to connect with community services that could support students both in school and at home. One individual stated “I have contacts with so many agencies that I’ve been working with on a weekly basis. We’ve been having team meetings to get some of these kids situated.” The group agreed that by connecting to outside agencies, the school then has a direct impact on the community by supporting the agencies and businesses within it.

The community also benefited from the time assessment because of the data that was founded. “That was really a four to five year process but that’s how the family support center came about and really stemmed from the time audit.” The family support center was funded and supported because the comprehensive plan process provided the focus and design to provide the

data that was needed. Once data was collected, the counseling team was able to present the need for responsive service support to central office and the board of education. The district funded the beginnings of a family support center for the community, designed to offer a home base for any outside resources that may assist students and families in crisis.

Counselors Although counselors agreed that the comprehensive plan has helped all stakeholders, individuals unanimously agreed that the plan has successfully assisted in strengthening the department as a whole and clarified the role of the counselor. As a direct result of the time assessment and development of the comprehensive plan, “some initiatives for the department were met. We are going to meet with each student to college plan. We are going to meet with each student to do their schedule.” The team agreed that these initiatives were being met consistently through seminars and groups that were established.

Another benefit counselors identified was that the comprehensive plan “gave me a flavor of what to expect and what was expected of me.” The plan strengthens the role of the counselor from both the counselor and the stakeholder’s viewpoint. First, the comprehensive plan gives the counselor focus, a sense that all counselors share a common goal and a plan to reach that goal. All mental health team members agreed that counselors “fall in this sort of abyss of ‘what do counselors really do?’.” The comprehensive counseling plan offers all the players within the building and the community the ability to answer that question and the school counselor role as a result is strengthened. Administrators or parents have a clear understanding of what is expected of the school counselor and that all students are receiving the same service from all counselors. Yet, it also gives counselors “permission to follow the plan” and allows counselors to refer to the written document when more initiatives are presented to them.

The Big Picture

The mental health team reported that the K-12 Comprehensive Plan provides the team and other stakeholders with the big picture. The big picture for the participants was defined as “covering all areas of the curriculum that we provide to students,” “Blue prints for everyone K-12 that should guide us so that we have a consistent plan all the way through,” “..a game plan sort of thing,” “comprehensive means the complete, what do we do, what is our job description for kids and the community,” “..we can’t forget about the bigger picture, we do a good job with connecting with each student.”

What is the big picture of a comprehensive plan? The comprehensive plan is a guideline, an outline, a focus for the whole mental health team. The plan provides a way for everyone to be on the same page and to be able to reach the most students. “It’s just a framework by which we can put our curriculum out there and make sure, see where we are lacking, where there are holes, where there are needs versus what we are working on.” Each participant agreed that there was a big picture umbrella called the K-12 Comprehensive Counseling Plan that provided a “solid direction” for all stakeholders involved to ensure the success of each student. The word comprehensive in and of itself describes the idea that the counseling plan looks at the whole student. Many times education plans focus primarily on academics, rather than all three aspects described by the ASCA national model; academic, career and personal/social (ASCA, 2005). The respondents agreed that “it’s really all together and you can’t really have one without the other, and one supports the other. And when it’s all going and it’s rolling in a positive direction, you start to see that your kids start to thrive.”

Comprehensive Plan: “Then and Now”

Role Clarity All participants reported having experiences with different counseling departments over a time span varying from 5 to 20 years. As times have changed, so has the role of the school counselors. School counselors reported that although there have been many changes in the profession; the comprehensive plan was a way to stay on top of those changes and clarify the role of the school counselor.

Counselors concurred that with the times, the profession has changed. Participants surmised that counseling departments must change to adapt to the evolving profession to better advocate for all students, and reported past experiences focused heavily on academics. The comprehensive plan focuses on uniting the counseling department together. One focus group member described seminars before and after the comprehensive plan. “[Before] everyone was doing things differently. Now it is in black and white” and administration, parents, and the community, know what counselors are teaching kids and what areas are being covered.

More team and trust The seminars were a common thread during the focus group and interviews. Counselors reported that in the past, seminars taught students general information around post high school options, yet each counselor was providing a different curriculum. This in turn, created ambiguity within the department “when parents would contact the administrators and say I want this counselor not that one because they provide a different service.” Many counselors reported working in different districts where there were no clear department goals, and it brought about tension within the department. The individuals agreed that this tension impacted the effectiveness of their role as counselors.

All participants agreed that having a comprehensive plan in place offered a team approach to all aspects of the counselor role. A mission statement for the department is essential to keep all counselors cohesive and consistent.

“I have worked in three other places, and the culture and the climate there is ‘How can I make myself look like the best counselor?’. It’s different here because of the plan and the group. It’s very much a team approach of how to make our entire office able to support our kids and our parents.”

The focus group members commented that they were better able to collaborate with anyone within the department on issues with students or families, because the plan allowed the cohesiveness of the department. One participant stated “I feel confident ...I could ask anyone and know they would help me out. That was not always the case.”

