

TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF THE ROLE OF A SCHOOL COUNSELOR

by

Katherine E. Skutley

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Dr. Amy L. Gillett
Research Advisor

The Graduate School

University of Wisconsin-Stout

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**The Graduate School
University of Wisconsin-Stout
Menomonie, WI**

Author: Skutley, Katherine E.

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ABSTRACT

Schools and school professionals today face a tremendous range of challenges created by cultural, political, economic, and social changes occurring in the twenty-first century. Given this daunting array of challenges, school counselors need to clearly educate and explain their role as an integral member in the total educational environment. Now more than ever, school counselors are challenged to demonstrate and gain evidence of their effectiveness. Through data collection and documentation, accountability can be shown and support can continue to link student success to the school counseling profession.

The purpose of this study was to examine teacher perceptions of the role of a school counselor and the services delivered in a middle school in the Eau Claire Area School District. Data was collected through the use of a survey during the fall semester of the 2006-2007 school year. This study investigated the

perceived needs of students, preferred counseling services, and the strengths and needs of the current guidance program.

The findings from this study revealed the top three teacher-perceived issues facing middle school students. The identified issues were: peer pressure, unsupportive home environments, and bullying/teasing. In addition, the results of the study presented the teacher-preferred counseling services of individual and small group counseling for their students. While more of these services were also recognized as needs of the guidance department, the additional needs of increased staffing and visibility in the school were mentioned as well. Lastly, many perceived strengths overlapped with recommendations named by the teachers. Overall, the teachers expressed the desire for counselors to continually be involved with them as well as in the students' lives.

The Graduate School
University of Wisconsin Stout
Menomonie, WI

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Chapter One: Introduction

As a result of the continued request for increased accountability in education, there is heightened awareness and interest by all members of the school community to ensure that proper and effective programming is defined and implemented. Teachers, administrators, counselors, students, parents, as well as other personnel in the system all hold considerable stake in the evaluation of our school services. School counselors, due to their unique situation in working with students and school staff, often find varied perspectives of how others see their roles and responsibilities defined. Through the examination of these perspectives, the ultimate goal is to bring clarity to the counselor role and thus support for the entire guidance program.

In order to understand how counselors work with students and staff in school guidance programs today, it is important to recognize the evolution of the profession first. The school counseling profession traces back to the early 1900's where it had the sole purpose of vocational guidance. It was developed in response to the economic and social problems of those times. Teachers were assigned to the counseling position, in addition to their regular teaching duties (Gysbers, 2001). As times progressed, new complexities arose and additional challenges to students and staff surfaced. It became evident that guidance programs needed to change with the times.

Historically, as it was just presented, teachers were the providers of guidance in the schools. Through this, despite the changing times, teachers still hold great interest in ensuring that effective guidance programs exist in our schools. Teachers feel as though their jobs are becoming more demanding, with increasing diversity, behavior concerns, academic, and personal/social needs of the students needing to be met. They tend to

center much of their attention on their classroom and the individual students within the room. On the other hand, counselors “tend to have a more holistic view of the school and its organization” (Clark & Amatea, 2004, p. 140). As working, collaborative relationships build between teachers and counselors, it is essential that both parties understand the roles of the other. In attempts to study what research stated about how teachers view the role of a school counselor, limited literature was available. Two studies, one conducted by Clark and Amatea (2004) and another by Beesley (2004), emphasized the lack of research that exists on teacher perceptions of counselor roles and responsibilities. In addition, both studies also discussed feedback regarding strengths and needs of the reviewed guidance programs. This feedback can have great impact on counseling programs and support for them.

Previously learned information and research, in regards to feedback teachers have provided regarding school counseling programs, is valuable and essential to examine as this profession moves forward. In recent years, as school budgets have tightened, school positions have been cut, and as student enrollment has transitioned, school counseling programs will need to use insight from the past to strengthen the support for the program in the future. Present school counselors will need to work towards evaluating current programs, while continuing the development and implementation of a comprehensive guidance program. Fortunately, the school counseling profession has several strong professional organizations on its side, including the American Association of Counseling and Development (AACD) and the American School Counseling Association (ASCA). Through the work of committees and these organizations, the ASCA National Standards for School Counseling Programs were eventually developed. These standards have

helped to guide necessary changes to the school counseling profession and will help to continue to lead counselors into the future (Beesley, 2004).

The ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2003) stated that a school counseling program should be “comprehensive in scope, preventative in design and developmental in nature” (p. 13). The model continued by emphasizing that school counseling programs need to service all students in the academic, career, and personal/social domains. It stressed the need to collaborate with all significant adults in the school community. As this occurs, school counseling programs will support the missions and visions of our schools and will be powerful advocates for all students (ASCA, 2003).

The school counseling profession has many resources to pull from as it continues to remain accountable in our educational system today. The history of this career is deep and progressive, gaining support from other professionals all along the way. Its present status, despite the lack of concrete, written evaluations, appears positive. Teachers, administrators, and parents know of the difficult times educational positions are facing, however, recognize the abilities of a counselor to do a job very different than the ones they do. Our school communities recognize that counselors meet with students in very unique situations. They also recognize that students are working through very complex issues and challenging times. This draws in continued support for the profession as well. Lastly, using its past and current position, counselors know that they must increase the documentation of the effectiveness of their programs. As this occurs, support, especially teacher support, will increase as well. As counselors gain evidence of their effectiveness, it needs to be shared with teachers and others in order to educate them on the benefits of effective school counseling programs. This education will allow for further

understanding of the role of a school counselor which will, in turn, demonstrate accountability and gain support overall for the continued status of the school counseling program in the future.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to document teacher perceptions of the role of a school counselor as reported by middle school teachers in the Eau Claire Area School District. Data was collected through the use of a survey during the fall semester of the 2006-2007 school year.

