

## PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL COUNSELORS AND ADMINISTRATORS ON THE ROLE OF SCHOOL COUNSELING

Heather D. Windham, *University of Alabama at Birmingham*  
Malti Tuttle, *Auburn University*

### Abstract

This quantitative survey study aimed to identify differences between school counselors' and administrators' perceptions of the school counselors' role and if demographic criteria of years of experience, years in education, enrollment size, and grade level impacted these perceptions. Currently employed school counselors and administrators in Alabama with at least one year of experience were recruited to participate in this study. The School Counseling Activity Rating Scale (SCARS) (Scarborough, 2005b) and SCARS Modified (Lane et al., 2020) instruments were utilized. Results were analyzed by comparing descriptive statistics and performing a factorial ANOVA and multiple regression. Results of the ANOVA suggest that discrepancies exist between how school counselors and administrators view the preferred role of the school counselor but were not statistically significant in how the groups perceive the fundamental role of the school counselor. The results of the multiple regression were inconclusive and suggested additional research. Implications for school counselors and administrators aim toward opportunities for advocacy and leadership through professional development, training, and collaboration.

*Author Note:* The authors provide permission to publish this manuscript. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Dr. Windham at [hwindham@uab.edu](mailto:hwindham@uab.edu), 205-975-2491

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## **Introduction**

School counselors report incongruency between their trained role as students and their expected role once established in the profession (Bardhoshi et al., 2014; Mullen et al., 2018). This discrepancy causes school counselors to experience various emotional concerns, including burnout, stress, and role confusion (Bardhoshi et al., 2014; Holman et al., 2019; Mullen et al., 2018). While many stakeholders within the school setting exist (administrators, teachers, parents, students, etc.), each has been reported to have differing expectations for the role of the school counselor (Bardhoshi et al., 2014; Birdsong & Yakimowski, 2021; Burnham & Jackson, 2000; Mullen et al., 2018; Ruiz et al., 2019). The most reported stakeholder group with differing perceptions of the role of the school counselor is that of administrators (Bardhoshi et al., 2014; Birdsong & Yakimowski, 2021; Fye et al., 2018; Fye et al., 2020; Lane et al., 2020; Moyer, 2011; Mullen et al., 2018; Rose, 2019; Ruiz et al., 2019).

Administrators report that while the school counselor's role, as defined by the American School Counseling Association (ASCA), is important, so are non-counseling duties (Finkelstein, 2009; Fitch et al., 2001; Ruiz et al., 2019). When school counselors are asked to complete these non-counseling duties, they report higher levels of burnout, job dissatisfaction, stress, role confusion, role ambiguity, exhaustion, and incompetence (Bardhoshi et al., 2014; Fye et al., 2020; Holman et al., 2019; Moyer, 2011; Mullen et al., 2018). School counselors have also reported a misunderstanding of the school counseling role often leads to an increase in non-counseling duties, stress, burnout, and exhaustion (Bardhoshi et al., 2014; Carey et al., 2012; Lapan et al., 2012; Mullen et al., 2018).

When school counselors experience these negative consequences from a discrepancy in the school counselor role, the impact leads to a decrease in direct counseling services, student outcomes, and overall implementation of the ASCA National Model (Carey et al., 2012; Lapan et al., 2012; Moyer, 2011). Therefore, it can be posited that the incongruence between school counselor role perceptions can lead to an increase in non-counseling duties, which causes a myriad of negative consequences for school counselors, and further decreases the productivity of the school counseling program. While it is evident that school counselors experience negative repercussions both personally and professionally from the disconnect between school counselors and administrators on the role of the school counselor (Bardhoshi et al., 2014; Carey et al., 2012; Lapan et al., 2012; Mullen et al., 2018), there remains a need to explore where the disconnect lies (Graham et al., 2011; Lane et al., 2020). The school counselor's role continues to change and adapt (Stone & Dahir, 2016); stakeholders within the school should continue to seek updated information on the school counselor's role. It is recommended that future research focus on including both school counselors' and administrators' perceptions of the role of the school counselor in the same study (Graham et al., 2011; Ruiz et al., 2019).

## **Review of the Literature**

### **ASCA National Model: Framework**

The ASCA National Model is a framework established by ASCA to guide school counselors in developing a comprehensive school counseling program. The National Model encompasses four main components: define, manage, deliver, and assess (ASCA, 2019b).

### ***School Counselor Role***

While these four components constitute the overall framework for the model, the introduction and executive summary of the ASCA (2019b) National Model addresses additional information relevant to the role of school counselors. For instance, the ASCA (2019b) National Model addresses that a school counselor should spend a minimum of eighty percent of time delivering direct or indirect services to students, outlines a recommended student-to-school counselor ratio of 250:1, and includes a list of appropriate and inappropriate activities for a school counselor to do within the role. The ASCA (2019b) National Model also speaks to a school counselor's importance in serving all students' academic, career, and social and emotional needs through classroom lessons, small groups, and individual sessions. Additionally, the ASCA National Model provides several methods of data collection to identify students' needs, school counselors' current time allocation, and methods to adjust this allocation as needed (ASCA, 2019b). This clear outline of the school counselor's role provides a grounding platform for school counselors to understand their role and ability to perform required duties.

### ***School Counseling Stakeholders***

Generally, stakeholders in education can be defined as individuals with a vested interest in the school's overall success (The Glossary of Education Reform, 2014). This can include teachers, administrators, parents, students, school personnel, community members, or others (The Glossary of Education Reform, 2014). Additional examples of stakeholders specific to school counseling include principals, teachers, school board members from the internal school community, parents, business partners, faith representatives, and college and university personnel from the external school community (Stone & Dahir, 2016). School counseling stakeholders support the comprehensive program (Stone & Dahir, 2016).

The administrator is a primary stakeholder in the comprehensive school counseling program (Cervoni & DeLucia-Waack, 2011; Moyer, 2011). School counselors often are supervised by the administrator of their building (Stone, 2022); therefore, the administrator directly impacts the school counseling program. Administrators are often responsible for assigning duties to school counselors (Birdsong & Yakimowski, 2021; Moyer, 2011). Further, administrators have a change in position about every three years (Gates et al., 2003), causing school counselors to have a new set of job duties assigned to them often (Cervoni & DeLucia-Waack, 2011). With each new administrator, school counselors are likely to deal with new role assignments and an increase in role conflict (Cervoni & DeLucia-Waack, 2011). The frequent change in leadership, and thus job expectations, may contribute to the role confusion that school counselors experience (Cervoni & DeLucia-Waack, 2011).