Independent counseling to cross caring The focus group agreed that because there was a plan in place, students developed relationships with different members of the department, not just their assigned counselor. The team reported that the plan gives the counseling department credibility and consistency, so students know they are receiving the same information and support from all members of the department. The mental health team stated the plan has provided a variety of ways for counselors to be in front of the students and gives students opportunities to connect with staff on different levels. Examples of these situations include seminars, which give each student the curriculum they need depending on their level at high school; mental health groups, co-facilitated by different members of the counseling department, which give the students a safe place to discuss their issues and develop deeper relationships with the counselors and their peers; and TAG, a Teen Advisory Group, which assists freshman

throughout the school year in the transition from middle to high school. One participant summed up the comments best:

“We do a very good job of putting ourselves out there for kids and for families. That’s really what the groups are about, including TAG. I think we have set it up, so that we’re not just working with our alphabet letter students, we’re cross caring for kids. I have other counselor’s kids, so the students can form several close relationships with caring adults. I believe that as a department, one thing we are not, currently, is territorial. We’re okay with any one of our kids seeing anybody. We don’t care as long as they get the help. That has not always been the case here, and I know it’s not the case in other places.”

Discussion

The focus group and individual interviews in this study provided important information that helped support the ASCA National Model and the suggested purpose of a comprehensive model. ASCA proposes that having a comprehensive plan is essential in order to reach the most students, to be able to collaborate with all stakeholders, and as a result, counselors are more effective and can better advocate for all students (ASCA, 2005). Each mental health team member saw benefits of having a comprehensive plan within the counseling department. This included clarity of the counseling role, the ability to reach all students, strengthen the relationships with all stakeholders, and better advocate for all students. Yet, the study introduced information which supported other initiatives outside the comprehensive plan.

A counselor recounted an experience shared by a student after graduation,

“One student came back and was talking about her experience in the collegiate level and accessing a group. There were other kids in a group and this young lady was very surprised that none of these other kids had access to groups when they were in high school. And her understanding was that high school groups were a norm.”

Initially, the groups at this high school were developed to help with the immediate issues that students were facing during a specific time in their lives. Not only did the groups help the student through a stressful moment in time, but it prepared the student to advocate for herself and provide self care. The experience also highlighted that many students do not receive those services within their high school environment, as many of her college mates were not familiar with the group process.

Another benefit that developed because of the comprehensive plan was stronger relationships between counselors and administration, which resulted in more meaningful relationships between administration and students. “I think one of the reasons counselors are requested to be on so many of these committees is that we’re the ones in the building that hold information as a whole picture.” “The administrators really want the counselors there because we know the big picture and we can talk it through and give the child a place to process so it’s very much a team approach, even when it’s disciplinary.”

One counselor reported it the best:

“Since we wrote comprehensive plan, the assistant principals have turned over several times, and their role has changed too. Today assistant principals bringing us into the conversation with the kids and yes, they’re

being disciplined. But you go back to 2007, the goal of discipline was consequences; you missed class, boom, you're out of here. Now, if counselors in the room, or even if we're not in the room, sometimes you hear administrators talking with other kids, and they're asking 'How are the rest of your classes going? How's it going at home?'. They know the kids at a deeper level. We're working together more."

The comprehensive plan is put into place to help strengthen the relationships between the administration and the counselors. The goal is to keep all stakeholders focused on the same goal, advocating for the student. The additional benefit that came out of the plan was administration began to know more of the whole student. The trusting relationship between the counselor and the administration resulted in counselors attending more meetings with students, and therefore, students and administrators deepening their relationships. This would provide the student, again, with yet an additional safe adult to go to when students are struggling with day to day life.

All mental health team members expressed a continued frustration with the lack of time available to be an effective school counselor. Each agreed that the K12 comprehensive plan has strengthened them as independent counselors and as a department. But the K12 plan needs to continue to be evaluated. All participants described the issue that there is no time to do the things expected of the mental health team. "I think that by nature as counselors you go into this field because you want to help, you go in this field because you want to change the world on some level. Because you know it's important and it needs to be done. But then I think we end up getting burned out and we end up getting frustrated," "I do see that we can sometimes get to the point where we're spinning our wheels on things that we shouldn't be." Each counselor agreed that the comprehensive plan gave direction to the department to better control their time and how

they were better able to work with students. However, because of the nature of the counseling position, counselors reported that you never knew what issue or crisis might happen at any given time. “We just have to be selfish with our time sometimes. Because your calendar is not your own, as much as you think it is,” “You are on a treadmill that you can’t get off, you’re just too busy,” “It’s just overwhelming that there are so many things going on, and you have to be at 3 different places at the same time which is impossible.”

Limitations and Future Research

The data collected through this study has limitations. First, the sample was out of convenience. The researcher also is a strong advocate for a comprehensive plan within a counseling department. Although research questions were open ended and intended to be unbiased, some questions asked by the researcher during the discussions may have leaned towards the pro side of the comprehensive plan. Also, the researcher was familiar with the participants and had some working relationship with them as they were chosen from the researcher’s internship. Future research may choose to collect data from a sample that the researcher does not have a working relationship to better ensure no biases.