Research Questions

There are three research questions this study attempted to answer. The questions were:

1. How do teachers perceive the role of a school counselor?
2. What types of services do teachers consider to be the most valuable provided by their school counselor?
3. What do teachers perceive to be guidance and counseling needs of their school and how might their school counselor address these?

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this research, there were four terms that needed to be defined for clarity of understanding. These terms were:

Guidance Program: A developmental program that allows students to acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for their life career development (Gysbers & Henderson, 2001).

Perception: The opinions or beliefs held by another person.

Role: The typical duties or job responsibilities taken on by a school counselor.

Teacher: A person whose primary job responsibility is to deliver curriculum in a classroom setting. Those individuals who support the direct instruction of students are excluded from this category. Examples include lunchroom staff, secretaries, teacher aides, administrators, counselors, and custodians.

Assumptions and Limitations

It was assumed that all study participants answered the questions honestly. It was also recognized that the participants might have answered the survey questions in a manner they thought the researcher would have wanted them to, because the researcher was known to some of the participants. Lastly, it was assumed that the participants had a basic understanding or knowledge of the role of a school counselor.

For the purposes of this research, a survey was given to teachers within a public middle school located in the Eau Claire Area School District. The middle school services both rural and urban students in grades six through eight, consequently, these results should be used with caution when generalizing to other subjects, schools, or locations.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter will begin with an examination of the history behind the school counseling profession. It will discuss the evolution of school counseling philosophies, as well as transitions the profession has seen organizationally. As the discussion moves into the present or current school counseling model, a closer look will be taken at previously conducted research. This research will present how school professionals, specifically teachers, perceive school counseling programs to be meeting the needs of their districts. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of how the school counseling profession can utilize conducted research for future planning. Role definition, data collection, and continued accountability will be emphasized.

The Evolution of Guidance and Counseling in the Schools

School counseling emerged in the late 1800s and early 1900s in response to social, political, and economic issues of those times. It was a time where many immigrants traveled to the United States in search of opportunities, as this country was intensely immersed in the Industrial Revolution. As industries grew, a migration of people from farm communities was noticeable. People were in need of being matched with jobs and societal changes became prevalent. As social reform occurred, the call for school reform came as well. Guidance was born at this time. Frank Parsons, the man considered to be the father of guidance, along with the help of other key individuals, became influential in ensuring that schools provided the types of education needed by this newly forming society that was rapidly unfolding in the United States (Gysbers & Henderson, 2001; Herr, 2002).

Early 1900s

According to Gysbers and Henderson (2001), the early implementation of guidance and counseling in the schools was accomplished by assigning teachers to the position of vocational counselor. In the early 1900s, vocational guidance was the term for guidance and counseling. As previously discussed, the vocational emphasis of guidance at this time was present in response to the reforming conditions of society. Students needed to be prepared to enter the world of work and teachers were the ones appointed to assist them with this endeavor. Teachers acquired this role, in addition to the others they already held, and were asked to perform all of the duties with no formal organizational structure.

1920s to 1950s

Concern began to arise in the 1920s regarding both the heavy loads of vocational counselors in the schools, as well as the lack of an overall guidance program. In the 1930s, a new organizational structure emerged for guidance and counseling. The new structure was called pupil personnel work and it included attendance officers, visiting teachers, school nurses, school physicians, and vocational counselors. This organizational structure allowed guidance and counseling to be one of the services offered within the schools (Gysbers, 2001).

The focus and purpose of guidance changed during this time as well. The vocational needs of industry and the military during World War I stimulated the development of aptitude testing and guidance. The years of the Great Depression set in and new findings about individual differences and their influences on educational and vocational tasks were discovered. While a vocational emphasis still existed in guidance,

topics such as mental health, child development, measurement, and progressive education surfaced and caused transition. An educational shift occurred and student psychological/clinical, personal, and educational issues began to dominate the field (Gysbers, 2001).

1950s to 1960s

The school counseling profession continued to expand with the development of the American School Counseling Association (ASCA) in 1953 (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). Additionally, the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) of 1958 had a major impact on guidance in the schools as well. The passage of NDEA resulted from the Soviet Union Sputnik launch in 1957. The NDEA made funds available to upgrade the skills of already employed school counselors, to prepare more individuals to become school counselors, to support the level of elementary counselors, and to acquire resources necessary to aid in the development of guidance and counseling programs. The Act also emphasized the improvement of curriculum and instruction in science and mathematics. School counselors became the individuals in charge of identifying strong students who had the capability of moving into higher education in the sciences and mathematics (Gysbers, 2001; Herr, 2002)

Carl Rogers, known as the father of counseling, and his person-centered therapy continued to emerge through this decade. In fact, “Rogers likely had the greatest effect of any individual on the development of the counseling profession” (Lambie & Williamson, 2004, p. 125). Rogers emphasized the therapeutic relationship as a central element in the counseling process. His research on the power of the therapeutic relationship encouraged school counselors to view their clients holistically, rather than

simply focus on their problems. As vocational and career plans were still important topics to discuss between students and school counselors, a broadened approach and position was taken to address more of the needs students had.

1960s to 1990s

Throughout the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, additional national trends, professional literature, and legislation guided school counselors through several updates in their profession. In the 1960s, largely due to the NDEA, more and more full-time personnel began providing guidance and counseling in the schools. The structure previously called pupil personnel work was changed to pupil personnel services. Not only did this change identify school counselors as individuals who provided services within the school, but it also included additional professional positions such as school psychologists, social workers, school counselors, and nurses (Gysbers & Henderson, 2001).

