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District-Level Supervisors: Leaders and Advocates for School Counseling

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District-Level Supervisors: Leaders and Advocates for School Counseling

A dissertation submitted in partial requirements toward a Doctor of Philosophy in Education with a concentration in Counselor Education and Supervision at Virginia Commonwealth University

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Abstract

All school counselors are expected to serve as leaders and advocates in their school communities. However, many are underprepared for the work after they complete graduate-level training. The present study explored the experiences of district-level school counseling supervisors in facilitating leadership development with professional school counselors. District-level supervisors are ideally placed to support school counselors in their leadership development and advocacy work. Through a semi-structured interview process, eight district-level school counseling supervisors provided information about their leadership development experiences. Data analysis yielded four themes in this descriptive phenomenological study involving social justice, role advocacy, barriers to effective leadership, and leadership perspective. The themes are described in detail along with identity descriptors that emerged during the data collection process. Discussion of these themes contextualizes the findings within the scholarship of school counselor leadership. Implications for graduate training and post-graduate leadership development suggest opportunities to improve alignment with best practice expectations of the profession. The discussion of findings also includes recommendations for future research about district-level school counseling supervisors engaged in leadership development work with professional school counselors.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Professional school counselors serve as leaders and advocates in their school communities. School counselors strive to dismantle educational practices that reinforce the marginalization of underserved students and families (Adelman & Taylor, 2002). They advocate for reform and draw attention to educational disparities that disproportionately impact low-income and minority students (Bemak, 2000; Gysbers & Henderson, 2001; McMahon et al., 2009; Paisley et al., 2010). School counselors provide culturally responsive connection opportunities for parents and pathways to success for all students (Colbert et al., 2006a; Kim et al., 2018; Lee, 2005; Lewis et al., 2011). Leadership in the school counseling context requires advocacy on behalf of individuals and communities. However, many school counselors lack the skills they need to lead and advocate effectively.

Multiple sources reinforce the interconnectedness between leadership and advocacy in the counseling profession. The American Counseling Association (ACA), the American School Counselor Association (ASCA), and the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) emphasize the connection between leadership and advocacy (ACA, 2014; ASCA, 2019; CACREP, 2016). Association presidents and division leaders repeatedly stress the importance of advocacy and service as foundational to their mission (Bartlett et al., 1985; Harper et al., 2013; Henderson, 2005; Miville et al., 2017; O'Brien, 2016; Perepiczka & Scholl, 2012; Roysircar, 2010c). Icons of the profession are held in high regard because of their advocacy on behalf of others (Cashwell & Sweeney, 2016; Coker, 2011; Nichols & Carney, 2013; Sherrell, 2015).

Counselor educators emphasize the leadership and advocacy connection in various ways (DeSimone & Roberts, 2016; Hollenbaugh, 2015; Kiser et al., 2011). Chi Sigma Iota (CSI) chapters facilitate service projects and positional leadership opportunities (Luke & Goodrich, 2010; McKibben et al., 2017a; Wahesh et al., 2018). Some counselor education programs offer integrated training with future school principals to facilitate a better understanding of the different leadership behaviors expected of school counselors and administrators (DeSimone & Roberts, 2016; Shoffner & Briggs, 2001; Shoffner & Williamson, 2000). Scholars highlight the specific skills school counselors should possess to effectively address opportunity gaps in schools (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007; Colbert & Magouirk Colbert, 2003; Colbert et al., 2006b; Kim et al., 2018). Peters et al. (2018) describe how the CSI Principles and Practices of Leadership Excellence apply to the school setting. Others offer social justice competencies to target best practices for advocating alongside marginalized students and communities (Colbert et al., 2006a; Lee, 2005; Lewis et al., 2011; Ratts & Greenleaf, 2017). Counselor educators strive to equip school counselors with the vision and tools to engage in effective advocacy, but with limited success.

Statement of the Problem

Instilling the priorities of leadership and advocacy with practicing school counselors has proven challenging. Consensus exists in the literature regarding the need for school counselors to engage in advocacy that addresses opportunity gaps in support of marginalized students and families (Adelman & Taylor, 2002; Beck, 2016; Bemak, 2000; Colbert et al., 2006a; Dixon & Dew, 2012; Gysbers & Henderson, 2001; Kim et al., 2018; Lancaster et al., 2017; Lewis et al., 2011; McMahon et al., 2009; Paisley et al., 2010; Shields et al., 2017). However, Ford and Nelson (2007) identify a disconnect

between the advocacy expectations championed in the leadership literature and practicing school counselor descriptions of leadership. Many school counselors do not identify as professionals working for systemic change on behalf of students and families (Janson, 2009). Their descriptions of leadership activities include responsibilities such as testing coordination, student scheduling, and speaking at faculty meetings (Ford & Nelson, 2007). Pressing for more details, Mullen et al. (2019) note that leadership self-efficacy and a comprehensive school counseling program do not significantly correlate with advocacy among practicing school counselors. Further, principals report being least satisfied with their counselors' ability to address diversity issues, parent outreach, and community engagement—the essential tools of advocacy (Beesley & Frey, 2006).

When school counselors complete graduate training and enter the profession, they encounter vastly different school environments that shape the transition experience (Amatea & Clark, 2005). School counselors thrive in schools where work expectations align with graduate training and the ASCA National Model (Goodman-Scott & Grothaus, 2017a; 2017b). Support networks, strong professional identity, self-efficacy, and early validation can aid the transition (Dollarhide et al., 2008). However, the transition can be difficult when veteran administrators lack critical knowledge of the school counselor role (Dollarhide et al., 2008; Walsh & Gibson, 2019; Wilkerson et al., 2013). Systems and structures at the school and district levels either support, or fail to support, new school counselors as they enter the profession (Bemak & Chung, 2008; Dollarhide et al., 2008; Goodman-Scott & Grothaus, 2017a; 2017b; Walsh & Gibson, 2019; Wilkerson et al., 2013). District-level supervisors of school counselors play a critical role in shaping the supports that promote or inhibit effective school counselor leadership development as they enter the profession.

The limited research on district-level school counseling supervisors indicates that most school systems do not employ individuals in these positions with appropriate knowledge of the leadership and advocacy expectations of professional school counseling (Biggers & Mangusso, 1972; Schmidt & Barret, 1983; Wilson & Remley, 1987). District-level supervisors can foster a professional climate that supports the leadership and advocacy skills learned in school counselor graduate training. They establish job descriptions, program priorities, and professional learning experiences. Their leadership efforts substantially impact the delivery of school counseling services in their districts (Kneale et al., 2018; Watkinson, 2015; Young & Bryan, 2015). Multiple authors highlight the importance of district-level school counselor supervisors (Biggers, 1976; Biggers & Mangusso, 1972; Brott et al., 2016; Brown & Ayala, 2017; Frederickson & Popken, 1972; Kaffenberger et al., 2006; Kneale et al., 2018; Schmidt & Barret, 1983; Watkinson, 2015; Wilson & Remley, 1987; Young & Bryan, 2015). However, no research to date has explored the ways in which district-level supervisors support leadership development with the professional school counselors they serve.

Purpose of the Study

No research existed prior to this study regarding the ways in which district-level school counseling supervisors facilitate leadership development that aligns with the counseling profession's emphasis on advocacy. This inquiry explored the role of district-level supervisors in supporting the leadership development journey alongside the professional school counselors they serve. Specifically, this study answered the question: What are the lived experiences of district-level school counseling supervisors in facilitating leadership development with professional school counselors?

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Need for the Study

A disconnect occurs in the leadership journey of many school counselors. The priorities of leadership and advocacy emphasized during graduate training fade in the school setting. School administrators who lack a strong understanding of appropriate school counselor priorities miss the mark in maximizing school counselor impact with undersupported students and families (Amatea & Clark, 2005; Bemak & Chung, 2008; Dollarhide et al., 2008; Wilkerson et al., 2013). Too often, a school counselor's assigned responsibilities do not align with the expectations articulated by CACREP-accredited training programs (Paisley & Hayes, 2003; Paradise et al., 2010). Principals can foster confusion by defining the roles of their school counselors in different ways (Amatea & Clark, 2005). School counselors can also be too flexible, adapting to principal expectations that conflict with leadership best practices learned during graduate training (Bemak & Chung, 2008).

District-level school counseling supervisors can address these concerns with both principals and school counselors (Kaffenberger et al., 2006; Kneale et al., 2018). However, few school divisions employ qualified district-level school counseling supervisors to meet this need (Schmidt & Barret, 1983; Wilson & Remley, 1987). District-level school counseling supervisors possess the systemic collaboration skills to address the leadership disconnect (Young & Bryan, 2015). Kaffenberger et al. (2006) offer a powerful example of district-level supervisors working in collaboration with counselor educators and state-level leadership. Through their combined efforts, they were able to increase awareness of the ASCA National Model, advocate for state-level counseling supports, and achieve meaningful legislative changes to better support school communities.

District-level school counseling supervisors shape the leadership expectations of professional school counselors working in their school divisions (Biggers, 1976; Biggers & Mangusso, 1972; Brown & Ayala, 2017; Frederickson & Popken, 1972; Kaffenberger et al., 2006; Kneale et al., 2018; Watkinson, 2015). However, little is known about these influential leaders apart from their strong systemic collaboration skills and social justice advocacy (Young & Bryan, 2015). In a survey of Virginia school divisions, 21% identified a staff member responsible for supervising school counselors at the district level (Wilson & Remley, 1987). A survey of district-level administrators in North Carolina found that less than half of their school counseling supervisors were trained in counseling or a related field (Schmidt & Barret, 1983). The limited research focused on these leaders indicates that qualified district-level school counseling supervisors are impactful, but rare. Further, no research to date has empirically explored the experiences of district-level school counseling supervisors in facilitating leadership development with the professional school counselors they serve.

Significance of the Study

This study identifies ways in which a small number of qualified district-level school counseling supervisors support the leadership development of professional school counselors. The last empirical studies to focus on district-level school counseling supervisors predate the school accountability movement and the ASCA National Model (Schmidt & Barret, 1983; Wilson & Remley, 1987). This study's findings present information about the leadership development activities of district-level supervisors and offer ways for school divisions to cultivate school counselor leadership that meaningfully addresses opportunity/support gaps. District-level school counseling supervisors are well-positioned to support principals in maximizing the effectiveness of the school

counselors helping to lead their schools. Preservice training alone does not effectively prepare most principals or school counselors for the teamwork necessary to address the disparities that exist in their school communities (Armstrong et al., 2010). This study identifies ways in which district-level supervisors facilitate leadership development that aligns with best practices of the school counseling profession.

This study provides empirical documentation of the ways in which qualified district-level school counseling supervisors engage in leadership development. Prior to this study, the lack of research on district-level school counseling supervisors left this small group of professionals unable to seek best practices in the literature. Veteran school counselors claim to engage in leadership practices more frequently than younger, less-experienced counselors (Mason & McMahon, 2009). However, veteran counselors do not strongly identify advocacy or social justice issues as leadership priorities (Ford & Nelson, 2007; Janson, 2009). The present study identifies ways in which these individuals facilitate leadership development that emphasizes advocacy and social justice among the school counselors they support. This inquiry offers information for current and future district-level school counseling supervisors to draw upon.

Fifty years ago, scholars began to call for the Association of Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) to develop training expectations for district-level school counseling supervisors (Biggers & Mangusso, 1972; Frederickson & Popken, 1972). Noting their effectiveness, Wilson and Remley (1987) urged the counselor associations to advocate for appropriately trained district-level school counseling supervisors. This inquiry amplifies the call to association members regarding the work these valued colleagues are doing to support the skills learned in graduate training programs. Multiple authors highlight the impact that effective collaboration can have when

counselor educators and district-level school counseling supervisors work together to advocate for high quality school counseling services (Brown & Ayala, 2017; Kaffenberger et al., 2006). The results of this study offer professional association leaders and school district administrators new information to consider in determining how to best support district-level supervisors in their leadership and advocacy efforts.

Definition of Terms

American Counseling Association (ACA): Established in 1952, ACA supports the professional development of counselors, advocates for professional unity, and promotes culturally inclusive ethical practices within the counseling profession.

American School Counseling Association (ASCA): ASCA promotes professionalism, ethics, and best practices among professional school counselors. ASCA strives to enhance the image and influence of school counselors in support of student success.

ASCA National Model: The ASCA National Model offers a comprehensive school counseling program framework that supports data-driven school counseling services to students and positively impacts student achievement (ASCA, 2019).

Chi Sigma Iota (CSI): The international honor society of professional counselors that promotes research, professionalism, and leadership development.

CSI Principles and Practices of Leadership Excellence: Rooted in the servant leadership philosophy of Robert Greenleaf, the CSI Principles and Practices of Leadership Excellence offer vision, perspective, and practical steps for supporting leadership development in professional counseling (Wahesh & Myers, 2014).

Comprehensive School Counseling Program: The delivery of academic, social-emotional, and career development services in a school setting that is data-driven, targeted, and responsive to the needs of all students in the school.

Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs

(CACREP): CACREP promotes excellence in professional counselor training through the

development of accreditation standards and procedures that reflect the needs of a

dynamic, diverse, and complex world (CACREP, 2016).

District-Level Supervisors: School divisions sometimes employ district-level school

counseling supervisors to oversee the delivery of school counseling services. These staff

members impact job responsibilities, leadership expectations, student/counselor ratios,

professional learning opportunities, budget priorities, etc.

Opportunity/Support Gap: Often referred to as the achievement gap, the

opportunity/support gap denotes measurable differences in test scores, grades,

suspension rates, and other data that highlight inequitable access to educational

opportunities--particularly for economically disadvantaged, black, and indigenous

students of color.

Professional School Counselors: Employed in schools, professional school counselors

use data to address the academic, social-emotional, and career-development needs of

students.

Public School District: Public schools in the United States serve children from age 2 to

22 with most children entering kindergarten at age five and completing grade 12 at age

18. Schools are grouped into districts for the purpose of administration and oversight.

The terms school district and school division are used interchangeably.

Social Justice: parity in life outcomes as well as appropriate access to resources and

opportunities for oppressed individuals and communities (Sue & Sue, 2013).

<u>Social Justice Advocacy</u>: Social justice advocacy involves partnering with marginalized individuals and groups to amplify concerns and collaboratively address institutional and societal barriers that reinforce disparities.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Leadership in counseling involves advocacy. The Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2016) describes leadership and advocacy as a singular concept in its doctoral program standards. Accredited counselor education programs must consider the leadership and advocacy potential of an applicant prior to admission. The American Counseling Association (ACA) also promotes advocacy as foundational to the profession. The ACA Code of Ethics (2014) expects counselors to advocate on behalf of clients at individual, group, institutional, and policy levels. In the school setting, the American School Counselor Association National Model (ASCA, 2019) encourages school counselors to use leadership, advocacy, and collaboration skills on behalf of students and families. Leadership and advocacy are intimately linked in counseling.

Leaders of the counseling profession emphasize concepts such as advocacy, leadership, service, and social justice in various ways. Miville et al. (2017) cites the importance of servant leadership and social justice in a description of the National Latina/o Psychological Association's leadership values and practices. Perepiczka and Scholl (2012) highlight advocacy on societal and professional issues when identifying the signature accomplishments of the Association for Humanistic Counseling. The Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling (ASERVIC) sought early-on to "provide leadership in moral and social justice issues related to counseling" (Bartlett et al., 1985, p. 450). ASERVIC's competencies note the importance of training to meet the needs of culturally diverse and marginalized client populations in alignment

with the counseling competencies of the Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development and the Association for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Issues in Counseling (Cashwell & Watts, 2010; Harper et al., 2013; Ratts et al., 2016). Henderson's (2005) address to the Association of Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) describes the leadership required to heal a hurting world and call attention to injustice. Smith and Valarezo (2013) identify the leadership needs specific to supporting high-quality international training and new counseling associations. The themes are consistent: leadership is needed to serve, advocate, promote the value of professional associations, and develop new leaders that will carry the work forward. However, a lack of clarity regarding concepts such as advocacy, leadership, service, and social justice can confuse professionals seeking to develop their leadership skills.

Leadership and advocacy are uniquely conjoined in the counseling leadership literature. Further, their associated terms are defined differently by various scholars in specific contexts. Young and Dollarhide (2018) note the importance of establishing shared definitions of terms associated with counselor leadership in order to advance scholarly conversations. When defined as an act of vision and mobilization, leadership activities can be distinguished from acts of advocacy (Young & Dollarhide, 2018). Further, acts of advocacy are not necessarily acts of social justice. Social justice work frequently involves advocacy in partnership with marginalized individuals and groups. However, professional school counselors regularly advocate alongside individual students regardless of their ethnicity, gender, ability status, or identity intersectionality. The different terms associated with school counselor leadership are unique and distinguishable from one another but are melded together in various ways throughout the scholarship. For example, the School Counselor Leadership Survey identifies social

justice advocacy as one of five dimensions of leadership alongside resourceful problem-solving, systemic collaboration, interpersonal influence, and professional efficacy (Young & Bryan, 2015). Similarly, social justice advocacy is an important expected outcome of implementing the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2019). Peters et al. (2018) note the challenges associated with isolating these overlapping concepts, particularly within the context of exploring the roles and responsibilities of school counselors. They also note the "lack of synthesis between the general counseling leadership and school counseling leadership literatures" (p. 2) that have disrupted the scholarly conversation in both areas. In response to this concern, this review will briefly overview the literature that broadly addresses counseling leadership across specializations before focusing more directly on the research that targets school counseling leadership.

Leadership in Counseling

Counseling researchers left leadership relatively unaddressed prior to the development of the CSI leadership principles in 1999 (West et al., 2006). Early publications on counselor leadership offered examples of legislative and advocacy efforts (Kaffenberger et al., 2006). Stories from the field confirmed the leadership emphasis on advocacy, service, and social justice (Lewis & Borunda, 2006). Authors drew parallels to business leadership theories and other disciplines (Curtis & Sherlock, 2006; Dollarhide, 2003; Paradise et al., 2010). Hughey (2001) offered analogies drawn from coaching and sports. In its nascent period, scholars explored the uniqueness of counselor leadership in various ways attempting to identify key similarities and differences with non-counseling leadership research.

The actions and experiences of high-level counselor leaders reveal consistent themes. Character traits of leaders include authenticity, passion, drive, agency, vision,

and alignment with the values of the counseling profession (Black & Magnuson, 2005; Borders & Shoffner, 2003; Magnuson et al., 2003; West et al., 2006; West et al., 2003). Levitt (2010) emphasizes the importance of positional leadership and the values of equality, empowerment, and opportunity. Counselor leaders repeatedly highlight the impact of others on their own leadership development (Gibson et al., 2010a; Gibson et al., 2018a). Some note the mentorship and encouragement of other leaders. Many discuss the impact of family as a positive and supportive influence, or a challenge associated with leadership. Notably, the scholarship does not depict leadership as a hierarchical opportunity only available to those who have reached the senior level (Bradley & Altekruse, 1992; Gibson et al., 2010a). Rather, leadership opportunities coincide with service to the profession. Leadership experiences facilitate personal/professional identity development, increased skills, and the agency to pursue additional opportunities to lead for the benefit of others.

A rich history of leader profiles runs through the counseling literature. Some of the revered names in the profession include DiAnne Borders, Thelma Daley, Courtland Lee, Don Locke, Jane Myers, Thomas Parham, Cheri Smith, Nicholas Vacc, and others. The stories of these leaders include descriptors like humble (Borders & Cashwell, 2014; Vereen, 2010) and servant leader (Cashwell & Sweeney, 2016; Coker, 2011; Sherrell, 2015). When asked about their accomplishments, they quickly highlight the hard work of others (Roysircar, 2010b) or the mentors who offered guidance and encouragement (Roysircar, 2010a). Counselor leaders form meaningful personal connections while mentoring others (McKibben et al., 2018) and exhibit an abiding advocacy for the profession (Nichols & Carney, 2013). Counselor leaders understand that embracing our diversity is foundational to addressing the needs of a vastly diverse world (Portman &

Garrett, 2005; Roysircar, 2010a). These profiles underscore the characteristics that are celebrated in counselor leaders and the value placed on leadership in support of the profession.

Counselor Leadership Assessments

Seeking to assess the unique nature of counselor leadership, McKibben et al. (2017b) developed the Dynamic Leadership in Counseling Scale—Self-Report (DLCS-SR) to measure the skills and behaviors exhibited by counselor leaders. Building on concurrent research, the DLCS-SR considers the actions and behaviors associated with counselor leadership. The 75-item DLCS-SR excludes internal factors such as values, thoughts, or motivation in order to emphasize observable skills that can be studied and practiced by counselor trainees. Normed with a professionally diverse sample of 218 students, practitioners, and counselor educators, the DLCS-SR yields excellent internal consistency (α = .942) and significant convergent validity (r = -.562, p < .001) with Carless et al.'s (2000) Global Transformational Leadership Scale (McKibben et al., 2017b). Statistical analysis supports a single-factor model of global leadership skill despite being developed around 19 leadership themes across multiple categories identified in the concurrent study (McKibben et al, 2017c). The authors highlight the difficulty of decoding context-specific, highly individualized leadership actions that are deployed in rapidly nuanced ways (McKibben et al., 2017b). Further, the unique nature of counselor leadership may lean heavily on the difficult-to-observe values, thoughts, and motivations excluded on the DLCS-SR. Development of the DLCS-SR underscores the complexity of assessing diverse counselor leaders that serve in numerous professional settings at different points along the leadership development journey.

School Counselor Leadership Assessments

Gibson et al. (2018b) assess the attitudes and skills of school counselor leaders with the School Counseling Transformational Leadership Inventory (SCTLI). Where the DLCS-SR assesses graduate students, practitioners, and counselor educators serving in multiple settings; the SCTLI focuses on practicing school counselors who are current ASCA members. Instrument development includes an exploratory factor analysis ($n = 217$) and confirmatory factor analysis ($n = 676$) that results in a 15-item questionnaire with excellent internal consistency ($\alpha = .94$). Despite the emergence of two factors during instrument development, confirmatory analysis yields a one-factor model demonstrating strong convergent validity ($r = .68$, $p < .01$) with the Transformational Leadership Questionnaire (Gibson et al., 2018b).

