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Principal's Perceptions of the Role of School Counselors and the Counselor-Principal Relationship

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Relationship

Todd Costanza

The College at Brockport, State University of New York

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the views of current administrators on the roles and tasks of school counselors, and on the relationship between counselors and principals. The participants were chosen from a convenience sample of one head principal and three assistant principals of a high school located in the northeastern United States. This research included a mixed methods design to incorporate a researcher-designed survey based on information from a list of appropriate and inappropriate tasks for school counselors as deemed by the American School Counselors Association (ASCA), and a focus group discussion on the relationship each principal has with the school counseling department. The research showed that there remains an inconsistent gap in the amount of exposure each principal has in relation to the ASCA National Model from their administrator certification training. Principals were also able to identify a number of characteristics that are viewed as critical to the success of a school counselors working at the high school level.

Principal's Perceptions of the Roles of School Counselors and the Counselor- Principal Relationship

High school students today are facing continuous stressors as they deal with classroom assignments, high stakes testing, personal and social crises, and pressure to identify career options. Issues with friends, family, and academics often create an enormous overload of stress and confusion. Schools are facing difficulty with decreasing graduation rates, education reform, standards- based curriculum, and budget cuts. Hodgkinson (2000) discussed that schools are facing shifts in society that require new approaches to education. Traditional family structures have changed. Families are changing from the worker- homemaker model to dual income or single parent. Many families are struggling with absent parents, homelessness, or economic hardship. Furthermore, immigrant and English as a second language students are increasing, creating a need for increased or additional resources in schools.

While many students are able to cope with these stressors, a large number of students need additional support at school. As the need for additional resources increases, so do budgetary demands. As leaders in the schools, administrators must often determine for themselves what the individual needs of the school are. Accountability is adding to the pressure of administrators and can be the rationale for many decisions (Dahir & Stone, 2012). An appropriate and effective counseling program can be an integral part of the success of students, and instills an atmosphere of academic success (American School Counseling Association, 2012). To ensure a successful counseling program, counselors and principals must maintain a partnership (College Board Advocacy, 2009).

The purpose of this research is to examine the perceptions that current school administrators have in regards to the roles of school counselors, as well as explore

administrator's perspectives of the principal- counselor relationship. Included is the history of school counseling and school counseling programs, discussing the standards created by the American School Counselor Association in the National Model, and exploring the relationship between counselors and administrators.

Review of Literature

A positive and supportive relationship between school counselor and school administrators can have a direct impact on the effectiveness of the school counseling program (Leuwerke, Walker, & Shi, 2009). To be effective, counselors and counseling programs must not only have the support of (Leuwerke et al., 2009), but must understand their relationship with principals (Dollarhide, Smith, & Lemberger, 2007) can dictate what their role is, and in what ways counselors interact with students. Principals and counselors are being asked to reevaluate their independent and collaborative roles in an effort to have more direct impact on their students than in the past (Amatea & Clark, 2005; Beesley & Frey, 2006). Collaboration between counselors and principals, open communication, and trust are necessary ingredients for a successful school counseling program (Ponec & Brock, 2000). Yet many school principals across the United States have had difficulty in understanding and clearly identifying the role of school counselors and school counseling programs. This may lead to a disturbance in expectations by both the counselor and the administrator, perhaps leading to conflict (Shoffner & Williamson, 2000). When the goals and expectations of counselors and principals are misaligned, counselors may find themselves in a position to justify, defend, or explain their contributions to student success. Likewise, when counselors are assigned tasks outside of the scope of counseling duties, it takes away from the time spent focusing on the academic, career, and personal/ social development of students (Dahir, Burnham, Stone, & Cobb, 2010).

High school students today are facing continuous stressors as they deal with classroom assignments, high stakes testing, personal and social crises, and pressure to identify career options. Issues with friends, family, and academics often create an enormous overload of stress and confusion. Schools are facing difficulty with decreasing graduation rates, education reform, standards-based curriculum, and budget cuts. Amatea and Clark (2005) discussed that schools are facing shifts in society that require new approaches to education. Traditional family structures have changed. Families are changing from the worker-homemaker model to dual income or single parent. Many families are struggling with absent parents, homelessness, or economic hardship. Furthermore, immigrant and English as a second language students are increasing, creating a need for increased or additional resources in schools.

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American School Counselor Association in the National Model, and exploring the relationship between counselors and administrators.

History of school counseling

Counseling in the school setting began in the late 1800's when Jesse Davis, a principal, sought to bridge vocational interest to school work, develop character education in students, and decrease areas of concern. Davis began teaching weekly guidance and character lessons within his class (Atkinson, 2002). Building upon the work of Frank Parsons, vocational guidance was highlighted as a major need at the time. Parsons believed that adolescents needed three key strengths to excel. These strengths were an understanding of their strengths, abilities, and interests, knowledge of the world around them, and self-awareness (Herr, 2013).

The aftermath of the Great Depression and the outbreak of World War II led to the development and instillation of intelligence and aptitude testing for employment both in the public and military. Student evaluation and testing helped to bridge students with their interests and work (Dahir & Stone, 2012). Gladding's book on counseling (as cited in Dahir & Stone, 2012) noted that in the 1940's the person-centered counseling theory of Carl Rogers along with the impact of World War II, and the government's involvement with education reform changed the direction of guidance programs and counseling. Funding became available to schools for the purposes of vocational guidance with the instillation of the George- Barden Vocational Education Act of 1946 (Dahir & Stone, 2012). The National Defense Education Act (NDEA) in 1958 helped to aid in the selection and training of school counselors (American School Counseling Association, 2012). With the passing of NDEA, additional funding became available for schools, primarily to help increase the output of students with academic strength in math and science (Herr, 2013). The aim of NDEA was to increase the number of students who were

college bound for math or science, and school counselors were seen as advantageous to aid in this transition. NDEA also aided in expanding the selection and development of school counselors (Dahir & Stone, 2012).