While the 1960s maintained a belief in the importance of career guidance, the guidance and counseling program gradually assumed more of a developmental concept as the 1970s began. Unfortunately, the 1970s was a period of declining school enrollment and difficult times for school counselors. Budgetary concerns in schools reduced the number of school counselor positions. The school counselors who remained were asked to assume additional roles, often ones that were not counseling related (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). During this time, in response to the challenges the profession had, a strong interest was taken in building developmental guidance programs that could be held accountable to meeting the needs of all students.

In 1975, the Education for all Handicapped Children Act aided in expanding the role of school counselors. This legislation mandated that all children, with an emphasis on exceptional children, be provided with a free and appropriate public education. In 1983, the National Commission of Excellence in Education published *A Nation at Risk*. This report further promoted the role of school counselors, as it recognized an achievement decline in students (cited in Lambie & Williamson, 2004). Although many other policies and pieces of legislation could be discussed, this focus will shift towards the work of implementing comprehensive developmental guidance programs in the schools. The history from the 1960s through the 1990s continuously pushed school counseling models to be refined and reformulated. As a program orientation is discussed, consider the rich history behind what once was identified as more of a position service. The past of this profession has built many of the values that still hold strong today.

Current Models in School Counseling

Until recently, the role of a school counselor in developing a comprehensive program was not clearly defined. Over time, it has been shown that school counselors support students in their growth, but the extent to what this has been expected has been unclear to many. This profession has “suffered from a lack of consistent identity, lack of basic philosophy, and consequently, a lack of legitimization” (ASCA, 2003, p. 1). In response, ASCA has recently published a national model containing national standards that many comprehensive professional school counseling programs are implementing (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). This model, in addition to the Wisconsin Developmental Guidance Model (WDGM), will be examined in greater detail. These models have provided school counseling programs with recommendations for role definition, time

allotments, and appropriate role responsibilities. While these models were recently developed and most likely will change in the future, they hold to be a great asset to the current position of the profession today.

It is important to recognize that the development of the ASCA National Model grew from the research and compilation of three successful counseling programs that have been implemented in school districts already. To give credit to these programs is necessary and essential in knowing that the ASCA model is derived from strong professionals working in the field. The programs were the Norm Gysbers and Pat Henderson model, the Sharon Johnson and Curly Johnson model, and the Bob Myrick model (ASCA, 2003).

The ASCA model began at a foundational level, emphasizing the beliefs, philosophies, and content standards in the three domains of academic, career, and personal/social, with which school counseling programs should operate. From here it moved into a second level, examining the management and delivery of counseling programs. In regards to the delivery, the ASCA model addressed four different approaches in how counseling services should be implemented. These approaches included the implementation of developmental lessons through a guidance curriculum, individual student planning, responsive services, and systems support (ASCA, 2003).

To discuss the management of a school counseling program, the ASCA model attended to the use of data in comprehensive programs, the importance of having an action plan across all grade levels, and to the distribution of a counselor's time. For example, according to ASCA (2003), middle level counselors should spend 15%-25% of their time doing individual student planning.

Lastly, the final level of the ASCA National Model stressed the accountability and evaluation of school counseling programs. It expressed a desire to not only have student results reported, but to have school counselors and their programs evaluated over time (ASCA, 2003).

The Wisconsin Developmental Guidance Model (WDGM) built the content of developmental guidance programs around nine competencies. The development of these competencies was supported by various pieces of professional literature, ethical codes, and professional organizations, one of which was ASCA. The nine WDGM competencies included: connect family, school, and work, solve problems, understand diversity, inclusiveness and fairness, work in groups, manage conflict, integrate growth and development, direct change, make decisions, and set and achieve goals.

The competencies, as applied in developmental guidance programs, also were distributed into three domains with which a student operates. The WDGM domains of educational, personal/social health, and career, matched well with the ASCA domains (WDPI, 2003). The concepts, represented in the WDGM model as competencies, have provided the framework upon which developmental guidance programming can be planned and implemented. As this was done, the WDGM model specified the importance of assessment and evaluation of programming. Ultimately, using the ASCA and WDGM models as guides, Wisconsin school counselors have a strong outline for how to best build their programs to meet the developmental needs of their students.

School Counselor Perceptions of their Roles

The researched models clearly stated suggested emphases, procedures, and role responsibilities for school counselors. Despite this, school administrators, teachers,

parents, and even counselors themselves view the role differently in how counseling skills and time should best be spent. In a study conducted by Burnham and Jackson (2000), school counselors reported how their time was utilized in comparison to various model suggestions. From the study, it became evident that school counselors were performing functions described in current program models. However, discrepancies and wide differences did stand out. In regards to the specific delivery methods, it was found that school counselors reported relying too heavily on individual counseling for a variety of different reasons. In addition to this, counselors stated that they implemented small group and whole class instruction into their programs, but it was found that the methods these counselors used when implementing groups needed to be refined somewhat. Lastly, it was clear that counselors took part in consultation with colleagues, as well as with families (Burnham & Jackson, 2000). The counselors in this study also reported on what duties they performed at school that were not counseling related. The concerning results yielded responses that ranged from counselors holding scheduling and nursing/medical duties to working as the testing coordinator within their school (Burnham & Jackson, 2000).

Paisley and McMahon identified additional challenges to the school counseling profession. They began with the ambiguity of the role, as discussed briefly above. They also recognized the increased demand for technological sophistication, accountability, and professional development. Setting appropriate boundaries, increasing diversity, and forming numerous collaborative partnerships were also discussed (cited in Whiston, 2002). School counselors work in a field pulled between different expectations and responsibilities. In response, strong empirical support, of which there currently is not

much, needs to be gathered in order to verify how school counselors should be spending their time. In turn, the collected data could help determine what programs and activities are most beneficial to students, and counselors could implement these recognizably supported interventions, thus gaining support for at-risk counseling programs (Whiston, 2002).