Evaluating the validity of a school counseling leadership assessment using a business management measure like the Transformational Leadership Questionnaire has the potential to nudge the SCTLI away from the advocacy and social justice aspects of school counselor leadership. Transformational leadership in school counseling may espouse very different values and ideals from transformational leadership in business management. Gibson et al. (2018b) note the importance of exploring the connection between transformational leadership skills and the practical ability to advocate for social justice in ways that disrupt disparities in education. An assessment like the SCTLI allows school counselors to consider their transformational leadership skills objectively and explore ways to improve them (Gibson et al., 2018b). Further, the SCTLI promotes dialog among professional school counselors about their leadership attitudes and skills. The SCTLI presents opportunities to district-level supervisors and regional collaborators for engaging in professional learning on the topic of leadership.

Young and Bryan (2015) introduce the School Counselor Leadership Survey (SCLS) to support school counselor professional development and the implementation of comprehensive counseling programs in schools. The SCLS evaluates beliefs about leadership practices as opposed to the skills and behaviors of the DLCS-SR or the attitudes and skills of the SCTLI (Gibson et al., 2018b; McKibben et al., 2017b; Young & Bryan, 2015). Adapting Kouzes and Posner's (2003) Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI), seventeen graduate students and ten school counselors generated the initial items for pilot testing of the SCLS (Young & Bryan, 2015). Exploratory analysis ($n = 801$) identified a five-factor model of leadership analogous to the five-factor model of the LPI. The authors did not consider convergent validity during the initial study (Young & Bryan, 2015). However, confirmatory analysis ($n = 776$) later considers convergent and divergent validity with selected items from Bodenhorn and Skaggs' (2005) School Counselor Self-Efficacy Scale (Young & Bryan, 2018). Confirmatory analysis refines the initial model to the following factors: resourceful problem solving ($\alpha = .88$), systemic collaboration ($\alpha = .86$), interpersonal influence ($\alpha = .82$), social justice advocacy ($\alpha = .81$), and professional efficacy ($\alpha = .87$). Notably, Young and Bryan consider response differences between professional school counselors and district-level supervisors. District-level supervisors returned significantly higher scores than school counselors on four of the five subscales in both studies (Young & Bryan, 2015; Young & Bryan, 2018). The authors suggest that positional experiences and increased access to professional development opportunities explain the higher scores of district-level supervisors. However, data was not collected during either study to support this assertion.

The three assessments presented here accentuate the challenges associated with the overlapping concepts of school counselor leadership. The DLCS-SR assesses skills

and behaviors of counselor leaders across diverse work settings (McKibben et al., 2017b). The SCTLI evaluates beliefs about leadership among professional school counselors (Gibson, et al., 2018b). The SCLS considers the attitudes and skills of school counselors (Young & Bryan, 2015). Actions, attitudes, behaviors, beliefs, and skills are all essential to effective leadership. These instruments offer leadership development tools for counselor training programs and district-level school counseling supervisors. However, Peters et al. (2018) argue that the scholarship of counselor leadership generally has disrupted the focused exploration of the roles and responsibilities associated with school counselor leadership. We now shift to a more specific discussion of the scholarship surrounding school counselor leadership.

School Counselor Leadership

Interestingly, much of the school counseling leadership literature emerged after publication of the ASCA National Model (2003) and the school accountability movement. Both the National Model and the accountability movement called for school counselors to use data to address student outcome disparities. At the time, professional school counselors were encouraged to be leaders with little information available to them about the nature of school counselor leadership. Cole and Ryan (1997) suggest that school counselors should assume leadership roles to improve the career development process for students. Drawing on the non-counseling literature of Covey (1989) and Manz and Sims (1989), they call on school counselors to contribute proactive, collaborative, and visionary leadership to their schools. They highlight the need for school counselor leaders to exhibit essential leadership skills like wellness, ethics, responsibility, communication, and organization (Cole & Ryan, 1997). Dollarhide (2003) offers contextualization as a way for school counselors to understand the leadership

challenges associated with implementing comprehensive school counseling programs. Adapting the work of Bolman and Deal (1997), Dollarhide invites school counselors to focus on the four contexts of structural leadership (implementing an effective school counseling program), human resource leadership (inspiring and empowering others), political leadership (understanding power dynamics and establishing relationships with key influencers), and symbolic leadership (making meaning in visionary ways to promote positive change). Sink (2009) highlights accountability to pre-assessment, evidence-based practice, and evaluation as an essential component of effective school counselor leadership.

Professional advocacy remains a focal point in the scholarly conversation surrounding school counselor leadership (Minton & Morris, 2012). However, the expectation that school counselors engage in leadership practices that promote social justice emerges more prominently in the school-specific literature. Adelman and Taylor (2002) highlight the need for school counselors to combat practices in education that reinforce the marginalization of historically underserved students and families. Others call on school counselors to serve as leaders in schools by advocating for educational reform and focusing on the achievement disparities that impact low-income and minority students (Bemak, 2000; Gysbers & Henderson, 2001; McMahon et al., 2009; Paisley et al., 2010). Beck (2016) argues for greater training to support the needs of LGBTQ students. Bemak (2000) focuses less on the skills of leadership and more on the need to align the school counselor roles of leadership and advocacy into the singular concept promoted in the CACREP standards. School counselors lead through social justice and advocacy work on behalf of students and families. These broad and visionary discussions highlight areas of focus for aspiring school counselor leaders. However,

equally important are the models that offer professional school counselors ways to concretize their leadership efforts in the school setting.

Conceptual Models of School Counselor Leadership

Conceptual models demonstrate some of the ways scholars have attempted to actualize school counselor leadership best practices in the school setting (Dixon & Dew, 2012). Colbert and Magouirk Colbert (2003) propose a model for school counselor advocacy that emphasizes the need for cultural awareness to address inequity in schools. Amatea and West-Olatunji (2007) note that school counselor leaders are uniquely positioned to communicate about cultural differences among students, families, and school staff in high poverty schools. Colbert et al. (2006b) describe the need for school counselors to consider ecological and contextual factors that perpetuate opportunity/support gaps in schools. Kim et al. (2018) describe the school counselor leader as one who engages parents in discussion about cultural disparities and barriers to success. By connecting parents with each other and increasing their awareness of school-related issues, school counselors better equip families to advocate for systemic change and student success. Peters et al. (2018) contextualize the CSI Principles and Practices of Leadership Excellence to the school setting to offer clarity. Others suggest social justice competencies to identify best practices for advocating alongside marginalized individuals with an emphasis on fostering community groups (Colbert et al., 2006a; Lee, 2006; Lewis et al., 2011; Ratts & Greenleaf, 2017).

The ASCA National Model (2019) emphasizes data-driven practices that address disparities in attendance, achievement, and discipline. ASCA highlights the mindsets and behaviors all students need to achieve success after high school. Multiple scholars support the ASCA National Model's focus on data-driven practices that lead to

measurable outcomes that address opportunity/support gaps in education (Michel et al., 2017). In an effort to bolster the focus on meaningful social justice advocacy that results in deep and equitable change to societal dynamics, Shields et al. (2017) apply a transformational leadership perspective to the ASCA National Model. They note the importance of deconstructing knowledge that reinforces inequities in education. They emphasize emancipation, justice, and democracy. Janson et al. (2009) shift the focus from an individualistic leadership role to a team approach. They discuss the applicability of the distributed leadership model to school counselor leadership as it emphasizes interaction, context, and shared leadership principles. The distributed model acknowledges that leadership needs change and must adapt to the specific school communities where school counselors serve (Lewis & Borunda, 2006). This collaborative approach aligns with the social justice focus of the profession and seeks to facilitate an accessible and equitable concept of leadership for school counselors (Baker et al., 2009). Models of school counselor leadership align with the advocacy and social justice expectations of the professional associations. However, they do not offer insight into how school counselor leaders are developed and supported as social justice advocates in the school setting.

Multiple authors describe leadership as a journey that aligns with professional identity development (DeKruyf et al., 2013; Gibson, 2016; Gibson et al., 2010b; Magnuson et al., 2003). Although not specific to only school counseling, Gibson et al. (2010b) identify transformational tasks that counselors in training must successfully navigate to calibrate their understanding of leadership with that of the counseling profession. DeKruyf et al. (2013) identify key concepts such as cultural competence and social justice advocacy that should be part of a shared identity of all professional school

counselors. Cultivating a strong and shared professional identity seems an important and worthwhile effort to support all professional school counselors. However, counselor training programs cannot singularly equip school counselor leaders for the decades of leadership their schools will need from them. Professional associations and school districts play a critical role in supporting the school counselor leadership journey. Also, student needs shift and evolve throughout one's career as a professional school counselor. School counselors rely on professional associations and the scholarship throughout their careers to continually calibrate their professional identity along the leadership development journey.

In addition to conceptual models, the scholarship offers practical examples of advocacy and social justice in action. Professional school counselors can develop as leaders by facilitating leadership development in their students (Bowers et al., 2017; Briggs et al., 2009). Betters-Bubon and Schultz (2018) describe action steps to engage Latinx students and families. The literature offers strategies for serving trauma-impacted immigrant populations (Chung et al., 2011) and school communities affected by gun violence (Fein et al., 2008). Harris et al. (2017) detail the connection between servant leadership and a social justice perspective that appropriately supports the development of black female students. Lancaster et al. (2017) highlight the importance of preventative work with underperforming students in primary grades as early-intervention social justice. Fulton and Shannonhouse (2014) describe the type of community engagement that school counselor servant leaders facilitate in partnership with under-supported students and families. In roughly two decades, the literature surrounding school counselor leadership produces several models to support the integration of leadership, advocacy, and social justice work in the school setting.

The variety of conceptual models that have emerged within the school counseling leadership literature aligns with the complex nature of the role. School counselors engage in a wide variety of job responsibilities. The typical workday of a school counselor is rarely predictable or consistent one day to the next. The array of conceptual models underscores the diversity of leadership expectations placed on professional school counselors. While conceptual models depict practical examples of leadership in context, leadership theories offer paradigms for professional school counselors. Conceptual models offer actionable steps. School counseling leadership theories offer perspectives on the nature of the work.

Leadership Theories in School Counseling

Unsurprisingly, no leadership theory to date provides a platform for consensus regarding the nature of school counselor leadership. Transformative leadership emphasizes the need for meaningful change with an emphasis on equity and social justice (Hewitt et al., 2014). Seemingly a natural fit for professional school counseling, references to transformative leadership appear sporadically in the literature (Lowe et al., 2018; Shields, 2013; Shields et al., 2018; Young & Bryan, 2015). Eschenauer and Chen-Hayes (2005) describe the ways in which individual counseling interactions in urban schools can identify institutional and systemic barriers towards the goal of overcoming them. This perspective leads to student awareness, empowerment, and collaborative advocacy that closes opportunity gaps. Transformative leadership theory aligns with the advocacy and social justice emphases of the professional associations and much of the scholarship surrounding school counselor leadership (Young & Dollarhide, 2018). However, scholars leave transformative leadership relatively unaddressed. Shields et al. (2018) offer a compelling argument for the comprehensive application of a

transformative leadership perspective to the ASCA National Model. Nevertheless, the transformative leadership model remains underexplored given the social justice advocacy emphasis of professional school counseling.

Perhaps because of its prominence in the business management field, transformational leadership surfaces more frequently in the literature (Gibson et al., 2018b; Henfield et al., 2017; Jacob et al., 2013; Mason & McMahon, 2009; McKibben et al., 2017b; Michel et al., 2018). Transformational leadership acknowledges the interactive nature of leadership (Hewitt, 2014). It emphasizes the need for leaders to facilitate genuine investment and enthusiasm for organizational goals. Within a school counseling context, transformational leadership involves inspiring and motivating others towards the counselor leader's programmatic goals (Gibson et al., 2018b). A content analysis of counselor leadership literature finds alignment between transformational leadership theory and the practices of counselor leaders in the areas of modeling, mentorship, creativity, motivation, and individualization (McKibben et al. (2017c). However, transformational leadership theory does not directly translate to the school context when distinguished from the leadership values of advocacy, service, and social justice. In the non-counseling literature, transformational leadership pursues increased profitability and staff professionalism; rewarding followers for task completion and intervening only when performance deviates from the norm (Sun & Leithwood, 2012, p. 429). These goals do not capture the aspirational aspects of school counselor leadership. School counselors seek to address educational barriers, elevate communities, and amplify the voices of marginalized populations. In another example from the non-counseling literature, Hewitt et al. (2014, p. 228) suggests that transformational leadership "involves reforming or improving the status quo while

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ultimately maintaining it and reproducing it." Social justice advocates will recoil at the thought of school counselors maintaining and reproducing the status quo. Nevertheless, transformational leadership has established a unique footprint in the counselor-leader scholarship that is akin to, but wholly different from, other disciplines. Apart from theory, the leadership perceptions of school counselors and their colleagues also offer insight into the nature of school counselor leadership.

Perceptions of Leadership

An intriguing line of inquiry in school counselor leadership explores the understanding of leadership among individuals serving as counselor leaders or alongside counselor leaders. Froeschle and Nix (2009) describe commonalities of leadership perceptions among administrators, counselors, and teachers. Notably, they do not differentiate between principal leadership and school counselor leadership. Results emphasize the importance of collaboration and positivity as well as the need to focus on strengths while building a climate of success. Results also underscore the important challenge of identifying counselor-leader behaviors that are distinct from administrator behaviors. Participants note the critical role of school counselor leaders, but many express concern over the lack of time focused on school counseling programs that directly support students (Froeschle & Nix, 2009). School counselors self-report high levels of emotional intelligence and leadership self-efficacy, but their perceptions of leadership frequently diverge from the values articulated by professional associations (Mullen et al., 2018).

Ford and Nelson (2007) explore high school counselor perceptions of their leadership roles and find similar ambiguity. Although four of five school counselor participants consider themselves leaders, their descriptions of leadership include testing

coordination, student scheduling, and speaking at faculty meetings. The authors note this discrepancy as a critical finding that needs to be addressed. In an effort to quantify the subjective perceptions of leadership, Janson (2009) explores secondary counselors' opinions of their leadership behaviors using Q methodology. Respondents seemed to distance themselves from overt leadership behaviors like social justice and advocacy. Only three of 49 participants identify themselves as agents working for systemic change on behalf of students (Janson, 2009). The limited research in the area of perceived leadership indicates a disconnect between the social justice expectations of the profession and the self-perceptions of practicing school counselors.

Mason and McMahon (2009) find similar results in a survey exploration of the relationship between the behaviors of school counselor leaders and various demographic factors. Respondents attending a state-level school counseling association conference self-reported their leadership behaviors using the LPI (Kouzes & Posner, 2003). The authors expected the leadership development efforts of The Education Trust's Transforming School Counseling Initiative to result in younger school counselors perceiving themselves as better equipped for the transformational leadership tasks associated with the new vision counselor (Mason & McMahon, 2009). However, results indicate that older, more experienced school counselors claim to engage in leadership practices more frequently than younger, less-experienced school counselors. When considered with the findings of Janson (2009) and Ford and Nelson (2007), these results present a persistent disconnect between school counselor perceptions of leadership and the social justice advocacy aspirations of ACA and ASCA. Mason and McMahon (2009) speculate about the impacts of tenure, age, title, and traditional power dynamics on leadership in school counseling. Nevertheless, professional school

counselors perceive themselves as leaders even though their concept of leadership does not align with the social justice advocacy called for by the associations. A complementary line of inquiry to perceptions of school counselor leadership involves the values of professional school counselors who are serving as leaders.

Values

Shillingford and Lambie (2010) investigate the relationship between values, leadership practices, and quality of programming. Self-report measures indicate most school counselors value "appreciating others" and "accepting rules." However, these values are not predictors of social justice advocacy. Less prevalent, "self-direction" and "personal success" in advocacy efforts better predicted effective service delivery (Shillingford & Lambie, 2010). Mullen et al. (2019) identify a positive correlation between leadership self-efficacy and school counselor ability to implement a comprehensive school counseling program in alignment with the ASCA National Model. However, they also note that leadership self-efficacy and strong program implementation do not correlate with social justice advocacy among practicing school counselors (Mullen et al., 2019). There is a persistent disconnect identified in the literature. The missing ingredient of the practicing school counselor's understanding of leadership is the strongly held belief that school counselor leadership includes an emphasis on advocacy and social justice.

The ACA Code of Ethics (2014), ASCA Code of Ethics (2022), and CACREP Standards (2016) promote advocacy and social justice as core values of school counselor professional identity. Consensus exists regarding the need for school counselors to provide leadership and social justice advocacy to the families they serve. The Education Trust's Transforming School Counseling Initiative (TSCI) highlights leadership and

advocacy as critical to school counselor development. Paisley and Hayes (2003) note that all counselor training programs associated with The Education Trust's TSCI grant hold a strong commitment to social justice and aspire to prepare counselors who are "proactive advocates for systemic change, working to remove barriers that impede the academic success of poor and minority students (p. 200)." Nevertheless, the shared value of social justice advocacy among the professional associations described in the literature is not translating to the leadership practices of professional school counselors in a systematic way. This disconnect may indicate a need within counselor education programs to consider the leadership training process for school counselors.

Counselor Training Programs

Counselor training programs have a clear role in preparing school counselor leaders to advocate on behalf of undersupported students and families. Paradise et al. (2010) highlight the lack of research on leadership training in an article subtitled "Neglected Skills." They argue that counseling skills and leadership skills overlap substantially and that leadership training should be maximized through coursework, workshops, in-service training experiences, and association efforts (Paradise et al., 2010). Counselor educators can intentionally model leadership behaviors that promote advocacy skills (McMahon et al, 2009). Cohort models can strengthen school counselor commitment to social justice leadership through purposeful student experiences (Paisley et al., 2010). School counselor training programs can equip students for social justice advocacy work by focusing on data collection and analysis (Ockerman et al., 2015). Training programs can include early interaction with teachers to foster collaboration and seek feedback on emerging leadership skills (Clark & Amatea, 2004). These intentional practices can build leadership and advocacy skills throughout the

school counselor training process—from pre-service graduate school stages, through practicum experiences, internships, and into the early years of service as a new professional school counselor.

Despite consensus on the importance of developing school counselor leadership skills, training programs do not prioritize leadership coursework. Pérusse and Goodnough (2001) conducted a national survey of school counselor preparation programs to assess alignment with the goals of The Education Trust's Transforming School Counseling Initiative. Respondents identified no coursework that focused on the domains of leadership and advocacy. An analysis of school counselor program responses over a decade later indicates that the situation hasn't changed (Pérusse et al., 2015). No respondents identify required leadership coursework. Only nine programs (7.1%) identify course content that specifically focuses on leadership and advocacy in some way (Pérusse et al., 2015). The 2016 CACREP Standards emphasize leadership as an essential domain in which trainees must demonstrate knowledge and skills while preparing for the school counseling profession (Edwards, 2017). The standards call for a 60 credit-hour standardization of all accredited specializations, including school counseling (CACREP, 2016). Leadership coursework seems an excellent fit for the added credit requirements in the 2016 standards for school counselor training programs (Merlin et al., 2017). However, implementation of the 60 credit-hour requirement for school counselor training programs has been delayed to 2023 (CACREP Special Announcement, 2018). Coursework specific to leadership and advocacy training for preservice school counselors remains a need.

Filling the gap, counselor educators infuse leadership development in various ways. Hollenbaugh (2015) facilitates an international immersion experience for

counselor education doctoral students in Costa Rica that focuses on transformational

leadership skill-building in a culturally diverse setting. Henfield et al. (2017) reflect on

the leadership journey for Black male counselor educators; noting that the path to

leadership looks very different depending on one's ethnicity and privilege. CSI chapter

efforts to prepare future counselor leaders emphasize the principles and practices of

leadership excellence. CSI offers an authentic setting for developing counselors to

experiment with leadership skills, fail when necessary, and discuss the experiences with

faculty mentors (Luke & Goodrich, 2010; McKibben et al., 2017a). However, only 30%

participate in formal leadership training offered by CSI chapters (Wahesh & Myers,

2014). Less than a third of students engage in leadership training through their

counselor education program (Wahesh & Myers, 2014). CSI chapters promote

leadership development through the organizational structure, retreats, meetings, and

service-learning opportunities (Wahesh et al., 2018). Officers highlight the value of

mentoring, initiatives, volunteer work, and event planning (Wahesh et al., 2018).

However, recognizing the value that CSI can offer future counselor leaders does not

systematize leadership skill building opportunities for all. Every school counselor is

expected to be a social justice leader and advocate for students. The leadership skills

needed to serve undersupported students in schools are largely developed through non-

mandated or co-curricular experiences instead of core coursework.

Post-Graduate Leader Development

The transition from school counselor trainee to professional school counselor

brings uncertainty. After experiencing the highly collaborative environment of graduate

school, many first-year counselors enter work settings where they are the only school

counselor in the building. Each school has a unique culture, leadership team, and

community of stakeholders. New school counselors strive to build relationships quickly. They learn to balance the leadership roles of team player, educator, social justice advocate, and change agent (McMahon et al., 2009). Successful school counselor leaders bring a strong sense of professional identity with them from their graduate programs (Dollarhide et al., 2008). They possess self-efficacy and believe that they can influence conditions to promote change (Bryan et al., 2018; Dollarhide et al., 2008). School counselors who believe that they matter to their colleagues report higher levels of job satisfaction and lower levels of job-related stress following the transition (Rayle, 2006). Support networks and validation are critical during this transition period as new school counselors begin to experience either frustration or success in their leadership efforts (Dollarhide et al., 2008).