ASCA

In 1952, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) was developed as a division from the American Personnel and Guidance Association. ASCA establishment gave school counselors an opportunity to be seen and heard as a national organization. Personal and social issues in the lives of students were seen as necessary areas of guidance. “Social problems including substance abuse, violence in the schools, mental health issues, and changing family patterns all pulled and tugged at defining the purpose of guidance in the schools and role of school counselors” (Gysbers, 2001). As the years and times changed, so did the needs of student support. Students needed support to overcome numerous obstacles, both in and out of school. ASCA responded to this need with the development of the ASCA National Model in 2003.

ASCA National Model

The first edition of the ASCA National Model was developed by a group of counselors and theorists to help create a natural progression for the profession of school counselors. As school counseling programs were different from state to state, and school to school, the National Model helped to create a standard for school counseling programs to aid in the academic, social, and career needs of students. Furthermore, the National Model aided in “re-establishing school counseling as a crucial educational function that is integral to academic achievement and overall student success” (ASCA, 2012).

The development of the ASCA National Model (2003) helped to clearly identify the roles of school counselors (Monteiro-Leitner, Asner-Self, Milde, Leitner, & Skelton, 2006). As different schools had different needs, the role of the school counselor was often gray and confusing to both counselors and administrators (Leuwerke et al., 2009). School counselors were often assigned non-counseling related duties to fit the needs of the school district. Dahir & Stone (2012) stated “when schools fail to clearly define the counselor’s role, school administrators, parents with special interests, teachers or others may feel their agenda ought to be the school counseling program’s priority. The results often lead to confusion and criticism when they are disappointed” (p. 11). Creating a standard for school counselors helps to diminish this confusion and criticism, and allows for more successful collaboration between counselors and school administrators (ASCA, 2012; Dahir & Stone, 2012; Dodson, 2009;).

The ASCA National Model (2012) stated that comprehensive school counseling programs are “driven by student data and based on standards in academic, career, and personal/social development, promote and enhance the learning process for all students” (p. xii). The ASCA National Model framework begins with four components: foundation, management, delivery, and accountability (ASCA, 2012).

Foundation

Included in the foundation component of the model is the program focus, student competencies, and professional competencies. The program focus asks school counselors to identify their own personal beliefs which in turn will aid in each student benefiting from the program, and the development of the counseling program mission statement which is associated with the mission of the school (ASCA, 2012). Program goals are also included in the program focus. Doran (1981) developed the SMART goal format which stands for specific, measurable,

attainable, results- oriented, and time bound. These goals are used to assist individuals with achieving a specific task.

Within the student competencies are the ASCA Student Standards (2012). The student standards “identify and prioritize the specific knowledge, attitudes, and skills that students should be able to demonstrate as a result of a school counseling program” (p. 29). Each of these standards are arranged within the focus of academic, career, or personal/ social development. In order to effectively assess student development, student standards are aligned with grade-level appropriate classroom lessons and group activities (ASCA, 2012).

Professional standards are those values that have been deemed necessary for individual school counselors to carry out the demands of the profession. These include professional knowledge, attitudes, and skills of the profession that are likely obtained from a counseling education program. Also included are the ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors (2010) which specifies professional behavior and guides ethical decision making for school counselors.

Management and Delivery

The management component of the National Model serves as a tool to help organize and manage the school counseling program. Included in the management component are areas such as program assessment, use of data, action plans for the overall program, counseling related calendars of activities/ events, and an annual agreement with school administrators. ASCA (2012) stated an annual agreement is important to “ensure formal discussion between the school counselor and administrator about the alignment of school counseling program goals with the goals of the school and can increase an administrator’s understanding of a comprehensive school counseling program” (p. 46). Included are a number of assessments for counselors and for other

stakeholders, such as administrators. These assessments give counselors and other stakeholders the opportunity to self- assess their own knowledge and skill (ASCA, 2008). Another assessment that is vital is the counseling program assessment which enables counselors to assess the current state of their counseling program in relation to the National Model. This assessment will help to discover current strengths and weaknesses of the program, as well as assist in program goal setting (ASCA, 2012).

One of the primary focuses of the management component is the use-of-time assessment. This assessment will allow counselors to gauge where the majority of their time is spent. In relation to the use-of-time assessment, the delivery component includes direct and indirect student service. Direct service is any in- person interaction with students. These types of services are individual planning, responsive services such as crisis management and individual or group counseling, and core curriculum of planned written instruction on topics in relation to academic, career, and personal/ social success. Indirect service is regarded as any service provided for the benefit of or on behalf of the student such as collaboration with other stakeholders or advocacy of the student. Advocacy may include in school or community referrals, and working with teachers, school staff, and parents. ASCA recommends that 80% or more of a counselor's time is spent in direct service to the students. The remaining time may be spent in relation to the other components of the National Model; this includes the daily or routine tasks that all staff and faculty share. Additionally, school counseling departments are given the flexibility to adjust their use of time to fit the needs of the students and the counselors individually (ASCA, 2012).

Accountability

The final component of the ASCA National Model is accountability. This component works to monitor student progress as well as to continuously evaluate and improve the overall school counseling program. ASCA (2012) stated, “School counselors use this evaluation to answer the question, ‘How are students different as a result of the school counseling program?’” (p. 99). Data analysis of assessments used, program results, small-group feedback, and other reports are all used to summarize the effectiveness of the counseling program and to make needed adjustments. An important consideration is in the proper dissemination of these results with other stakeholders. Shared results often promotes collaboration with other school departments, and may increase the value of professional school counselors (ASCA, 2012). Additionally, individual counselor competencies, performance appraisals, and program goals are recommended areas of analysis in the accountability component. These assessments assist with the continued professional development of new and experienced school counselors.

Role of the School Counselor

ASCA (2012) defined the role of school counselors as providing for academic achievement, coordinating personal and social development, and preparing for successful careers after high school graduation. Historically, many schools have dictated the role of the counselor to include inessential activities. Hart and Jacobi (as cited in Dahir & Stone, 2012) stated “the assignment of non-counseling activities suggest that the role of the school counselor and the school counseling program were poorly defined and not valued by the school administration” (p. 11). Because administrators often influence or dictate the daily activities of counselors, principals may be viewed as a barrier to the school counselor role and the progress of the counseling program (Chatra & Loesch, 2007; House & Martin, 1998).