### ***School Counselor Role Confusion***

When school counselors feel an imbalance between duties assigned and expected within an occupation, including duties that other individuals are equally qualified to perform, this is called role confusion or role diffusion (Astramovich et al., 2013; McCarthy et al., 2010). Research has shown that role confusion can develop without an established professional identity (Gibson et al., 2018). Furthermore, Brott and Myers (1999) found that professional identity is negatively impacted due to the disconnect between how school counselors are trained and the job expectations in the field. School counselors are trained through a graduate master's program, often accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) (Branthoover et al., 2010; Perry et al., 2020). Programs accredited through

CACREP cover eight common core areas and school counseling-specific standards (CACREP, 2015). The disconnect between the training school counselors receive, and the expectation after graduation leads to role confusion for school counselors (Cinotti, 2014).

Additionally, school counselors are trained by the same curriculum that professional counselors in other specialty areas receive (Gibson et al., 2018). The Education Trust's Transforming School Counseling Initiative (TSCI) tried to improve the training for school counselors by implementing an updated vision of the role of the school counselor to that of a student-oriented, holistic system approach to be change agents to ensure that all students experience educational equity (Perkins et al., 2010). However, this similarity among curricula can lead to an internal debate on whether their role is that of a counselor or educator in the school setting (Gibson et al., 2018). A study by Perkins et al. (2010) reports that stakeholders view the predominant role of school counselors as counselors to support students' emotional or personal needs over academic or career roles. However, in a study by Lane et al. (2020), 89% of administrators stated that they were not familiar with the ASCA National Model, a tool that outlines the expected role of the school counselor.

### ***Administrators' Training of the School Counselor Role***

School counselors and administrators are trained in different programs in which the coursework is aligned with their specific roles (Carnes-Holt et al., 2012). While there is a focus on collaboration between school counselors and administrators in the school setting, administrators may not be receiving training on the benefits of this collaboration (Perruse et al., n.d., as cited in Perruse et al., 2009; Tygret et al., 2020). Additionally, administrators have reported not feeling adequately trained to collaborate with school counselors (Lowrey et al., 2018). Unfortunately, it is common for administrators in training to learn about the role of the school counselor through informal sources, primarily personal experience (Mason & Perera-Diltz, 2010). The National Policy Board for Educational Administration has produced Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (McConnell et al., 2020; NPBEA, 2015). However, this document neglects to provide specific instruction on the collaboration with or roles of school counselors (McConnell et al., 2020; NPBEA, 2015). Administrators may remain unclear on the counselor's role as outlined by ASCA (Boyland et al., 2019; Graham et al., 2011). Therefore, it may be helpful to overlap the training that future school counselors and administrators receive (Carnes-Holt et al., 2012; Perruse et al., 2009; Tygret et al., 2020). Administrators who understand the school counselor's role can ensure that school counselors are assigned roles and responsibilities aligned with their training and advocate for appropriate tasks (Birdsong & Yakimowski, 2021).

### ***School Counselor Burnout***

Burnout has been defined as extensive feelings related to exhaustion, pessimism, inefficiency, and other negative workplace factors (Maslach & Leiter, 2017). School counselors experience high levels of burnout due to daily job expectations (Bardhoshi et al., 2014; Fye et al., 2020; Mullen et al., 2018). There has been research to directly connect an increase in school counselor burnout when school counselors are asked to complete tasks that are labeled as non-counseling tasks or tasks that contradict the training that school counselors have received about their intended role (Bardhoshi et al., 2014; Fye et al., 2020; Moyer, 2011; Mullen et al., 2018). When school counselors experience burnout, they have less job satisfaction (Baggerly & Osborn, 2006; Mullen et al., 2018; Rayle, 2006). This is predominantly a concern for younger school

counselors, a distinction from being novice school counselors (Mullen et al., 2018; Wilkerson, 2009). Additionally, school counselors with high caseloads experience higher levels of burnout (Bardhoshi et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2007; Moyer, 2011). ASCA recommends that the caseload of students assigned to school counselors, or the school counselor-to-student ratio, be 1:250 (ASCA, 2019b). However, in 2019-2020 only 4% of the United States met this ideal ratio, with the national average being 1:424 (ASCA, 2021). This information supports the increase in burnout that school counselors have experienced.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Stakeholders in the comprehensive counseling program, such as administrators, teachers, and parents, have conflicting perceptions of the school counselor's role (Bardhoshi et al., 2014; Birdsong & Yakimowski, 2021; Moyer et al., 2011; Mullen et al., 2018). This controversy on the school counselor role has led to an increase in non-counseling duties assigned to school counselors and school counselor burnout, exhaustion, and stress (Bardhoshi et al., 2014; Carey et al., 2012; Cervoni & DeLuca-Waack, 2011; Lapan et al., 2012; Moyer, 2011; Mullen et al., 2018). Research by Cervoni and DeLuca-Waack (2011) posited that the more time school counselors spent completing non-counseling duties, the less time was spent on the duties that ASCA (2019b) recommends. Further, the primary indicator of high school counselors' job satisfaction in a study by Cervoni and DeLuca-Waack (2011) was how much time was spent on non-counselor-related duties. In addition to job satisfaction, when school counselors have non-counseling tasks assigned to them, they also have increased reports of burnout (Bardhoshi et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2007; Moyer, 2011). An increase in school counselor burnout leads to school counselors having negative feelings about the work environment, more exhaustion and feelings of incompetency, and increased negativity in their personal lives (Moyer, 2011).

