

Factors Impacting on the School Counselor Hiring Process
Poster Session

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Abstract

There has been a major paradigm shift in the professional expectations for the role of school counselors. The possibility that this shift is having a role in the hiring process for school counselors was studied. The research question was the identification of latent factors that are part of the decision process used by school administrators in selecting school counselors for employment. In a study of 144 building administrators three factors were identified that come into play when a potential school counselor is considered for possible employment.

Paper Presented at the Annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association,
New Orleans, LA, April 8-12, 2011

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Background in Literature:

- School counseling began as a profession in America's high schools over 100 years ago (Glossoff & Rockwell, 1997).
- The first high school counselors were drafted from the ranks of high school teaching faculty (Wright, 2011). Originally the position of high school counselor was focused on career development and placement (Jones, 1994).
- Harvard University was the first higher institution to offer post-graduate education programs for the training of high school (vocational) counselors (Thayer, Castle, De Howe, Pier, De Voto, & Morrison, 1912).
- Funding by the federal government for support of vocational counselors began in 1917 with passage of the Smith-Hughes National Vocational Education Act. This law, signed by President Woodrow Wilson, provided a federal source of funding for vocational guidance programs and for the hiring of counselors.
- The goal for this development of vocational counseling in the schools was one of efficiency. Vocational guidance was structured to serve the need for social efficiency by sorting students by their various capacities and making a smooth transition for high school students into the world of work (Gysbers, 2001).
- By the 1920s the role of the school counselor had expanded and encompassed academic planning, mental hygiene, and socialization (Crow & Crow, 1935).
- The selection of school counselors from among certified classroom teachers continued to be the norm until the rapid expansion of public school enrollments during the 1980s. The postwar baby boom of the 1950s and 1960s provided an

expansion in the population of school-aged students. This occurred at the same time state standards for the certification of school counselors became more complex. In the 1950s and 1960s it was possible for a teacher to become a school counselor without taking time off from teaching. By the 1980s the problem of finding experienced teachers who wanted to begin a graduate program in school counseling became acute. Graduate programs for counselor certification require teachers to take a semester or two off from their jobs to complete a supervised internship. In all but a handful of states, school counselors must also pass a mandatory certification examination. One result of these upgraded state certification requirements was a shortage of school counselors.

- The ongoing need for school counselors resulted in a new set of certification guidelines in most states. Today, only eight states (Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oregon, Rhode Island, and Texas) and the District of Columbia continue to require that school counselors hold a valid teaching certificate and/or have teaching experience (ASCA, 2008).
- One concern for those hiring new school counselors is the impact that having or not having a teaching background has on the ability and effectiveness of a new school counselor.
 1. Jean Peterson and her colleagues found that interns with prior teaching experience had fewer problems in communications, establishing their credibility, and in making presentations to classroom groups of children than was true of intern school counselors without prior teaching experience (Peterson, Goodman, Keller, & McCauley, 2004).

2. Counseling interns without teaching backgrounds found that classroom management and communication with other professionals in the school was surprisingly difficult and more complex than what they were prepared to find. Non-teaching background interns assumed that there was a school culture and they used their professional skills to define an appropriate role within it.

Problem

Along with new rules for state certification rules, there was a major paradigm shift in school counseling in the 1990s. The role of school counselors prior to that shift was to react to problems while serving as supervisors of many clerical tasks related to pupil services. The shift was first described in 1996 by the Education Trust, and involved a new vision for the profession and the education of professional school counselors. The new direction involved school counselors playing leadership roles within their schools. This new role for school counselors includes a focus on embracing educational leadership, team building and consultation, advocacy for all students, and evaluation (McMahon, Mason, & Paisley, 2009). That vision was incorporated into the national framework in 2003 and 2005 by the American School Counselor Association (American School Counselor Association/Hatch & Bowers, 2005).

One key player in defining the role and job description of a school's counselor is the building principal. The possibility of conflict and role confusion occurs in schools where some old line administrators have not changed their focus and understanding of the job of a school counselor in this age of accountability. Modifying the counselor's role as defined by the administration may take time and careful negotiation on the part of a new

counselor. Research into the principal–counselor relationship has found that the principal not only plays a significant role in defining the counselor’s job description but also accounts for half of the measured level of job satisfaction on the part of the school’s counselor (Clemens, Milsom, & Cashwell, 2009). The problems some counselors experience in defining their jobs and having a good working relationship with their school’s principal is found in the difference in definitions of the appropriate role for a school’s counselor.

The first point of potential conflict between the principal’s goals and beliefs regarding school counselors for his or her school is the hiring process. The focus of this study was on the question of factors that may have an impact on the decision as to whether or not to hire a particular counselor.

Methods

This study can be seen a preliminary effort to identify latent and obvious factors that play a role in the hiring process for new school counselors. A survey was developed and field tested in a class of doctoral level students in school administration. The items of the survey were selected from the literature on the role of school counselors. Ten items of the questionnaire employed a Likert type format asking the importance of the particular issue in the hiring decision. The scores ranging from (1) Essential to (2) Moderate, and (3) Trivial. Five demographic questions on survey explore factors of the respondent’s graduate education, professional licensure, and experience in the hiring decision process of school counselors.