The ASCA National Model (2012) included within the management component a comparison chart of appropriate and inappropriate counselor activities. ASCA makes an effort to request that school administrators reassign or remove any inappropriate tasks that counselors currently have. This allows for the school counselors to focus on the complete delivery of the counseling program. Along with the entirety of the National Model, ASCA's list of appropriate and inappropriate activities solidifies the role of the school counselor.

Appropriate and Inappropriate Activities for school counselors

Appropriate Activities for School Counselors	Inappropriate Activities for School Counselors
Individual student academic program planning	Coordinating paperwork and data entry of all new students
Interpreting cognitive, aptitude and achievement tests	Coordinating cognitive, aptitude and achievement testing programs
Providing counseling to students who are tardy or absent	Signing excuses for students who are tardy or absent
Providing counseling to students who have disciplinary problems	Performing disciplinary actions or assigning discipline consequences
Providing counseling to students as to appropriate school dress	Sending students home who are not appropriately dressed
Collaborating with teachers to present school counseling core curriculum lessons	Teaching classes when teachers are absent

Analyzing grade-point averages in relationship to achievement	Computing grade-point averages
Interpreting student records	Maintaining student records
Providing teachers with suggestions for effective classroom management	Supervising classrooms or common areas
Ensuring student records are maintained as per state and federal regulations	Keeping clerical records
Helping the school principal identify and resolve student issues, needs and problems	Assisting with duties in the principal's office
Providing individual and small-group counseling services to students	Providing therapy or long-term counseling in schools to address psychological disorders
Advocating for students at individual education plan meetings, student study teams and school attendance review boards	Coordinating school wide individual education plans, student study teams and school attendance review boards
Analyzing disaggregated data	Serving as a data entry clerk

(ASCA, 2014)

Perception of principals

Student success is one of the primary goals for both counselors and administrators, and principals can be a vital part of the school counseling program (Beesley & Frey, 2006).

Principals are more likely to advocate for and align with a counseling program when they share the goals and objectives of the program, the individual counselors, and the additional student supports (Walsh, Barrett, & DePaul, 2007). The majority of school principals believe that

counselors have a positive influence on student's academic, career, and personal/ social development and success, but their views of individual roles may not agree with the ASCA National Model. Zalaquett and Chatters (2012) found that some administrators contributed and estimated only 20% of a counselors time to direct student service, as opposed to ASCA's 80% recommendation.

Several studies have shown that principals do not always have a clear and consistent concept of the counselor's role, and may lack opportunities to learn (Dodson, 2009). There continues to be an inconsistency in the literature of school administrator certification programs to the degree that principals are exposed to the roles of school counselors (Kirchner & Setchfield, 2005). A 2009 study by Leuwerke et al. (2009) found that an overwhelming 71.5% of school principals surveyed had very little to no exposure to the ASCA standards. The vast majority of those principals who had been exposed to the national model had been so through discussion and collaboration with a professional school counselor. Of the 337 participants, only 6 respondents had received exposure through their administrator education.

Educational level may also play a role in how administrators define the role of school counselors. Perusse, Goodnough, Donegan, and Jones (2004) found that elementary and high school principals rated the ASCA National Standards similarly, but a large majority of high school principals indicated that administrative tasks such as registration and administering testing were appropriate for counselors. Additionally, middle school was seen as more focused on personal/ social development, and the high school level put career development as a higher priority. Many principals' expectations revolve around the historical role of counselors, and their perceptions may reflect the role that was popular at the time the principal was educated (Dollarhide et al., 2007). For principals that have been in place for some time, there may not be

an awareness of counselors moving into a proactive role, as opposed to a historically reactive perspective. Administrators who are new to their role may be more aware of changes in the school counseling profession and the ASCA National Model (Dahir et al., 2010)

Counselor's relationship with administrators

A positive collaboration between counselors and principals can do much to increase the success of a school counseling program. Counselors can do much to advocate for themselves as well as for the school counseling profession by engaging in open communication with administrators. Regular meetings, shared goals and objectives, and consistent evaluation contribute to the overall success of the school counseling program (Amatea & Clark, 2005; Beesley & Frey, 2006; Zalaquett & Chatters, 2012). Numerous authors note that a positive counselor- principal relationship includes trust, understanding, open communication, respect, cooperation, and support mutually from both sides (Amatea & Clark, 2005; Murray, 1995; Ponec & Brock, 2000; Vaught, 1995). Dahir and Stone (2010) stated “when the principal and school counselors meet, collaborate, and agree on program priorities, implementation strategies, and the organization of the counseling department, the entire program runs more smoothly and is more likely to produce the desired results for the students” (p. 195).

Principals have stated that they desire counselors who are proactive, visible, and have a strong work ethic including dedication and devotion to the students and student success. Counselors are also asked by principals to be advocates for themselves, and to maintain a level of professional development by attending workshops and conferences, remaining up to date on national and state expectations, and staying current on student and school issues (Dollarhide et al., 2007). The College Board's National Office for School Counselor Advocacy (2009) stated the relationship between counselors and principals can further be strengthened by understanding

the viewpoint of each other. While each desired mutual respect, principals desired respect for their vision and goals, while counselors wanted respect for themselves and their profession.

Much of the previous literature on the role of the school counselor is found to be closely related and repetitive. There appears to be a general consensus on the lack of evidence of how principals come to define the school counselor's role. Previous authors have noted that the principals define the role dependent on numerous factors. Principals often take into account the needs of the school and community at large, the current trends of the field, and their own preconceived notions of the counselors' roles. These preconceived ideas may or may not include any formal education on school counselors or counseling programs within their graduate studies or administrative certification program. Yet principals and counselors alike agree that establishing an agreement on the counselor's role is a priority for the counseling program. Additionally, principals that are aligned with the counseling program are more likely to be advocates for the program and for counselors. While counseling departments may or may not prescribe to the ASCA National Model, principals in general agree that counselors have a positive impact on students academic, career, and personal/ social development.

There is overwhelming evidence that previous authors agree on a positive counselor-principal relationship is of great importance to the success and production of the counseling program. Counselors and principals working together for the benefit of student's success is a natural and obvious combination (Zalaquett, 2005). Previous literature agrees that a positive counselor- principal relationship is based in numerous factors, with the most important being open communication, sharing ideas and information, mutual trust and respect, and a shared vision of goals and student success. Additionally, principals desire counselors who are proactive and visible, have a strong work ethic, and advocate for themselves and their profession.