With increased non-counseling duties, school counselors also experience increased role confusion (Holman et al., 2019). The role confusion that school counselors experience impacts their ability to implement a comprehensive school counseling program (Carey et al., 2012; Lapan et al., 2012; Moyer, 2011). Because the comprehensive school counseling program is developed with the primary goal of supporting the emotional and social, career, and academic needs of students (ASCA, 2019b), students are the ones who primarily suffer from an underperforming counseling program (Carey et al., 2012; Lapan et al., 2012). School counselors also suffer from role confusion personally. For instance, Cervoni and DeLuca-Waack (2011) found that when school counselors reported less role confusion, they also reported higher job satisfaction. Therefore, the disconnect in school counselor role assignments impacts the assignment of non-counseling duties, role confusion, and the success of the comprehensive counseling program.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study aimed to determine the differences between the perspectives of school counselors and administrators on the school counselor's role and how demographic criteria impact these differences. School counselors who graduate from the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) accredited programs are trained using the ASCA National Model (Olsen et al., 2018). However, there is continued evidence of a disconnect between the trained role of the school counselor and the job expectations of a school counselor from administrators (Brott & Myers, 1999; Cinotti, 2014; Havlick et al., 2019; Lane et al., 2020; Mullen et al., 2018; Ruiz et al., 2019; Slaten et al., 2013). Therefore, this study

examines the differences between how the school counselor and administrator view the school counselor's role.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions will be utilized for this study:

1. What are administrators' perceptions of the school counselor's role in the ASCA National Model?
2. What are school counselors' perceptions of the role of the school counselor in the ASCA National Model?
3. What are the differences between school counselors' and administrators' perceptions of the role of school counselors?
4. Does the perception of the school counselor's role differ based on demographic criteria?

### **Significance of the Study**

This study provides critical insight into the disconnect between how administrators and school counselors view the school counselor's role. There has been ample evidence to support that there is a disconnect between the perceptions of these two roles (Bardhoshi et al., 2014; Brott & Myers, 1999; Cinotti, 2014; Graham et al., 2011; Henderson, 2020; Lane et al., 2020; Monterio-Leitner et al., 2006; Rose, 2019; Ruiz et al., 2019; Unger et al., 2021), with little change in recent studies (Unger et al., 2021). Therefore, this study pinpoints certain differentiating factors. It is crucial for the role of the school counselor to be understood in the field in which they work. This would reduce school counselor role confusion and burnout (Bardhoshi et al., 2014; Fye et al., 2020; Mullen et al., 2018). For instance, in a study by Graham et al. (2011), administrators were surveyed on their familiarity with the role of the school counselor, but the authors recommended that school counselors be included in future research to compare the perception of the role fully. This study meets this need by contributing to the research on school counselors' and administrators' roles of the school counselor about the ASCA National Model.

## **Methods**

### **Procedures**

Before conducting this study, permission was collected from the Auburn University Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Human Subjects. Permission to utilize the adapted SCARS instrument has already been collected from the authors of the survey instrument. Participants were asked to complete an electronic Qualtrics survey containing a demographic form and two measures. This survey was modified with consent from authors: Lane et al. (2020). The survey consisted of five parts: multiple choice, short response, ranking, and slider questions, including the SCARS instrument.

### **Instrumentation**

The School Counselor Activity Rating Scale (SCARS) (Scarborough, 2005a) was established by Scarborough (2005b) as a reliable scale to measure the differences between how school counselors spend their time and how they would prefer to spend their time. This measure

includes 48 survey items broken down into five subscales: (a) counseling activities, (b) consultation activities, (c) curriculum activities, (d) coordination activities, and (e) other activities (Scarborough, 2005b). Instead of using a traditional Likert scale to have participants rate how much they agree with a particular statement, this instrument utilizes a verbal frequency scale to measure how often school counselors spend their time performing each task (Scarborough, 2005b).

### ***SCARS Modified***

Lane and colleagues (2020) received permission to adapt the SCARS survey instrument to meet the needs of their study; to measure how familiar administrators were with the duties of school counselors and the school counseling programs. This survey consisted of five parts, one of which included the adapted SCARS instrument.

The first section of the survey asked administrators about school counseling national and state programs (three Likert-type questions and six yes or no questions), the program implemented at the participant's current school (four or five multiple-choice responses), and the responsibility of particular tasks at the participant's current school (five open-ended questions) (Lane et al., 2020). The second section of the survey measured appropriate and inappropriate activities through 28 statements taken from ASCA (2019a) (Lane et al., 2020). Participants were asked to rank these statements of possible activities as appropriate, inappropriate, or neutral (Lane et al., 2020). The third section of the survey consisted of the SCARS instrument, which was adapted slightly in verbiage to accommodate administrators as participants instead of school counselors (Lane et al., 2020). The fourth section of this survey measured the percentage of time perceived and desired for each category within the SCARS instrument (counseling, consultation, curriculum, coordination, and other activities) (Lane et al., 2020). Participants were asked to use a slider to place a percentage of time beside each category that added up to 100% of the school counselors' time for both how much the administrator perceived that a school counselor spends on the tasks and for the administrators' desired amount of time for a school counselor to spend on the tasks (Lane et al., 2020). The final section of the survey included ten demographic questions about the participant's current school, professional experience, and personal demographic information (Lane et al., 2020).

### ***Demographic Information***

Participants were asked to self-report multiple types of demographic data used in this study's data analysis. Participants first identified their current roles as school counselors or administrators. Participants then reported how many years of work experience they have obtained within their specified role and their total years of experience in the field of education. Participants were asked to include their school level to determine the impact of the education setting (elementary, middle, high, combination of grade levels, or all grade levels) on the study variables. School enrollment size, whether the school is classified as public or private, and the school's urban or rural classification were also collected to determine the impact of these factors. Participants were also asked to provide their identified gender and ethnicity. These demographic factors were expected to impact the variables measured in this study as these have aligned with previous research (Bardhoshi et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2007; Mullen et al., 2018).

## Participants

Participants for this study consisted of both currently practicing school counselors and administrators from Alabama. School counselors were invited to participate in the study through statewide professional listservs. Snowballing was encouraged to increase the number of professionals invited to participate in the study. All eligible part- or full-time administrators (assistant principals or principals) and school counselors (elementary, middle, or high school) in these positions in Alabama were recruited for this study. Participants were limited to school counselors and administrators working in these positions for at least one academic year.

G\*Power software (Faul et al., 2007) was utilized to determine the required sample size for this study. Utilizing a priori power analysis for multiple linear regression, the total sample size needed was 85. The following parameters were used to determine this sample size: a medium effect size of ( $f = 0.15$ ), an alpha level of  $p < 0.05$ , and 4 predictors. With 85 total participants, the estimated critical  $f$  value is  $F(4,80) = 2.49, p < 0.05$ .

