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Abstract

This mixed method study examines the perceptions of both elementary and secondary principals in two northeastern states regarding the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model, state-specific models of School Counseling and the role of the school counselor. One state surveyed has mandatory administrative training of the ASCA National Model and a state-specific model of school counseling while the other does not have such state mandates or an implemented model of school counseling. A fifteen-question survey was sent to four hundred ninety-eight school administrators. Results indicate little difference in knowledge of the ASCA National Model between principals in both states. The results of the study and a plan to impact principal perceptions in support of the ASCA National Model are presented.

Keywords

School counseling roles, principal perceptions, training models

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Mary Amanda Graham, Kimberly J. Desmond, Erica Zinsser

This mixed method study examines the perceptions of both elementary and secondary principals in two northeastern states regarding the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model, state-specific models of School Counseling and the role of the school counselor. One state surveyed has mandatory administrative training of the ASCA National Model and a state-specific model of school counseling while the other does not have such state mandates or an implemented model of school counseling. A fifteen-question survey was sent to four hundred ninety-eight school administrators. Results indicate little difference in knowledge of the ASCA National Model between principals in both states. The results of the study and a plan to impact principal perceptions in support of the ASCA National Model are presented.

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Literature Review

School counselors and school counselor educators face many challenges. For school counselors, the support of their administrative team is imperative for facilitating their roles within the school environment. It has been documented, discussed, and verified in the literature that the roles of administrators, primarily the principal(s), are central in determining the function and tasks the school counselor will undertake within the school system

(Kirchner & Setchfield, 2005; Zalaquett, 2005; Kaplan & Evans, 1999). Ideally, school counselors and administrators work collegially in developing and implementing school counseling programs, services, and roles. Unfortunately, this may not be the case in many situations. In the field of professional school counseling there is and continues to be a pervasive struggle toward professional identity, role definition, and service delivery, as well as gaining support from administrators to facilitate the work of the school counselor as defined by the

American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model (2005) and state-specific models of school counseling.

The American School Counselor Association (2005) has taken a strong position on defining the role of the school counselor and providing a framework for professional school counselors to follow in regard to establishing and facilitating services inside the school system. Many of today's professional school counselors are being taught to provide services under the ASCA National Model and/or state-specific models of school counseling. A disconnect still remains between what emerging school counselors are being taught regarding their roles and the ASCA National Model and what the reality is in many school districts. Monteiro-Leitner, Asner-Self, Milde, Leitner, and Skelton (2006) reported administrators do not recognize the incongruence of what their school counselors should be doing and what services are being provided. The challenge may be in the pressures school administrators face regarding staffing levels, special needs students and standardized testing.

The question becomes not only how professional school counselors and school counselor educators can ensure that school administrative teams are being trained to be knowledgeable about the ASCA National Model and/or state-specific models of school counseling, but also how they can support the implementation of the models given the existing pressures faced in the school system. Poynton, Schumcher, and Wilczenski (2008) noted:

As school districts across the nation implement the ASCA National Model or a state school counseling model, consideration of what facilitates, hinders, and blocks change is significant for school counseling leaders at the state and district levels, and for professional associations guiding model implementation (p. 420).

Public Awareness of Models

According to Schwallie-Giddis, ter Maat, and Pak (2003) the ASCA National Model is an outstanding way to create and facilitate successful school counseling programs for all school stakeholders. The issue becomes how professional school counselors and counselor educators ensure school stakeholders, specifically school administrators, buy into the ASCA National Model as well as state-specific models of school counseling as the foundation for school counseling programs and school counselor roles. There have been numerous articles, books and research published focusing on the importance of the ASCA National Model and its implication for professional school counseling and the role of the school counselors as system-wide change agents (Perusse, 2004; Chata & Loesch, 2007; Dollarhide & Saginak, 2008). Lacking in the field is empirically-based evidence that establishes if current advocacy and outreach regarding the ASCA National Model and state-specific models of school counseling is impacting the level of support given by school administrators regarding model implementation and the role of the school counselor. Because of the impact school administrators have on school counseling program, this study is meant to

explore if current practices around training administrators to the ASCA National Model and state-specific models of school counseling have impacted change in school systems regarding the role and function of the school counselor.