Principals share the expectations of counselors for professional development, and an opportunity to stay connected with current issues in their field.

The purpose of this study is twofold. First, to identify how current school administrators view the role of school counselors in relation to ASCA's defined list of appropriate and inappropriate duties. It is hypothesized that the majority will agree with the defined appropriate tasks, and those that agree with inappropriate tasks will be administrators who have less awareness of the ASCA national model, and/ or more time removed from their administrator certification program. Secondly, this study will look for qualitative feedback on the counselor-principal relationship. The current hypothesis is that overall, there is a very strong relationship between counselors and administrators. While the counselor- principal relationships are mostly positive, students are assigned to counselors and collaborating principals alphabetically causing very little cross interaction between other counselors and principals. While this may be beneficial to the working relationship individually, there is room for discussion on whether assignment by grade level is more appropriate in certain situations or in other school districts.

Method

As principals often dictate the role of the school counselors, it is imperative that counselors and administrators have a shared vision and appropriate goals. Principals who are unaware of what is deemed as appropriate tasks for school counselors run the risk of creating friction in their working relationships. Likewise, counselors who are unwilling to engage in open communication with administrators are also risking damage to the relationship. Understanding which tasks principal's view as appropriate, and understanding their perspective on the relationships with counselors helps to create a positive learning environment for students, as well as a healthy work environment for counselors and administrators alike.

A mixed methods model was used in conducting this research. A survey was developed and used to gauge how agreeable principals are to whether specific school counselor roles are appropriate or inappropriate as determined by the American School Counselor Association. Secondly, a focus group interview was conducted on the views that administrators had in their working relationship with school counselors. Narrative data was collected, coded, and categorized into themes related to both the positive and negative aspects of the relationships, and the differing expectations that principals have individually.

Setting

This study was conducted in a rural- suburban high school in the northeastern United States. The high school has an enrollment of approx. 1400 students in grades 9-12, with 20% eligible for free or reduced lunch. Ninety two percent of students identify as White, 3% identify as Hispanic or Latino, 2% as Black or African American, 1% as Asian or Native Hawaiian/ other Pacific Islander, and 1% as Multiracial.

The surveys were distributed to administrators to complete at their convenience in their personal office space. The focus group interview was conducted in the administrative conference room which consists of a large table and numerous chairs where the members were seated.

Participants

The participants for this research were selected as part of a convenience sample from those that have been hired by the school district to work in the high school. The participants consist of one head principal and three assistant principals. The principals were diverse in gender, as three participants identified as male, and one identified as female. The participants also represented a diverse range of experience. One principal identified as having less than 1 year

experience, one principal identified as having 3- 5 years of experience, and 2 identified as having 5 or more years of experience. All four participants identified ethnically as White.

Measurement Instruments

The sole instrument used in this study was a researcher- made survey entitled, Assessment of the Role of School Counselors. The survey was developed from the American School Counselor Association's chart of appropriate and inappropriate activities of school counselors. The survey includes 28 questions that measure the agreeableness of respondents on a 5- point Likert scale. The possible responses include strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree. ASCA lists 14 of the questions as appropriate activities, and 14 inappropriate activities. The validity and reliability of this instrument have not yet been measured. As this is a researcher- made instrument, there was no opportunity prior to the administration to "pilot" the assessment.

Data Collection

Each survey was folded and placed in a white envelope, and then placed in a manila envelope with a copy of the recruitment letter which detailed the instructions to participants. Manila envelopes were hand delivered to each participant, and an opportunity for questions was given. Respondents were asked to complete the survey, fold, and seal it in the white envelope, and then place it in the manila envelope. Participants were asked to return the all materials to the counseling office administrative assistant within one week. The office administrative assistant collected the sealed envelopes and held them in a secure location. Once all surveys were returned, they were hand delivered to the lead investigator who secured them in a locked office.

The focus group was conducted during the weekly meeting of all four principals. The lead investigator met with the administrative team for approximately 35 minutes and asked a series of questions related to themes that were concluded from current literature. The first set of questions asked were in relation to their perceptions on the roles of school counselors, and the second set of questions in relation to the counselor- principal relationship. After a brief introductory question about how the principals viewed the survey, questions driven from the literature were asked and audio recorded.

Principals were first asked to generally describe their view on the role of the school counselor. The second question asked was in relation to the formal training that each had. Administrators were asked if there was any discussion or training on the role of school counselors, or in working with counselors in either their graduate work or administrative certification training. The next question asked was how much awareness each administrator had on the ASCA National Model, either from their education or from their professional experience. Next, the administrators were asked for their perception on what percentage of a school counselor's day should be devoted to direct service.

The second set of questions began with asking for the administrators to generally describe their relationship with the counselors that they are alphabetically assigned to. The second question was how often the principals meet with the counselors to discuss goals, objectives, or program evaluations. Next, administrators were asked to discuss their opinion on what makes a positive working relationship, followed by what attributes they look for in a school counselor in terms of working with and in the hiring process. Finally, the administrators were asked to discuss their views on the assignment of students alphabetically to counselors and principals as opposed to grade level.

Data Analysis

The survey data collected was transcribed into an excel spreadsheet. The 5 point Likert scale used in the survey was shortened to a 3 point scale for response consistency to ASCA . The 3 point scale consisted of agree, neutral, and disagree. The 28 survey questions were grouped into 14 sets of two questions, one task that has been designated by ASCA as inappropriate with the related task designated as appropriate. Each set of questions were paired by a relevant task of school counselors. Total number of respondents that agreed with the task as either appropriate or inappropriate were recorded in the result.

The audio recording of the focus group was transcribed using a Word document. The Word document was placed in a 3 section table, separated by identifier of respondent, quotation, and theme of discussion. Specific interview questions were referenced in relation to the research study questions. Quotations were selected from the focus group that best represented the theme and concept in relation to the research study questions.

Results

Survey Results

The survey data collected is separated into 14 categories of paired questions in relation to specific tasks of school counselors. Each initial question is deemed by ASCA as an inappropriate (I) task for school counselors, followed by a related task that is considered appropriate (A). Each question has a total response (n) of four, and number of responses are represented following each question.