## Data Analysis

This study utilized multiple data analysis methods to address each research question. The first and second research questions were analyzed utilizing descriptive statistics for the responses of administrators and school counselors individually. This research question was analyzed with a factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA). The fourth research question was analyzed using multiple regression to explain the relationship between school counselors and administrators broken down by demographic factors (years of experience, years in education, enrollment size, and grade level. This study had the following *independent variables*: years of experience, years in education, enrollment size, and grade level. The *dependent variables* in this study were the school counselor and administrator's responses to the SCARS instrument. The dependent variables were measured using the sum means of each of the subscales of the SCARS instrument (counseling, consultation, curriculum, coordination, and other activities), as conducted in research by Wilder and Ray (2013).

## Results

Of the 51 initial survey responses ( $n=51$ ), 30 participants ( $n=30$ ) completed the survey in full. These responses comprised 25 school counselors ( $n=25$ ) and 5 administrators ( $n=5$ ). Therefore, this study had a completion rate of 58.8%. The completion rate for school counselors was 69.4%, while only 55.6% for administrators. It is also important that the participant ratio of the school counselor to administrator was 4:1, as there were more school counselor participants ( $n=36$ ) than administrator participants ( $n=9$ ).

*Research Question 1: What are administrators' perceptions of the school counselor's role in the ASCA National Model?*

When comparing the responses from administrators to the list of appropriate and inappropriate school counselor duties, administrators averaged a score of 1.45, with 2 being the score assigned to duties as they aligned with the ASCA NM. Table 1 shows the average administrator and school counselor responses to each item within the survey corresponding to the ASCA NM list of appropriate and inappropriate school counselor activities.

**Table 1***Appropriate and Inappropriate School Counselor Duties*

Item		ASCA Rating	M Responses	
			Admin	SC
1	Consulting with teachers about building classroom connections, effective classroom management, and the role of noncognitive factors in student success	A	1.00	1.47
2	Maintaining student records	I	0.57	1.13
3	Interpreting cognitive, aptitude, and achievement tests	A	1.71	1.39
4	Analyzing grade-point averages in relationship to achievement	A	2.00	1.55
5	Keeping clerical records	I	1.14	1.58
6	Providing counseling to students who are tardy or absent	A	1.71	1.68
7	Performing disciplinary actions or assigning disciplinary consequences	I	2.00	1.87
8	Consulting with the school principal to identify and resolve student issues, needs, and problems	A	1.86	2.00
9	Assisting with duties in the principal's office	I	1.57	1.65
10	Advisement and appraisal for academic planning	A	2.00	1.77
11	Supervising classrooms or common areas	I	1.14	1.81
12	Providing long-term counseling in schools to address psychological disorders	I	1.00	1.65
13	Advocating for students at individual education plan meetings, student study teams, and school attendance review boards	A	1.57	1.87
14	Analyzing disaggregated schoolwide and school counseling program data	A	1.86	2.00
15	Serving as a data entry clerk	I	1.43	1.90
16	Coordinating cognitive, aptitude, and achievement testing programs	I	0.71	1.29
17	Coordinating paperwork and data entry of all new students	I	0.71	1.61
18	Providing counseling to students who have disciplinary problems	A	1.57	1.97
19	Building the master schedule	I	1.43	1.68
20	Consulting with teachers to schedule and present school counseling curriculum lessons based on developmental needs and needs identified through data	A	1.86	1.94
21	Providing short-term individual and small-group counseling services to students	A	2.00	2.00
22	Coordinating schoolwide individual education plans, 504 plans, student study teams, response to intervention plans, MTSS, and school attendance review boards	I	0.43	1.61
23	Protecting student records and information per state and federal regulations	A	1.86	1.55
24	Signing excuses for students who are tardy or absent	I	2.00	1.81
25	Covering classes when teachers are absent or creating teacher planning time	I	1.29	1.90
26	Computing grade-point averages	I	0.57	1.26
27	Interpreting student records	A	1.71	1.26
28	Orientation, coordination, and academic advising for new students	A	2.00	1.77

Note: The "ASCA Rating" column signifies which items are listed in the ASCA National Model chart for Appropriate and Inappropriate Activities for School Counselors (ASCA, 2019a). Items above deemed A are listed as "Appropriate," and items deemed I are listed as "Inappropriate" (ASCA, 2019a).