Teacher Perceptions of the Role of a School Counselor

There has been very little written about the perceptions of teachers towards influencing the counseling programs in their schools. Yet, teachers are the professionals who are with students for the majority of a school day and those who work with counselors to remove barriers blocking student abilities to feel academic success. Teacher knowledge, expectations, and perceptions can have great impact on students, parents, and administrators, and therefore on counseling programs (Clark & Amatea, 2004).

In a study conducted by Clark and Amatea (2004), teachers reported needing help from school counselors in getting their job done. The theme of communication and collaboration emerged from this study. Teachers emphasized the importance of counselor-teacher communication, as well as collaboration and teamwork. Interestingly, teachers also expressed their valuing of counselors providing direct services to students through both small group and classroom guidance lessons. Individual counseling was mentioned as well as an effective method for working with students, despite the recognition that this took much of a counselor's time. Additionally, teachers expressed a desire for counselor visibility and school-wide involvement. They identified counselors as an integral part of building a positive school community. Lastly, teachers talked about

the special needs of students in their schools. They mentioned that the role of a school counselor was not only being knowledgeable about their students' special needs, but also being able to point them towards resources needed when working with these students (Clark & Amatea, 2004). Two further findings that emerged from this study were unique, but positive for school counselors. Educating teachers about the roles of school counselors and counselors not performing administrative tasks such as scheduling and testing were mentioned. This data lent itself quite well in building support for the implementation of the ASCA National Model, as well as continuing the strength of developmental guidance programs within our schools (Clark & Amatea, 2004).

Another study, conducted by Beesley (2004), surveyed K-12 classroom teachers about their perceptions of the effectiveness of school counseling services within their school settings. Overall, it was found that teachers were satisfied with their school counseling services and reported strengths in several areas. These areas included classroom guidance, individual and group counseling, consultation, and coordination of special education services. Through an analysis of the data collected, suggestions for improvement in services were also found. The top four areas for recommended improvement were career counseling, academic planning/college preparation, community referrals, and public relations (Beesley, 2004).

Using teacher data is a powerful way to help in the development of a guidance and counseling plan, as well as in building a support system for the program. Teachers in both studies expressed a need for counselor support. As teachers are often the first ones exposed to student concerns, it is only in students' best interests that the counselors and teachers build collaborative, working relationships in order to get students the help they

may need. The reviewed data supported the perceived importance of the role of school counselors, but it also emphasized the needs of increased role education, as well as further documented research. Both the past and this present information will help guide the school counseling profession into its next steps and visions.

Roles and Responsibilities of Current School Counselors

According to Lenhardt and Young (2001), the “school counseling profession has arrived at a crossroads, one pointedly marked by the need to define the profession, create a unified identity, and establish a public presence” (p. 187). Throughout the presented research, it has been clearly evident that school counselors have recently faced these tough challenges in their profession. There has been a continued call for accountability and credibility in school counseling programs. School counselors are being asked to give evidence of what they do, but more so, they are also being asked to articulate how what they do makes a difference in students’ lives (Gysbers, 2004).

The theme of accountability should ideally be seen as an opportunity in this profession. The time for action has been set. Being active applies to both providing strong guidance and counseling services to students, and to assisting in the development of policy at the local, state, and federal levels (Gysbers, 2001). Consistent with this is the consideration taken to the ASCA National Standards and how they help to bring some clarification on the role and function of a school counselor. Despite this, many administrators, teachers, and parents are still not aware that these standards exist, nor of what they suggest for counseling programs (Whiston, 2002). School counselors can and should share their expertise and knowledge of the ASCA National Model in order to educate the larger school community of which they work. In connection with this, school

counselors need to work to maintain the delivery of a comprehensive guidance program. Student-to-counselor ratios, time allotments, and delivery methods are specified in the standards and fall underneath this issue.

As school communities become educated, current school counseling programs can become strengthened and enriched through the consistent work of their counselors. Lenhardt and Young (2001) provided the recommendations of keeping accurate records and data regarding the effectiveness of counseling programs, conducting research regarding the efficacy of school counseling programs, establishing network systems by maintaining regular contact with influential school community members, completing needs assessments within schools, and lastly, marketing the present school counseling programs. Many of these recommendations match the purposes conducted by this research. Furthermore, Whiston (2002) stated the need for more research documenting the efficacy of school counseling programs and that most school counselors truly want to help students. Yet, without determining and knowing what programs and activities are most beneficial and helpful to students, students essentially cannot be helped.

Throughout time, in particular since the passage of the National Defense Education Act, school counselors have been identified as professionals who support the overall school community, as well as students within the school. School counselors will continue to be key players in this new century and through this, they must assume responsibility for the continued development and growth of the profession. Counseling is built with a foundation in teamwork. By joining together, counselors can be a powerful force in the movement toward assuring that children today have the programming necessary to meet their needs (Lenhardt & Young, 2001).

Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter will begin with the subject selection and description, followed by a thorough explanation of the instrumentation used. An overview of the data collection and analysis will be provided. The chapter will conclude with the methodological limitations.

Subject Selection and Description

The subjects of this study were sixth through eighth grade certified teachers in the Eau Claire Area School District. Using the cluster method, teachers were selected from one middle school in this district and all certified teachers of the school, regardless of grade level taught, subject matter taught, part-time or full-time status, or years of teaching experience, were asked to participate in this study. The school's principal was contacted and approved the study prior to contacting the teachers. The school was comprised of approximately 900 students with middle-class socioeconomic status. The middle school serviced both rural and urban students in grades six through eight. Teacher participation was voluntary and the teachers' names remained confidential and were not used in the study.

Instrumentation

Prior to beginning the study, the survey was submitted and approved by the UW-Stout Institutional Review Board. A copy of the letter of approval can be found in Appendix A.