Tasks- Enrollment/ Planning	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Counselors are expected to coordinate paperwork and data entry of all new students (I)	2	1	1
Counselors are expected to be involved in individual student academic program planning (A)	4		

Tasks- Testing	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Counselors are expected to be coordinating cognitive, aptitude and achievement testing programs (I)	1	3	
Counselors are expected to be interpreting cognitive, aptitude and achievement tests (A)	2		2

Tasks- Attendance	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Counselors are expected to sign excuses for students who are tardy or absent (I)			4
Counselors are expected to be providing counseling to students who are tardy or absent (A)	4		

Tasks- Discipline	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Counselors are expected to perform disciplinary actions or assign discipline consequences (I)			4
Counselors are expected to provide counseling to students who have disciplinary problems (A)	4		

Tasks- Behavior/ Dress	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Counselors are expected to send students home who are not appropriately dressed (I)			4
Counselors are expected to provide counseling to students as to appropriate school dress (A)	4		

Tasks- Instruction	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Counselors are expected to be teaching classes when teachers are absent (I)			4
Counselors are expected to collaborate with teachers to present school counseling core curriculum lessons (A)	2	1	1

Tasks- Achievement	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Counselors are expected to compute grade- point averages (I)	2	1	1
Counselors are expected to be analyzing grade- point averages in relationship to achievement (A)	2	1	1

Tasks- Records	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Counselors are expected to be maintaining student records (I)	4		
Counselors are expected to interpret student records (A)	3		1

Tasks- Supervision	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Counselors are expected to supervise classrooms or common areas (I)		2	2
Counselors are expected to be providing teachers with suggestions for effective classroom management (A)	2	1	1

Tasks- Clerical	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Counselors are expected to keep clerical records (I)	2	2	
Counselors are expected to ensure student records are maintained as per state and federal regulations (A)	3		1

Tasks- Principal Relations	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Counselors are expected to be assisting with duties in the principal's office (I)	1	1	2
Counselors are expected to be helping the school principal identify and resolve student issues, needs, and problems (A)	4		

Tasks- Counseling Services	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Counselors are expected to be providing therapy or long- term counseling in schools to address psychological disorders (I)	2	1	1
Counselors are expected to provide individual and small- group counseling services to students (A)	4		

Tasks- Advocacy	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Counselors are expected to coordinate school wide IEP's, student study teams and school attendance review boards (I)	1	1	2
Counselors are expected to be advocating for students at IEP meetings, student study teams, and school attendance review boards (A)	3	1	

Tasks- Data	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Counselors are expected to serve as a data entry clerk (I)			4
Counselors are expected to be analyzing disaggregated data (A)	3		1

Focus Group

The focus group discussion provided an opportunity for each administrator to openly discuss their thoughts and feelings towards the school counseling program, and their relationships with the counselors. During the discussion, the lead investigator asked specific questions in relation to their familiarity of the ASCA National Model and the relationship they

have with the counselors. Each administrator was purposely given the opportunity to share their thoughts without structure. Topics of discussion related to the ASCA National Model centered around the themes of general thoughts, administrator certification programs, awareness of the national model and the amount of time dedicated to direct service of students. In discussion of the counselor- principal relationship, themes discussed were related to general relationship, collaboration, positive working relationships, the alphabetical assignment of students, and essential counselor attributes.

National model.

General thoughts. Principals were first asked to share their general thoughts of the roles of school counselors. A number of participants responded that they are aware that counselors have large caseloads and extremely limited schedules. One respondent mentioned that they were aware that counselors are often seeing students, families, and participating in grade level meetings without much break in between. Each principal agreed that they see themselves and the counselors as partners for working with students, and will occasionally assist in what may be traditionally seen as a counselor role by meeting with students or talking with parents when necessary.

Certification. Participants were asked if their administrator certification program included any training or education on working with counselors, or what appropriate tasks are for school counselors. Two administrators, both of whom have less than 5 years of experience, discussed that their certification program did incorporate some training and collaborating in regards to school counseling. Both principals participated in a collaboration project with the counselor education program of their graduate school. The project included researching the ASCA model, meeting with the counselor education graduate students, and participating in a

mock presentation of implementing an ASCA based comprehensive school counseling program in a fictional school setting. One principal commented that the project was an excellent experience, and “gave us as future administrators more of a perspective on what counselors do, and how we can help the counseling department in a school to function a little bit more efficiently”. Conversely, the remaining two administrators, who are both greater than 5 years removed from their certification programs, stated that there was absolutely no training or educational piece of their certification in the roles of or working with school counselors.

Awareness of National Model. The administrators were next asked to discuss how much, if any, experience and awareness they had of the ASCA national model for comprehensive school counseling programs. Both of the newly certified principals stated that because of their certification program they believed that they were “very familiar” with the national model. One of the principals with over 5 years of experience discussed that he has become aware of the national model through his own experiences working in the school, first as an assistant principal in charge of the counseling department, and now as the head principal. He also acknowledged that he is married to a school counselor which has helped his understanding of the abilities and roles of school counselors. The fourth principal stated he has no experience in or awareness of the ASCA national model at all.

Direct service. A direct service is defined as an “in-person interaction between counselors and students” (ASCA, 2008). The group was asked what percentage of time they believed a counselor should spend in direct service with students. Each administrator agreed that counselors spend almost 100% of their time in relation to serving the collective needs of students, as well as the individuals. Each discussed that they are aware that counselors often need to participate in other tasks as related to their specific job or as an employee of the school district, but the

majority of counselor's time is spent in relation to serving students. One principal stated that the percentage of counselor's time spent in direct contact with students likely "would be a very high percentage... probably over 75%".

Counselor- principal relationship.

Positive working relationships. In defining what makes a positive working relationship, each principal commented and agreed that the overwhelming factors are communication and teamwork. The forms of communication may be verbal, email, or a phone call, but contact between the offices is essential to the relationship. One principal described that while administrators and counselors do not always agree on a course of action, there is always discussion and consideration for other points of view. A positive working relationship also contains "a shared ownership" in the school according to another principal.