New school counselors need their school districts to invest in their professional development. A lesson plan analysis by Lopez and Mason (2018) reveals only 28% of counselor lesson plans to be effective. Where systems and structures exist that align with the ACA code of ethics and the ASCA National Model, new school counselors can utilize their skills and thrive. For example, Goodman-Scott and Grothaus (2017a; 2017b) find that school counselors experience alignment and success in schools with Recognized ASCA Model Programs (RAMP schools) and established Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) programs. The emphasis on data analysis, tiered interventions, and collaboration fits nicely with the training received in CACREP accredited programs. However, RAMP schools are few and far between. In the spring of 2011, less than 500 schools in the United States possessed RAMP certification (Wilkerson et al., 2013). Nine years later, ASCA website data indicates the number of RAMP schools in the U.S. remains below 500 (ASCA, 2020). Principals define the role

of their school counselors very differently (Amatea & Clark, 2005). School counselors can be too flexible, adapting to principal expectations that conflict with the best practices promoted by ACA and ASCA (Bemak & Chung, 2008). District-level administrators with a good understanding of school counselor professional identity can maximize counselor training and student impact. Unfortunately, the opposite is more often the case. School districts fail to capitalize on school counselor training when administrators lack critical knowledge of counselor leadership and advocacy skills (Dollarhide et al., 2008; Walsh & Gibson, 2019; Wilkerson et al., 2013).

Professional associations like ACA and ASCA offer support for new school counselors. They facilitate professional learning opportunities, programming resources, and ready-made support networks that can provide continuity between graduate training programs and the school setting. However, financial realities can present barriers to a new school counselor's ability to stay connected. Student loan payments, moving costs, and living expenses limit a new counselor's ability to connect with colleagues through ACA and ASCA. School districts may lack the resources to support new counselors with funding for association memberships or conferences—particularly in school divisions that serve high poverty student populations. Continuing the leader development journey can be challenging for new school counselors when isolated from other counselors. New professionals rely on their school districts for professional learning that actualizes leadership, advocacy, and social justice work in the local community.

Counselor educators have proposed various ways for professional school counselors to fill the leadership void after graduate school. Watkinson (2015) describes a two-year professional learning effort emphasizing vision as a key leadership skill for

professional school counselors. Clarity of vision allows school counselors to showcase their comprehensive school counseling programs in ways that reinforce the ASCA National Model and support school counselors as leaders (Watkinson, 2013). Watkinson (2015) developed the initiative in partnership with a district-level school counseling supervisor in a school division of 33,000 students in the mid-Atlantic. Kneale at al. (2018) proposes a framework for district-level school counseling supervisors to follow to help integrate new school counselors into an appropriate counselor-leader role. The approach acknowledges that leader development requires time and practice (Kneale et al., 2018). It also underscores the importance of school administrators and district-level leaders in creating opportunities for school counselors to develop their skills.

Administrator Connections

Associations like ACA and ASCA can provide resources and networking opportunities, but the school principal sets the leadership tone for school counselors and their work environments each day. The relationship between school counselors and school administrators is important to the leadership dynamic of a school community. When school counselors perceive their principals as knowledgeable and supportive of the school counselor role, they demonstrate greater ability to implement the ASCA National Model (Fye et al., 2018). A comprehensive school counseling program thrives with a supportive principal and a strong administrator/counselor relationship (Amatea & Clark, 2005; Dollarhide et al., 2007; Ponec & Brock, 2000; Zalaquett, 2005). However, there are differences in the leadership perceptions of principals and school counselors. Principals report being generally satisfied (73%) with school counseling services (Beesley & Frey, 2006); but principals consider their school counselors as leadership partners more frequently than school counselors report feeling the same

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(Armstrong et al., 2010). Assertiveness, communication skills, and clear articulation of school counseling program goals can address some of these concerns (Armstrong et al, 2010; Fitch et al., 2001). But the research on the principal/school counselor relationship indicates there is more work to be done to increase the leadership and advocacy skills of school counselors.

To strengthen this important relationship, DeSimone and Roberts (2016) call for collaborative training between pre-service school counselors and future principals to improve administrator understanding of the school counselor's leadership role. They argue that course collaboration between these future colleagues will increase their ability to work closely as school leadership teams. Pre-service training initiatives can include integrated coursework and problem-solving activities that require collaboration to maximize student outcomes (Shoffner & Briggs, 2001; Shoffner & Williamson, 2000). Kiser at al. (2011) describe training modules in which instructional leadership faculty facilitate assertiveness skill development with school counseling students. Future school counselors and administrators train together on the leadership needs of schools and critical role differences between administrators and school counselors. They emphasize engaging all stakeholders through the process of implementing a comprehensive school counseling curriculum that aligns with the ASCA National Model (Kiser et al., 2011). Although outcome data is not provided, this model shows promise in offering opportunities for developing a shared understanding of administrator-specific and school counselor-specific leadership roles.

Despite these isolated examples, current preservice training regarding school counselor leadership does not effectively prepare the majority of school counselors or principals for the teamwork necessary to address student needs (Armstrong et al.,

2010). Further, principals report being least satisfied with their school counselors'
ability to address diversity issues, program accountability, community engagement, and
parent outreach (Beesley & Frey, 2006). These activities identified as lacking by
principals are the building blocks of leadership, advocacy, and social justice work.
Building an effective school counselor/administrator partnership takes time, trust, and
continuous attention (Ponec & Brock, 2000; Saginak & Dollarhide, 2006). New school
counselors indicate that both formal and informal administrator interactions facilitate
an effective transition onto the school-based leadership team (Curry & Bickmore, 2012).
A shared understanding of the importance of family engagement positively correlates
with school counselor self-efficacy and stronger partnerships among all stakeholders
(Bryan et al., 2018). School counselors can assert themselves as school-level leaders to
effect systemic change (McMahon et al., 2009). However, advocacy and communication
skills are essential tools for building the school counselor/administrator relationship
(Clemens et al., 2009).

Equipping school counselors with these skills deserves greater systemic emphasis
during pre-service training. However, pre-service training alone cannot prepare school
counselors for the ever-changing needs of their school communities. A knowledgeable
and communicative administrative team can positively impact a school community. But
the evidence indicates many school counselors and their leadership teams are
underprepared for the work (Armstrong et al., 2010; Beesley & Frey, 2006). District-
level leaders also impact the leadership climate of the schools they support. The
individuals who supervise principals, school counselors, and the programming they
facilitate play an important part in empowering school-based leadership teams to be
effective agents of change for students and families.

District-Level School Counseling Supervisors

District-level school counseling supervisors receive minimal attention in the literature on school counselor leadership. District-level supervisors champion the needs of professional school counselors during budget meetings, legislative sessions, and national councils (Young & Bryan, 2015). They advocate for appropriate school counselor responsibilities and use student outcome data to highlight the impact of professional school counselors on student achievement (Kneale et al., 2018). They cultivate the "resources, culture, and support to allow all school counselors to serve as leaders" in their school communities (Kneale et al., 2018, p. 2). The ASCA National Model (2019) does not address the role of district-level school counseling supervisors. However, their leadership efforts substantially impact the delivery of school counseling services in their districts (Brott et al., 2016; Brown & Ayala, 2017; Kneale et al., 2018; Watkinson, 2015; Young & Bryan, 2015). They establish job descriptions, program priorities, and professional learning opportunities. Through professional learning initiatives, they can reinforce the advocacy skills learned during graduate training and help professional school counselors to thrive. Conversely, they have the power to contradict graduate training, impede advocacy efforts, and reinforce institutional disparities.

Much of the research on district-level school counseling supervisors predates the scholarship that now exists regarding school counselor leadership. It also indicates that most school systems do not have district-level school counseling supervisors who are knowledgeable about the leadership and advocacy expectations of professional school counselors (Biggers & Mangusso, 1972; Schmidt & Barret, 1983; Wilson & Remley, 1987). In 1972, A national survey of America's largest school divisions found that only

two-thirds of the professionals tasked with overseeing guidance programs were employed full-time in the role. (Biggers & Mangusso, 1972). Further, a survey of district-level supervisors in North Carolina revealed that less than half (45%) were highly qualified in counseling or a related field (Schmidt & Barret, 1983). In Virginia, 79% of school districts did not report having district-level school counseling supervisors at all (Wilson & Remley, 1987). Of the school divisions that employed district-level school counseling supervisors, the individuals who held the role were well-regarded for their effectiveness. Enough national consistency existed among district-level school counseling supervisors that scholars began to call for ACES to develop training expectations (Biggers, 1976; Biggers & Mangusso, 1972; Frederickson & Popken, 1972; Schmidt & Barret, 1983). Wilson and Remley (1987) urged the counselor associations to advocate for appropriately trained district-level school counseling supervisors.

Three decades have passed since the call went out for legislative advocacy and consistent training expectations of district-level school counseling supervisors. The school accountability movement and comprehensive school counseling program expectations have become mainstays of public education systems in the United States. Multiple authors discuss the importance of district-level school counseling supervisors (Biggers, 1976; Biggers & Mangusso, 1972; Brott et al., 2016; Brown & Ayala, 2017; Frederickson & Popken, 1972; Kneale et al., 2018; Schmidt & Barret, 1983; Watkinson, 2015; Wilson & Remley, 1987; Young & Bryan, 2015). Kaffenberger et al. (2006) share a powerful example of district-level school counseling supervisors working in collaboration with counselor educators and state-level leadership to advocate for high quality school counseling services. Working together, these leaders increased awareness of the ASCA National Model among professional school counselors; advocated

successfully for state-level professional school counselor support; and pushed for legislation to support school counselor access for elementary-age students statewide (Kaffenberger et al., 2006). Brown and Ayala (2017) describe the regional collaboration of district-level supervisors, school counselors, and counselor educators that has led to improved supervision practices and increased professional learning opportunities. These examples contrast with Wilson and Remley (1987) who noted that district level school counseling supervisors and counselor educators exhibit minimal collaboration. The School Counselor Leadership Survey (SCLS) indicates that district-level school counseling supervisors report stronger systemic collaboration skills and greater emphasis on social justice advocacy than school-based counselor leaders (Young & Bryan, 2015). However, no systemic evaluation has occurred since 1987 to explore the role of district-level school counseling supervisors. Further, no research has investigated the leadership development activities being facilitated by district-level school counseling supervisors to grow the leadership skills of the professional school counselors they serve.

Summary

The counseling leadership literature has grown substantially since the emergence of the CSI principles and practices of leadership excellence in 1999. School counselor leadership has an ethos that emphasizes advocacy and social justice as important aspects of effective leadership. Evidence points to leadership as a developmental journey (Meany-Walen et al., 2013) that involves trial and error (McKibben et al., 2017a), transformational tasks (Gibson et al., 2010b), the influence of others (Magnuson et al., 2003), and self-belief when times get rough (Dollarhide et al., 2008). Professional school counseling requires high-level collaboration, engagement, and social justice

advocacy skills to fight entrenched disparities in the school setting (Adelman & Taylor, 2002; Bemak, 2000; DeKruyf et al., 2013; Gysbers & Henderson, 2001; McMahon et al., 2009; Paisley et al., 2010; Shields et al., 2018).

Schools need strong leadership from their professional school counselors (DeRoche, 2000). Unfortunately, many school counselors lack the social justice advocacy skills needed to help students overcome institutional and societal barriers (Ford & Nelson, 2007; Janson, 2009). Despite the best efforts of counselor educators, school counselor training programs can only do so much. The school counselor leadership journey starts prior to graduate school and continues throughout one's career and life (Gibson, 2016; Gibson et al., 2018a; Magnuson et al., 2003). Associations like ACA and ASCA provide resources, support, learning opportunities, and advocacy on behalf of professional school counselors. Importantly, school administrators have the power to affirm counselor training, promote association involvement, and positively impact students. However, school administrators can also sew confusion about school counselor roles and responsibilities when they lack appropriate knowledge.

District-level school counseling supervisors are influential individuals who can advocate for comprehensive school counseling services in alignment with training expectations. They call attention to student needs, highlight school counselor successes, and champion school district initiatives that promote social justice (Kneale et al., 2018). These key collaborators partner with counselor educators to promote professional learning for school counselors that continues the leadership development journey (Watkinson, 2015). They advocate at the local, state, and national levels for legislative action and policy changes that promote equity and access to comprehensive school counseling services (Kneale et al., 2018). Unfortunately, little is known about these

influential leaders other than that they exhibit strong systemic collaboration skills and social justice advocacy (Young & Bryan, 2015). A comprehensive study of district-level school counseling supervisors has not occurred since 1987 (Wilson & Remley, 1987). No research to date has empirically explored what district-level school counseling supervisors are doing to facilitate leadership development for professional school counselors working in schools.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The previous chapter offers evidence from the scholarship that leadership in school counseling closely aligns with advocacy and social justice. However, the literature also suggests that professional school counselors do not consistently demonstrate an understanding of leadership in alignment with CACREP accredited training programs and the professional associations of ACA and ASCA (Beesley & Frey, 2006; Ford & Nelson, 2007; Janson, 2009; Mullen et al., 2018). District-level school counseling supervisors are valued leaders with strong skills who are well-positioned to facilitate leadership development with professional school counselors (Kneale et al., 2018; Watkinson, 2015; Wilson & Remley, 1987; Young & Bryan, 2015). However, no empirical research to date has explored how district-level school counseling supervisors facilitate leadership development with the professional school counselors working in their school systems. This exploration of these leaders provides insight into how district-level school counseling supervisors facilitate leadership development alongside professional school counselors working in schools.

Descriptive phenomenology is a method of inquiry appropriate for exploring the lived experiences of district-level school counseling supervisors facilitating leadership development with professional school counselors. Descriptive phenomenology seeks to understand phenomena from the perspective of the individual providing the information (Prosek & Gibson, 2021). Giorgi (2012, p.4) explains descriptive phenomenology as a way to study experiences and phenomena that is "both rigorous and non-reductionistic." McKibben et al. (2017b) characterize counselor leadership as

context-specific, highly individualized actions that occur in rapidly nuanced ways.

Further, the unique nature of counselor leadership can lean heavily on difficult-to-observe values, thoughts, and motivations (McKibben et al., 2017b). The school counselor leadership literature offers multiple conceptual models of school counselor leadership development. Within the qualitative tradition, a descriptive phenomenological approach offered the opportunity to explore how district-level school counseling supervisors support leadership development without a priori assumptions about the nature of leadership. Descriptive phenomenology offered the opportunity to investigate school counselor leadership development in a way that capture information about actions, attitudes, behaviors, beliefs, and skills from the perspective of the individual providing the data. It offered the opportunity to explore the research question without adopting a specific leadership model that may or may not apply to the leadership perspectives of the participants in the study.

Descriptive Phenomenology

Edmund Husserl is largely credited with developing research methodologies associated with the philosophical traditions of phenomenology (Giorgi et al., 2017; Prosek & Gibson, 2021). Phenomenological inquiry posits that researchers set aside prior knowledge and suppositions about a concept to consider the research data as wholly independent (Giorgi, 2009). Researchers consider and bracket their own understandings of a given phenomenon in order to evaluate the data as a unique object of study. Englander (2012, p. 16) notes that descriptive phenomenology is appropriate to research questions when "there is a need to understand a phenomenon from the point of view of the lived experience in order to be able to discover the meaning of it." Phenomenology does not seek to establish causality or generate theory, but rather to

identify and understand a given phenomenon in and of itself (Englander, 2012; Hays & Singh, 2012).

The present study approached the research question from a descriptive phenomenological perspective for multiple reasons. First, there are multiple models and perspectives on the nature and development of school counselor leadership. The leadership journey starts prior to graduate-level training and continues throughout one's career. It involves mentorship, transformational tasks, and culturally unique pathways (Borders & Shoffner, 2003; Gibson, 2016; Gibson et al., 2010b; Gibson et al., 2018a; Henfield et al., 2017; Magnuson et al., 2003). School counselor leadership has been conceptualized and assessed as actions and behaviors (DLCS-SR), attitudes and skills (SCTLI), and beliefs about leadership (SCLS). Second, the lack of literature on the leadership development experiences facilitated by district-level school counseling supervisors suggested that the exploratory process provided by descriptive phenomenology was appropriate. An inquiry rooted in the search for specific leadership skills or behaviors might have missed the ways in which district-level school counseling supervisors strive to develop leadership mindsets or social justice perspectives among the school counselors they serve. The descriptive phenomenological method allowed for the exploration of the leader-development actions of district-level school counseling supervisors as distinct from any specific leadership model or framework. The descriptive data invites discussion of theoretical alignment and adds to the nuanced understanding of school counselor leadership.

Role of the Researcher

Both the philosophy and the science of phenomenology place great emphasis on a concept called epoché. Epoché involves bracketing the assumptions, expectations, and

theories associated with a concept under study in order to examine the phenomenon in its essential or purest form (Englander, 2016; Giorgi et al., 2017; Prosek & Gibson, 2021; Wertz, 2005). Giorgi et al. (2017) refer to this practice as the scientific phenomenological reduction when applied to psychological research. Epoché does not disregard prior knowledge; rather, it involves an intentional suspension of the researcher's connection with any preconceptions about the topic of study to explore the phenomenon in isolation (Englander, 2016). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) discuss both the importance and limitations of one's ability to set aside all preconceptions and biases about a phenomenon. Nevertheless, the practice of declaring researcher positionality and research assumptions has become common practice within qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). By declaring positionality and relevant biases, researchers guard against them to the extent this is possible.

At the time this study occurred, I served as the district-level school counseling supervisor in a suburban public school district with approximately 24,000 students. I supported approximately 75 school counselors at various sites and levels. I trained in a CACREP accredited school counseling program and served as a professional school counselor in urban, rural, and suburban settings before assuming my current position. I served for six years as a district-level school counseling supervisor while pursuing a doctoral degree in counselor education and supervision with an emphasis on social justice, advocacy, and leadership. The political climate in the country where I lived was divisive at the time these interviews were conducted. Protests against racism and violence towards Black Americans were persistent and ongoing. Further, the COVID-19 pandemic initiated mass closures of schools. Professional school counselors were striving to adapt to online and hybrid educational environments at a time when there

was great need for advocacy and social justice work on behalf of students and families. Barriers to this work had become more pronounced and politicized in American public school systems. These personal and cultural factors contributed to the backdrop behind the interviews conducted as part of this study.

I perceive leadership in counseling to be a developmental journey that is highly individualized, grounded in personal experiences, and constantly changing. Other than conceptualizing leadership as developmental, I had no particular affinity for the school counselor leadership theories or frameworks discussed in chapter two at the time of this inquiry. If anything, I was concerned that the research associated with school counselor leadership relied too heavily on the transformational leadership literature adapted from the scholarship associated with business and management. Like McKibben et al. (2017b), I considered my experiences with leadership to be highly individualized and context specific. Like Janson (2009, p. 95), I thought it appropriate to assume "that there is probably not a set of best practices or a definitive and monolithic school counselor leadership model." School counselor leadership was an elusive concept for me as I sought ways to disrupt institutionalized practices that oppress marginalized students and families. I had no preconceptions that district-level school counseling supervisors were facilitating leadership development with school counselors using a specific methodology or conceptual model. If anything, I expected the opposite—that district level school counseling supervisors facilitated leadership development unconsciously, in nuanced ways. Hence, my positionality reinforced the need for a descriptive phenomenological inquiry.

Methodological Framework

The present study employed Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological method to explore the experiences of district-level school counseling supervisors in facilitating leadership development with professional school counselors (Giorgi, 2009). Merriam and Tisdell (2016, p. 238) note that the rigor and trustworthiness of a study hinges on the researcher's willingness to apply "standards well developed and accepted by the scientific community." Giorgi's (2009) descriptive phenomenological method is an established research paradigm within phenomenology (Englander, 2016; Giorgi et al., 2017; Prosek & Gibson, 2021; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Wertz, 2005). Credibility in qualitative research involves transparency in specifying the steps associated with an inquiry to invite scrutiny of method from colleagues in the field (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Thus, the steps associated with the descriptive phenomenological method as they relate to the present study are discussed here. Emphasizing researcher credibility, Giorgi et al. (2017) note the importance of seeking information from persons other than the researcher. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with currently employed district-level school counseling supervisors to explore the research question. As specified by Giorgi (2009) and Giorgi et al. (2017), data analysis involved the following steps:

1. Each interview was transcribed and considered in its entirety.
2. Applying the scientific phenomenological reduction, researcher assumptions were bracketed to the extent possible.
3. Meaning units were identified within each transcript.

4. Transformed expressions were created based on the contextualized implications of each meaning unit to explicitly reflect the lived experiences of the participant (see Appendix A for sample analysis).

5. Descriptions of these experiences are provided in chapter 4 based on analyses of participant data.

Research Design

Following institutional review board approval, semi-structured interviews with district-level school counseling supervisors were conducted to address the research question: what are the experiences of district-level school counseling supervisors in facilitating leadership development with professional school counselors? Semi-structured interviews are a preferred method of data collection in descriptive phenomenological research (Englander, 2012; Padilla-Díaz, 2015). As opposed to written responses to survey questions, interviews can generate richer, more detailed accounts of lived experiences. They also offer interactive opportunities for follow-up questions and clarification when necessary (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Interview questions were developed based on the literature surrounding school counselor leadership and its unique emphasis on advocacy and social justice. Questions were discussed with the dissertation chair to gather feedback regarding alignment with descriptive phenomenological research methodology as well as the nature of school counselor leadership described in the previous chapter.

Questions were pilot tested with a district-level school counseling supervisor to evaluate wording, conversational flow, and length of interview time. Pilot testing can offer feedback regarding confusing or vague questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Pilot testing was conducted with a district-level supervisor who has served in the role for six

years in a suburban school division of roughly 17,000 students. The semi-structured interview required approximately 45 minutes to complete. Pilot testing offers respondents the opportunity to clarify the wording of questions and suggest additional questions to better inform the inquiry (Creswell, 2007; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Based on the interview, the question regarding professional association involvement was reworded for greater clarity. An additional question was added to better explore leadership differences between new and veteran school counselors. Two questions were reordered to better support conversational flow. Appendix B represents the revised interview questions following the pilot interview.