Method

Participants

Study participants were recruited by accessing school administrators' e-mail addresses and contact information using the National and State Associations of Elementary and Secondary School Principals as well as public school websites. Four hundred ninety-eight school administrators from two northeastern states were invited to participate in this study. For the purpose of this study the researchers identified participants from a state that has a state-specific model of school counseling and state mandates for administrators to learn the ASCA National Model as Group A. The researchers then identified Group B as the group of administrators from a state in which there is not an implemented state-specific model of school counseling and no legislation regarding training of the ASCA National Model for administrators.

Group A's state code and state-specific board of education policy declare that schools have: "responsibility for providing professional development, technical assistance and support to each county board of education in the development and implementation of the comprehensive guidance and counseling program and policy, including the training

for counselors and administrators to implement the national standards specific to state code" 2315;18-5-18b.

Group A was also selected based on their state school counseling association having developed and implemented a state-specific model of school counseling. Group B, a neighboring state, was selected based on the absence of state mandates regarding the training of school administrators on school counseling programs and models. Group B has piloted a volunteer training program focusing on training school administrators and school counselors on the ASCA National Model. One hundred nine participants or 21.89% of the invited administrators chose to participate in the study.

Research Design

This exploratory study examined the following research questions:

1. Are elementary and secondary school principals aware of a state-specific school counseling model, the ASCA National Model or both models?
2. Do principals in a state that have adopted a state-specific school counseling model have increased awareness of the ASCA National Framework of School Counseling?
3. Do principals in a state that has adopted a state-specific school counseling model have an understanding and support of the role

of the school counselor as defined by ASCA?

Research was facilitated using Survey Monkey, an internet survey tool. The first e-mail contact set the groundwork, foundation, and invitation for the study. The second and third e-mail contacts included the survey link for the questionnaire and presented information regarding the researchers' sponsoring Institutional Review Board (IRB). The fourth and final e-mail was sent as a thank-you letter and a survey link to a final opportunity to participate in the study.

Instrument

Participants were asked to complete a 15-item online survey via the survey tool, Survey Monkey (See Appendix A). The survey covered items related to administrators' knowledge of state-specific models of comprehensive school counseling and the ASCA National Model. The survey was constructed by the researchers based on available literature and information regarding state-specific models of comprehensive school counseling, the ASCA National Model, and state-specific code 2315. Survey readability, usability and validity were sought by colleagues in the field of school counselor education prior to administering the survey.

The research design utilized both quantitative and qualitative design. Although the quantitative methodology in this study is both descriptive and inferential, a number of results of the survey will be presented in percentages. Researchers performed a chi-square analysis on three of the survey questions to determine if there

was statistical difference between school administrators perceptions in a state that has a state-specific model of school counseling and state mandated administrator training on the ASCA National Model in comparison to school administrators from a state that does not have an implemented model of state-specific school counseling and lacks stated mandated administrator training of the ASCA National Model. A qualitative methodology was also utilized in this research via open-ended questions on the e-mail survey to gather more descriptive details about administrator experience with the ASCA National Model and state models of school counseling. From the responses emerging themes were identified and coded based on commonality. These results are summarized below.

Results

Demographic information was collected from four survey items focusing on administrators' level (principal or vice-principal), grade level of students administrators supervised, and if they had a school counselor on staff and the number of school counselors under their guidance as administrators. Six survey items focused on participant knowledge of state-specific models of comprehensive school counseling and knowledge of the ASCA National Model. Two of the six survey items focusing on knowledge of the ASCA National Model were open-ended questions allowing the participants to provide written responses. Three survey items focused on administrators' perceptions of the roles and responsibilities of the school counselor. All

of these were open-ended questions allowing the participants to provide written responses. The final item in the survey was an open-ended question for participants allowing opportunity for additional responses. The reader might note several percentages adding up to more than 100%. This is due to the fact participants were permitted to select more than one item on the survey.