Collaboration. The group discussed that each has a very good relationship with their assigned school counselors. Mutual respect and collaboration were discussed as important aspects in collaborating. One principal commented "we can count on [the counselors] to be professional, courteous, keep kids first, and go that extra step in order to do what they need to do for kids". A part of collaboration according to one principal includes different approaches to reaching students. "You don't want to compromise that counselor- student piece. But as an administrator, I can send that [disciplinary] message whereas the counselor is sending a little bit more of a supportive message. But together we can make sure that we are sending a collective message that's in the best interest of the [student]".

For one assistant principal, working and collaborating with his counselors has evolved over the years. "I've been working with the same two counselors for the last 4 years. I think we

know what each other's roles are. We used to have a lot of formal meetings and now we are almost 'on the fly' because we are all kind of working on the same things all the time. It's a good experience". Other principals maintain that they continue to have regularly scheduled meetings, and will often find themselves meeting at numerous times throughout the school day.

Additionally the head principal states he will meet with the counseling department as a whole occasionally, but scheduled meetings are often reserved for specific or unique student issues.

Assignment of students. Each of the participants agree that there are advantages and disadvantages to both systems in assignment of students. One principal commented that an advantage is making connections with students who are all at the same level. He states that as freshmen, student's needs are more focussed on the academic and social-emotional aspect, while seniors are focussed on the college and post high school process, creating a needs based workload for the counselors. Conversely, one disadvantage for administrators and counselors is that as the students go through high school, the needs of the students change which creates a gap in time for dealing with grade specific issues. "If you're the senior person, and then next year you are like... wow, I haven't done freshman in four years. So it's almost like you are learning it all over again".

Another principal commented that the high school had been grade assigned previously, and it carried distinct disadvantages to working with the families. "When we were assigned by grade some of our families would reach out to us and say, 'well, I like working with this other counselor for our other child. Can I keep that counselor?' And I can tell you that those requests have almost gone away completely since we went to the family model." He contributes this to the unique qualities that each counselor has. "[Families] don't feel like they are split, or getting different services from different counselors. You could have a family with two or three kids in

the same school and they would have to manage between two and three counselors in that other model. This way... they only have to reach out to one counselor, and that counselor would have that family connection”.

Counselor attributes. The group was next asked to discuss what attributes they believe are needed for school counselors. Speaking in regards to high school counselors specifically, the head principal stated “It really comes down to someone who’s going to have a balance. They have to be able to understand that there’s a high level of need for social/ emotional counseling at the high school level. Sometimes in an advanced situation, where a kid is dealing more with adult issues. However, we are not just a therapeutic program. There is also that academic counseling needs. So you have to understand that scheduling, and academic progress monitoring, college and career counseling, those are all components to a successful high school counselor. So one minute you have to be able to manage those crisis situations... emotional issues, or social issues, and the next period you are dealing with a student and a parent about choices for college”.

Principals also desire counselors who meet certain expectation for the school district. “They have to be student centered and focused, positive, a good energy, and want to contribute to the school in more than just what they do in their offices". This includes counselors who are willing to contribute to the entire school community by maintaing involvement in clubs, sports, and school activities, as well as working with teachers to support student success both in and out of the classroom. Additionally, each principal noted that continued involvement in professional development is also important. The group noted that while some counselors may have a strong desire to not take the time away from students or may find difficulty in balancing the responsibility of their work load, there is a need to be “a lifelong learner”.

Discussion

In recent years, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) has made efforts to advance the functions and understanding of the importance that school counselors play in the support of academics, personal/ social issues, and career/ college preparation of students. But the specific daily tasks of school counselors are often dictated by administrators, and can vary from school to school. A successful school counseling program must include a partnership between counselors and principals (College Board Advocacy, 2009).

Previous research has shown that many administrators are unaware of current trends in the school counseling profession (Beesley & Frey, 2006). Administrators that have recently gone through their certification program are more likely to be aware of the ASCA National Model and what are deemed appropriate tasks. When the goals and tasks of counselors and principals are misaligned, student success can be jeopardized (Dahir et al., 2010). A strong relationship between counselors and principals is one that is based on mutual trust, open communication and teamwork.

The purpose of this research was to seek the perspective of current school administrators on their views of appropriate versus inappropriate tasks for school counselors in relation to their understanding of the ASCA National Model. The researcher also sought to discover what principals most valued in working with school counselors to create a positive working relationship.

Assessment Instrument

Consistent with previous research (Beesley & Frey, 2006), survey responses by the principals show that there is a high level of divide in what the administrative team as a whole

deems as an appropriate or inappropriate task for school counselors. Of the 14 tasks deemed inappropriate for school counselors by ASCA, all four respondents agreed the task was inappropriate only five times (attendance, discipline, behavior/ dress, instruction, data). Likewise, all four respondents agreed on the appropriate tasks in only six instances (enrollment/ planning, attendance, discipline, behavior/ dress, principal relations, counseling services). As each response in these areas is in line with ASCA, this leads to a belief that there may be a clear understanding on the role the school counselors play in attendance, discipline, and behavior/ dress.

A number of responses by the administrators were not consistent with ASCA. At least one respondent reported that they see an inappropriate task as acceptable in seven areas. The strongest occurrence of this is in the task of maintaining records. ASCA deems maintaining student records as inappropriate, yet all four administrators agreed that this was acceptable. This inconsistency may be related to a misinterpretation of what is meant as a student record. It is possible that each administrator took the term student record to include case notes or academic plans, while ASCA is referring to official school records and profiles.

Another strong area of concern for the inconsistency between responses and ASCA is in the area of testing. Half of the administrators responded that school counselors should not be interpreting cognitive, aptitude and achievement tests. As ASCA has worked to expand the role of school counselors over the years, many principals may not be aware that interpretation and understanding of cognitive, aptitude, and achievement based testing is a part of many counselor education programs. This inconsistency may be related to the amount of time that has passed since each administrator went through a certification program. It stands to reason that the principals who have less than 5 years of experience may have more knowledge of the educational

training of school counselors to include interpretation and understanding of cognitive, aptitude, and achievement based testing.