Participants

Phenomenological research addresses sample size differently than quantitative or other variations of qualitative research. Quantitative and certain qualitative research methodologies can require a representative or random sample of a population that is of sufficient size to conduct statistical analyses (Kvale, 1994; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Phenomenological research pursues a wholly different endeavor. Kvale (1994) suggests focusing on fewer numbers of participants intently when the goal is exploratory knowledge. Descriptive phenomenologists argue that discovering who is able to provide descriptions of the phenomenon under study is more important than the number of participants (Creswell, 2007; Englander, 2012; Giorgi, 2009; Kvale, 1994). However, multiple authors advise at least three participants to provide contrasting descriptions of the phenomenon under study (Englander, 2012; Gill, 2020).

The present study employed purposive sampling with a well-defined population. The limited and dated research on district-level school counseling supervisors indicated the likelihood that relatively few school divisions employ professionals that meet

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participation criteria for this study (Biggers & Mangusso, 1972; Schmidt & Barret, 1983; Wilson & Remley, 1987). Potential participants were contacted via email based on a listserv obtained from the department of education of the state in which the study was conducted (see Appendix C for recruitment script). Criteria for participation included: current employment as a district-level school counseling supervisor, graduate-level training as a professional school counselor, at least one year of experience as a district-level school counseling supervisor, and the assigned responsibility at the district level for supervising school counseling service delivery at more than one school site. The 181 contacts on the listserv included a variety of individuals who self-selected to receive information from the department of education on issues related to professional school counseling. The list included school counselors working at individual schools, counselor educators, and district-level administrators of all backgrounds. Of the 12 individuals who responded to the recruitment email, nine met the criteria for participation in the study and were contacted to schedule an interview.

Eight district-level school counseling supervisors agreed to participate in the study. Participants were provided the interview questions ahead of time to review and prepare for the interview. Participants established interview times that were conducive with their schedules. Interviews were conducted by video conference (Zoom) and recorded. On average, interviews lasted between 45 and 55 minutes. Following the interviews, video recordings were transcribed for analysis. Participants were invited to review their transcripts for misstatements or needed corrections, prior to data analysis, in order to increase the trustworthiness of the data collection process. Examples of high-quality exploratory research with limited numbers of participants occur within the counselor leadership literature (Dollarhide et al., 2008; Gibson et al., 2010a; Henfield et

al., 2017). In keeping with prior research and the descriptive phenomenological emphasis on depth and richness of description over sample size, eight participants were deemed sufficient for analysis.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are an expectation in every aspect of research (Hays & Singh, 2012). Institutional review board approval was obtained through Virginia Commonwealth University prior to initiating the study. Participants were contacted via email regarding participation in the study. An informed consent document (Appendix D) provided details to potential participants about the expectations associated with the study. Participants were notified in advance that published findings would anonymize identifying information including names, the names of others discussed in the interview, and places of work. Pseudonyms were used throughout the research process. Only the primary researcher had access to the pseudonym key. Although complete anonymity cannot be assured, the study was developed to identify actions that promote leadership development. The study did not seek ways in which district-level supervisors impede school counselor leadership. Thus, participation in the inquiry process did not anticipate negative consequences for participants. As noted in the informed consent document, participants were able to withdraw from participation in the study at any point.

The study did not employ a participatory action research methodology. However, the ethical considerations associated with participatory action research apply. Participatory action research invites participants into the research process in an interactive way that enriches both the inquiry and their experience of the inquiry process (Kemmis et al., 2013). I had no prior supervisory connections or conflicting

tangential relationships with any of the participants to suggest multiple relationships could be a concern. Participants engaged in discussions of their leadership development experiences and reflected on their actions that promote counselor leadership development. The nature of the inquiry process promoted reflection on leadership development activities and cultural/systemic factors that impact school counselor leadership. It is an ethical aim of this inquiry to partner with the district-level school counseling supervisors who participated in this study in pursuit of greater understanding and awareness of school counselor leadership development practices. Multiple district-level supervisors expressed gratitude during the interview for the opportunity to dialog about the underexplored topic of school counselor leadership.

Kitchener (1984) and Meara et al. (1996) identify six ethical concepts that all qualitative researchers should consider in designing in an inquiry (Hays & Singh, p. 77). This study's design prioritized ethics that honor both the participants and the interview data in alignment with the six principles of autonomy, nonmaleficence, beneficence, justice, fidelity, and veracity. Participants were provided the interview questions prior to data collection to promote autonomy. This allowed for withdrawal from the study in the event a district-level supervisor was uncomfortable discussing the interview questions for any reason. The nature of the research question prioritized nonmaleficence and beneficence. The study did not seek ways in which district-level supervisors impede school counselor leadership. Rather, the study sought to illuminate and describe in phenomenological terms the experiences that facilitate leadership development with professional school counselors. Results and published findings were anticipated to reflect positively on district-level supervisors based on the nature of the inquiry. Justice involves research that does not favor a particular privileged group over another (Hays &

Singh, 2012). The nature of school counselor leadership promotes justice on behalf of undersupported students and families. Focusing on leadership development highlights the ways in which district-level supervisors emphasize the need for advocacy and social justice alongside the school counselors they serve.

Research Credibility

The discussion of research credibility in qualitative inquiry is both extensive and varied (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Postmodern reflections on concepts like internal validity, external validity, and reliability underscore the difficulties associated with embracing non-positivist research perspectives. Lincoln and Guba (1985) are regularly cited for translating the quantitative terms above into the qualitative equivalents of credibility, generalizability, and confirmability (Creswell, 2007, p. 202). However, many qualitative researchers resist the residual connection to post-positivist and quantitative perspectives and seek other ways to establish research credibility (Lincoln, 2009). Sousa (2014) proposes that declaring the limits of a qualitative inquiry is foundational to establishing research credibility in descriptive phenomenological research. The present study did not presume to establish a common understanding of the ways in which all district-level school counseling supervisors facilitate leadership development with professional school counselors. Rather, the present study sought insight into the experiences of district-level school counseling supervisors from a descriptive phenomenological perspective. Themes and descriptions provided in chapter four offer participant voices in a balanced manner to provide detailed descriptions without offering identifying details.

A qualitative inquiry establishes intrinsic credibility by offering a methodological framework and a detailed description of the steps applied to conduct the inquiry

(Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Creswell, 2007). The present study employed Giorgi et al.'s (2017) descriptive phenomenological method. Counseling leadership researchers are invited to critique the trustworthiness of this study by considering the extent to which it was conducted in alignment with descriptive phenomenological methodology. Interview questions and informed consent documents are included in the appendices of this dissertation for transparency. A sample description of the data analysis process is provided in Appendix A. Participant voices are included to the greatest extent possible in the results section of this dissertation as evidence of the themes identified during data analysis.

Reflexive journaling involves the systematic written processing of researcher thoughts and reflections during the research process (Yeh & Inman, 2007). Reflexive journaling provides a mechanism for continually revisiting researcher assumptions and reflecting on all aspects of the research process (Wertz, 2005). After receiving dissertation committee and IRB approval of the inquiry, reflexive journaling was employed throughout the data collection and transcription process. This reinforced the bracketing of researcher perceptions and maintained a consistent focus on Giorgi et al.'s (2017) scientific reduction. Debriefing with the dissertation chair provided additional scrutiny of the data collection and analysis process. Debriefing offered ongoing assessment of the coding process and adherence to the methodological steps outlined in this chapter (Creswell, 2007; Yeh & Inman, 2007). The dissertation chair provided oversight throughout the project to monitor fidelity of the research process.

Data analysis is at the heart of research credibility in a descriptive phenomenological study (Englander, 2012; Giorgi, 2009; Souza, 2014). However, there is disagreement among phenomenological researchers about certain aspects of data

analysis. Interpretive phenomenologists propose confirmation of findings by research participants to verify that descriptions of the research phenomenon are accurate (Smith et al., 2007; Souza, 2014). Souza (2014) and Giorgi (2012) note that this practice contrasts with the importance of epoché or the scientific phenomenological reduction in descriptive phenomenology. Descriptive phenomenology places great emphasis on the intentional suspension of the researcher's connection with any preconceptions about the topic of study (Englander, 2016). In alignment with the methodological framework outlined by Giorgi (2009) and Giorgi et al. (2017), participants were not asked to confirm or refute research findings following data analysis.

Data triangulation emphasizes different sources of information to better inform the descriptive phenomenological process (Creswell, 2007; Morrow, 2005; Yeh & Inman, 2007). To aid in triangulation of data, the publicly available position description of professional school counselor for each participant's school district was obtained and analyzed in the same manner as the interview transcripts. Morrow (2005) draws attention to the fact that data triangulation in phenomenological research offers greater richness and depth of understanding as opposed to a reductionistic confirmation of interview data. Analyzing these job descriptions provided additional information about the leadership expectations of professional school counselors working in their districts. This triangulation promoted validity of the research process (Creswell, 2007). Findings are detailed in chapter four of this dissertation.

Conclusion

Descriptive phenomenology offered a method of inquiry appropriate for exploring the lived experiences of district-level school counseling supervisors in facilitating leadership development with professional school counselors. Emphasizing

the bracketing of assumptions and rich descriptions of participants, descriptive

phenomenology strives for the essence of a lived experience without relying on

preconceptions or existing theoretical frameworks. The limited research on district-level

school counseling supervisors and the varied research perspectives regarding school

counselor leadership rendered descriptive phenomenology a desirable methodology to

explore the focus of the inquiry: the experiences of district-level school counseling

supervisors in facilitating leadership development with professional school counselors.

Data analysis was conducted in accordance with the descriptive phenomenological

research steps detailed by Giorgi (2009) and Giorgi et al. (2017).

Chapter 4

Results

This study explored the experiences of district-level school counseling supervisors in facilitating leadership development with professional school counselors. This chapter describes the participants in this study based on information that emerged during the interviews. Participant descriptors and professional responsibilities are discussed prior to detailing the four themes that emerged during data analysis: social justice, role advocacy, barriers to effective leadership, and leadership perspective. Each theme will be explored in detail with participant voices provided wherever possible to describe the concept from the perspectives of the individuals experiencing the phenomenon. These interviews were conducted in 2021, roughly one to two years after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. During this time, school districts provided in-person or virtual learning opportunities for students based on the safety concerns associated with available public health data. At times, no students were permitted to physically attend school for periods of weeks or months. In some cases, families were able to choose in-person or virtual learning based on their level of health risk. Participant references to in-person, hybrid, or virtual learning reflect the time in which these interviews occurred. In accordance with Giorgi et al.'s (2017) recommendations, reflections on the data are reserved for the discussion section in chapter five.

Participant Descriptors

Descriptions of the participants are provided here to offer information about the district-level supervisors who participated in this study as well as context for the response data offered later in this chapter. This inquiry included interview questions

that asked how personal identity influenced descriptions of school counselor leadership. A demographic questionnaire was not used during this study. In part, this decision was made to protect the confidentiality of a small and publicly identifiable participant group. The decision also aligned the research process with phenomenological principles. By not gathering information via predetermined and potentially limiting categories, participants were able to emphasize aspects of their identity they considered relevant to their descriptions of leadership. With this phenomenological perspective in mind, four of the eight participants included gender or racial identity descriptors as relevant in some way to their discussions of leadership. One participant discussed being married with school-age children while the other seven participants did not bring up partners or children. Apart from one participant who talked about being raised in church as a child, religion or spirituality was not a topic of discussion during any of the interviews. Age was referenced by two participants who indicated they entered the profession at a typical age following post-secondary training in school counseling.

Professional identity descriptors also arose during the discussions. Three members of the sample indicated they had previously served as counseling association presidents. One earned national school counselor of the year recognition. Three individuals shared they possessed the certifications or endorsements to serve as administrators. Five of the eight participants discussed working as school counselors in multiple states during their careers. Two leaders opened new schools and discussed the opportunities associated with developing new school counseling programs at sites with no institutional history. Two individuals identified as counselor educators who came to the district-level leadership role after serving in academia. One participant served previously in higher education administration. One identified as a licensed professional

counselor while another noted her career history included a leadership position at a community mental health agency. One participant cited teaching experience and another cited experience as a former assistant principal. Five participants indicated they possessed doctoral degrees in addition to the school counseling master's degree required for participation in the study. Structurally, four of the leader participants supervised school counselor programming at all levels. Two participants oversaw either elementary or secondary school counselor programming. The remaining two participants focused largely on secondary programming as their districts were not required to employ elementary school counselors at the time this study was conducted.

Each of the eight district-level school counseling supervisors in the study met the criteria for participation at the time of the interview. Six participants worked at public school districts in the state where the study was conducted. Two participants worked outside of the state as district-level supervisors in other metropolitan areas. Represented school districts ranged in size from approximately 5,000 to 90,000 enrolled students and included rural, urban, and suburban communities. All participants supervised the delivery of school counseling services at more than one school site. All participants had served as a district-level school counseling supervisor for at least one year. The longest-serving district-level supervisor had just completed her fourth year in the position at the time of our interview. All had received master's-level training as a school counselor. Next, procedures used during data analysis are offered to support research credibility.

Data Analysis

Recorded interviews, averaging 49 minutes in length, were initially transcribed using a university-approved online transcription service. Transcripts were then downloaded and reviewed for accuracy by the primary researcher. Once finished, each participant was invited to review their transcript for accuracy, additions, or corrections via password protected download link. No modifications or corrections were requested from any of the research participants. Following the transcript review, meaning units were identified by the primary researcher and entered verbatim into an Excel spreadsheet in alignment with Giorgi et al.'s (2017) Descriptive Phenomenological Psychological method. A sample analysis is provided in Appendix A of this dissertation. Each interview question was given its own tab/sheet in the Excel document and meaning units were organized by question and participant. Following the identification of 473 meaning units, each meaning unit was evaluated for psychologically meaningful expressions. Data evaluation yielded 372 psychological expressions which were then analyzed to explore the participants' lived experiences in facilitating leadership development with the professional school counselors they support.

Adhering to standards of research credibility was a priority throughout the data analysis process. In addition to requesting data validation from each participant, triangulation of data sources included an analysis of publicly available school counselor position descriptions from each school counseling supervisor's district website. School counselor position descriptions were analyzed in the same way as the interview data. Position descriptions were divided into two categories: the position summaries and the bulleted job responsibilities. Meaning units were derived from the position description data and then transformed into psychologically meaningful expressions. These

additional data sources supplemented the interview data and are included in the themes presented below. Reflexive journaling was employed throughout the research process to bracket researcher assumptions. Journaling consistently through the research process ensured consistent attention to the phenomenological psychological reduction throughout the data analysis process (Wertz, 2005). Leader experiences are shared in participants' own voices throughout this chapter as evidence of the themes presented (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Stated adherence to Giorgi et al.'s (2017) phenomenological psychological method also offers evidence of transparency and credibility in how the data was analyzed and themes were developed throughout the research process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The roles and responsibilities of leader participants are presented next to provide further details about the nature of the work as described by the district-level supervisors themselves.

Roles & Responsibilities

Data collected on the professional responsibilities of district-level supervisors are presented here to contextualize the circumstances in which school counselor leadership development occurs. As noted above, the participants in this study serve in urban, suburban, and rural school divisions of varying sizes across multiple communities and states. The varied responsibilities of these district-level supervisors serve as the backdrop of the leadership development experiences described later in this chapter. Each of the district-level supervisors had the assigned responsibility at the district level for supervising school counseling service delivery at more than one school site. All identified the responsibility of providing professional learning for school counselors as a fundamental aspect of the leadership role. None of the district-level supervisors indicated they have evaluative oversight of the school counselors they support. No other

unifying responsibilities emerged from the data. Participant descriptions of their varied roles and responsibilities offer details in their own words. Note: Participant quotes are identified by number (e.g., P1, P2) to demonstrate representation of participant voices in the study findings and to maintain the confidentiality of the participants.

All eight supervisors identified supporting school counselors as a primary responsibility of their position. P1 explained:

> I meet with them monthly and support them in their program. I don't directly evaluate or supervise them. It's more so the programmatic support and supervision. That's that piece that involves professional development, advocacy, and consultation around a number of things—with parents, with students, with situations with students, with self-harm, assessment, consultation, that kind of thing.

P2 shared, "My responsibilities are to be a best practice leader, an instructional specialist who supports our school counselors. I'm not considered their direct supervisor. They are hired and supervised locally." P4 stated, "I don't evaluate counselors, but they do come out of our budget and I'm responsible for the programming. So, the comprehensive school counseling program and anything that goes along with that." P5 explained, "Mainly I'm responsible for supervising the programs, not the school counselors themselves, but the programs."

An associated responsibility identified by all participants involved facilitating professional development and/or meetings in support of school counselor programming in their school districts. Every supervisor discussed this responsibility in some way. P6 explained, "We plan division-level trainings specifically based on the needs of the counselors. Those division-level trainings are separate from our counselor meetings." P5

discussed the importance of professional learning in promoting leadership development with school counselors: "I worked really hard on this piece because I believe it keeps people invested and you can see people that are just hungry for more leadership." P7: "We provide professional development to our counselors once a month. And then ongoing within virtual world, we've done some pop-up PD is what we call it where we'll offer something that's optional." P2: "I definitely provide lots of professional development to school counselors—lots of structure and weekly email interaction with them—keeping them upright and moving forward as they're keeping kids upright and moving forward."

Apart from program oversight and supporting school counselors through learning opportunities, the other job responsibilities described by district-level school counseling supervisors vary significantly. P1 and P5 (from the same school division) oversee school registrars, student transfer requests, and custody interpretations for principals. P6 manages special education processes including individual education (IEP) development, case management, and section 504 plan oversight under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). P3 coordinates the student disciplinary process:

> I'm also in charge of discipline and student conduct along with the school counselors. So that details administrators, when they send up discipline referrals. That details the coding, making sure that their referrals are coded … That [details] everything with the code of student conduct and any long-term suspension, any short-term suspension that may take place at any one of our schools in our school division. I oversee all of that.

P4 notes her role in facilitating collaboration among school-based mental health

professionals with different roles:

> A huge part of the job is we have unified mental health teams at each of our
>
> schools and I am on the central office planning committee for that. Counselors
>
> are the lead in each school for those unified mental health teams.

Other responsibilities mentioned during the interviews include oversight of graduation

requirements, homeschooling, behavior coaches, and the jail education program.

Individual supervisors described involvement with interagency collaboration, risk and

threat assessments, college and career readiness initiatives, policy development,

international exchange students, and consultation for transgender and gender expansive

students requesting accommodations. Having summarized the professional

responsibilities of district-level supervisors, findings that emerged during data analysis

are presented next.

Findings

Four themes emerged in the data involving social justice, role advocacy, barriers

to effective leadership, and leadership perspective. These themes are detailed below

along with descriptions in the participants own voices. The themes are organized and

presented in order of significance—meaning, social justice emerged as the most

prominent theme in the data, followed by role advocacy, barriers to effective leadership,

and leadership perspective.

Social Justice

Social justice emerged as a primary theme in the data. All participants talked

about social justice as an essential aspect of the role of a school counselor. However,

each district-level supervisor emphasized different aspects of social justice. Some

described it expansively and all-inclusive while others highlighted specific types of social justice work that school counselors facilitate in their school communities. Professional learning emerged as an important tool for engaging in social justice work. Effective learning opportunities were described as appropriate for all staff, individualized, and necessary preparation for effectively addressing the issues students bring into the school. The supervisors also identified challenges they face while fostering social justice work in their school divisions. Participants discussed their experiences of cultural and personal resistance to social justice work. The work is complex, scary, and deeply personal.

Integral to the Role

Every district-level school counseling supervisor in this study described social justice work as an essential aspect of school counseling. P1 explains:

> I think social justice just comes out naturally as a school counselor's unspoken responsibility … it goes back to our care for all students, right? And a lot of social justice issues impact mental health … It's just a natural tie-in to what we do.

Describing the importance of social justice work, P5 noted the importance of aligning with the ethical expectations of ACA and ASCA:

> It's something that's part of our ethics. We draw counselors back to their ethical code all the time out of ASCA. And ACA for that matter. This is the work we're supposed to be doing. If we're supposed to be closing gaps, we're supposed to be doing equity work. We are supposed to be doing the work of inclusion, making everyone feel included, meeting the needs of every student, seeing them and appreciating them for the differences that they have and helping students to do the same.

P6 describes social justice work as innate to the role:

> I think all counselors are social justice advocates. I think they should be. That's a
> critical part of being a school counselor, of being an educator. I think if you're
> working with kids, you should be trying to advance opportunities for all students
> and tear down barriers whenever you see them. I think that's really innate in the
> vision of what a school counselor is and should be.

P2 explained:

> I feel like school done right is about social justice. That's probably a personal
> value. That was a personal value I had long before the ASCA national model, long
> before our professional journals started talking about social justice work. I just
> feel like school is, in theory, supposed to level the playing field ... to make sure
> everybody has the ability to pursue whatever post-secondary
> opportunities/dreams that they can get. We know that isn't how the world works.
> Still, I think the way that our profession has decided to clearly train school
> counselors to serve in that capacity is powerful.

When asked about the importance of social justice work, P7 responded passionately: "I think it's everything. It's the entire foundation!"

Aspects of Social Justice

Although every district-level supervisor talked about the importance of social justice, they emphasized different aspects of it. P8 noted, "When we think about the concept of social justice, it doesn't just limit itself to ethnicity. We're looking at sexual orientation, we're looking at religious differences, as well as language." P1 also described social justice work expansively:

When I think social justice, I think the first thing that comes to my mind is all students and everybody. A lot of times when you say social justice, I think subconsciously we leave white male students out of the conversation and sometimes even the thought process. That's been something that we've had a discussion group amongst the leadership here in student services about equity and about social justice. How do we make sure all students are included in this movement, this discussion, this understanding, this being able to share?