A cover letter was included as part of the survey. The cover letter informed participants of the purposes for the research, the fact that their completion of the survey implied their consent, confidentiality, and the ability to withdraw from the study at any point in time. A copy of the cover letter is located in Appendix B.

The survey portion of the study was designed to collect descriptive information and was based on current research that was reviewed by the researcher. The questions were made to be simple and easy to answer in a short amount of time. The survey consisted of two sections. The first section asked for minimal demographic information. The second section asked teachers to give their opinion on six questions regarding the role of a school counselor. The complete survey was eight questions and required approximately 5 to 15 minutes to complete. Because the survey was designed specifically for this study, there were no measures of reliability or validity. A copy of the final survey can be found in Appendix C.

Data Collection Procedures

The school's principal and counseling department were contacted in order to gain their consent and approval to carry out this study. The cover letters and surveys were placed in each teacher's mailbox in October 2006. In addition, they were emailed as an attachment to all of the teachers at this time. The survey was then collected in an envelope that was placed near the mailboxes. Sixty-nine surveys were distributed which accounted for all certified teachers within this building. Twenty-five surveys were collected.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics, using percentages and frequencies, were used to analyze the data. This information was then used to address the research questions. The chapters that follow will provide a presentation of the findings and discuss any conclusions based on the analysis.

Limitations

One limitation of the study was that the survey had no reliability or validity measures documented. Also, the researcher realized that this instrument was used on teachers who work at a public middle school in the Eau Claire Area School District. Therefore, the results of this survey should be used with caution when generalizing to teacher perceptions in other school districts. A final limitation was that, due to collegial relationships, teachers might have filled out the survey only because they recognized that it would benefit the researcher.

Chapter Four: Results

This chapter presents the results of the survey that was completed by sixth through eighth grade certified teachers at a middle school in the Eau Claire Area School District in October 2006. The survey collected information about the teachers' perceptions of school counseling services and the current guidance program within their school. The first part of the chapter will discuss demographic information of the participating teachers. It will also include an item analysis of the survey questions. The chapter will conclude with an examination of how the data collected answered the research questions of the study.

Demographic Information

Sixty-nine surveys were distributed to the teachers in their school district mailboxes in October 2006. The teachers were instructed to place completed surveys in an envelope labeled "completed surveys" located on the mailroom bulletin board. Twenty-five surveys were completed and returned to the envelope. This resulted in a 36.2% return rate.

The only demographic information asked was current teaching position description and number of years employed as a teacher. Of the 25 participants, 52% (n=13) of the sample described themselves as core classroom teachers. In addition, out of the 25 respondents, 9 teachers (36%) were encore classroom teachers and 3 teachers (12%) were special education teachers.

Of the teachers responding, 12% (n=3) have been employed as a teacher for 1 to 5 years. Five teachers (20%) have been employed for 6 to 10 years, two teachers (8%) have been employed for 11 to 15 years, six teachers (24%) have been employed for 16 to

20 years, three teachers (12%) have been employed for 21 to 25 years, and lastly, six teachers (24%) have been employed for 25 or more years.

Item Analysis

This section will include an item analysis for the short answer questions in the survey. The first short answer question the survey invited participants to respond to referred to what teachers perceived to be the most critical issues that middle school students face today. All 25 participants responded to this question. There were several different responses (See Appendix D). The top three issues from the participants were peer pressure of various forms, with 10 teachers (40%) expressing this, unsupportive home environments reported by 10 teachers (40%), and bullying/teasing from 8 teachers (32%).

The next short answer question asked participants to state which type of counseling services they prefer based on the type of teacher they are. Again, all 25 participants responded to this question and the question yielded several different results (Appendix D). The number one service expressed by 32% of the respondents (n=8), was small group counseling. This was followed by 6 teachers (24%) responding with individual or one-on-one counseling, and 5 teachers (20%) responding with classroom guidance.

The third short answer item encouraged teachers to identify areas of strength in the current guidance program within their school. One encore teacher did not respond to this question, as he/she expressed the lack of contact he/she had with the guidance department. This resulted in a 96% response rate, with 24 out of the 25 teachers reporting. The number one response was that the current guidance staff is caring and

compassionate, with 7 teachers (28%) identifying this strength. Following this, there was a tie between the next two most popular responses. Follow-through communication with teachers and the demonstration of a sincere interest in students' well-being were both expressed by 5 teachers (20%). Appendix D contains several additional strengths that were identified by the respondents.

As teachers were asked to consider the strengths of the current guidance program, they were also invited to think about the needs of it as well. Twenty-one out of the 25 respondents answered this question. Two teachers reported being so new to the teaching profession and to the school that they could not report on the guidance department needs. Additionally, two different teachers reported that overall the current guidance department does an excellent job and needs could therefore, not be identified by them. The responses received (Appendix D) named three top guidance and counseling needs of the school. Nine teachers (36%), expressed the need for small group counseling sessions with students. Six teachers (24%), also identified the needs for increased staffing and increased visibility outside of the guidance area.

The fifth survey item invited participants to offer any suggestions for improvement they had for the current counseling department. Eighteen out of the 25 participants answered this question. The responses were quite diverse, with no outstanding themes in the answers to address separately (Appendix D). Some of the responses included goal setting with students, developing focus book groups, providing parent classes focusing on different issues, teaching an interdisciplinary unit with a team of teachers, and keeping the staff informed of what the guidance department is currently offering.

Lastly, the final short answer survey question allowed the participants to make any additional comments they wanted to with regards to the school's counseling program. While only 9 respondents (36%), included comments at this point in the survey, the comments they provided were varied (Appendix D). Some of the responses encouraged counselors to maintain their work with bullying, to continue the collaborative approach they are currently taking, to provide services in all domains, and to follow-up with students after a crisis.