Additional research is needed to continue to decide if the comprehensive plan supports the counselor role. One counselor reported “I suppose it covers all the ingredients, but when you put all those ingredients together, it can look differently.” Although counselors were in support of the comprehensive plan, comments suggest there is still a long way to go. Starting the plan was the most difficult. Now it is a matter of continuing to follow through with what was started in order to build support. If the questions are not asked by the counselors, who, then, will advocate for the counselor? The profession has been quiet too long and has thus muddied the role of the counselor. Not only is the profession in jeopardy as districts continue to look for

ways of balancing their budgets, but students will suffer as there will not be a safe adult available, whose job it is to advocate for kids in a holistic way. The ASCA National Model offers a guide to begin the process of advocating for and strengthening the profession.

Conclusion

The findings of this study suggest that the impact of a comprehensive plan has provided a counseling department with support and a guideline to assist the counselor role as it continues to evolve.

“It gives our department credibility when we can say these are the things we do. And answers the question, how does the plan impact the high school, the community, the administrators, and the teachers? When we can very safely say that these are the things that we do, and we systematically go through it; through the seminars, through groups, this meeting, that meeting, individual meetings, it gives our department credibility. It holds us accountable. It keeps us focused. It keeps us moving in the right direction, and I think those things in a comprehensive plan are key.”

Through the discussions with the participants, all mental health team members agreed the comprehensive plan has the ability to be used as a tool to continue to strengthen the counselor role and advocate for all students. One participant explained “But I think the comprehensive plan helps me look at things, again, all aspects of the student. I suppose it covers all the ingredients, but when you put all those ingredients together, it can look differently.” If history repeats itself, times will change, and so will the needs of students, and the direction of the school counselor.

“I am pretty certain they are not as aware of everything that is done in this department. Some of the board members that are older and see the traditional "guidance" "oh yeah they plan for classes and they plan for

college.", but knowing that there is true mental health counseling going on here.”

School counselors need to advocate for the profession by starting to advocate for themselves within their buildings and districts. All stakeholders need to know that the school counselor is an essential piece to the success of their students and their district. Begin, the rest is easy.

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Appendix A

Table 1

Common Themes and Coding Chart from focus group and individual interview transcriptions

THEMES	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8
BIG PICTURE	Xxi	x	i	xxi	li	x		
CU – COUNSELOR UNDERSTANDINGS				x				
CT&N-changes now and then		l		x		x		
seminars	i	l		i	i	x		
More team and trust	i	Xxi		xxxii	Xi	Xii		
Different focus – academics vs social/emotional	i				l	ii		
More unified	li	l		i	l	xi		
Independent counseling to cross caring	xi	X	i	xii	Xi	i		
More organized and structure	lx	lx	i	iiix	x	iix	x	
One on one vs group – see more students	l			x				x
CUSS- Strengths of system								
-link to standards	Xi		i					
-identifying areas/use of assessments	Xii	l	xii	x	X			
-support from admin	xxxxx	x	xxi	xx	Xxii	xxi	x	xx
-solid direction	l	Xi	i	i				x
-groups-seminars	Xii		xi	xi	Xi	x	x	xx
-stronger relationships with all students	Xiii	xxi	i	xxx	xxx			xx
Collaboration with other buildings	X			X	li	xii		
Mission statement	Xi	l	Xx					
-strengthening communication all stakeholders	Xxxiii	Xxi	X	xxxx	X			

-clarity of role – (plus new counselor help)	xi	xii	ii	iii	i	xii		
<i>CUNS - Needs within system</i>								
CUTO-More Time Needed Overextended (example of assessment-results family support ctr)	xxxx	Xx	xxxiii	xxii	xxxxx	xi		x
CUST-describe role to stakeholders	X				i	l	x	
Advocate better for students	X		Xxi	X	Xx	xx		x
CUNP-Provides consistent roles/responsibilities		xi	ii		iiii	x		
ADVANTAGES TO STAKE HOLDERS								
AS – to students								
Spend lots of time with kids	ix		ix	ix	ix	x		
Better able to self-care post high school	X							
Sense of trust in building – better advocacy	xxx				x			x
Holistic look at student	X		X	X				x
AP- to parents								
tells parents what students are supposed to be learning	l			X				
All students are getting same thing				l				
AA- to administration								
Better relationships with students						x		
Building control	xi			X				X
Assists with graduation rates	l							
Supports discipline	xi							x
AC – to community								

-Links to community resources	Xi							
Website supports counselors	X							
ACO – to counselors								
Website supports – less work yet reaches more people	X							
More self-care/trust in department	Xx	i	Xi	X	xxi	i		
Better relationships with students	Xii	x	X	X	x	x	x	xx
Quiets critics	I		I	xi				

Key: i/I=theme came from individual interviews; x/X=theme came from focus group.