The survey was administered to 144 school principals located in 10 states. The majority were from California (31%) and Florida (30%). These respondents were all

volunteers identified from their school systems web-pages. The survey was administered via the Internet, and represents 17.5% of the 825 principals originally contacted and requested to participate.

Results

Principle components factor analysis with Varimax rotation with Kaiser Normalization identified **three** distinct factors that are part of the decision process used by school principals in the process of hiring a new school counselor (Kaiser, 1958) (see Table 1). The first of these factors accounted for 23% of the available variance and can be named “school focus.” The second factor, “professional focus,” accounted for an additional 16.5% of the model’s variance. The final factor, “clinical focus,” loaded an additional 15.5% of the available variance. The ‘school focus’ factor includes survey items, coursework in special education, knowledge of high-stakes testing, and knowledge of webpage construction and maintenance. The factor of ‘professional focus’ includes items involving ability to consult with individual faculty, certification as a professional counselor by the National Board for the Certification of Counselors, experience working as a counselor in a private or clinical practice, and adherence to the National Framework for School Counseling programs. The final factor, ‘clinical focus’ is composed of only two survey items, knowledge of human sexuality and development, and knowledge of drug and alcohol abuse prevention.

Table 1: Rotated Factor Structure from Principal Survey

Variable	Loading Factor 1	Loading Factor 2	Loading Factor 3
Special Education	.66		
Testing	.58		
Web-page Construction	.74		
Consultant to Faculty		.58	
National Board Certification		.74	
Private Practice Experience		.58	
Follows ASCA Framework		.55	
Knowledge Human Sexuality			.75
Knowledge Alcohol & Drug			.82

Conclusions

Job descriptions posted by human resources offices of school systems for school counselors are almost always purposely vague on questions such as previous experience. Job descriptions will typically require candidates for a school counseling position have between one and three years of “relevant experience.” This use of the term “relevant” provides the school’s principal great flexibility when making a hiring choice.¹ A principal may only view classroom teaching as relevant, thereby excluding other highly qualified job candidates. Beyond the question of first being a classroom teacher, there are other clear factors that go into the decision matrix employed in making a selection decision for

a new school counselor. These factors should be part of the educational development of all new school counselors.

This does not imply a laundry list of classes to complete, but a well thought-out approach that will optimize each graduate's opportunity to be hired as a school counselor upon completion of the degree and certification requirements. For example, students can be encouraged to become substitute teachers in the local public and private schools or with the university's campus charter school.

Gaining volunteer experience working with developmentally disabled students in private residential treatment centers is another invaluable way to add experience and skills a school's principal is likely to be looking to find. Summer camps for children with disabilities frequently look for assistant counselors and volunteers to fill helping roles with children when their programs tool-up each June.

Substance abuse programs abound in most communities. Graduate school faculty may have many useful contacts with these agency-based and/or privately proffered treatment options. Such programs typically will accept a few volunteers to monitor phone banks and assist with client observations. Other agencies using volunteers and providing potential counselors with important skills include Planned Parenthood, Big Brothers and Sisters, Boy's and Girl's Clubs, YM/WCA, suicide prevention hotlines, and Special Olympics.

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Instrument

Part I: Hiring School Counselors

How do you weigh the following factors when selecting which of several school counselor candidates to recommend for hiring?

1. Prior classroom teaching experience
 Essential Quality Moderately Important Trivial
2. Ability to consult with individual faculty
 Essential Quality Moderately Important Trivial
3. Prior private clinical experience as a counselor
 Essential Quality Moderately Important Trivial
4. National Board for Certification as a Professional Counselor
 Essential Background Moderately Important Trivial
5. Recent course work in special education and special needs children
 Essential Background Moderately Important Trivial
6. Knowledge of webpage construction and maintenance
 Essential Background Moderately Important Trivial
7. Knowledge and coursework in human sexuality and sex-education
 Essential Background Moderately Important Trivial
8. Knowledge and coursework in high-stakes testing
 Essential Background Moderately Important Trivial
9. Knowledge and coursework in drug and alcohol abuse and treatment
 Essential Background Moderately Important Trivial
10. Knowledge of, and adherence to, the National Model Framework for School Counseling Programs (ASCA, 2005)
 Essential Background Moderately Important Trivial

Part II: Your Background:

11. My job in education is as a:
 - A. Central office administrator
 - B. Building level school administrator
 - C. Department head or team leader

- D. Curriculum supervisor
 - E. Other job type (please describe) _____
12. My school's community is best described as:
- A. Very rural and removed from city life
 - B. Small town and/or exurban
 - C. Suburban
 - D. Small city or urban area
 - E. Urban, big city
13. Approximately how many students are enrolled in your school?
- A. Less than 400 students
 - B. 400 to 650 students
 - C. 651 to 900 students
 - D. 901 to 1,050 students
 - E. More than 1,050 students
14. Total years you have been a school administrator or supervisor.
- A. 1 to 5 years
 - B. 6 to 10 years
 - C. 11 to 15 years
 - D. 16 to 20 years
 - E. More than 20 years
15. How many school counselors work in your school?
- A. Zero to 1.5
 - B. 2 to 3.5
 - C. 4 to 5.5
 - D. 6 or more

ⁱ As is true for all professional educators, the school board, with the advice of the district superintendent, is the official body that hires school counselors. The role of the principal is to select the best candidate for the job, and recommend him/her to the school district's superintendent.