Research Questions

The survey was given to answer specific research questions. The data collected will help determine teacher perceptions of the role of a school counselor in a middle school in northwestern Wisconsin.

Research Question #1 - How do teachers perceive the role of a school counselor? Items 3, 5, and 6 addressed this question. The survey results presented the largest areas of concern that teachers thought middle school students faced. The areas included peer pressure of various forms, unsupportive home environments, bullying/teasing, interpersonal relationships, and self-esteem issues. In addition to this, teachers reported numerous strengths the current guidance department has. Many of the most commonly mentioned strengths, being a caring/compassionate staff, demonstrating a sincere interest in students' well-being, effective communication skills, and a strong job commitment, were named because the current guidance department possesses skills that can assist students with the needs identified by the teachers.

The survey results also asked teachers to report on guidance and counseling needs of their school. The expressed needs included small group counseling, increased staffing,

increased visibility, communication with all students, and preventative counseling. The student concerns reported, the recognized strengths, and the identified needs combine to demonstrate how teachers in the surveyed middle school perceive the role of their current school counselors.

Research Question #2 - What types of services do teachers consider to be the most valuable provided by their school counselor? Item 4 addressed this question. According to the results, the teachers expressed value in almost all of the guidance services able to be delivered by their school counselors. The service considered to be the most valuable was small group counseling with 32% of the respondents reporting this as the type of counseling service they most prefer. The teachers also most commonly stated individual counseling and classroom guidance as valuable delivery services in meeting students' guidance and counseling needs.

Research Question #3 - What do teachers perceive to be guidance and counseling needs of their school and how might their school counselor address these? Items 6, 7, and 8 addressed this question. The results showed that the teachers felt that the most pressing need was the need for an increase in small groups being offered by the current guidance department. Suggestions provided by the teachers in regards to this need included offering small groups during the school's resource time, beginning small book bibliotherapy groups with students focused around a particular theme or issue, and getting involved as part of an interdisciplinary teaching unit with a particular team or teacher.

Results from the survey also presented the need of increased counselor staffing in order for a lower counselor-to-teacher ratio to exist. While suggestions on how to

improve upon this need were not given, almost all teachers who reported this need expressed the value they placed on the school counseling profession. Teachers stated that counselors served as resources to them, encouraged counselors to continue to stay involved with them, and emphasized the collaborative approach current counselors took in working with them. In connection with this, an additional need that many teachers reported on referred to the need for counselors to increase their visibility in the building and in the classrooms.

Chapter Five: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This chapter will provide a discussion of the information presented in chapter two with the results of the survey. It will also address conclusions made from the study and provide recommendations for the teachers and school counselors of the surveyed middle school, in addition to recommendations for future research on this topic.

Discussion

Schwallie-Giddis, Maat, and Pak (2003) stated that the questioning of what school counselors do and how we know that what they do connects to student achievement has occurred frequently in school community conversations. In addition, they recognized that rarely are school counselors addressing these questions. Dahir and Stone (2003) joined in on this discussion by expressing that school counselors can fully participate in the accountability measures taken by schools in relation to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. They expressed the need for school counselors to examine their practices in order to demonstrate how their programs contribute to school success. This study developed from the researcher's desire to take the first steps in the accountability process, collecting information from some members of a school community, the teachers, regarding current school counseling programs.

The results of this study illustrated that the teachers in the middle school in the Eau Claire Area School District shared very similar ideas to both the ASCA and WDGM models previously discussed. Again, these models have served as a foundation for school counseling programs. They have offered school counselors philosophical bases, shared vision statements, and role recommendations. The models can be the link between the

unanswered questions of our school communities to school counseling program change and accountability to student success.

The surveyed teachers expressed a desire to have counselors help students mostly in the personal/social domain. While the academic and career domains were both mentioned, the perceived concerns seemed to be less emphasized in these areas. Additionally, the theme of a need for more small group counseling stood out among the returned surveys. According to the ASCA model, middle school counselors should spend 25 to 35% of their time delivering guidance curriculum. One aspect of this includes small group counseling (ASCA, 2003). Teachers also reported on the preferred services of individual counseling and classroom guidance. The ASCA model expressed the allotments of 15 to 25% for individual counseling and again, 25 to 35% for classroom guidance (ASCA, 2003).

In addition to the above-mentioned models, other studies have further supported and matched closely to the results from this research. Burnham and Jackson (2000) discussed the reassignment of non-guidance duties as a result of increased education of school staff. The surveyed teachers expressed concern regarding increasing issues that middle school students are having to face and the need for increased staffing. Clark and Amatea (2004) discussed the importance of collaboration and interdisciplinary cooperation. These ideas were both highlighted in this research.

While the similarities and differences between past and previous research could continue to be evaluated, several common themes continue to resurface. Model implementation, data collection, evaluation of services, role education, accountability,

teamwork, and student success are only just a few. The challenges from this profession's past have molded into the present and will work to shape its future.

Conclusions

The results of the study showed that the school counseling profession, although sometimes scrutinized, has teachers that are in support of it. In order for this support to continue, school counselors need to be continually active in keeping their colleagues educated about their role and they also need to act as advocates for themselves and for their profession. The ASCA model, in its early implementation stages yet, is perhaps the strongest guide for school counselors in this journey. The conducted research, as well as the current teacher perception research, resulted in reoccurring similarities and occasional differences that have provided conclusions and recommendations for counselors at this time.

To begin with, the call for accountability in education continues to get stronger as schools face tighter budget concerns and increasing expectations. These measures will require educational change and demonstrated results. School counselors will be one group of professionals that must continually show how their programs contribute to student success and how committed they are to increasing student achievement. The teachers indicated the value they place on their counseling department and yet, desires to see it continually improve by reaching for higher levels.