P7 shared her view that effective social justice work involves data disaggregation and proactive services:

I tell counselors, our job as a school counselor is to find the kids who need us before the kids knew that they even needed us. We're not sitting in our office waiting for kids to come to us. We're using data, we're disaggregating data. We're finding these students and we're going to them. I think that's social justice.

P3 described one of her elementary school counselors who engaged in virtual social justice work during the time of school closure:

One counselor that comes to mind is one of our elementary school counselors who did go out of their way to have weekly zoom sessions with students over while we were in the pandemic. We also had a lot of social justice things taking place within our society. And she had time set up weekly for students to come talk about, hey, what are you seeing on TV? And provided a folder of resources to families. And made that time available to have a chit chat with students. I think this was maybe three through fifth grade at the elementary level that this was provided to where they had time to hop on and just talk about what's happening.

P2 emphasized the importance of supports for young students: "Even in kindergarten—that successful transition is part of that family's initial experience of school. That going well is a social justice initiative."

Professional Learning and Social Justice

Six participants talked explicitly about the connection between social justice work and professional learning. P3 noted the importance of self-awareness and motivation to grow professionally:

That goes back to what we were just talking about—seeking out those professional development opportunities in that particular aspect, social justice and all of that. If you need more information about it or need more understanding of it, make sure your school counselors are aware of it and make sure they understand. We're going to see it firsthand, whether we are aware of it or not because our kids are going to bring it to us—they're looking at TV; they're looking at social media. We need to be prepared at our level to help our teachers and be prepared to help our students, family, and staff with that as it comes to us.

P6 highlighted the value of professional learning focused on culturally responsive practices and noted that some school counselors are leading the discourse:

We've been doing *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain* for the past five years. It started with the administrative team doing that book study, and then it kind of branched out into each individual school. I know that some of the counselors have taken a leadership role in running small group type book clubs at their schools—looking specifically at this book and walking through the activities and things in here with teachers. So I think that's one example of looking at barriers that exist and being proactive and overcoming those barriers.

P4 emphasized the importance of individualized professional learning:

> You have to know as a leader where your staff is regardless of gender, sexual
> orientation, race, religion, because everybody evolves on their own. Part of the
> training that we did right before COVID broke out is we used *Teaching*
> *Tolerance*. Very basic … talks with people … doesn't talk at people. They have a
> lot of webinars where we would assign them to counselors and say, view these on
> your own time. We normally have [professional development] days, but we're not
> calling everybody together. We want you to use these next several hours to view
> these professional development webinars. And we picked ones on LGBTQ, on
> race, and all these other things. Please watch them in your own time. That
> allowed people that were uncomfortable with the topic to process it on their own
> and to possibly have conversations with people at work or at home so that they
> could have a better introduction to what social justice was.

P8 noted that professional learning provides opportunities for educators to reflect and
engage in inner social justice work:

> What are some of my biases? Where are some things that I need to work on so
> that I'm not pushing anything negative? How can I welcome my families in
> multiple ways? How can I make my bulletin board easy to access for students
> whose first language is not English? How can I welcome culturally diverse
> students in the building?

Challenges of Social Justice Work

Multiple participants discussed the challenges associated with social justice work.
P4 described leading social justice work as scary:

A lot of times it's scary. And I have to be a leader; I'm out here on my own. There are times when I have to let staff know, the black kids are getting treated this way. The Latinx kids are getting treated this way. You need to check your biases at the door.

P3 shared,

We do have those in our school division who would rather shy away. Not that they don't want to address it, but it may seem overwhelming to them. [They] want it to be clear on how to address it and not wanting to offend.

P1 discussed the complexity associated with doing social justice work well:

Social justice issues tend to traumatize and retraumatize certain groups, depending on whatever the issue might be. As school counseling leaders, we have an obligation to look out for all students, to help adults and students have difficult conversations, address our biases that we all have.

P4 shared about the challenges associated with being a Black woman engaged in social justice leadership efforts:

I have to tread lightly when I bring up social justice issues. Because I don't want people to think that I am trying to be the stereotypical angry Black woman, "You're gonna fight for these students and you're gonna do this and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah." I don't want to come off that way. So I need to be able to always think strategically before I have a request or an ask of my staff. I don't want to seem like it's favoritism. I don't want it to seem like I am involved in retribution. So, I have to find data. I have to find the things that support the mission, the viewpoint, the stance, that is what counseling should say it should be. And also,

what education is saying that it should be regardless of the culture that we reside in within our school division.

P1 discussed the challenge of staying focused on the needs of students and not a personal agenda:

I think for me, I've always sought to support students and social justice conversations. But being careful if you're a school counseling leader to not have a platform or a stance, if you will. One of the things, for example, when we were sending out information around the whole George Floyd death time, one of the things I said is this: I don't want the message here to be that we agree or disagree with what went down . . . and I had to slow down another leader who came from a very different perspective, who also was born in a different era and has seen different things and experienced different things. And I said, it needs to be about us supporting all of our counselors and whatever they may be experiencing through this; as well as resources for them supporting students and whatever people bring to the table. Because I think the moment you come out as a leader denouncing something or saying that something is wrong … I don't think it's our position to say it's wrong. Did I feel it was? Absolutely. Do I have certain personal feelings about it? Yes. That letter we sent to counselors supporting them and providing resources was not my opportunity. It should not be a counseling leader's opportunity to share their personal views or takeaways from a particular issue or situation.

P2 summarized the resistance that many school counselors bring to social justice work: "I'm really trying to help people understand the gentle fierceness with which they can really be advocates for children, families, and communities . . . and I have some school

counselors who are like, please be quiet." Reflecting on her own social justice work, P5 observed the current culture as a growing impediment:

> I did a lot of [social justice work] when I was an elementary school counselor … I had really purposeful discussions. I wonder often, had we been having them in today's climate, what would occur? Because I was facilitating *No Place for Hate* as a school counselor … having student leadership, student voices, and really doing diversity inclusion work at that level … I am concerned as a school counseling leader at certain directions I see divisions going in.

Social justice work is integral to the role of a school counselor. It aligns with the expectations of professional organizations and includes all students. Professional learning experiences can promote growth when they are individualized and provide opportunities for reflection and growth. Social justice work can be challenging. District-level supervisors engaged in this work use data and face resistance from others in facilitating the sometimes-difficult personal reflection that social justice work requires. Leadership in the area of social justice requires bravery, strategic insight, and an openness to the growth needs of others. The second theme that emerged in the data involves role advocacy for appropriate school counselor job responsibilities.

Role Advocacy

Every district-level supervisor discussed their efforts to align the role of professional school counselors with the expectations of the professional associations. P4 described the lack of alignment between the school counselor role and the expectations of the professional associations that she has observed through her career:

> I have a master's in counseling, a doctorate in counseling. I have an endorsement in ed supervision or admin supervision. I've been a school counselor since '97. I

have worked in 6 school divisions and 3 states. I'm finding that there definitely is

a shared theme of having to advocate, because people just don't understand. I

thought it would be different in different places. It may be a little bit better, but

I've yet to be someplace where it is that exceptional.

Participants described their role advocacy efforts as critically important, ongoing, and

exhausting. Some highlighted advocacy efforts with specific colleagues or stakeholder

groups. Others gave examples of ways they advocate as district-level leaders to increase

alignment with the expectations of the professional associations. Each supervisor

highlighted the importance of role advocacy in some way.

The Importance of Role Advocacy

Multiple participants talked about role advocacy as a primary responsibility of a

district-level school counseling supervisor. P7 described role advocacy as an ongoing

task:

I feel like I'm often advocating for school counseling. The way I describe my work

is: when something is coming through central office or from different

departments, I filter it through the lens of the school counselor. Before it gets to

the school or before it gets to the counselor, I've tried to filter it and see what it

would look like in the eyes of a school counselor.

P3 described her desire to advocate as a primary reason for becoming a district-level

supervisor:

I hear from across the state because I'm on various boards like the Virginia

School Counseling Association and the American School Counseling Association.

And you hear, especially in small/rural school divisions, the need and there's not

one dedicated person to help answer those questions—to help facilitate what it

should look like and help make sure the lines are not blurred between a teacher and a school counselor because that often can happen in small school divisions including the school counselor being the quasi-administrator. We've taken on a lot of administrative duties as school counselors. I had a need within myself to have someone or have a position dedicated to leading and advocating for school counselors.

P4 notes that her role advocacy involves "constantly educating the public. Grassroots work and social justice work is forever evolving and it's exhausting trying to educate everyone, but you have to know that going into the job. That this is how I can be a leader." P4 described her professional efforts in advocating for appropriate school counselor responsibilities over a multi-year period:

My first year was trying to prove to them that I knew my stuff. I knew what I was doing. Now, you know I've just finished year four. I'm not gonna say I have won everyone over, but definitely it's easier than it has been in the past. I had a lot to clean up and the counselors were used to fending for themselves. And I don't believe in that model. If I'm your supervisor and I get paid for that, it's my job to help fight for you or with you … not for you to fight by yourself.

P7 described role advocacy as integral to her professional identity:

I feel a very strong commitment and obligation to be a voice of school counseling and school counselors; and to be a leader and to raise and support other leaders so much so that it's a huge part of my identity. And when I can't, or I don't feel successful with that, it really impacts me.

P6 emphasized the importance of staying aligned with the history and expectations of the professional associations:

I think understanding school counseling leadership is understanding the

profession; having a foundation of what is school counseling, what is the mission

of school counselors, and then really helping support the school counselors to

fulfill their calling—to maximize their ability to serve in that role.

In addition to discussing the importance of role advocacy, multiple district-level

supervisors talked about how they advocate with specific stakeholder groups.

Advocacy with Specific Stakeholder Groups

Unsurprisingly, school administrators are a focus of role advocacy. P5 discussed

her desire to support principals in better understanding appropriate school counselor

responsibilities:

I want to give principals also some support about what school counseling

programs need to look like and how to really go about this conversation the best

way. Because we really want to encourage them to have a strong leadership

relationship with their administrators and to be able to talk openly with them;

and advocate positively when there's something that needs to be adjusted.

P8 noted she advocates with administrators strategically during budget season: "I make

sure that I drop resources on the principals weekly when it's budget season . . . I've had

lots of conversations with principals about how I can help them build their budget to

include a school counselor." P8's message of advocacy to principals takes an

administrative perspective:

This is why school counselors are important. This is an asset in your building that

you may not quite know how to use right now but let me walk you through how

your school counselor can help you reach your academic goals; achieve your

comprehensive school plan … and I know that every district calls it something

different . . . but if your school has a goal, school counselors can help you meet it.

P7 highlighted the ways in which professional associations can advocate for role clarity

with administrators:

There's counselor leadership, but how do we help principals and administrators

really understand the role? What are we doing as a profession to make sure that

we're getting in front of administrators and principals and superintendents to

help them see what school counselors could be bringing to the table if we let

them?

P3 discussed the importance of role advocacy with school-based administrators as well

as district-level leaders:

It goes back to the advocacy of, what is the school counselor? Here's the role of

the school counselor and here's what we can do . . . They're just not your

transcript person or your academic and career plan person or your classroom

guidance person. They can be a part of your school improvement team. They can

be a part of your PLCs. They can be a part of looking at those reading and writing

scores and saying, hey, here's some interventions that can be put in place. So you

can bring your academic and instructional side in with your school counseling

services side.

In addition to administrators, other stakeholders emerged as strategic targets of

role advocacy. P3 drew attention to school board policymakers:

My biggest thing for this upcoming school year is being an advocate for who you

are. Advocate for your profession. Let people know, here's what the school

counselor does. These are the services I can provide that I offer to students,

families, and to staff. We're going to set up a session where we're also going to

inform our school board members. This is the school counselor. This is what we

do.

P4 shared that school-based mental health professionals were a stakeholder group that

needed attention when she began her role:

When I first came to [this district], I'll tell you that my biggest challenge was

educating psychs and social workers about what school counselors do. Because

they had this myth. They had a perception. They didn't know. I had to break

everything down, got my ASCA stuff out and was showing and printing them off.

P4 also observed that veteran school counselors sometimes need to revise their

understanding of the role:

We're really trying to make sure our staff understand comprehensive

programming. I find that when you have a large staff, especially seasoned, maybe

not so much in age, but years of service, they didn't have the same requirements

in the master's programs that they do now. So they kind of have to play catch up.

And then there are some programs that didn't teach or currently really don't harp

on ASCA that much. They do other things. So making sure everyone has the same

expectation and if they don't know what their expectation is, we teach it to them.

P1 summarized: "there are so many people—teachers, administrators, parents,

community members, school board members—that don't fully understand our role as

school counselors."

Doing the Work of Role Advocacy

Multiple district-level supervisors shared examples of how they advocate

systemically for appropriate school counselor responsibilities. P5 highlighted the value

of her annual administrative conference document in promoting appropriate school counselor responsibilities:

> One of the documents that we ask for is the annual administrative conference document. And I think we're going to provide even more support this year about how to get that done. If they want some support, I want to give principals also some support about what school counseling programs need to look like.

P8 added school counseling information to the district website as a means of systemic advocacy:

> Until recently, school counseling didn't even have a website on the district website. We had to create a website. So people knew, hey, school counselors exist? Yes. School counselors exist. This is what we do. This is how we can help you.

P7 identified the lack of systemic expectations in her district as an opportunity for needed growth:

> The counselors are struggling because if we had something from central office that said, this is what counselors are supposed to be doing, that helps the counselors advocate and lead within their buildings. But when we don't provide for them a plate or a foundation, then the counselors are left on their own to fend for themselves.

District-level school counseling supervisors are uniquely positioned to promote systems at the district level to support school counseling responsibilities that align with the associations.

Using data as a tool for role advocacy emerged in multiple interviews. Conversations about role advocacy included discussions of data-driven programming.

P3 shared her view that data is an important tool in advocating for appropriate school counselor responsibilities:

> It goes back to advocating and being very visible and vigilant about what a school counselor does. And then putting that into action—not just hanging a poster saying this is what school counselors do, but putting it into action. That's my focus for school counselors in this division. Show what you're doing, show the data, document everything, and show how you are able to help with a school improvement plan.

P4 also talked about data as a tool for role advocacy and program promotion:

> As with everything else that has evolved in school counseling, you have to know and understand data. You have to be able to share and show and tell your stakeholders. This is what school counselors do. This is how they make a difference. As simple as, this is how many meetings they had this year. Because people don't know what they don't know. They don't know that you may have 200 kids on your case load, but you've had a thousand meetings with those 200 kids. That says a lot about your interaction and that counselor's advocacy for their students.

P7 shared a story of how data helped her advocate with her administrator early on in her school counseling career:

> It's interesting to me when there's this disconnect between the school counselors and the admin. In my second year as a school counselor, I was very intimidated by this woman. And by the next year, I figured her out. She was a data person. She was one of those people, she's got to see it. Prove it to me, you know? And once she saw what I could do, we were just fine after that.

P3 returned to the importance of data when asked about aspects of school counselor leadership that are critically important:

> Data. For some of our veteran school counselors, that's a new field. But we have Google Docs. We have a lot of different formats and platforms where you can show your data . . . If I come in, show your 80% of time being spent working directly with students. Are you able to put that on a pie graph? You facilitated a small group. How did that go? Did it meet your needs? Did it meet the needs of the students? did you hit the goal that you had embarked on meeting?

Data is a tool utilized by school counselors and district-level supervisors in promoting school counselor effectiveness and advocating for professional responsibilities in alignment with ASCA.

The ASCA National Model also emerged as a tool for role advocacy. P7 sends National Model resources to principals and provided a half-day training on the model for assistant principals in her division. P8's school counselors are in an active partnership with ASCA. They are engaged in "a two-year training opportunity with ASCA where they've been providing virtual training so our counselors can build their programs better." P1 acknowledged the power of RAMP certification in promoting programmatic success, which celebrates school counseling best practices: "We just had six schools RAMP. I'm calling the [communications office] and I'm like, look, I need a good story. And I need it all over the website I need it here and there and everywhere." Half of the participants cited the ASCA National Model as a tool that supports their role advocacy efforts.

Despite the prominence of the ASCA National Model, district-level supervisor comments were mixed regarding its value. P5 spoke about the ASCA National Model's lack of widespread acceptance while acknowledging its importance:

I think being knowledgeable about how to use the ASCA National Model lens to look at your job is important. You know, I've talked with some different people about this. Not everybody's in the same place about the support of it, which, this is what our job is. This is what our regulation says; professional identity.

P2 discussed the value of the National Model, but stopped short of embracing the Model in its totality:

I separate from the ASCA National Model. The ASCA National Model for me just feels ... I need to be cautious about this. I think it's a great graphic organizer for how to contain all of the things that are going on in present day school counseling. But within that, there are lots of different versions of school counselors. The programs end up manifesting uniquely.

The supervisors referenced the ASCA National Model and components of the Model at various times throughout our conversation.

Multiple supervisors stressed the importance of activating school counselors as partners in the leadership work of role advocacy. P7 described the value of activating school counselors as leaders and advocates in order to model for others who need to grow in this area:

What I'm learning is: instead of focusing on the folks that aren't ready and don't want to do it, I'm trying to find the folks that are—that do want it and really tapping into them and seeing what can I do to foster their leadership. Where can I invite them into opportunities to build their capacity and to raise their voice

when it comes to utilizing the model or advocacy within our district? I can't do it all myself. Our district is a pretty large district, midsize, 30,000 students. I need a team of folks around me, of other counselors particularly to influence the other counselors.

P7 echoed the importance of motivating building-level counseling directors as leader/advocates in her district:

I really need them to not be afraid to be an administrator . . . They're paid on the same level as APs. So they need to know they're an administrator. And in their building, they need to advocate and they need to fight and they need to be part of those conversations so that they can move the ball forward.

Observing that some school counselors may shy away from celebrating their program accomplishments, P1 stressed the importance of school counselors promoting their successes as an aspect of role advocacy:

One of the things I really push is counselors as leaders promoting their program. Not from a standpoint of being haughty or look at me, but even to this day, there are so many people—teachers, administrators, parents, community members, school board members—that don't fully understand our role as school counselors.

P7 strives to encourage school counselors to be role advocates by tapping into their passionate advocacy for students:

I try to use that as an analogy for advocacy, for their profession, for their role. You have no problem throwing down for a kid in a meeting. I've seen it. You will do it. Why won't you do it for yourself and your job? If you are freed up to do more of that, to work more with students like that, you're going to have more of an impact.

Activating school counselors as partners in the work of role advocacy is an important tool in the toolkit of district-level supervisors.

Advocating for school counselor responsibilities that align with the expectations of professional associations like ACA and ASCA is an ongoing and important aspect of serving as a district-level school counseling supervisor. Role advocacy involves learning the history of school counseling within the profession and educating stakeholders on current best practices. District-level supervisors advocate with school staff, administrators, district leaders, parents, and school counselors who are not up to date on current best practices of the profession. District-level supervisors facilitate information sharing and systems-level practices that promote aligned school counselor responsibilities. Data is an important tool for demonstrating the impact of school counselor programming to various stakeholder groups. The ASCA National Model also offers a framework to promote alignment of the school counselor role to the expectations of ASCA. A primary aspect of the role of district-level supervisor is the opportunity to foster role advocacy skills of professional school counselors. District-level supervisors encourage school counselors to accept their leadership role and promote their programmatic successes. Role advocacy is a primary responsibility of district-level school counseling supervisors in supporting appropriate school counselor responsibilities that align with the expectations of the professional associations of ACA and ASCA.

Barriers to Effective Leadership

The third theme presented in this chapter involves the barriers experienced by district-level supervisors that disrupt their efforts to lead effectively. These barriers include systemic disconnects that impede school counselors' ability to engage in

effective programming and service delivery that aligns with professional associations like ACA and ASCA. Barriers also include the ways in which leadership development efforts of district-level supervisors are impeded in their school districts. This theme does not seek to highlight the overabundance of non-counseling duties experienced by many professional school counselors. Rather, this theme identifies the systems and structures that perpetuate a lack of alignment between school counselor training and the work they perform in schools each day. The district-level supervisors who participated in this study shared multiple systemic practices that act as barriers to school counselor leadership effectiveness. They identified aspects of their positions that sometimes conflict with appropriate school counseling responsibilities. They also shared ways in which graduate training can be refined to improve alignment with professional associations and the demands of the job. Notably, they could not describe a clear leadership pipeline to support the development of future district-level school counseling supervisors. The barriers described below disrupt district-level supervisors' ability to promote high quality school counseling services. They also impede leadership development efforts alongside the school counselors they support.

Systemic Disconnects

The district-level supervisors in this study identified various organizational barriers to their leadership effectiveness. P2 noted that, despite ASCA's emphasis on data-driven programming in support of school improvement goals, school counselors were excluded from the school improvement planning (SIP) process in her district:

> You didn't invite me to the school improvement meetings? You met with
>
> principals and all kinds of people on my floor. I came into work and said, where is
>
> everybody? And the secretary said, oh, they're at the SIP meetings downstairs.

That was a big wake up call . . . so one of my goals for my school counseling team this year is partnership with our MTSS people in the county and partnership with behavior intervention support specialists and partnership with school improvement.

P8 described a lack of equitable counseling support across her school district which does not require schools to employ elementary counselors: "Unfortunately in my school division, elementary counselors are a flexible position, meaning that they are not required. When I send things to elementary counselors, there's some schools that, I don't know, because they don't have a school counselor there." P7 described how the lack of role clarity in her district has contributed to confusion as support roles have been introduced:

We have academic and career planning coordinators in our middle schools that are half-time. So one of the struggles is we've brought in ACP coordinators. We have PBIS coordinators and the counselors are having some identity crisis. If they're bringing in all of these other people, then what am I left to do? Oh, here's the master schedule is what's happening in some cases; or here's some recess duty. Here's the walkie-talkie.