**Table 2***SCARS Means*

Subscale and Corresponding Items	Admin		SC	
	Act.	Pref.	Act.	Pref.
<b>Subscale: Counseling Activities</b>	<b>3.36</b>	<b>3.60</b>	<b>3.65</b>	<b>4.10</b>
Counsel with students regarding personal/family concerns	4.00	3.80	4.73	4.85
Counsel students regarding school behavior	3.00	3.00	4.47	4.62
Counsel students regarding academic issues	4.40	4.40	4.07	4.31
Counsel students regarding crisis/emergency issues	4.00	4.00	4.20	4.62
Counsel with students regarding relationships (e.g., family, friends, romantic)	3.80	3.80	4.73	4.58
Provide small group counseling addressing relationship/social skills	3.20	4.00	3.00	3.85
Provide small group counseling for academic issues	3.20	4.00	2.87	3.67
Conduct small groups regarding family/personal issues (e.g., divorce, death)	2.40	3.00	3.20	3.92
Conduct small group counseling for students regarding substance abuse issues	2.20	2.20	1.67	2.45
Follow-up on individual and group counseling participants	3.40	3.80	3.60	4.08
<b>Subscale: Consultation Activities</b>	<b>2.97</b>	<b>3.29</b>	<b>3.48</b>	<b>3.59</b>
Consult with school staff concerning student behavior	3.20	4.00	4.60	4.54
Consult with community and school agencies concerning individual students	3.60	3.60	3.60	3.85
Consult with parents regarding child/adolescent development issues	3.80	4.00	3.73	4.00
Coordinate referrals for students	3.40	3.60	3.60	4.08
Assist in identifying exceptional children (special education)	2.00	2.60	2.93	2.58
Provide consultation for administrators	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.17
Participate in team/grade level / subject team meetings	1.80	2.20	2.87	2.92
<b>Subscale: Curriculum Activities</b>	<b>2.80</b>	<b>4.00</b>	<b>3.77</b>	<b>4.38</b>
Conduct classroom activities to introduce yourself and explain the program	3.00	4.20	4.20	4.62
Conduct classroom lessons addressing career development and the world of work	3.00	3.80	3.93	4.46
Conduct classroom lessons on various personal and social traits	2.60	4.00	4.00	4.62
Conduct classroom lessons on personal growth and development issues	3.00	4.20	3.80	4.62
Conduct classroom lessons on conflict resolution	3.00	4.20	3.47	4.38
Conduct classroom lessons regarding substance abuse	2.00	3.40	3.20	3.83
Conduct classroom lessons on personal safety issues	3.00	4.20	3.80	4.15
<b>Subscale: Coordination Activities</b>	<b>3.16</b>	<b>3.69</b>	<b>3.33</b>	<b>3.87</b>
Coordinate special events and programs or personal/social issues	2.80	3.60	3.53	4.23
Coordinate and maintain a comprehensive school counseling program	4.20	4.40	4.40	4.92
Inform parents about the role, training, program, and interventions	3.80	4.00	3.87	4.42
Conduct or coordinate parent education classes or workshops	2.60	3.20	2.40	3.83
Coordinate school-wide response for crisis management and intervention	3.00	3.20	2.87	3.50
Inform teachers/administrators about the role, training, program, and interventions	3.00	3.80	2.67	4.00
Conduct or coordinate teacher in-service programs	1.40	2.60	2.53	2.58
Keep track of how time is being spent on the functions that you perform	3.25	3.75	3.40	3.62
Attend professional development activities (e.g., state conferences, local in-services)	3.60	4.00	4.00	3.85
Coordinate with an advisory team to analyze/respond to counseling program needs	3.00	3.80	2.87	3.62
Evaluate student progress as a result of participation in individual/group counseling	3.00	3.60	3.27	3.77
Conduct needs assessments and counseling program evaluations	3.40	4.00	3.87	4.17
Coordinate orientation process/activities for students	4.00	4.00	3.67	3.83
<b>Subscale: "Other" Activities</b>	<b>2.92</b>	<b>3.04</b>	<b>3.03</b>	<b>2.26</b>
Participate on committees within the school	3.20	3.60	3.87	4.17
Coordinate the standardized testing program	4.40	4.40	3.53	1.67
Organize outreach to low-income families	2.80	3.20	4.07	3.85
Respond to health issues (e.g., check for lice, eye screening, 504 coordination)	2.60	2.80	3.87	2.00
Perform hall, bus, and cafeteria duty	1.60	2.60	3.20	1.67
Schedule students for classes	4.00	3.40	3.27	3.00
Enroll students in and withdraw students from school	3.60	3.60	2.13	1.62
Maintain/Complete educational records/reports	3.80	3.80	2.60	1.67
Handle discipline of students	1.40	1.20	1.80	1.64
Substitutes teach and cover classes for teachers at your school	1.80	1.80	1.93	1.29

*Note:* Some items are abbreviated.

Table 2 outlines the item means reported by administrators and school counselors. These results suggest that administrators prefer that as part of the school counselor's role, school counselors limit their engagement in these activities.

Table 3 summarizes the SCARS mean responses from administrators and school counselors for actual and preferred activities based on the subscale means. Recall that the SCARS instrument utilized a frequency rating scale from 1 to 5, with 1 representing a low frequency and 5 a high frequency of a function (Scarborough, 2005b). The results from comparing the scores of the SCARS instrument suggested that administrators prefer for school counselors to be frequently performing curriculum activities ( $M = 4.00$ ) while only occasionally performing all other activities (Counseling,  $M = 3.60$ ; Consultation,  $M = 3.29$ ; Coordination,  $M = 3.69$ ; "Other,"  $M = 3.04$ ).

**Table 3**

*Results: SCARS Summary of Mean Responses*

Subscale	Admin		SC	
	Act.	Pref.	Act.	Pref.
Counseling Activities	3.36	3.60	3.65	4.10
Consultation Activities	2.97	3.29	3.48	3.59
Curriculum Activities	2.80	4.00	3.77	4.38
Coordination Activities	3.16	3.69	3.33	3.87
"Other" Activities	2.92	3.04	3.03	2.26

When reviewing the administrators' responses to how much time they would prefer that school counselors spend in each category of activities, administrators favored counseling. As shown in Table 4, administrators preferred that school counselors spend about half of their time counseling ( $M = 48.00$ ), about a third of their time providing curriculum ( $M = 32.00$ ), about a fifth of their time consulting ( $M = 20.00$ ), and a small percentage of time doing "other" activities ( $M = 6.00$ ).

#### Percentage of Time-based on SCARS

Statements		Admin		SC	
		Act.	Pref.	Act.	Pref.
1	Counseling Activities (individual, group, etc.)	46.00	48.00	38.40	43.75
2	Consultation Activities (school staff, community partners, etc.)	20.00	20.00	18.00	17.60
3	Curriculum Activities (classroom guidance on career, personal/social, and academic issues)	32.00	32.00	25.60	36.40
4	Coordination Activities (special events, training, etc.).	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
5	Other Activities (committee participation, responding to health concerns, disciplining students, hallway monitoring)	10.00	6.00	20.40	7.20

*Research Question 2: What are school counselors' perceptions of the role of the school counselor in the ASCA National Model?*

School counselors' average responses on the list of appropriate or inappropriate activities for school counselors are located in Table 1. The overall average for school counselors on all items was  $M = 1.68$ . This study found that school counselors agree with the ASCA's list of appropriate and inappropriate duties for school counselors.

After reviewing school counselors' responses to the SCARS instrument, as shown in Table 3, school counselors prefer to engage in counseling and curriculum activities frequently ( $M = 4.10$ ,  $M = 4.38$ ). While school counselors reported a preference for engaging in consultation and coordination activities occasionally ( $M = 3.59$ ,  $M = 3.87$ ), they only rarely preferred to engage in "other" activities ( $M = 2.26$ ). Table 2 outlines school counselors' itemized results for this instrument.

As Table 4 reports, school counselors preferred spending time with students. School counselors indicated a preference for spending about half their time counseling ( $M = 43.75$ ), about a third of their time providing curriculum activities ( $M = 36.40$ ), about 18% of their time consulting ( $M = 17.60$ ), and about 7% of their time completing "other" activities ( $M = 7.20$ ).

*Research Question 3: What are the differences between school counselors' and administrators' perceptions of the role of school counselors?*

To determine differences between the perceptions of school counselors and administrators on the role of school counselors, data results were sorted into two groups based on how each participant responded to their current role (school counselor or administrator). Sum means were used to develop independent variables for this study, as was done by Wilder and Ray (2013). This allowed for a factorial ANOVA to compare the main effects of actual and preferred activities (IV) and their interaction effects on school counselors and administrator responses (DV).