The growing list of perceived challenges to students today would be daunting to address by one group of school professionals alone. Therefore, the conclusion that an increased need for collaboration among all professionals including teachers, parents, counselors, administrators, and community members arose. School counselors must

embrace the challenges presented and continually connect with others to creatively and effectively work through them.

Lastly, the above-mentioned conclusions continue to promote and suggest the need for school counseling programs to be comprehensive in scope. Guided mission statements, delivery components, organizational structures, data collections, and reflections are a few of the components that should serve as a basis for comprehensive counseling plans. Past and present research has supported this notion. Diverse student needs, teacher preferences, and professional standards emphasize that this type of program is an essential and integral part of the educational process.

Teachers accepted and executed the first guidance programs in our nation's schools. Counseling programs today cannot continue without the support and commitment of teachers. The most desired and effective means to best serve students is for teachers, counselors, and others to unite and to collaboratively educate and assist each other through the process.

Recommendations for the Teachers and School Counselors

From the literature review and the survey, the following recommendations to the teachers and school counselors are given:

1. Work to maintain a collaborative approach when addressing the needs of students.
2. Address the needs of all students, not only those who have extreme needs or challenging behaviors.
3. Increase the amount of small group counseling.
4. Educate staff, over a period of time, on the role of a school counselor, including what the department is offering at the time to help students in specific areas.

5. Work to educate and involve the parents of the students within the school. This could take place in various forms.

Recommendations for Future Research

From the results of the study, the following recommendations are given for future research:

1. Survey other school community members (parents, administrators, students) in regards to their perceptions of the role of school counselors.
2. Conduct an awareness survey with the teachers, collecting baseline information regarding what they truly know about the role of a school counselor.
3. Survey teachers from different schools or levels and compare the similarities and differences in perceptions and ideas.
4. Replicate this study using more specific survey items, similar to a needs assessment, in order to acquire a more thorough overall assessment or clearer vision as to which services should continue and which need attention.

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Stout Solutions • Research Services
152 Voc Rehab Building

University of Wisconsin-Stout
P.O. Box 790
Menomonie, WI 54751-0790

715/232-1126
715/232-1749 (fax)
<http://www.uwstout.edu/rps/>

Date: September 22, 2006

To: Katherine Skutley

Cc: Dr. Amy Gillett

From: Sue Foxwell, Research Administrator and Human Protections Administrator, UW-Stout Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (IRB)

Subject: **Protection of Human Subjects**

Your project, "*Teacher Perceptions of the Role of a School Counselor*," has been approved by the IRB through the expedited review process. The measures you have taken to protect human subjects are adequate to protect everyone involved, including subjects and researchers.

Please copy and paste the following message to the top of your survey form before dissemination:

This research has been approved by the UW-Stout IRB as required by the Code of Federal Regulations Title 45 Part 46.

This project is approved through September 21, 2007. Modifications to this approved protocol need to be approved by the IRB. Research not completed by this date must be submitted again outlining changes, expansions, etc. Federal guidelines require annual review and approval by the IRB.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB and best wishes with your project.

***NOTE: This is the only notice you will receive – no paper copy will be sent.**

SF:dd

October, 2006

Dear Teachers,

I, Katherine Skutley, am a graduate student in the Guidance and Counseling Master's Program at the University of Wisconsin-Stout. I am currently working on my thesis for graduate school, which is entitled *Teacher Perceptions of the Role of a School Counselor*. The attached survey is intended to determine what teachers believe to be important roles of a school counselor. It will also assist the Guidance Department in determining the needs of the school's guidance program. I would appreciate your participation in this study, which should take approximately 5-15 minutes of your time. Please place the completed survey in the envelope by the mailboxes labeled "Completed Surveys."

In filling out and returning this survey, you are giving your informed consent to voluntarily participate in this study. The risks in participation of this type are minimal compared to the benefits of your responses. Your responses will be treated in a confidential manner and the minimal identifiers are necessary only to further analyze the data produced by this study. You have the right to withdraw from this study at any time and your decision will be respected.

This study has been reviewed and approved by the University of Wisconsin-Stout's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has determined that this study meets the ethical obligations required by the federal law and University policies. If you have questions or concerns regarding this study, please contact Katherine Skutley or Dr. Amy Gillett. If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a research subject, please contact Sue Foxwell.

Investigator:

Katherine Skutley
UW-Stout
(715) 552-1405
skutleyk@uwstout.edu

Research Advisor:

Dr. Amy Gillett
School of Education
UW-Stout
(715) 232-2680
gilletta@uwstout.edu

IRB Administrator:

Sue Foxwell, Director, Research Services
152 Vocational Rehabilitation Building
UW-Stout
Menomonie, WI 54751
(715) 232-2477
foxwells@uwstout.edu

Teacher Perceptions of the Role of a School Counselor

1. How would you best describe your current teaching position? (please check *only one*)

Core Classroom teacher _____ Special Education teacher _____

Encore Classroom teacher _____

2. How many years have you been employed as a teacher?

1-5 _____ 6-10 _____ 11-15 _____ 16-20 _____ 21-25 _____ 25+ _____

3. What do you believe are some of the most critical issues that middle school students are facing today? Please consider areas that school counselors are specifically able to provide student support.

4. What are helpful strategies that you could suggest in how counselors might deliver services to students? In other words, what counseling services do you prefer for students based on the type of teacher you are?

5. What areas of strength do you see in the current guidance department?

Teacher Perceptions of the Role of a School Counselor

1. How would you best describe your current teaching position? (please check *only one*)

Core Classroom teacher 13 Special Education teacher 3

Encore Classroom teacher 9

2. How many years have you been employed as a teacher?

1-5 3 6-10 5 11-15 2 16-20 6 21-25 3 25+ 6

3. What do you believe are some of the most critical issues that middle school students are facing today? Please consider areas that school counselors are specifically able to provide student support.