Focus Group

National Model

The focus group allowed an opportunity for the four administrators to discuss their views on the roles of school counselors, their understanding and experiences of school counseling programs, and in their relationships with school counselors. Each principal discussed at length that they see the counselor's roles as supporting of each student's individual needs, as well as the needs of the whole student body. Each principal acknowledged that the counselors often have busy schedules to accommodate the needs of each student, while making time to attend to other school related business as needed and as available. Collectively, the administrators see the counselors as team members that place students first, and driven to support the academic, social/emotional, and career/ college preparation of each student.

There was a noticeable divide in the experience that the collective group had in their understanding of a comprehensive school counseling program in relation to the ASCA National Model. Half of the administrators had exposure to the model while in their certification program and the other half had none. The latter half was additionally divided by the fact that one principal had been exposed to the model through the course of his working career as well as in his private life being married to a school counselor. The final principal had no knowledge of, or training in the ASCA National Model. Leuwerke et al. (2009) had also found that half of their sample had been exposed to the ASCA National Model creating a consistency between the findings of each study. The divide in awareness of the National Model may certainly be attributed to the historical

training of administrator certification programs. However as one principal noted that learning is a lifelong process, there can be room to argue that principals have an obligation to educate themselves in the current trends of how vital members of the school are trained.

One aspect of how ASCA has worked to advance the school counseling profession is in their use-of-time assessment. ASCA recommends that school counselors should spend approximately 80% of their day in direct service to students. Initially, this question was answered by all administrators that they believed it should be 100% of counselor's time. This overestimate may have been contributed to a poorly phrased question in relation to the definition of direct service. After clarification and discussion, the administrators recognized that the amount of time that counselors spend in direct contact with students should be and is a very high percentage. Their assessment that counselors spend "over 75%" of their time is accurate and consistent with ASCA's recommendation.

Counselor- Principal Relationship

The discussion of the focus group moved to their perceptions on their individual relationships with counselors in terms of what makes a positive working relationship, their collaboration with counselors, their working model of alphabetical student-to-counselor assignment, and what administrators view as essential school counselor characteristics. There was overwhelming agreement between administrators that the main ingredient to a positive working relationship is open communication, teamwork, and mutual respect. Each administrator believes that there is excellent communication between themselves and the counselors that they work with, and that they work together to support student's needs. As Ponec and Brock (2000) discussed, these collaborations are essential to a successful school counseling program.

A part of the ongoing teamwork that counselors and principals have worked towards is in their daily communication and collaboration. The three assistant principals each discussed that they often meet numerous times a day with counselors in formal meeting, through email or phone conversations, and in person “on the fly”. There is a general sense that each principal is aware that this is a necessary piece to working together as a team and see it as working collectively towards the best needs of the students. While the three assistant principals each commented that they communicate numerous times throughout the day, the head principal discussed that while he may not have the same level of daily contact, he believes there is a very positive relationship with the counselors, and that the school counselors feel he is open and available to meeting with them as the need arises.

It was clear in the discussion that each of the principals were in favor of the assignment of students alphabetically. While only the head principal had been employed at the school prior to changing from a grade level assignment, one assistant principal had previously experienced the different model. As each discussed this type of student assignment, there were few negatives mentioned on the alphabetical assignment, leading to a sense that there was a preference to this model by far. The overwhelming issue at hand was in the principal’s collective view that an alphabetical assignment by both counselors and principals worked to serve the whole family.

Finally, the administrators discussed what individual characteristics they believe make a good school counselor. According to this group of administrators, the key to being a successful school counselor is having the ability to balance working with numerous students in numerous areas of need. This is an accurate statement. School counselors see numerous students throughout the school day. Every student brings a different issue to each discussion. A counselors may have a student in their office first period working on college application, and spend second period

calling Child Protective Services for an abuse situation. The administrators each agreed that counselors need to have the ability to “change gears” quickly.

During the discussion, each administrator discussed teamwork, respect, and communication as vital counselor attributes. But the most agreed upon attribute that the administrators like to see is in a person who involves themselves with the school community. Principals desire counselors (and all staff members) to immerse themselves in the school environment; from clubs and activities, sports events, social activities, and other events. The underlying message was that each administrator wanted counselors who could not only fulfill the role and job description, but individuals who were a part of the school as a whole.

Limitations

While this research was able to provide many poignant results, there were a number of limitations to the study. The first limitation is in relation to the sample and the sample size. Time constraints limited the sample size to participants who were immediately available. This access was reduced by the number of administrators that are employed in the building where the research took place. Additionally, while the convenience sample may have represented separate genders, there was no ethnic diversity. A second limitation to this study involved the use of the measurement instrument. The instrument used was created to identify whether principals agreed with the point of view of the American School Counselor Association. Because this was a researcher- made survey, there is no measurable validity or reliability of the instrument. Both of these limitations contribute to the overall validity and reliability of the study.

Additional limitations to the study involve the focus group. First, there was a genuine time constraint on the part of all the administrators. The meeting took place during the school day

while the principals were holding their weekly meeting, and they were scheduled to be in another meeting immediately following the time devoted for the research. This time constraint may have caused administrators to not allow for additional contemplation or comment for each question. Another limitation to the focus group discussion was the generalness of the questions asked. Questions the researcher asked were centered around the themes of current literature. However, questions may have been framed differently to maintain the themes of the literature, and additional follow up questions could have assisted in relating responses to the themes of current literature.

A final limitation involved the school itself. The school where this study took place is a progressive school district that has a working knowledge of school counseling programs, and has implemented many aspects of the ASCA National Model. Argument can be made that the results of the study may have been different had this study been conducted in a location that was not as progressive, or had no working knowledge nor implementation of the ASCA standards. While the above limitations affect the overall results of this study, by using this research as a pilot study for future research there is ample opportunity to address the limitations and expand on the groundwork laid here.

Recommendations for future research

The results of this research may be best used by viewing this as a pilot study for future research. This being the case, the researcher has a number of recommendations for continuing this research in the future. The primary recommendation is to increase the sample and sample size of the research. This study would benefit from expanding to include a number of administrators from diverse backgrounds and differing experience levels. Increasing the number of respondents would also add to the validity and reliability of this research. In addition to this,

expanding the study to include different schools, school districts, and potentially different states would add to the collective knowledge, and perhaps highlight the differences in perspectives from varying cultures. Including schools in states or areas of the country where the ASCA National Model is not as prevalent would add to the results and benefits of this research. Additionally, including another measurement instrument that has been previously established and tested would add to the significance of this research.