The effects of actual scores were not statistically significant ( $p = 0.66$ ), but the effects of preferred scores were statistically significant ( $p = 0.05$ ). Therefore, the effect size of preferred scores indicated that they account for 100% of the variance in the school counselor and administrator responses ( $F_{(1, 27)} = 4.12$ ,  $p = 0.05$ ). This also explains why there was no significance in the effect of actual scores ( $F_{(1, 27)} = 0.19$ ,  $p = 0.66$ ) or the interaction of actual and preferred scores ( $F_{(1, 27)} = 1.43$ ,  $p = 0.24$ ). The assumptions of a factorial ANOVA were also tested. A Levene's test was conducted, and homogeneity of variances was found ( $F_{(1, 27)} = 1.95$ ,  $p = 0.17$ ). Histograms were utilized to graph and confirm the normality of samples and residuals.

*Research Question 4: Does the perception of the school counselor's role differ based on demographic criteria?*

Multiple regression was completed to determine if demographic criteria (IV) could statistically significantly predict administrator responses (DV). The specific demographic criteria observed were years of experience, years in education, enrollment size, and grade level. Sum means were used to develop independent variables for this study, as was done by Wilder and Ray (2013). A participant's sum mean was collected by averaging their responses in one category and then adding among each subscale to obtain one score per participant. Sum mean scores were obtained for responses on the following SCARS subscales: counseling activities, consultation activities, curriculum activities, coordination activities, and other activities.

The final predictive model was as follows: Administrator Responses =  $8.90 + (0.80 * \text{Years of Experience}) + (0.10 * \text{Years in Education}) + (0.60 * \text{Enrollment Size}) + (5.13 * \text{Grade Level})$ . The results indicated that the model explained 100% of the proportion of variation ( $R^2 = 1.00$ ). In contrast, years of experience explain about 63% ( $R^2 = 0.63$ ), years in education explain about 16% ( $R^2 = 0.16$ ), enrollment size explains about 29% ( $R^2 = 0.29$ ), and grade level explains about 98% ( $R^2 = 0.98$ ) of SCARS responses. The model did not significantly predict the administrator's SCARS responses, as the results were inconclusive ( $F_{(4, 0)} = \text{NaN}, p = \text{NA}$ ). The inconclusive results are likely explained by the small participant sample ( $n = 30$ ) and the lack of reaching the G\*Power target sample size ( $n = 85$ ). Grade level contributed significantly to the model ( $F_{(1,3)} = 140.9, p = .001$ ); however, years of experience ( $F_{(1,3)} = 5.06, p = .11$ ), years in education ( $F_{(1,3)} = 0.59, p = .49$ ), and enrollment size ( $F_{(2,2)} = 0.41, p = .71$ ) did not contribute significantly to the model. Therefore, it can be hypothesized that grade level impacts administrators' perception of the school counselor's role, although additional research is needed to determine this.

## Results Summary

This study aimed to identify differences between administrators' and school counselors' perceptions of the role of school counselors. The SCARS and SCARS Modified instrumentations were utilized to achieve this goal. The results demonstrated no statistically significant effects on administrators' and school counselors' perceptions of the school counselor's role when comparing actual and preferred scores. However, small differences exist, such as the statistically significant effect of preferred scores on the school counselor and administrator responses. Additionally, the results were inconclusive in determining how demographic criteria impact the perception of the school counselor's role.

## Discussion

This study focused on the school counselor's role and how administrators and school counselors perceive this role. This study's first two research questions aimed to determine how administrators and school counselors perceive the school counselor's role concerning the ASCA National Model, respectively. The third research question sought to determine if differences existed between how school counselors and administrators perceived the school counselor's role. While the overall effects were not statistically significant, the results suggest that preferred scores affect how school counselors and administrators perceive the school counselor's role. Lastly, the fourth research question aimed to consider the impact of demographic criteria on the perception of the school counselor's role. The specific demographic criteria considered in this study include the following: years of experience, total years of experience in the field of education, school enrollment size, and grade levels served. Due to the small sample size, these results were inconclusive in determining the effect of demographic criteria on the perception of the school counselor's role.

As part of the SCARS Modified instrument (Lane, 2020), participants were given items from the ASCA National Model list of appropriate and inappropriate activities for school counselors (ASCA, 2019a). There was only one item in which administrators and school counselors completely agreed with the ASCA National Model: "Providing short-term individual and small-group counseling services to students" (See Table 1, Item 21;  $M = 2.0$ ). It is a positive finding that there is agreement among administrators and school counselors that school

counselors should be providing individual and small-group counseling to students. However, it is also a testament to the differences among these perceptions of the role. This is the singular response in which both groups of participants fully agreed with the ASCA National Model.

However, there were other items in which school counselors and administrators did not fully agree with the ASCA National Model, yet their responses agreed. For instance, the item “Providing counseling to students who are tardy or absent” (See Table 1, Item 6) was scored similarly for both administrators ( $M = 1.71$ ) and school counselors ( $M = 1.68$ ). This suggests that while both groups agree with the ASCA National Model, they have a stronger agreement with one another (range = 0.03). Therefore, the results suggest that while both groups have somewhat differing opinions and differing opinions from the ASCA National Model, there are specific items in which they agree with one another.

### **Desired Activities for School Counselors**

The SCARS Modified (Lane et al., 2020) instrument was utilized to determine how often school counselors and administrators sought school counselors to engage in particular activities. The results of this instrument suggested that administrators want school counselors to engage in these activities more often than they believe they currently are (Actual Mean < Preferred Mean). While school counselors agree for most categories of activities, they desire to do less in the “Other” Activities category than they currently are (Actual  $M = 3.03$ , Prefer  $M = 2.26$ ). The specific activities in which school counselors feel the strongest desire to engage less often are as follows: “Respond to health issues (e.g., check for live, eye screening, 504 coordination)” (Table 2, Subscale “Other” Activities, Item 4, Range = 1.87), “Coordinate the standardized testing program” (Table 2, Subscale “Other” Activities, Item 2, Range = 1.86), and “Perform hall, bus, and cafeteria duty” (Table 2, Subscale “Other” Activities, Item 5, Range = 1.53). For each of these tasks, school counselors feel as though they are engaging in these tasks occasionally ( $M \approx 3.00$ ) and desire to engage in these tasks either never ( $M \approx 1.00$ ) or rarely ( $M \approx 2.00$ ). However, administrators prefer that school counselors engage in testing coordination frequently ( $M \approx 4.00$ ) and rarely ( $M \approx 2.00$ ) respond to health issues or engage in shared duties.