- **Importance of middle school education**
- **Selecting appropriate courses/planning for the next grade**
- **Peer pressure (labeling of others, grades, sports, appearance, sex, drugs/alcohol, destructive actions) (repeated 10x)**
- **Parent pressure for success (repeated 3x)**
- **Broken families/Divorce (repeated 6x)**
- **Blended families**
- **Unsupportive home environment (repeated 10x)**
- **Stress from being too scheduled (repeated 5x)**
- **Lack of parental discipline**
- **Growing up too fast**
- **Influences by media (repeated 5x)**
- **Bullying/Teasing (repeated 8x)**
- **Interpersonal relationships/Friends (repeated 7x)**
- **Taking responsibility for own actions**
- **Academic study skills**
- **Social skills (social growth) (repeated 2x)**
- **Self-esteem issues related to body image, eating patterns, healthy lifestyle (repeated 5x)**
- **Depression**
- **Self-mutilation**
- **Gangs**
- **Finding available resources to help with their issues**

4. What are helpful strategies that you could suggest in how counselors might deliver services to students? In other words, what counseling services do you prefer for students based on the type of teacher you are?

- **Being present in classrooms-even if it is just a "social" visit (repeated 5x)**
- **Individual, one-on-one counseling (repeated 6x)**
- **Small groups of students meeting with similar needs (repeated 8x)**
- **Alternating times of appointments-not always pulling them from the same class**
- **Guidance sessions during Resource times (repeated 2x)**

- Network with social services, peer support groups, etc. (repeated 3x)
- Team teaching counseling or other content with teachers
- Contacts/meetings with parents/home environment
- Educational counseling related presentations in Resources/classrooms
- Connect with teachers during Team times

5. What areas of strength do you see in the current guidance department?

- Communication with teachers-follow through occurs (repeated 5x)
- Communication with students and parents (repeated 3x)
- Positive with community connections
- Demonstrate a sincere interest in students' well-being (repeated 5x)
- Visibility in the building (repeated 2x)
- Approachable staff (repeated 3x)
- Caring/compassionate staff (repeated 7x)
- Cohesive department
- Effective in their work with students (repeated 2x)
- Supportive of teachers when working with students (repeated 4x)
- Strong work ethic (repeated 2x)
- Very networked
- Provide usable feedback and recommendations for teachers
- Willing to get involved with students in need (repeated 4x)
- Organized department
- Information is given early on regarding at-risk students
- Open minded to try new ideas
- Committed to the job/profession (repeated 2x)
- Get involved with students in both academic and personal/social areas
- Knowledgeable/Capable
- Logical and firm
- Professional
- Collaborative
- Ownership of documentation
- Good role models for students
- Positive

6. What do you perceive to be guidance and counseling needs of our school?

- More direct instruction in classes (repeated 3x)
- Small group counseling sessions with students (repeated 9x)
- Communication with ALL students-not just students with concerns (repeated 4x)
- More career guidance
- Increase staffing-lower student to counselor ratio (repeated 6x)
- Take a proactive/preventative approach (repeated 4x)
- Increase visibility in the halls between classes & in classrooms/outside of the guidance area (repeated 6x)
- Specific areas of need mentioned: conflict resolution, accepting others, drug/alcohol prevention, friendships, bullying
- Identified bullies should receive individual/small group intervention
- Balanced time usage-making sure multiple concerns and approaches are addressed

- Focus on the transition to high school for 8th graders
- Emphasize follow-ups with teachers (repeated 3x)
- Teach skills to carry on with future problems (assertiveness, communication, goal setting, etc.)-do not allow students to make excuses/blame others for their issues (repeated 2x)
- Resources/Books/Videos/Pamphlets/Etc. to assist parents, teachers, administrators in supporting students in their growth & development, skills, and needs (repeated 2x)

7. What suggestions for improvement do you have for the counseling department?

- Provide family counseling sessions/Parent classes focusing on different issues (repeated 3x)
- Teaching teachers how to talk to kids about guidance related issues
- Make sure staff is informed of new students to the school
- Give the “Words of Wisdom” on the P.A. in the mornings
- Educate staff on the roles of school counselors
- Hold large group sessions on early release days on various guidance related activities
- Assist Student Council with some of their efforts
- Small reading book group during DEAR time with a particular focus (repeated 2x)
- Become involved in an interdisciplinary unit of a particular team/class (repeated 2x)
- Morning breakfast/lunch meetings with students
- Utilize/train staff that would be willing to run small groups
- Keep the staff informed of what the guidance department is currently offering or doing (repeated 2x)
- Helping to educate a classroom of students/team/grade level about students with disabilities
- Goal set with students-write the goals down and help to monitor them (repeated 2x)

8. Please feel free to use the following space to provide any additional comments that would contribute to our school’s counseling program.

- Continue to share student concerns with teachers (at least communicating with team leaders where situations are at and/or schedule changes) (repeated 3x)
- Teachers want to be aware of schedule changes before they happen
- Keep core teachers “in the loop” as well
- Continue to help in keeping parents informed
- Continue to help teachers with students in need-flexibility of time is valued
- Continue to work with teachers in meeting students emotional/social/academic needs- Counselors serve as a resource to teachers (repeated 2x)
- Maintain the current work with bullying-if not increase it (repeated 2x)
- Monitor new students to our building
- Maintain a COLLABORATIVE, open-door approach when working with staff, students, and parents (repeated 2x)
- Make outside referrals when necessary
- Assess students both formally and informally when needed
- If a student encounters a crisis, support as needed (repeated 2x)
- Counselors seem to have taken on more administrative duties in the last several years (directing meetings, supervisions, hiring, etc.) despite the increase in issues presented to students during this time