P2 explained that aspiring school counselor leaders are excluded from her district's leadership development program in its current form:

Professional development used to offer something called counselor lead. Then they reorganized our professional development team and counselor lead went away. They've sort of built PD back up. And I caught wind of the fact that teacher lead was coming back. I went to PD and said, all right. I know there was a great partnership between school counseling and this department in the past. Can we

do that again? And they were like, we're not doing that. We don't have the

resources for that. And I'm like, I think that's a mistake. I think maybe we could

negotiate. Can we call it educator lead? Can we be more inclusive? Which, you

know, is leadership in my asking them to think outside of the box. And they were

like, that's not a bad idea, but really it's for teachers because that's the way our

superintendent wants it to be.

P8 shared her opposition to the school district's plan to require all school counselors to

possess or pursue the Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) endorsement:

You were already certified as a school counselor. You've already demonstrated

your effectiveness. You should not have to get additional letters in your name to

demonstrate your effectiveness. Because if you're the LPC, that means you're

doing private practice and having a bill, like it's a whole other layer of complexity.

These descriptions identify systemic structures that work against district-level

supervisor efforts to facilitate comprehensive school counseling programs and

leadership development within their districts.

Each of the district-level school counseling supervisors noted that they do not

directly evaluate the school counselors they oversee. The topic of indirect oversight

typically arose during discussions of role advocacy efforts, program inconsistencies, and

ancillary job responsibilities. Participants did not identify this indirect supervisory

structure as a barrier, but discussions of this structure conveyed a lack of ownership or

empowerment by the supervisors. P2 described it this way: "My responsibilities are to

be a best practice leader, an instructional specialist who supports our school counselors.

I'm not considered their direct supervisor. They are hired and supervised locally." P8's

description expressed more frustration:

I do not provide direct supervision of school counselors because [my school district] likes to operate in its own way. I write the supervision impact document that our school counselors receive evaluation for. As far as who provides direct supervision, our principals have more autonomy than I do. Now I will go into the buildings. I will provide indirect supervision. I'll give feedback, but [my district] likes to operate in its own way.

P7 described the supervisory challenges associated with facilitating institutional change without direct oversight:

I'm not a supervisor which is nice sometimes, and sometimes it's not. So I say, I always get to be the good guy, which is nice. But then it's hard when you're trying to make movement. We're trying to work on the model. I'm the lead RAMP reviewer and the model work has been very slow. I can ask people to turn things into me, but again, I'm nobody's boss. So until their principals or supervisors are on board with some of that stuff, it's really hard to make movement.

P8 explained the impact of this indirect supervision model on the hiring process of new school counselors and programming inconsistency:

For me, we're responsible for also hiring. So we're reviewing resumes, we're pre-screening candidates, and then we're sending them to principals so they can select them for hire. And sometimes principals will take my recommendation and sometimes they won't. And that's also a problem for me. Unfortunately, our schools have a lot of autonomy. It makes it very hard for things to be consistent.

The structure of indirect oversight presented itself as a barrier in the data despite not being directly identified as such by the participants.

At certain points, participants described school counselor actions that contradict the role expectations of professional school counselors and the ASCA Code of Ethics. P6 described observing a school counselor acting as a quasi-administrator:

> We have some small schools where there's no assistant principal and so the school counselor ends up getting pulled into that administrative role. That can be really tough. I remember one example: the principal, I don't know where she was, but the counselor was in the front office and the student had been brought in because he was in trouble. The counselor put them at a desk in the front office and was kind of firm with him. She looked like the principal. And I was like, Hmm. But the principal wasn't there and so she's stepping into that role. I can understand where she's coming from, but at the same time it's hard because when you're being the disciplinarian in that way ... and it doesn't mean that you shouldn't correct students. We should. But when you're being a disciplinarian and giving consequences, that really hurts the therapeutic relationship that your school counselor has.

P7 shared how a veteran school counselor embraced non-counseling duties and reinforced job responsibilities that drove a new school counselor out of the profession:

> We have one guy that's been around for 25 years. He does the master schedule and he's really good at it. And he loves doing it and he can get it done in like two days. Right. Which is fine. Great, do it. But then when the new grad comes, that's 24 and the principal says, here 24-year-old, take my master schedule and make this happen. I'm like, have you lost your fucking mind? You're going to give your master schedule to this 24-year-old. It's going to take them months and weeks to do this and they're not with kids. We just lost a wonderful counselor, a black

man, because he kept advocating: I didn't do this to become a school master

scheduler. I said, we have a black male school counselor. Again, our district, we

don't walk our talk. He wants to work with kids. He wants to be with kids and

you're giving him a master schedule. You're putting him in a door, telling him to

shut the door and work in there for three months by himself without working

with kids at all. So he left our district and he went to be an assistant principal in

another district.

Despite the district-level supervisors' efforts to resist counselor involvement in discipline and non-counseling duties, their descriptions indicated that school counselors experience the impact of systemic misalignment in negative ways.

Graduate Training and the Leadership Pipeline

Another barrier to leadership involved the lack of alignment between graduate training and the leadership development experience of professional school counselors. P8 discussed some of the important skills that are underdeveloped in many new school counselors:

Gosh, I think that our graduate programs need some revamping. A lot of

counselors are still not confident about putting together their program. A lot of

counselors are still uncomfortable with social justice work. They only have one

multiculturalism course. A lot of programs are still not adequately preparing

school counselors to work with students of color, families of color, linguistically

diverse students, special education students. Do they understand the difference

between a 504 and an IEP? What does it mean to lead? It's a lot. I feel like

graduate school programs need a big overhaul.

P7 also noted the lack of emphasis on leadership in graduate training programs:

Our grad programs, I know they're starting to change, are very heavily focused on

therapy. And that's a small part of what school counselors get to do . . . I don't

want to stereotype, but a lot of folks that come from a mental health background

who went into school counseling thinking they're going to do mental health

counseling or one-on-one individual counseling, they are somewhat

uncomfortable with the advocacy and the leadership.

The lack of emphasis on leadership skills in graduate training also emerged as

participants talked about what prepared them for district-level leadership.

Participant descriptions of their preparation for district-level school counseling

leadership roles were different for each leader. Notably, no supervisor identified their

master's level school counseling training as significant in their leader development. P5

cited her teaching background and the training she received pursuing a post-graduate

certificate in educational leadership as significant in preparing her for a district-level

leadership role:

I trained alongside people who were looking to be principals and assistant

principals for my certificate. So I was like two or three classes short of another

master's degree, and I am certified to be an administrator in the state. I think that

that was really important. I think my teaching background has brought an extra

for me as a school counselor. And then in this particular role, I really enjoyed the

leadership training because I think that it brought to life some things I was

already doing in school counseling leadership, but also helped me see from the

perspective of an assistant principal or a principal.

P7 identified her state counseling associations as essential to her leadership journey:

I would say what helped me most was volunteering and being a part of my state

school counseling associations—going to the conferences, going to sessions,

getting involved with that, hearing from people, getting involved with ASCA,

winning school counselor of the year. The access that I got to people and to

leaders, that was the game changer for me ... getting involved professionally with

my organizations more so than what happened in grad school.

P5 also highlighted the importance of state-level counseling associations: "I was the

president of the [state-level association] and working with [the association] at the time

just gives you all sorts of organizational leadership experience. So I felt comfortable

coming into a role like this." P1 identified the leadership training for administrators

provided by his school district as important to his leadership development:

We've had a lot of professional development here for leaders in [my school

district] through our office of professional learning. For example, I'm in one now.

It's a four-part series about having difficult coaching conversations around

reprimanding, correcting, or disciplining an employee, that kind of thing ... that

tough conversation.

P6 identified her doctoral program as an important leadership development experience:

I think my program prepared me for a leadership role. I was in a leadership

position running a community counseling program when I was doing my doctoral

program. That was really helpful. Because the things I was learning about, I was

really practicing and using. And so I think that whole experience helped me.

Participants cited experiences other than their master's level school counselor training

as essential in preparing for the leadership role.

Three participants reflected on the lack of a clear leadership pathway during the interview. P5 mused about the variety of leadership pathways she has observed:

I was definitely advised on the educational leadership route. But I've grown in this, these past two years, in this position. There've been positions advertised without that … maybe with a different background altogether. So I know that there's people all over the state, all over the nation, who have varying backgrounds as school counseling leaders. And it's interesting to see what they bring to their positions and their leadership. How it impacts their work. That's something that I'm interested in as a leader. I have seen, sometimes people have thought that you need to be educated like a professor would be educated. It's interesting that the reality of my school system was something different. And then you find in other school systems, they're not even looking for anything. They're just looking for you to be a school counselor. Or maybe they're looking for you to be like a former principal.

P8 envisioned district-level leadership training as its own program:

If you're interested in going into school counselor leadership, here is a 15-credit course. Here are the things that you're going to need to know about being a central office leader, taking off your school counselor hat and putting on your leadership hat and being able to move the needle as a leader.

P1 described the lack of a leadership pipeline from school counselor to district-level supervisor as a deficiency he could have addressed more effectively:

You don't hear a lot about division-level leadership. And growing to that point and some of the things that [school counselors] can do to position themselves to

be ready for that. And we don't talk about it that often. And so I think that's an area that, as a division level-leader, I could have done a much better job.

All district-level supervisors spoke about the importance of leadership development. However, descriptions of the leadership development process were personal to each participant.

The district-level school counseling supervisors in this study identified multiple systemic barriers to programmatic effectiveness and the leadership development of school counselors. These structural disconnects included systemic ways in which school counselors and district-level supervisors are excluded from school improvement planning and leadership develop opportunities. Policies and district expectations negatively impact school counselor staffing and create disconnects that perpetuate inequities in service delivery and inappropriate job responsibilities. Indirect supervision structures disrupt district-level supervisors' ability to hold school counselors accountable to best practices. Lack of role clarity in alignment with ACA and ASCA impacts organizational cultures in ways that perpetuate non-counseling duties, blur the lines between counseling and discipline, and disrupt leadership development. Participants identified growth opportunities for graduate training programs to facilitate increased leadership and advocacy skills that meet the needs of diverse students and families. Additional elements of leadership development include: professional counseling association work, mentorship, and training alongside non-counseling administrators. All participants identified learning outside of their master's level training in school counseling as important to their preparation for a district-level leadership role.

Leadership Perspective

The fourth theme that emerged in the data involved the leadership perspective that school counselor leaders possess. District-level supervisors described a broad, whole-child perspective that school counselors bring to the role. The school counselor leader attends to the needs of all students while simultaneously focusing on the unique needs of the individual. This expansive perspective is accompanied by a passion for the role. School counselor leaders work passionately on behalf of the students and families they support. Participants identified passion as an important part of their work as district-level supervisors and described ways in which they seek to reinforce passion for the profession among the school counselors they support. These expectations contribute to the picture of school counselor leadership that district-level supervisors facilitate alongside the school counselors they support.

Holistic and Expansive

The participants in this study described the broad perspective that school counselors bring to their school communities. P3 shared how the school counselor perspective may be difficult to quantify, but is essential to assessing student needs:

> The school counselor is going to bring in more of that in-depth deeper dive . . . your school counselor is going to bring a deeper insight of what's happening with the student as a whole and possibly their home life.

During a discussion of the differences between administrative and counseling perspectives, P6 described it this way:

> I feel like a school counselor is more focused on thinking about the culture of the school with a broad lens. Identifying needs on a school wide level, but also really looking at the individual needs of students—their academic, social, emotional,

career needs—and then using the tiered approach, planning out how to meet those needs for each individual student.

P8 also summarized the school counselor perspective expansively:

They can see everything about a child. They're looking at everything from a developmental lens. How can I provide the appropriate support for an elementary student, middle school student, high school student? We know that our students come in with various sorts of needs. School counselors partner with families. School counselors partner with teachers. Being on the leadership team and talking with the school principal you can say, hey, here's what I know about this family. Here's what's going on.

District-level supervisors described a holistic and expansive perspective as critical to addressing the unique needs of students effectively.

This broader perspective also appeared in participant descriptions of leadership. P4 explained how school counselors can bring a broad perspective to their leadership development journey:

I'll say this. If people have the opportunity to work at different levels, they should do so. I've worked at every level and each experience was invaluable. Each experience helps me understand the totality of the experience. I know that there are some people that don't get those opportunities. I'm not bashing them for not doing that or for people that are comfortable in one area. But even if they're comfortable in one area, they may want to try moving to a different school. Because again, that cultural experience is going to be different and it's just something for them to draw upon when they're creating their own toolkit. The impetus for change, I would say is one thing about leadership I don't think people

need to fear. I think that if you can move to a different division, do so. If you want to take opportunities for growth, do so.

P1 described the connection between basic counseling skills and the importance of reframing situations as counselor leaders:

I think school counselors bring a perspective of, naturally and through education, knowing how to deescalate. Knowing how to communicate so that people hear you and listen. Knowing how to listen and be good active listeners. Reframing situations. All of those counseling skills come into leadership.

When asked about barriers school counselors face, P2 reframed the question as an expansive reflection on the work that has been done by school counseling leaders through the years:

I think we're our own biggest barriers in terms of conceptualizing what you actually have the ability to do and how you can do it. But people who are school counselors now don't have any idea of what our colleagues 30 years ago had to do to get to this amazing space of work. I have a great deal of respect [for them].

Descriptions of school counselor leadership regularly involved this expansive, systems-level perspective.

Passionate

Participants also spoke of the passion associated with doing the work of school counseling. When asked to describe an exemplary school counselor leader on her team, P6 explained:

She's very passionate about working with students. She's very motivated and dedicated . . . sometimes it's overwhelming. It's not like she's perfect—always putting on this perfect show, but she's honest. She's genuine. Her passion for

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helping kids and doing programs that are going to help the school and help the

culture of the school and help engage families—It's a real genuine passion.

P1 noted: "Leadership is about leaving school knowing that you've given students your

very best." Multiple participants associated the work of school counseling with passion

and commitment beyond the stated job responsibilities during their descriptions of

leadership.

Passion for the leadership work appeared in descriptions of the school counselor

role as well as the ways in which district-level supervisors facilitate leadership

development. As we discussed her onboarding plan for new school counselors, P6

described passion as a protective factor she wants to cultivate within her team during

their orientation sessions:

It's going to be overwhelming, so I'm going to start off by talking about

connection to their passion for school counseling. I really want them to think

about why they're in this and to be connected to it. And I'm going to come back to

it when they have their discussions with their regional leads in breakout rooms.

And I'm going to have a self-care plan. So it's not just, "take care of yourself." I

want you to discuss some specific ways of what is going to be your plan when you

are feeling overwhelmed.

P3 described the passion she sees as an essential aspect of being a school counselor

leader and district-level supervisor:

If you're going to be a school counselor leader, you're going to have to be

passionate about it . . . Just having the passion for the profession enough to

where you are going to seek out those professional development opportunities for

your staff. And you're going to know what the needs are. You're going to know

every school counselor. You're going to know their weaknesses. You're going to

know their strengths and you're going to know what they need. Being able to

know what can help better them as a school counselor, but also you're helping the

students at the end of the day. We're here for all students and we're here for their

success. And so just being passionate enough about the position and being a

leader that you're going to advocate.

P7 described passion as a key factor that merits cultivation and investment:

I want to bring my visionaries together, foster their leadership, and provide

opportunities for them for growth; and it's going to be the right people. I'm

hoping that I can either compensate them for the time or pay for them to go to

the state school counseling conference or something like that so that the

financing or the money is not the driver, but the passion behind the work is. [I

want to] provide opportunities for them to continue to grow and develop as

school counseling leaders.

The leadership of the district-level supervisors who participated in this study

included expansive and holistic perspectives. School counselors who invest in students

and families bring a whole-child perspective to data analyses and intervention planning.

They provide insight into school culture and the impact of leadership decisions on all

students. Participants discussed their efforts to identify systems-level perspectives

during the hiring process and how they invest in developing future counselor leaders

with expansive and holistic mindsets. School counselors can grow their leadership

perspectives through seeking professional learning opportunities and diverse work

environments. District-level supervisors also described school counselor leadership as

intrinsically passionate. Participants look for ways to reinforce passion for the

profession and provide pathways for leadership growth when passion and expansive thinking are present in the school counselors they support.

Conclusion

This chapter detailed the results of this inquiry into the leadership development of school counselors and the district-level supervisors who support them. This chapter also provided a detailed description of participants and the data analysis procedures employed during this phase of the study. Four themes emerged during data analysis involving social justice, advocacy in support of the school counselor role, barriers that disrupt effective school counselor leadership, and a leadership perspective that includes passion for the profession and an expansive mindset regarding the work of school counseling. Participants' own words provided evidence throughout this chapter to elucidate and support the themes. The next chapter explores these results in relation to the existing scholarship regarding school counselor leadership. The next chapter offers discussion on the data, implications for leadership development, and opportunities for future research.

Chapter 5

Discussion

This study explored the experiences of district-level school counseling supervisors who facilitate leadership development with professional school counselors. Four themes emerged during data analysis involving social justice, role advocacy, barriers to effective leadership, and the leadership perspective of district-level supervisors. This chapter explores these themes and their implications in relation to the existing leadership literature in school counseling. This discussion revisits the limitations of this inquiry and its methodology to contextualize the findings. Recommendations for future research offer ways for future researchers to expand the scholarship surrounding school counselor leadership and district-level school counseling supervisors.

Overview of the Study

Leadership in school counseling involves advocacy that addresses opportunity gaps in support of marginalized students and families. However, few school counselors are adequately prepared for this important work when they complete graduate training. A disconnect exists between the leadership expectations of the professional associations and the leadership descriptions of practicing school counselors that include student scheduling and testing coordination (Ford & Nelson, 2007). Systems and structures at the school and district levels can support or impede the leadership development of school counselors. District-level school counseling supervisors are uniquely positioned to foster a climate of support that can help school counselors grow their leadership and advocacy skills throughout their careers. However, no research to date explored the

ways in which district-level school counseling supervisors facilitate leadership

development alongside the school counselors they support.

This study employed descriptive phenomenological methodology to investigate

the lived experiences of district-level school counseling supervisors in facilitating

leadership development with professional school counselors. Descriptive

phenomenology offered the opportunity to explore the research question without

adopting a priori assumptions involving a specific leadership model or style. The limited

research on district-level school counseling supervisors and the varied research

perspectives regarding school counselor leadership aided in the selection of a descriptive

phenomenological approach for this inquiry. Data collection involved interviews with

eight district-level school counseling supervisors that were video recorded and

transcribed for analysis. This study employed purposeful sampling to identify

participants who met the following criteria: current employment as a district-level

school counseling supervisor, graduate-level training as a professional school counselor,

at least one year of experience as a district-level school counseling supervisor, and the

assigned responsibility for overseeing school counseling service delivery at more than

one school site. Job descriptions were also analyzed to better understand the

professional expectations of school counselors serving under the leadership of the

district-level supervisors who participated in this study.

Themes

Four themes emerged during data analysis involving social justice, role advocacy,

barriers to effective leadership, and leadership perspective. Participants described social

justice as integral to the role of a school counselor but emphasized different aspects of

social justice work. They noted the importance of professional learning while reflecting

on the challenges associated with social justice efforts. Participants discussed the importance of advocating for the school counselor role with various stakeholder groups and reflected on the challenges associated with role advocacy work. They described barriers to leadership that disrupt their ability to support school counselors in their work and facilitate leadership skill development. The study also identified commonalities among district-level supervisors regarding their passionate and expansive perspectives on leadership. These themes are discussed here as well as their relationship with the existing scholarship surrounding school counseling leadership.

There was significant interconnectedness among the themes. For example, participants described role advocacy efforts as important in order to prioritize social justice work among school counselors. Barriers to effective leadership were described as impediments to promoting role clarity in alignment with the expectations of ACA and ASCA. Passionate and expansive leadership perspectives were described as critical to doing social justice work in ways that align with best practices of the profession. The following discussion explores the four themes holistically in ways that align with the descriptive phenomenological methodology utilized throughout this study. The themes are discussed in the same order as presented in the results section of this dissertation: social justice, role advocacy, barriers to effective leadership and leadership perspective.

Social Justice

The district-level supervisors who participated in this study identified social justice work as an essential aspect of the school counselor role. This aligns with the research of Young and Bryan (2018) who noted the high social justice advocacy scores of school counseling supervisors on the School Counselor Leadership Survey. Multiple scholars note the disconnect between the social justice leadership expectations of ACA

and ASCA in contrast with school counselor descriptions of leadership behaviors that include testing coordination, master scheduling, and speaking at faculty meetings (Ford & Nelson, 2007; Janson, 2009; Mullen et al., 2018). Young and Bryan (2018) observed higher self-reported social justice advocacy scores among school counseling supervisors than non-supervisor professional school counselors. No data was collected by Young and Bryan (2018) to assess the effectiveness of participants' self-reported emphasis on the importance of social justice work. However, this study offers evidence that district-level supervisors possess strong alignment with the social justice emphasis of the professional associations.

The present study does not offer evidence to support Young and Bryan's (2018) assertion that increased access to professional learning opportunities and experiences associated with the supervisor role explain the increased emphasis on social justice among district-level supervisors. Notably, the longest-serving district-level supervisor who participated in this study had just completed her fourth year in the position at the time of our interview. Two participants cited association leadership positions they held prior to becoming district-level supervisors as important to their leadership development. They described association leadership as a way for them to learn more about leadership in preparation for a district-level supervisory role. All participants discussed the value of ACA and/or ASCA during their interviews. However, they described the importance of the associations in championing the school counselor role and creating best-practice norms. They did not emphasize the professional learning offered by professional colleagues at conferences or regional meetings.