Another finding is that school counselors believe to be engaging in activities more often than administrators believe that they are. For instance, administrators reported that school counselors rarely engage in consultation ( $M \approx 2.00$ ), curriculum, and “other” activities, whereas school counselors believe they are engaging in these activities occasionally ( $M \approx 3.00$ ). School counselors and administrators believe that school counselors engage in counseling and coordination activities occasionally ( $M \approx 3.00$ ), but school counselors rated actual engagement in these activities higher than administrators did.

### **Differences in Perceptions of Role**

The main method of determining differences in how school counselors and administrators perceive the school counselor’s role was done through a factorial ANOVA. While these results suggested no statistically significant difference in how these two groups perceive this role, there are slight differences in the way these two groups responded to the survey.

The results from the appropriate and inappropriate duties of the school counselor section of the survey suggest some activities in which school counselors and administrators disagree. As mentioned, these results directly respond to the groups’ agreement towards the ASCA National Model. There are 6 items in which the school counseling group scored the task agreeing with the

ASCA National Model ( $N > 1$ ). In contrast, the administrator group scored the task as disagreeing with the ASCA National Model ( $N < 1$ ), and one item in which the administrator group scored the task as neutral in agreement with the ASCA National Model ( $N = 1.00$ ). These findings suggest that the following tasks are viewed by administrators as appropriate for school counselors but are viewed as inappropriate by school counselors themselves and the ASCA National Model: a) student record keeping, b) new student data entry, c) student grade calculations, d) school-wide testing organization, and e) coordination of school-wide MTSS programs. For the following tasks, school counselors agreed with the ASCA National Model as an appropriate activity, while administrators disagreed with counseling students with disciplinary concerns and assisting teachers with rapport building, classroom management, and overall student success.

Based on the SCARS results (see Table 2), both school counselors and administrators agree that the school counselor's role should include counseling activities; however, there is a difference in agreement on how often to engage in these specific behaviors. School counselors reported a desire to engage in counseling activities frequently ( $M = 4.10$ ), while administrators reported a preference for school counselors to provide counseling services only occasionally ( $M = 3.60$ ). However, when reviewing how both groups responded to the percentage of the time portion of the instrument (see Table 4), administrators prefer school counselors to engage in counseling services for approximately half of the day ( $M = 48.00$ ). School counselors believe to be providing counseling services ( $M = 38.40$ ) less often than administrators perceive them to be ( $M = 46.00$ ) and only want to be engaging in counseling activities about 44% of the time ( $M = 43.75$ ). This is likely a result of the ASCA National Model recommendation that school counselors spend 80% of their time engaging in direct or indirect services to benefit students (ASCA, 2019b).

## **Implications of Research Findings**

### ***Targeted ASCA Training***

In the appropriate and inappropriate school counselor duties section of the survey, the findings suggest that the school counseling group did not fully align with the ASCA National Model either. School counselors agreed with all appropriate and inappropriate activities overall ( $N > 1$ ) and agreed more strongly than administrators did, with an average of 1.68 compared to the administrators' overall group average of 1.45. However, when school counselors are trained with the ASCA National Model in CACREP-accredited programs (Branthoover et al., 2010; Perry et al., 2020), it can be hypothesized that these individuals would score in more agreement with the ASCA National Model. These findings may be skewed. There were 105 instances when a school counselor marked an item in this portion of the survey as "neutral," which means that each school counselor rated approximately 3 items as neutral when taking the survey ( $n = 2.92$ ). While this number may seem low, this is approximately 10% of the items in which school counselors either did not have a strong opinion or were unsure whether the activity listed should be considered appropriate or inappropriate for their role. It is possible that school counselors need additional training in the use of the ASCA National Model themselves.

Additionally, participants were asked in the survey to rate how familiar they were with the ASCA National Model. The responses were coded such that "Not familiar at all" = 0, "Not very familiar" = 1, "Familiar" = 2, and "Very familiar" = 3. School counselors reported feeling familiar ( $M = 2.52$ ) with the ASCA National Model. This further supports the idea that school

counselors may need additional training in the ASCA National Model. This may be helpful to be provided in the form of professional supervision. Many school counselors reportedly lack professional supervision (Zalewski, 2022) or targeted professional development for school counselors (Griffen & Hallett, 2017), and this may be a great way to fill that gap.

Administrators reported feeling unfamiliar ( $M = 1.88$ ) with the ASCA National Model. As a result, administrators must receive proper training in the ASCA National Model because this tool trains school counselors within their programs (Birdsong & Yakimowski, 2021). Administrators can learn more about the ASCA National Model through webinars, conferences, or even collaborative team meetings with the school counselor at their school or district. The ASCA National Model (2019b) supports this idea and teaches school counselors to hold an “Annual Administrative Conference” in which these concerns could be addressed. This conference or meeting is intended to be a time to outline the goals of the school counseling comprehensive program, address any limitations or needs of the program, and foster collaboration between these two roles (ASCA, 2019b). This would be a good time for school counselors to model the school counselor’s role and for the administrator to bridge any gaps in their knowledge of the ASCA National Model.

### ***Open Communication and Role Expectations***

This study found that administrators do not feel familiar ( $M = 1.88$ ) with the ASCA National Model. While increasing administrators’ knowledge about the ASCA National Model is a step in the right direction, administrators and school counselors also need to have formalized conversations about how the ASCA National Model will be integrated into the school counselor’s role at their school. This study found some specific activities in which school counselors and administrators agree more with one another than with the ASCA National Model (See Table 1, Item 6). There are also some instances in which school counselors and administrators have differing perceptions on how much time school counselors are and should be spending on certain activities (See Table 4). While school counselors and administrators can increase their understanding of the ASCA National Model, they should also increase communication to ensure a collaborative approach to the comprehensive school counseling program (Geesa et al., 2019).