Another recommendation for future research would be to format the focus group differently. The group would benefit from having more availability to ensure that participants have ample time to collect their thoughts and consider follow up questions to their responses. An alternative would be to supply participants with focus group questions prior to meeting to allow for reflection and consideration of their responses. This would also allow for any needed or requested clarification of questions by the participants.

Conclusions

There are a number of conclusions that can be drawn from this research study. The first conclusion is that there is a large inconsistency in administrator certification programs on exposure of new administrators to the ASCA National Model of school counseling programs. By not including any exposure to the National Model in these administrator programs, school counselors will be subject to varying roles and tasks dictated by the individual administrator. These roles and tasks will not only misalign with the ASCA standards, but takes the focus away from counselors attending to the academic, social/ emotional, and career needs of student. These unrelated tasks may also cause strife in the working relationship between counselors and principals. Incorporating the ASCA National Model to administrator certification programs would do well to not only educate principals on the current trends of the counseling profession,

but it would assist in creating consistency in the roles of school counselors nationwide. However, with newly trained administrators are gaining exposure to the ASCA standards which may be a sign of change.

A second conclusion is that school principals strongly see communication as the essential tool in creating a positive working relationship with school counselors, and in dictating the direction of the school counseling program. Administrators and counselors use a number of tools throughout the day to communicate student progress and any issues that arise. The tools include emails, phone conversations, and both scheduled and spontaneous face-to-face meetings. By maintain an open line of communication with administrators, counselors are able to advocate for both the needs of the students and for the entire counseling program. This also creates an opportunity for the alignment of mutually agreed upon goals, which creates a positive and strong learning environment for students.

The third conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that principals have a clear understanding of the attributes that are most desired in school counselors. These characteristics include counselors that have a high regard for student success, involve themselves in professional development, and those that are able to balance the various needs of students throughout their academic career. Principals also look for counselors who will hold the entire school community in high regard. Counselors can do well to immerse themselves in the activities, clubs, sporting events, and other school related experiences throughout the year. In addition to serving the needs of students, counselors can also place themselves as leaders in the community by serving as an advocate for the school, parents, teachers, and other school stakeholders.

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Appendix

Assessment of the Role of School Counselors

This assessment will help to identify current administrators' thoughts and beliefs on the role of school counselors. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

- 1) Counselors are expected to coordinate paperwork and data entry of all new students.
 strongly agree agree neither agree nor disagree disagree strongly disagree
- 2) Counselors are expected to be involved in individual student academic program planning.
 strongly agree agree neither agree nor disagree disagree strongly disagree
- 3) Counselors are expected to be coordinating cognitive, aptitude and achievement testing programs.
 strongly agree agree neither agree nor disagree disagree strongly disagree
- 4) Counselors are expected to be interpreting cognitive, aptitude and achievement tests.
 strongly agree agree neither agree nor disagree disagree strongly disagree
- 5) Counselors are expected to sign excuses for students who are tardy or absent.
 strongly agree agree neither agree nor disagree disagree strongly disagree
- 6) Counselors are expected to be providing counseling to students who are tardy or absent.
 strongly agree agree neither agree nor disagree disagree strongly disagree
- 7) Counselors are expected to perform disciplinary actions or assigning discipline consequences.
 strongly agree agree neither agree nor disagree disagree strongly disagree
- 8) Counselors are expected to provide counseling to students who have disciplinary problems.
 strongly agree agree neither agree nor disagree disagree strongly disagree
- 9) Counselors are expected to send students home who are not appropriately dressed.
 strongly agree agree neither agree nor disagree disagree strongly disagree
- 10) Counselors are expected to provide counseling to students as to appropriate school dress.
 strongly agree agree neither agree nor disagree disagree strongly disagree
- 11) Counselors are expected to be teaching classes when teachers are absent.
 strongly agree agree neither agree nor disagree disagree strongly disagree

12) Counselors are expected to collaborate with teachers to present school counseling core curriculum lessons.

strongly agree agree neither agree nor disagree disagree strongly disagree

13) Counselors are expected to compute grade-point averages.

strongly agree agree neither agree nor disagree disagree strongly disagree

14) Counselors are expected to be analyzing grade-point averages in relationship to achievement.

strongly agree agree neither agree nor disagree disagree strongly disagree

15) Counselors are expected to be maintaining student records.

strongly agree agree neither agree nor disagree disagree strongly disagree

16) Counselors are expected to interpret student records.

strongly agree agree neither agree nor disagree disagree strongly disagree

17) Counselors are expected to supervise classrooms or common areas.

Strongly agree agree neither agree nor disagree disagree strongly disagree

18) Counselors are expected to be providing teachers with suggestions for effective classroom management.

strongly agree agree neither agree nor disagree disagree strongly disagree

19) Counselors are expected to keep clerical records.

strongly agree agree neither agree nor disagree disagree strongly disagree

20) Counselors are expected to ensure student records are maintained as per state and federal regulations.

strongly agree agree neither agree nor disagree disagree strongly disagree

21) Counselors are expected to be assisting with duties in the principal's office.

strongly agree agree neither agree nor disagree disagree strongly disagree

22) Counselors are expected to be helping the school principal identify and resolve student issues, needs and problems.

strongly agree agree neither agree nor disagree disagree strongly disagree

23) Counselors are expected to be providing therapy or long-term counseling in schools to address psychological disorders.

strongly agree agree neither agree nor disagree disagree strongly disagree

24) Counselors are expected to provide individual and small-group counseling services to students.

strongly agree agree neither agree nor disagree disagree strongly disagree

25) Counselors are expected to coordinate school wide individual education plans, student study teams and school attendance review boards.

strongly agree agree neither agree nor disagree disagree strongly disagree

26) Counselors are expected to be advocating for students at individual education plan meetings, student study teams and school attendance review boards.

strongly agree agree neither agree nor disagree disagree strongly disagree

27) Counselors are expected to serve as a data entry clerk.

strongly agree agree neither agree nor disagree disagree strongly disagree

28) Counselors are expected to be analyzing disaggregated data.

strongly agree agree neither agree nor disagree disagree strongly disagree