Group A

Group A consisted of 56 participants. Eighty-three percent of the respondents identified as principals, and 18.9% identified as vice-principals. Elementary administrators comprised 35.7% of respondents, 39.3% were middle school administrators, 21.4% were high school administrators and 7.1% worked in both middle-high school buildings. Of those surveyed, 96.4% of participants reported having a school counselor. When Group A was asked if they had knowledge of the ASCA National Model, 21.4% indicated they did have knowledge of the model. Of the 18 administrators who responded to the question of how they gained knowledge of the ASCA National Model, 27.8% of the participants indicated they learned of the ASCA National Model through their state principals' association, 5.6% through colleagues, and 72.2% from their school counselor. When asked if they were familiar with a state-specific model of school counseling (Group A does have a state-specific model in place), of the 53 respondents 25.9% stated they did have knowledge of a state model, while 74.1% said they did not have knowledge of state-

specific model of school counseling. Of those who responded to having knowledge of a state-specific model of counseling, 27.3% indicated learning about the model through their principals' association, while 9.1% learned about it through colleagues and 54.5% through their school counselor.

Group B

Group B (without a state-specific model of school counseling) consisted of 53 participants. Of those who responded, 69.8% identified as principals and 30.2% identified as vice-principals. Elementary administrators comprised 32.1% of respondents, 32.1% middle school administrators, 26.4% high school, 7.5% middle-high school and 1.9% indicated they were an administrator of a K through 12 building. Ninety-eight percent of the participants reported having a school counselor in the building. When group B was asked if they had knowledge of the ASCA National Model, 32.7% indicated they did have knowledge of the model while 69.2% indicated they did not have knowledge of the model. Of the 20 administrators who responded to the question of how they gained knowledge of the ASCA National Model, 20% of the participants indicated they learned of the ASCA National Model through their state principals' association, 90.0% from their school counselor, 5% from the state school counseling association and 5% from the national school counseling association. When asked if they were familiar with a state-specific model of school counseling (Group B does not have an implemented state-specific model of school counseling),

24.5% stated they did have knowledge of a state model while 75.5% said they did not have knowledge of state-specific model of school counseling. Of those who responded to having knowledge of a state-specific model of counseling, 15.4% indicated learning about the model through colleagues, 76.9% through their school counselor and 7.7% through the national school counseling association.

A chi-square analysis was also used to address if there was statistical significance in the responses of administrators who have school counseling training per mandated state legislature and whose state school counseling association has implemented a state-specific model of school counseling. The focus of the questions was:

1. Do administrators in a state where there is administrator school counseling training and a state-specific model of school counseling recognize what the acronym ASCA stands for?
2. Do administrators in a state where there is administrator school counseling training and a state-specific model of school counseling have knowledge of the ASCA National Model of School Counseling?
3. Do administrators in a state where there is a state-specific model of school counseling have knowledge of said model?

On question one regarding knowledge of the ASCA acronym, the chi-

square revealed statistical significance $X(1,109) = 8.171, p=.004 <.05$. The analysis revealed Group B did have knowledge of the acronym ASCA in comparison to Group A. On question two regarding having knowledge of the ASCA National Model (Framework), the chi-square revealed no statistical significance ($X(1, 109) = 1.625, p = .202 >.05$) between Group A and B. On the final question regarding gaining knowledge of a state-specific model of guidance, the chi-square revealed no statistical significance ($X(1, 107) = .028, p = .868 >.05$) between Groups A and B.

Qualitative analysis of the open-ended research questions revealed themes under each of the following three questions:

(1) Briefly describe your understanding of the ASCA National Model and or state-specific model of school counseling.

Group A

One theme that emerged from this question was the identification of specific components of either the ASCA National Model or state-specific model. More specifically, participants named components of each of the models. Within Group A, those with a state-specific model, participants commented that school counselors spend 75% of their time in direct service to students. One participant stated, "There are specifications that a counselor should be working with children at least 75% or more of the time available." This allotment is consistent with the state's model of school counseling. Other participants identified descriptors such as "preventive",

“developmental”, “design”, “implement”, and “manage”; terms that are all consistent with the ASCA National Model and state-specific models of school counseling.

Group B

The theme of helping students succeed emerged from the answers to this question from the state without a State-Specific Model of School Counseling. More specifically, one participant commented, “The ASCA model reflects a comprehensive approach to program foundation, delivery, management, and accountability. The model provides the mechanism with which school counselors and school counseling teams will design, coordinate, implement, manage, and evaluate their programs for students’ success.” Another participant said the model exists “to help students succeed in school academically by giving them the personal/social help they may need.” Another theme that emerged was the ASCA National Model being a source of support for school counselors and students. One administrator explained that “It is designed to support school counselors.” Another stated that it “support[s] the efforts of counselors and their work with students in the academic, career, and personal areas.”