Open communication between administrators and school counselors needs to include the perception of a safe space in which both parties feel respected and valued when expressing agreement and disagreement (Lawrence & Stone, 2019). Some examples of ways to increase this open communication include asking administrators to serve on the advisory council, as recommended by ASCA (ASCA, 2019b); holding weekly or bi-weekly check-in meetings between administrators and school counselors within a school or district and holding debriefing opportunities after professional development related to the ASCA National Model. Increasing open communication between school counselors and administrators on the role expectations for school counselors would increase unified perspectives.

In addition to increasing communication, school counselors and administrators should formally outline specific role expectations. The ASCA National Model (2019b) provides an outline or template for the suggested Annual Administrative Conference. This template, to be filled out by the school counselor and then discussed during the meeting, consists of the following components: priorities and goals of the school counseling comprehensive program, school counselor use of time analysis, ratio, and caseload size, the comprehensive program plan

to address student needs (based on student data), professional development plan, and school and district responsibilities (ASCA, 2019b). While all of these components are great for minimizing role confusion, a primary tool of focus should be the section related to school and district responsibilities. This section might include responsibilities associated with bus duty, testing, 504 planning, Response to Intervention, or advisory council. It also allows school counselors and administrators to be clear about the time commitment requirements of each activity and the overall time that school counselors should spend in each category (direct or indirect services, program planning, or non-school counseling duties). Providing a document with clear role expectations can increase the ability for both parties to have open communication about these expectations. This would reduce school counselor role confusion and burnout (Bardhoshi et al., 2014; Fye et al., 2020; Mullen et al., 2018).

### ***Collaborative Educational Opportunities***

School counseling and educational leadership educators can also intentionally integrate collaborations between program coursework. There are numerous opportunities to provide collaboration between these programs. For instance, section 2 of the CACREP School Counseling specialty standards highlights contextual dimensions (CACREP, 2015). One standard reflects school counselors' content knowledge of effective leadership styles (CACREP, 2015, Standard 5.G.2.j.). This could be done by having educational leadership students collaborate with school counseling students by presenting knowledge on leadership styles. The school counseling students could practice demonstrating a specific leadership style while teaching administrators about the school counselor role. This would also interweave another standard by demonstrating their ability to advocate for the school counselor role (CACREP, 2015, Standard 5.G.2.f.). Further, school counseling and educational leadership students could engage in a group project to train the other students in their roles, establish ways that each role could collaborate throughout the year, and build a sample annual collaboration plan. This could include components of several CACREP (2015) standards: "school counselor roles in school leadership and multidisciplinary teams" (5.G.2.d.), "competencies to advocate for school counseling roles," (5.G.2.f.), "Development of school counseling program mission statements and objectives," (5.G.3.a.), "design and evaluation of school counseling programs" (5.G.3.b.), "techniques to foster collaboration and teamwork within schools," (5.G.3.l.), "use of accountability data to inform decision making," (5.G.3.n.) and "use of data to advocate for programs and students," (5.G.3.o.).

While these are suggestions for collaboration, these are the only ways students could engage with one another. Faculty can also organize for students to attend a class from the other program; invite guest speakers of students, recently graduated students, or faculty from the other program to speak on a specific topic; develop collaborative assignments across courses; or integrate role-play or other hands-on activities across courses, giving students practice interacting with one another. These teaching tools would greatly increase advocacy skills and basic content knowledge of the other profession and provide networking opportunities for students. Previous scholarship has also supported the idea of collaboration between training programs for future school counselors and administrators (Carnes-Holt et al., 2012; Perruse et al., 2009; Tygret et al., 2020). This would encourage the overlap in training for school counselors and administrators moving forward.

## Limitations

One limitation of this study was the limited number of survey participants. Only 9 administrators and 36 school counselors contributed to the survey. This unequal distribution of participants could have impacted the data analysis of this study. Additionally, the G\*Power software (Faul et al., 2007) utilized recommended sample size of 85 participants, of which only 30 were obtained to complete the survey in full. This resulted in inconclusive data in the multiple regression for research question number 4, made it challenging to compare differences in perceptions of the school counselor's role for research question number 3, and limited the overall representation of the sample. This also impacts the generalizability of the study results as this small sample size cannot ethically represent the intended population. It is also possible that the decision to recruit participants during the spring of the academic year made it difficult for administrators to find time to engage in research. Additionally, the length of the survey may have contributed to the level of participatory dropout from the beginning of the survey.

Another limitation of this study was that there were two flaws in the percentage of time section of the SCARS Modified (Lane et al., 2020) instrument. The participants were instructed to identify how much time they engaged and preferred to engage in each category per week. When doing so, they were asked to make the results equal to 100, representing 100% of the time spent in all five categories each week. However, the sum of responses in this section for many participants was higher than 100. This caused this section of the data to be skewed. Additionally, the researcher neglected to include a sliding bar to represent the Coordination Activities section. Therefore, this component has no data to report (See Table 4).

## Recommendations for Future Research

This study utilized multiple regression to determine if demographic factors impacted the perception of the school counselor's role. The findings were inconclusive in determining if years of experience, years in education, enrollment size, or grade level impact the way school counselors or administrators view the role of the school counselor. However, grade level contributed significantly to the model ( $F_{(1,3)} = 140.9, p = .001$ ). This suggests that grade level may influence the perception of the role, although more research is needed to support this.

Additionally, expanding the demographic criteria utilized when determining the impact on the perception of the school counselor's role may be beneficial. For instance, research has shown that school counselors with higher caseloads also have higher levels of burnout and job dissatisfaction (Bardhoshi et al., 2014; Mullen et al., 2021). It may be worth considering how caseload size may impact the perception of the school counselor's role. Many school counselors are trained in CACREP-accredited programs (Brandthoover, 2010; Perry et al., 2020). Therefore, comparing the results of individuals trained by CACREP programs to those who attended non-CACREP accredited programs would be interesting. Another possible impact on this perception could be the difference in public and private school settings. The responses of this study were 100% from public entities, which lends itself to the question if results would differ if participants worked in another setting.

Furthermore, qualitative research may help gain additional insight into how school counseling roles are perceived. This may help determine themes among the responses provided. Additionally, it may provide a way to increase the stakeholders included in the sample (i.e., teachers, students, parents, and staff members). A qualitative study may also be useful in comparing the direct results within one school system. This would allow a direct comparison

between a school counselor and an administrator within the same working dynamic. Lastly, a longitudinal study may be beneficial in identifying changes in the perception of the school counselor's role over time from both the administrator's and school counselor's perspectives.

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