The participants' emphasis on the importance of social justice was typically expressed with passion and conviction. This commitment to social justice work seemed

more of a deeply held personal belief or an aspect of professional identity than the result of relatively recent professional learning opportunities or experiences associated with the supervisor role. Dollarhide et al. (2016) and Gibson et al. (in press) suggest that a strong sense of social justice identity can frequently be traced back to early life experiences that raise awareness of injustice and oppression. Dollarhide et al. (2016) describe the "feedback loop" that can occur in the social justice identity development of counselor leaders: deeply held beliefs lead to changes in feelings, thoughts, and behaviors which reinforce the elective social justice identity. In a qualitative content analysis of 34 peer-reviewed studies, Gibson et al. (in press) note that the elective identities of "leader" and "social justice practitioner" frequently occur together in counselor leaders. Training and experiences lead to awareness, which can foster the desire to enter the counseling profession and engage in leadership activities that promote social justice (Gibson et al., in press). The district-level supervisors who participated in this study passionately described social justice as an essential aspect of their leadership role. Their commitment to social justice work aligns with existing research regarding social justice identity development (Dollarhide et al., 2016; Gibson et al., in press).

Few scholars have stressed the importance of district-level professional learning opportunities for school counselors to continually grow leadership skills throughout their careers. Kneale et al. (2018) discuss ways school districts can cultivate leadership development through cohort learning opportunities. Watkinson (2015) also describes a two-year professional learning series for elementary school counselors that centers on vision as a leadership practice. Neither article emphasizes social justice work as an area of focus. In contrast, six of the eight district-level supervisors discussed district-level

professional learning opportunities as an important tool for social justice work. Participants described the importance of self-awareness in identifying intrapersonal growth opportunities connected with social justice. They also described ways in which school counselor leaders facilitate individualized, small group, and whole staff learning opportunities to increase cultural awareness and inclusivity. The concept of continually pursuing professional growth opportunities as a school counselor and educator aligns with those who conceptualize leadership as a developmental journey (DeKruyf et al., 2013; Gibson, 2016; Gibson et al., 2010b; Magnuson et al., 2003). The district-level supervisors in this study identified multiple ways in which they strive to raise awareness about the need for social justice work in schools through professional learning.

This dissertation discusses professional learning within the theme of social justice because descriptions of professional learning arose almost entirely within the context of participants' efforts in promoting awareness of the disparities and inequities that too often characterizes school cultures. Multiple scholars emphasize the need for school counselors to engage in social justice advocacy alongside students and families (Adelman & Taylor, 2002; Beck, 2016; Bemak, 2000; Gysbers & Henderson, 2001; McMahon et al., 2009; Paisley et al., 2010). Several authors provide examples of ways school counselors have engaged in effective social justice work (Betters-Bubon & Schultz, 2018; Chung et al., 2011; Fulton & Shannonhouse, 2014; Fein et al., 2008; Lancaster et al., 2017). The district-level supervisors' efforts to raise awareness of social justice opportunities in their school districts aligns with the expectations of the professional associations. However, discrepancies persist regarding the leadership perceptions of school counselors and the leadership expectations of ACA and ASCA (Ford & Nelson, 2007; Janson, 2009; Mullen et al., 2018). School counselors have

under-emphasized social justice as an important aspect of their leadership. Shields et al. (2018) offer an excellent blueprint for school counselors and district-level supervisors seeking to develop comprehensive school counseling programs that promote equitable and systemic change. The participants in this study reported being highly engaged in this important work. Social justice is an essential focus of their leadership efforts.

Role Advocacy

Advocacy efforts to increase awareness about appropriate school counselor responsibilities emerged as a prominent theme in this study. Participants described their role advocacy efforts as a critically important, exhausting, and primary responsibility. They advocate for school counselors to join the school improvement planning process and impact reading and writing scores through strategic programming. They advocate with veteran school counselors to increase their knowledge of best practices and comprehensive programming that addresses opportunity/support gaps and the needs of all students. They advocate with teachers, administrators, parents, community members, and school board members to educate stakeholders about the impact school counselors can have when allowed to create safe inclusive spaces for all students and focus on data-driven programming to address outcome disparities. As Kneale et al. (2018) suggest, the district-level supervisors in this study use data to highlight the impact of professional school counselors on student achievement. They advocate for funding to support increased school counseling services at all levels and better awareness of the ASCA National Model (Brown & Ayala, 2017; Kaffenberger et al., 2006). The results of this study indicate that district-level supervisors are highly engaged in role advocacy work.

Based on prior scholarship and the results of this study, the emphasis district-level school counseling supervisors place on role advocacy is not a surprise (Armstrong et al., 2010; Beesley & Frey, 2006; McMahon et al., 2009). Frustratingly, extensive role advocacy work remains a need despite considerable efforts made by The Education Trust and ASCA to change stakeholder perceptions of school counselors. Two decades after The Education Trust's Transforming School Counseling Initiative (1997) and The ASCA National Model (2003), school counseling leaders continue to fight for school counselor responsibilities that align with best practices of the profession. The district-level supervisors in this study strive to address misaligned descriptions of leadership identified by Ford and Nelson (2007) and Janson (2009) that include non-counseling duties like master scheduling, test coordination, and faculty announcements. This study offers no evidence that a shared understanding of the school counselor role is taking hold within the larger profession of education. Further, district-level supervisor descriptions of their efforts to shape the leadership understandings of school counselors working in their districts reinforces prior scholarship that notes school counselors are underequipped as school-level leaders with a clear understanding of leadership that aligns with the expectations of the professional associations. (Armstrong et al., 2010; Beesley & Frey, 2006).

Barriers to Effective Leadership

The district-level supervisors in this study identified multiple systemic barriers that disrupt their leadership effectiveness. These barriers could arguably be conceptualized as descriptions of the circumstances that necessitate the role advocacy efforts discussed previously. The results of this study support assertions by Armstrong et al., (2010) and Fitch et al. (2001) that more work is needed to promote a better

understanding of school counseling leadership. A lack of understanding regarding school counselors' skills with data analysis and planning school improvement goals left P2 and her team out of the SIP process in her school district. P7 described how her district added support positions (ACP & PBIS coordinators) that inadvertently supplanted school counselors from tasks that align with their education and training. P8 described her district's plan to require all school counselors to earn the LPC endorsement as a barrier to comprehensive programming in support of all students. Each of these instances portrays a lack of understanding among administrative colleagues that school counselors use data to identify student needs, close opportunity/support gaps, and develop programming that results in improved student achievement, attendance, and discipline (ASCA, 2019). Dishearteningly, P2 noted that professional learning opportunities in her district designed to promote leadership skills was re-envisioned in a way that excluded school counselors. School counselors demonstrate greater ability to implement comprehensive school counseling programs when administrators are knowledgeable and supportive of the school counselor role (Fye et al., 2018). However, descriptions offered by the district-level supervisors in this study do not convey a shared understanding of appropriate school counselor responsibilities. The data collected in this study demonstrates how school districts fail to capitalize on school counselor training when administrators lack appropriate understanding of counselor leadership skills (Dollarhide et al., 2008; Walsh & Gibson, 2019; Wilkerson et al., 2013).

District-level supervisors also described circumstances in which school counselors impeded their own support structures and effectiveness. P6 described a school counselor who stepped into the role of disciplinarian in the absence of an

administrator and potentially damaged the student/counselor relationship. P2 shared

how some of her veteran school counselors tacitly expressed their desire for her to

"please be quiet" regarding her role advocacy and social justice leadership efforts. P7

explained how a veteran school counselor embraced non-counseling duties as an aspect

of leadership, perpetuated misalignment with appropriate school counselor

responsibilities, and drove a new school counselor from the profession. P7 also shared

her frustration with school counselors who decline to advocate for their role:

> You have no problem throwing down for a kid in a meeting. I've seen it. You will
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> do it. Why won't you do it for yourself and your job? If you are freed up to do
>
> more of that, to work more with students like that, you're going to have more of
>
> an impact.

P8 spoke about how school counselors with negative perceptions of central office staff

"assume we're the bad guys." These examples point to school counselors acting as

barriers to district-level supervisors' leadership efforts to align the school counselor role

with the expectations of ASCA. Although prior scholars identified a lack of leadership

skills among school counselors (Paradise et al., 2010), the participants in this study

offered evidence that school counselors impede their own leadership development in

some cases. The results of this study underscore the need to develop school counselor

leadership skills during graduate training and on the job.

Data collected during this study supports the need to increase leadership

development efforts during graduate training. Scholars have proposed a variety of ways

to focus on the leadership skills expected of school counselors in their schools (Clark &

Amatea, 2004; McMahon et al., 2009; Paisley et al., 2010; Paradise et al., 2010). The

participants in this study emphasized experiences other than master's level training

when describing what prepared them for a leadership role. Participants cited counselor association involvement, doctoral training, teaching experience, education leadership training in programs designed for administrators, opportunities provided by school districts, mentors, and God-given ability as contributing factors to their leader development journeys. It's concerning that no participants identified experiences during master's-level counselor training as important to their leadership development. Scholars have noted the lack of emphasis on leadership skills during graduate training (Pérusse & Goodnough, 2001; Pérusse et al., 2015) even though CACREP Standards require developing counselors to demonstrate knowledge and skills within the leadership domain while preparing for the counseling profession (Edwards, 2017). This study supports the call of Merlin et al. (2017) to add coursework specific to leadership in school counselor training programs. The possibility exists that graduate training aided in the leader development process of the participants in this study in covert ways. However, participants identified multiple factors other than master's-level training that contributed to their leadership skills and described them in detail. The results of this study support prior scholarship that notes leadership training is not adequately prioritized during graduate training.

Participants acknowledged the lack of a clear pipeline for aspiring counselor leaders. P5 summarized the situation:

> I know that there's people all over the state, all over the nation, who have varying backgrounds as school counseling leaders . . . I have seen, sometimes people have thought that you need to be educated like a professor would be educated. It's interesting that the reality of my school system was something different. And then you find in other school systems, they're not even looking for anything.

They're just looking for you to be a school counselor. Or maybe they're looking for

you to be like a former principal.

Multiple participants described the educational leadership degree typically pursued by

aspiring school administrators as influential in developing their leadership skills.

However, chapter two of this dissertation describes school counselor leadership as

uniquely intertwined with advocacy, social justice, and service to the profession. School

counselor leadership has an ethos that is distinct from other professions. Also, all school

counselors are expected to lead and advocate within their school communities—not a

select few who possess administrator endorsements in addition to their school counselor

training. This study supports the need for leadership coursework or specific student

learning outcomes that emphasize leadership development within the context of

master's-level training in school counseling.

Leadership Perspective

The final theme describes the leadership perspective of district-level supervisors

as passionate, expansive, and holistic. School counselors and counselor educators are

unlikely to be surprised by this theme. However, the findings within this theme contain

implications for leadership. District-level supervisors operate as the gatekeepers of the

profession. They create job descriptions, prescreen applicants, and make hiring

recommendations (Kneale et al., 2018). Aspiring school counselors will do well to note

that the district-level supervisors interviewing them are seeking passion and enthusiasm

for the work. Also, these findings draw attention to the need for cultural competence

among district-level supervisors. Passion for the work of school counseling can manifest

as a deeply personal and internal commitment that an applicant may not overtly

communicate in an interview depending on the components of the application process.

Further, applicants who identify with marginalized communities may be less likely to express the passions that align with their identities. The participants in this study describe passion for the work as an important aspect of being an effective school counselor. District-level supervisors play an important role in determining who gets hired to engage in social justice and advocacy work on behalf of students and families. Cultural competence, self-awareness, and community awareness are critical traits for district-level school counseling supervisors seeking passionate school counselor applicants.

Similarly, the holistic and expansive leadership perspective of these participants is not surprising. The nature of school counseling involves partnering with students and families to identify barriers to success. School counselors become a part of their school communities, build relationships, identify barriers to student success, and collaborate with students and families to break through those barriers. School counseling requires a holistic and expansive perspective to identify and address educational practices that reinforce marginalization of underserved students and families (Adelman & Taylor, 2002). It stands to reason that district-level school counseling supervisors also possess a holistic and expansive perspective on the advocacy, social justice, and leadership work of school counselors. Nevertheless, this finding is reassuring. The participants in this study conveyed expansive and holistic leadership perspectives that align with the ethos of school counseling. Janson (2009) and Ford and Nelson (2007) contrast the leadership disconnect between the expectations of the professional associations and the descriptions of leadership offered by professional school counselors. The results of this study imply alignment between the leadership perspectives of district-level school counseling supervisors and the professional associations of ACA and ASCA.

Limitations

The research methodology employed in this study involves limitations regarding the interpretation of findings. The descriptive phenomenological approach used in this study (Giorgi et al., 2017) is appropriate to exploratory research in which little is known about the object of study. Although the literature surrounding school counselor leadership has grown considerably, the scholarship of counselor leadership generally has impeded the focused exploration of the roles and responsibilities associated with school counselor leadership (Peters et al., 2018). Prior to this study, no research explored the experiences of district-level school counseling supervisors in facilitating leadership development with professional school counselors. Phenomenological research does not seek to establish causality or generate theory (Englander, 2012; Hays & Singh, 2012). Descriptive phenomenology sets aside prior knowledge of the object being studied to consider the concept as wholly independent (Giorgi, 2012). The findings in this study should not be considered confirmation or refutation of previous research.

The descriptive phenomenological methodology employed in this study generated information about leadership based on a small number of participants (n=8). Focusing on fewer participants intently with the goal of exploring the phenomenon is appropriate in descriptive phenomenological research (Kvale, 1994). However, the leadership descriptions offered here should not be considered representative of all district-level school counseling supervisors. McKibben et al. (2017b) describe leadership as highly individualized and context specific. The descriptions offered by the eight participants in the results of this study should be considered as information that can lead to future research. Data collected from eight participants is insufficient to draw

conclusions about the experiences of district-level school counseling supervisors in facilitating leadership development with professional school counselors.

Participant descriptors offered by the district-level supervisors in this study also point to a purposefully exceptional sample. The limited research into district-level school counseling supervisors indicates the majority are not trained in counseling or a related field (Schmidt & Barret, 1983). Further, Wilson and Remley (1987) noted that most school districts in Virginia did not report having district-level school counseling supervisors at all. The purposeful sampling employed in this study sought to identify qualified district-level supervisors with master's level training in school counseling and at least one year of experience. The study explored optimal circumstances in which a qualified district-level school counseling supervisor with appropriate training facilitates leadership development alongside professional school counselors. Five of the eight participants indicated they possessed doctoral degrees in counseling. Three served as counseling association presidents. Two identified as counselor educators who came to the district-level leadership role after serving in academia. The data collected during this study indicates an exceptional sample group distinct from the results described in prior research. Generalizations from this sample should not be considered applicable to the population of district-level school counseling supervisors.

Another limitation of descriptive phenomenology is its emphasis on bracketing researcher assumptions with the goal of considering the object of study in its essential or purest form (Englander, 2016; Wertz, 2005). The scientific phenomenological reduction seeks to intentionally suspend one's preconceptions about the topic of study to explore it independently (Englander, 2016; Giorgi et al., 2017). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) discuss the limitations any researcher's ability to set aside all preconceptions and biases

about an object of study. The primary researcher in this study served as a district-level school counseling supervisor at the time this study was conducted. Reflexive journaling and debriefing activities supported the effort to identify and bracket researcher assumptions about the nature of school counselor leadership. The methodological steps followed are described in detail to offer transparency in the research process. Also, participant voices are offered as evidence of the findings presented. However, a limitation of descriptive phenomenology is the extent to which any researcher can completely isolate their positionality and prior experiences in order to study a phenomenon as wholly independent.

Implications

The results of this study underscore the need for additional leadership training among professional school counselors. Participant descriptions of social justice were diverse—involving internal reflection, professional learning, conceptualizing social justice, and including all students in the work. Although this reflects the complex nature of social justice work, it also speaks to the lack of clarity regarding the ways in which school counselor leaders describe their social justice efforts. Young and Dollarhide (2018) discuss the importance of establishing shared terminology surrounding leadership and advocacy in the counseling leadership literature. Participant descriptions of their social justice and advocacy work portrayed the opposite—diverse descriptions of personally developed social justice concepts and ideals. Encouragingly, ASCA offers specialist training in leadership through its ASCA U initiative for members who would choose to grow in this area. However, all school counselors are expected to serve as leaders in their school communities—in ways that align with the expectations of ACA and ASCA. Graduate training could include specific course content and student learning

outcomes to increase students' understanding of leadership, social justice, advocacy, and the intersection of these concepts. Infusing leadership training into school counselor graduate programs appropriately prioritizes leadership as foundational learning required of all professional school counselors.

Leadership training specific to district-level school counseling supervisors is a need as well. Although this study seeks to illuminate the experiences of district-level supervisors in facilitating leadership development, it raises questions about the differences between school counselor leadership and district-level leadership. Multiple participants in this study explicitly stated they identify as school counselors despite acknowledging that district-level leadership is a different role. At times, it was unclear during data collection and analysis whether participants were describing school counselor leadership or district-level leadership. Since no prior scholarship has explored the leadership experiences of district-level school counseling supervisors, this is not surprising. However, this study only offers a glimpse into the differences between school counselor leadership and district-level leadership. Prior researchers have advocated for appropriately trained district-level school counseling supervisors (Wilson & Remley, 1987). Others have called for ACES to develop training expectations for district-level school counseling supervisors (Biggers, 1976; Schmidt & Barret, 1983). The school counselor role has changed dramatically since these calls for district-level supervisor training. ACES or ASCA could develop competencies for district-level school counseling supervisors to establish consistent leadership expectations. ASCA could also develop a training module specific to district-level supervision as one of its ASCA U specialist learning opportunities. Currently ASCA offers specializations in school counseling leadership and school counseling association leadership. A training module for district-

level school counseling supervisors could focus on policy development, budget development, onboarding best practices, and other topics specific to the role of district-level supervision.

The results of this study highlight an opportunity to reconsider how school counselors are supervised in schools. A primary finding of this study involves the ongoing role advocacy efforts of district-level supervisors to align the daily responsibilities of school counselors with the expectations of ACA and ASCA. Current preservice training regarding school counselor leadership does not effectively prepare the majority of school counselors or principals for the teamwork necessary to address student needs effectively (Armstrong et al., 2010; Beesley & Frey, 2006; Bemak & Chung, 2008). Given the lack of clarity regarding school counselor leadership within the profession, it follows that most administrators are underprepared to supervise school counselors in ways that help them thrive. The results of this study offer no evidence that role clarity has improved since Pérusse and Goodnough (2001) surveyed counselor preparation programs to assess alignment with The Education Trust's Transforming School Counseling Initiative. Scholars have suggested multiple ways in which administrators and school counselors can improve their understanding of school counselor leadership during graduate training (DeSimone & Roberts, 2016; Kiser et al., 2011; Shoffner & Briggs, 2001; Shoffner & Williamson, 2000). However, the present study offers no indication that administrator ability to effectively supervise school counselors is improving. ACA and ASCA could consider advocating for appropriately trained district-level supervisors who evaluate school counselor performance instead of the school principal.

Similarly, district-level school counseling supervisors can advocate to take over the evaluation and supervision of professional school counselors in their districts. The participants in this study described their repeated efforts to educate administrators about appropriately utilizing and supervising school counselors in alignment with the best practices of the profession. They also described ways in which school counselors impede their own effectiveness. Bemak and Chung (2008) observed that school counselors can sometimes be too flexible in adapting to principal expectations that conflict with appropriate school counseling responsibilities. School counselors who are evaluated by their principals are incentivized to align with administrative expectations— even when they contradict the best practices of the profession. When administrators lack understanding of the school counselor role and professional school counselors adapt to administrator expectations, the supervision model reinforces the disconnect. The dysfunctional supervisory relationship perpetuates itself. As an alternative, district-level school counseling supervisors could both supervise and evaluate the professional school counselors they support. School districts can consider this model as they seek to increase the impact of school counselors in their communities.

Opportunities for Leadership Action

This study highlights the need for leadership development that aligns with best practices of the school counseling profession. Thus, the following suggestions offer practical opportunities for leadership growth. These opportunities for leadership action are offered for specific stakeholders to support colleagues who are looking to amplify their impact on the leadership development pipeline. These opportunities are rooted in the scholarship associated with school counselor leadership as well as the results of the present study.

Graduate Students Training to Become School Counselors

Current graduate students can benefit from the wisdom of the leader-participants who contributed to this study as well as existing scholarship on leadership development. Graduate students should connect with ACA and ASCA as soon as possible after beginning the master's program. The leaders in this study cited association work as essential to their leadership development. Graduate students should also seek out opportunities to present at a conference, provide feedback when asked, engage in graduate student workshops, and explore student-leadership opportunities that may be available to them. These opportunities allow graduate students to practice leadership in a safe space. CSI chapter events offer leadership development opportunities during graduate training. Graduate students can pursue leadership positions within CSI and engage in servant leadership opportunities as they become available. Where CSI chapters do not currently exist, students can begin the discussion with faculty members about starting a chapter. Leadership opportunities during graduate training offer students the chance to cultivate a counselor leadership perspective in alignment with professional best practices. Graduate student engagement also reinforces the connection and attention of the professional associations to the leadership needs of the newest members of our professional community.

Graduate students should begin practicum and internship experiences with the knowledge that not every supervising counselor is aligned with best practices of the profession. It is not uncommon for school counseling interns to hear messages from principals and school counselors that contradict graduate training. The phrase, "Let me tell you how this job really works" comes to mind. Graduate students should prepare for this very real possibility. Also, graduate students can remain confident in the knowledge

that many school counselors engage in the aligned work of leading and advocating alongside students and families in effective ways. The participants in this study offer multiple examples of school counselors engaged in social justice and advocacy work that meaningfully supports marginalized students and families. Graduate students should not begin internship experiences planning to acclimate and adapt. They should begin experiences planning to learn and grow. Ideally, this growth will occur alongside a school counselor leader-advocate who demonstrates professional best practices in the school setting. However, students need to know that the opposite is possible as well. In either case, students can process the experience with their peers and counselor educators to learn and grow their leadership perspectives.