(2) What thoughts do you have on the relevance and/or importance of school counseling program models?

Group A

One theme that emerged from the group of participants with a state model of school counseling was the lack of significance of models of school counseling.

More specifically one participant commented, “We’re doing just fine without a National Model.” Another participant agreed sharing, “Principals do not follow them anyway, and so what is the point?” Several other participants answered “none” that school counseling program models are irrelevant and unimportant. Conversely, another theme that emerged from the responses to this question was the value of the school counseling models. One participant stated, “I feel like the ASCA Model is very relevant and can be useful to school counselors in a school setting.” Another echoed similar sentiments, “[the models are] very important to the well-being of our students, parents and community.”

Group B

The theme of school counseling programs being an integral component of the school was evident in the responses from the participants without a state-specific model of school counseling. One participant commented, “Counselors are integral to schools, primarily with regard to helping student to be ready to learn and providing assistance for the development of the whole child.” Another stated that school counseling is an “integral part of the school team.” In addition, another participant explained, “[models] provide a guide for identifying job responsibilities and expectation.

(3) Identify some of the responsibilities of the school counselor in your building or district.

Group A

A theme of student support emerged from the participants with a state-specific model of school counseling. One participant stated that school counselors provide “[s]tudent support on an individual basis, small group counseling, and classroom developmental counseling.” Another wrote that their school counselor gave “[d]irect student support [and was a] coordinator of state tests.” Inappropriate roles of a school counselor were also identified by the administrators. For example, discipline emerged as a theme among some of the administrators who answered this question. One stated the role of a school counselor was “504, discipline/counseling” and another shared “student support, teacher support, [and] discipline” as responsibilities of the school counselor.

Group B

The participants from the state without a state-specific model of school counseling identified roles of a school counselor that are in line with appropriate roles of the professional school counselor outlined by ASCA. One participant identified “individual counseling, group counseling, academic counseling, special needs student support, preliminary career advice, [and] teacher support” as some of the responsibilities of the school counselor. Another shared that some responsibilities were “[w]orking with students and parents. Helping teachers who ask about students and related issues...”

Results Summary

The results of the quantitative data indicated a minimal statistical difference between administrators’ knowledge of the ASCA National Model from states with and without state mandated training and state-specific models of school counseling. The chi-square analysis revealed administrators from Group B (a state without mandatory training) did have knowledge of the acronym ASCA in comparison to Group A (a state with mandatory training) but found there no statistical difference in overall knowledge of the actual framework of the model(s) between groups.

The themes that emerged from the qualitative data suggested that there is still much to be learned from the implementation of either the ASCA National Model or a state-specific model of school counseling. The qualitative results of this survey are consistent with the literature identifying the need for a greater understanding of the professional identity of the professional school counselor including clearer roles and responsibilities (ASCA, 2005; Schwallie-Giddis, ter Maat, & Pak, 2003).

Discussion

Within the context of the current study and in relation to literature surrounding models of school counseling, the authors have identified four recommendations for building collaboration between professional school counselors, school counselor educators, and school administrators. The first recommendation is to give consideration to the incorporation of

learning communities and partnerships between counselor educators and educational leadership faculty. Given the proximity of many school counseling training programs to educational leadership programs it seems reasonable and pertinent that those faculty members from both domains to not only collaborate but also consider team teaching. The nature of the school environment is conducive to professionals teaming to meet the needs of the students. In fact, this is a theme identified by the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2005). Based on this prevalent philosophy in public schools it is unclear why collaborative teaching and learning environments are not the norm in university training programs. According to Amatea and Clark (2005), it would be advantageous for school counselor educators to team teach and create learning communities with faculty in educational leadership programs, school psychology programs, and other related school programs to create leadership teams prior to students entering the field.

A second recommendation is to encourage faculty in school counselor training programs to educate emerging school counselors in ways that help them view themselves holistically (Amatea & Clark, 2005). More specifically, this involves teaching emerging school counseling students how to understand a holistic service approach and how to conduct themselves as school leaders. The research is limited regarding the number of school counseling training programs that actually facilitate this learning process for students. If school counselor educators were

consistent in their delivery of curriculum for students that supported their role as collaborative school leaders, it might directly impact the consistency of how school counselors are viewed in the field as well as assist them in gaining support for implementation of the ASCA National Model and state-specific models of school counseling.

A third recommendation includes a responsibility of school counselor educators to offer support in the field to those providing direct service. Outreach by faculty to local school districts offering training opportunities and support for implementation of the national and state models to school counselors and administrators is essential. School counselors and school counseling faculty should consider presenting the models at state and national principals' associations. Universities in which school counseling programs are housed could offer free and continuing credit hours to school administrators and school counselors for training on the ASCA National Model and state-specific models of school counseling. Faculty internship instructors should consider meeting with principals to discuss and provide information and support regarding the implementation of the national and state models of school counseling as well as incorporating this topic in meetings with their school counseling student and the site supervisor during regular site visits. Faculty outreach and advocacy needs to go beyond words in a classroom through offering support in the field.

Fourth, the research in this study indicated there is a gap in the training, understanding, and support of the ASCA National Model and state-specific models of school counseling from both school administrators who have and do not have mandatory administrative training in place. In order for school counselors to fulfill their roles as set forth by the ASCA National Model, school administrators need to understand the role of the school counselor as delineated by ASCA, the importance of the school counselor in system-wide change, and the value of the national model as the foundation for a comprehensive school counseling program. Chata and Loesch (2007) explained that principals hold widely different views of the role of the professional school counselor and their responsibilities in the school. Kirchner and Schetfield (2005) offered another perspective suggesting, "it may not be principals' lack of understanding of counselor roles that leads to poor allocation of counselors' time, but the real demands of the work setting that impinge on both roles" (p. 13). This quandary warrants further investigation to add to the body of knowledge and understanding about the relationship between the professional school counselor and administration in the implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program.

Limitations and Future Research

The current study was facilitated with two northeastern states. To strengthen the study, larger nationally-focused research would be appropriate. Future research should consider including school counselors

as well as administrators. This would aid in the investigation of the variance of school counselors' perceptions versus administrators' perceptions regarding model implementation. It would also be pertinent to further investigate the level of administrative team support for model implementation. Research should also be facilitated with school counselor educators to investigate the number of programs nationally that are teaching school counseling students to adhere to the ASCA National Model and state models of school counseling.

The survey, in order to encourage participation, was short in length. Future surveys conducted could include themes of the ASCA National Model and state-specific models of school counseling and give the opportunity for participants to identify such themes being facilitated in their schools. It is quite possible that the themes, concepts, and foundations of the ASCA National Model and state-specific models of school counseling are alive and well in many schools. The challenge for school counselors and administrators may be to think about how to formalize and link counseling program services to models of school counseling. More specifically, it may be that schools are providing services that are consistent with professional school counseling programs, but are not yet identifying the link to the model.

It is essential to uncover the roadblocks to the support of the ASCA National Model and/or state-specific models of school counseling in order to advocate

more intentionally for the role and services

of the professional school counselor.

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Appendix A

Survey Questions (to be facilitated through Survey Monkey) (attachment # 5)

1. Are you a (circle the appropriate title)?

Principal

Vice Principal

Other

2. What grade levels of students are in your building?

Elementary

Middle

Secondary/High School

3. Do you have a school counselor (s) working in your building?

Yes

No

4. How many school counselors work in your building?

1

2

3

4 or more

5. Do you have knowledge of the ASCA National Model?

Yes

No

If you answered yes, what does the acronym ASCA stand for?

6. Where did you learn about the ASCA National Model?

Principals' association

Colleagues

School counselor

School counseling association

Other

7. Are you aware of a state-specific school counseling model?

Yes

No

8. If you answered yes to the above question, where did you learn about the state-specific school counseling model?

Principals' association
Colleagues
School counselor
School counseling association
Other _____

9. Describe your understanding of the ASCA National Model and/or State-specific Model of School Counseling

10. What thoughts do you have on the relevance and/or importance of models of school counseling programs?

11. What do you see as the primary role of the school counselor? (check one)

Administrative Support
Teacher Support
Direct Student Support
Disciplinary/Vice Principal Role
Systems Support

12. Identify the responsibilities of the professional school counselor in your building or district.

13. How were the roles of the school counselor established in your building? (check/circle one)

ASCA National Model
Principal Established Roles and Responsibilities
School Board Established Roles and Responsibilities
Other _____

14. Any other comments or questions?