Professional School Counselors

The district-level supervisors in this study described the work of school counselors as overwhelming and exhausting. They also convey a vision of leadership development that is ongoing throughout one's career. The lead author of this study likes to say: people are like plants—they're either growing or they're dying. Professional school counselors can grow their leadership skills in alignment with professional best practices throughout their careers. ACA and ASCA provide learning opportunities for school counselors that are increasingly available in both in-person and virtual formats. P6 described passion for the work as a protective factor that not only invigorates school counselors to do good work, but also serves as a protective factor that can sustain them in the profession. Professional learning opportunities do not steal time from the school counselor who is trying catch up on an overwhelming amount of paperwork. It does the opposite—it provides a much-needed break from the perception that the work is never-ending. Professional learning opportunities offered by a district-level supervisor, state-

level conference, or national association gathering can offer rest, encouragement, opportunities to collaborate with others, and new tools for doing the work. Many school administrators will provide funding to support school counselors who want to grow their skills by attending a conference. If an administrator is particularly stingy with professional learning funds, ask the school to pay the conference registration fee and consider paying for your own transportation, lodging, and meals. Alternately, request to attend the conference virtually if in-person attendance is prohibitively difficult. Further, request to attend virtual conference sessions from home to avoid the inevitable disruptions that will occur if you attempt to engage from your office at school. This allows you to maximize your engagement in sessions and experience a break from the everyday pace and routine of school. Professional learning experiences offer leadership growth and the important reminder that professional school counselors are just as important as the work they do each day.

The participants in this study also noted the impact of mentors and valued colleagues who reinforced their aspirations for leadership and best practice. Identify an individual in your professional community who you value and trust. This can be a school counseling colleague, an administrator with knowledge of school counseling best practices, or a district-level supervisor. Request and set aside time to ask growth-oriented questions about your leadership skills. Avoid the stereotypical perception of central office as "the bad guys" (P8, p. 108). As a former district-level supervisor, the lead author tremendously enjoyed the experience of supporting and encouraging school counselors in their leadership development efforts. Start with low-risk questions as you build rapport and confidence in your leader-colleague:

- What do you see as a leadership strength of mine?

- How does my leadership style influence the culture/climate of my school?

- In what ways could the counseling team at my school amplify our impact with our undersupported students and families?

Intentionally seek out leaders and colleagues who will help facilitate your professional growth as a counselor leader.

School Administrators

The data collected through this study offers insight into ways principals and district-level administrators can amplify the impact of school counselors in their communities. School counselors are trained to offer their leadership teams data analysis skills for developing school improvement plans and measurable goals. However, these skills can go underutilized in schools. The participants in this study also describe instances in which school counselors impede their own effectiveness. Some school counselors may find comfortability and success in non-counseling duties—particularly if they perceive the completion of these tasks to be the implied expectations of school administration. Best practices of the school counseling profession involve analyzing data and intervening on behalf of undersupported students in ways that measurably improve academic engagement, attendance, and discipline. Administrators seeking to maximize the effectiveness of their school counselors can challenge them to engage in meaningful work that supports the school's improvement goals. School counselors can and should provide evidence of their impact in working with students, families, staff, and other stakeholders. If these skills are underdeveloped, encourage them to attend professional learning opportunities or association conferences that will sharpen their leadership skills and improve the work they are doing in your school community. Intentionally

limit their lunch duty, recess duty, and class coverage expectations to focus their work on the school improvement goals.

School administrators will also benefit from acknowledging that school counseling leadership looks different than the leadership perspective of teacher leaders or other school-based administrators. A theme of this study involves the holistic and expansive perspective of school counseling leaders that approach data analysis from an ecological, whole-child perspective. Understanding this aspect of school counselor leadership can empower principals to place school counselors on teams where this strength is needed. School counselors may be a poor fit for dissecting reading subscores with the goal of placing students into remediation groups. However, they can offer insight into student assistance or child study teams tasked with unpacking complex and interconnected factors to identify needed supports. They should not take on the role of school administrators in these setting as their leadership perspective is fundamentally different; but they can significantly contribute their holistic leadership perspective. School counselors can also contribute expansive perspectives to strategic planning teams working on mission, vision, and long-term goals for their school communities. Understanding the nature of school counselor leadership offers opportunities for school administrators and other leaders to maximize the impact their school counseling colleagues.

Counselor Educators

Counselor educators can impact the leadership development pipeline during graduate training in important ways. Graduate programs that require 60 credit-hours of study can develop courses on advocacy, social justice work, and the unique aspects of school counseling leadership. The lead author in this study took a course on leadership

in social justice and advocacy as an elective opportunity during doctoral training. This course offered a safe space to unpack the challenges associated with social justice and advocacy work in various settings. The students engaged in project-based learning and processed their experiences with each other as part of the course. Opportunities like this offer practical learning experiences focused on advocacy and social justice work that reinforces CACREP counseling professional identity expectations. Counselor education programs can positively impact the leadership development pipeline by offering specific coursework in leadership, social justice, and advocacy.

Counselor educators can also reconsider the ways in which school counseling leadership skills are taught during master's-level training. School counseling graduate students typically engage in coursework alongside students specializing in clinical mental health counseling, college counseling, family counseling, and rehabilitation counseling. A shared counselor identity fosters unity among professionals that counsel in different work settings. Conversely, the results of this study align with previous scholarship indicating school counselors do not always view themselves as school-based leaders who engage in social justice and advocacy work. Project-based learning experiences in practicum and internship courses provide opportunities to focus on these skills more intensely. Also, multiple participants in this study cited association leadership as important to their leader identity development. Counselor educators can emphasize connecting with ACA and ASCA throughout one's career—with the goal of serving in a leadership capacity at some point. Counselor educators can also infuse discussions of leadership and advocacy into courses more deliberately. By affirming leadership as an expectation of all professional school counselors, counselor educators

reinforce the interconnectedness of leadership, advocacy, and social justice as an essential aspect of supporting students and families in schools.

District-Level Supervisors

The results of this study and prior scholarship offer insights for district-level supervisors serving in public school districts. First, district-level supervisors can maximize their impact by collaborating with others involved in the same work. The limited scholarship describes regional colleagues pooling their skills and resources to maximize their effectiveness (Brown & Ayala, 2017; Kaffenberger et al., 2006). Regular interaction with other district-level supervisors offers the opportunity to share ideas, seek feedback, and collaborate on professional learning efforts. It offers the opportunity for mutual encouragement in leadership work that can be lonely and exhausting. Meetings can occur monthly, quarterly, or biannually. Leaders who are close to a university with a school counseling master's program can reach out to counselor educator colleagues as well. The work associated with serving as a district-level school counseling supervisor is complex and specialized. It involves policy development, community-level advocacy, and social justice work with various stakeholder groups. Reflecting on the work together can safeguard against stagnation and provide an ongoing opportunity to pursue alignment with best practices of the profession.

District-level supervisors may want to critically examine the district-level structures that impact their work. This can be done individually or with regional colleagues. A theme of this study involves the systemic disconnects that disrupt school counselor leadership development that aligns with best practices of the profession. The leader-participants in this study offer unexpected examples of disruptors such as school-based mental health teams, PBIS and ACP support staff, school psychologists, school

social workers, and school counselors themselves. District-level supervisors are uniquely placed to build relationships with other leaders and address these systemic disconnects. School counseling supervisors can maximize their impact by focusing on the leadership work that only they can do. As an example, the lead author (a district-level supervisor) facilitated a mental health advisory that included leaders from school counseling, school psychology, and school social work. The team engaged in a year-long examination of the roles and responsibilities associated with each group. We visited various school sites and explored ways to optimize our effectiveness. Positive outcomes of this work included a guidance document, clarity on work responsibilities, collaborative training on risk assessment procedures, stronger collaborative relationships, and increased awareness of school-based mental health needs among community stakeholders. Entrenched systems and procedures can reinforce *the way it's always been done* as the right answer—even when the way it's always been done perpetuates dysfunction. District-level school counseling supervisors are uniquely positioned to reflect on systemic practices and explore ways to improve them.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study explored the experiences of district-level school counseling supervisors in facilitating leadership development with professional school counselors. Current scholarship includes limited information about these influential professionals. Kaffenberger et al. (2006) describe district-level school counseling supervisors working in collaboration with counselor educators and state-level leadership to advocate for high quality school counseling services. Other scholars detail the successes of district-level school counseling supervisors working regionally to improve supervision practices for school counselors in training (Brott et al., 2016; Brown & Ayala, 2017). Young and Bryan

(2015) identify the strong systemic collaboration skills and emphasis on social justice advocacy reported by district-level supervisors who are trained in school counseling. Multiple authors have posited about their significant impact on school counseling services (Biggers, 1976; Biggers & Mangusso, 1972; Frederickson & Popken, 1972; Kneale et al., 2018; Watkinson, 2015). The limited information available points to inconsistent training expectations if school districts specify anyone to do the work at all (Schmidt & Barret, 1983; Wilson & Remley, 1987). The lack of information available about these leaders points to basic demographic research and analysis as an appropriate place to start.

Future research can explore new information about district-level school counseling supervisors—including their prevalence, education, and training. Conventional thinking would suggest that smaller public-school districts are less likely to employ district-level school counseling supervisors for the specific purpose of school counseling programmatic oversight. Larger school districts require more staff to manage the administrative tasks associated with a greater number of students and families. More staff typically leads to greater role specificity within the larger organization. However, no evidence exists to support this supposition. Future research could explore the prevalence of district-level school counseling supervisors as well as their training and professional responsibilities. Discovering more information about these leaders and the communities they serve will provide preassessment baseline information for developing professional learning opportunities designed to promote best practices in alignment with ACA and ASCA. If most district-level school counseling supervisors are employed in larger school districts, training opportunities can be tailored to this work setting. Similarly, this information could provide useful data regarding the lack of

leadership support in small districts—allowing ACA and ASCA to focus leadership development efforts on school counselors working in relative isolation with limited district-level support.

Future research can explore the impact of district-level school counseling supervisors in more concrete ways. Assessments like the SCTLI (Gibson, et al., 2018b) and the SCLS (Young & Bryan, 2015) offer opportunities for district-level supervisors to assess the needs of the professional school counselors they support and develop responsive professional learning opportunities. Watkinson (2015) conducted a multi-year professional development initiative with elementary school counselors on vision as a reflect leadership practice. Similar opportunities exist for district-level supervisors and counselor educators to partner in ways that will measurably demonstrate the impact of leadership training offered by district-level school counseling supervisors. Exploring school counselor leadership effectiveness in relation to professional learning provided by district-level school counseling supervisors would add more information to the scholarship.

The experiences of recent graduates as they enter the profession could further illuminate the relationship between district-level supervision structures and leadership effectiveness. Dollarhide et al. (2008) qualitatively studied the leadership experiences of six new school counselors entering the field. The authors noted the impact of external conditions on the leadership development of participants and that no leadership mentors or consultants were readily available to support the new professionals (Dollarhide et al., 2008). Participants largely described building-level experiences that impacted their success. The authors did not specifically explore district-level supports. It would be interesting to assess new school counselor experiences in relationship with the

district-level systems and structures that impact their leadership development. New school counselors who develop meaningful support networks and strong relationships with colleagues experience success and report higher levels of job satisfaction (Dollarhide et al., 2008; Rayle, 2006). District-level school counseling supervisors are well-positioned to facilitate the systems and structures that support new school counselors in the profession. Additional research in this area can offer more information about the impact of appropriately trained district-level supervisors in relation to persistence, job satisfaction, connectedness, and other variables that impact leadership development.

Future research can also explore the intersection of school counselor leadership with the leadership of school principals. For example, distributed leadership (sometimes called shared or team leadership) appears in the principal leadership literature as a model that promotes distributing the tasks associated with leadership broadly among staff members (Dahir, 2019; Spillane, 2005). Distributed leadership asserts that the tasks of leadership can be completed by any staff member with the specific skills needed for the task (Spillane, 2005). Bush (2013) suggests that distributed leadership has become the preferred model among principals who are "overloaded" with work—a pragmatic approach that seeks to leverage the leadership skills of all staff members instead of relying on a select few individuals. Janson et al. (2009) discuss distributed leadership as a perspective that can make leadership seem less intimidating and therefore more accessible to school counselors. However, they do not empirically investigate distributed leadership with a school counseling lens. Scholars have explored transformational and transformative leadership from a school counseling leadership perspective (Eschenauer & Chen-Hayes, 2005; Gibson et al., 2018b; Henfield et al.,

2017; Jacob et al., 2013; Lowe et al., 2018; Mason & McMahon, 2009; McKibben et al., 2017b; Michel et al., 2018; Shields, 2013; Shields et al., 2018; Young & Bryan, 2015). Future research could investigate distributed leadership from a district-level school counseling supervisor perspective to explore the possibility of tapping the leadership energies of all professional school counselors in the school district.

Conclusion

This study explored the experiences of district-level school counseling supervisors in facilitating leadership development with professional school counselors using descriptive phenomenological methodology (Giorgi, 2009; Giorgi et al., 2017). Purposive sampling identified eight participants who participated in a semi-structured interview lasting approximately 45-60 minutes. Criteria for participation included current employment as a district-level school counseling supervisor, graduate-level training as a professional school counselor, at least one year of experience in the role, and the responsibility for supervising service delivery at more than one school. Interview data yielded participant identity descriptors as well as four primary themes that emerged during data analysis.

The findings of this study are presented in four themes: social justice, role advocacy, barriers to effective leadership, and leadership perspective. Participants described social justice as integral to the role of a school counselor while emphasizing different aspects of social justice work. They described their efforts in facilitating professional learning on social justice as well as the challenges associated with social justice work. The supervisors discussed the importance of their role advocacy efforts with specific stakeholder groups. They provided multiple examples of their efforts in doing the work of role advocacy. Participants detailed the systemic disconnects that

served as barriers to effective leadership. They also described a disconnected leadership development pipeline and opportunities to improve the alignment between graduate training and professional expectations in the field. The leadership perspective of the district-level supervisors in this study were holistic and expansive, conveying the expectation that school counselors passionately engage in their professional responsibilities.

These themes were discussed in relation to the existing scholarship of school counselor leadership. Implications for graduate training, supervision, and school counselor supports offered considerations for district-level supervisors and counselor educators engaged in leadership work. Limitations of qualitative phenomenological research were discussed to contextualize the findings of this inquiry. Recommendations for future research described opportunities for expanding the scholarship surrounding the leadership development practices of district-level school counseling supervisors and their impact on the professional school counselors they support.

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Appendix A

Sample Analysis

Obama, M. (2017, January 6). Remarks by the first lady at the national school counselor

of the year event. https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-

office/2017/01/06/remarks-first-lady-national-school-counselor-year-event

Raw Data	Transformed Expression
MRS. OBAMA: Hey! (Applause.) What's going on? (Applause.) Thank you all so much. You guys, that's a command -- rest yourselves. (Laughter.) We're almost at the end. (Laughter.) Hello, everyone. And, may I say for the last time officially, welcome to the White House. Yes! (Applause.)	S1 welcomes audience members to the event and the White House.
Well, we are beyond thrilled to have you all here to celebrate the 2017 National School Counselor of the Year, as well as all of our State Counselors of the Year. These are the fine women, and a few good men -- (laughter) -- one good man -- who are on this stage, and they represent schools from across this country.	S1 announces the purpose of the event--to celebrate the national school counselor of the year and the state school counselors of the year. All are female except for 1 male honoree.
And I want to start by thanking Terri for that wonderful introduction and her right-on-the-spot remarks. I'm going to say a lot more about Terri in a few minutes, but first I want to take a moment to acknowledge a few people who are here. First, our outstanding Secretary of Education, John King. (Applause.) As well as our former Education Secretary, Arne Duncan. (Applause.) I want to take this time to thank you both publicly for your dedication and leadership and friendship. We couldn't do this without the support of the Department of Education under both of your leadership. So I'm grateful to you personally, and very proud of all that you've done for this country.	S1 thanks the national school counselor of the year for introducing her and for her positive remarks. She also thanks the current and former secretaries of education for their leadership, support, and friendship.
I also want to acknowledge a few other special guests we have in the audience.	S1 thanks various celebrities by name for supporting the event and acknowledges

We've got a pretty awesome crew. As one of my staff said, "You roll pretty deep." (Laughter.) I'm like, well, yeah, we have a few good friends. We have with us today Ted Allen, La La Anthony, Connie Britton, Andy Cohen -- yeah, Andy Cohen is here -- (laughter) -- Carla Hall, Coach Jim Harbaugh and his beautiful wife, who's a lot better looking than him -- (laughter) -- Lana Parrilla, my buddy Jay Pharoah, Kelly Rowland, Usher -- AUDIENCE MEMBER: Woo! MRS. OBAMA: Keep it down. (Laughter.) Keep it together, ladies. Wale is here. And of course, Allison Williams and her mom are here.	their notoriety during playful back and forth with the audience.
And all these folks are here because they're using their star power to inspire our young people. And I'm so grateful to all of you for stepping up in so many ways on so many occasions. I feel like I've pestered you over these years, asking time and time again, "Well, where are you going to be?" "I'm going to be in New York." "Can you come? Can you come here? Can you do this? Can you take that? Can you ask for that? Can you come? Can we rap? Can we sing?" (Laughter.) So thank you all so much. It really means the world to this initiative to have such powerful, respected and admired individuals speaking on behalf of this issue. So congratulations on the work that you've done, and we're going to keep working.	S1 expresses her gratitude to the celebrities in attendance for their participation and flexibility in supporting today's event and other events with their talent and advocacy.
And today, I especially want to recognize all these -- extraordinary leadership team that was behind Reach Higher from day one. And this isn't on the script so they don't know this. I want to take time to personally acknowledge a couple of people. Executive Director Eric Waldo. (Applause.) Where is Eric? He's in the -- you've got to step out. (Applause.) Eric is acting like he's a ham, but he likes the spotlight. (Laughter.) He's acting a little shy. I want to recognize our Deputy	S1 goes off-script from her speech to thank the lead staff members by name who have led her Reach Higher initiative. She thanks each staff member by name and acknowledges their creativity, intellect, and ability to work with a limited budget based on available funds from the First Lady's Office.

Director, Stephanie Sprow. Stephanie. (Applause.) And he's really not going to like this because he tries to pretend like he doesn't exist at all, but our Senior Advisor, Greg Darnieder. (Applause.) There you go. Greg has been a leader in education his entire life. I've known him since I was a little organizer person. And it's just been just a joy to work with you all. These individuals, they are brilliant. They are creative. They have worked miracles with hardly any staff or budget to speak of -- which is how we roll in the First Lady's Office. (Laughter.) And I am so proud and so, so grateful to you all for everything that you've done. So let's give them a round of applause. (Applause.)	
And finally, I want to recognize all of you who are here in this audience. We have our educators, our leaders, our young people who have been with us since we launched Reach Higher back in 2014.	S1 generally thanks all attendees for their support of the Reach Higher initiative since it launched 3 years ago.
Now, when we first came up with this idea, we had one clear goal in mind: We wanted to make higher education cool. We wanted to change the conversation around what it means and what it takes to be a success in this country. Because let's be honest, if we're always shining the spotlight on professional athletes or recording artists or Hollywood celebrities, if those are the only achievements we celebrate, then why would we ever think kids would see college as a priority?	S1 notes that American culture often celebrates professional athletes, recording artists, and celebrities. The Reach Higher initiative was designed to shift the culture of perceived success in America to include higher education more prominently.
So we decided to flip the script and shine a big, bright spotlight on all things educational. For example, we made College Signing Day a national event. We wanted to mimic all the drama and excitement traditionally reserved for those few amazing football and basketball players choosing their college and university teams. We wanted to focus that same level of energy and attention on kids going to college because of their academic achievements. Because as a nation, that's where the spotlight should	The Reach Higher initiative has celebrated educational successes through events like College Signing Day, which emulated star athlete draft celebrations. S1 notes that the United States should celebrate academic achievements, hard work, overcoming difficult life circumstances, and doing the right thing when no one is watching.

also be –- on kids who work hard in school and do the right thing when no one is watching, many beating daunting odds.	
Next, we launched Better Make Room. It's a social media campaign to give young people the support and inspiration they need to actually complete higher education. And to really drive that message home, you may recall that I debuted my music career -- (laughter) -- rapping with Jay about getting some knowledge by going to college. (Laughter and applause.)	Reach Higher also developed a social media campaign to support and inspire young people to complete their higher education programs and degrees.
We are also very proud of all that this administration has done to make higher education more affordable. We doubled investments in Pell grants and college tax credits. We expanded income-based loan repayment options for tens of millions of students. We made it easier to apply for financial aid. We created a College Scorecard to help students make good decisions about higher education. And we provided new funding and support for school counselors. (Applause.) Altogether, we made in this administration the largest investment in higher education since the G.I. Bill. (Applause.) And today, the high school graduation rate is at a record high, and more young people than ever before are going to college.	S1 shares that the administration has made higher education more affordable by doubling the investment into federal grants and tax credits. She notes they made the financial aid application process easier and developed resources to simplify the college evaluation and selection process for families. S1 highlights that her administration increased funding for school counselors and higher education generally. She suggests these actions have contributed to the current high school graduation rate being at a record high and increased young people going to college.
And we know that school counselors like all of the folks standing with me on this stage have played a critical role in helping us get there. In fact, a recent study showed that students who met with a school counselor to talk about financial aid or college were three times more likely to attend college, and they were nearly seven times more likely to apply for financial aid.	School counselors like the event's honorees are critical to the higher education successes of students and the administration. S1 cites a study indicating students who met with a school counselor to discuss financial aid or college were three times more likely to attend college and nearly seven times more likely to apply for financial aid.
So our school counselors are truly among the heroes of the Reach Higher story. And that's why we created this event two years ago, because we thought that they should finally get some recognition.	Reach Higher created the school counselor of the year event two years ago to recognize the important work of school counselors in the lives of young people.

(Applause.) We wanted everyone to know about the difference that these phenomenal men and women have been making in the lives of our young people every day.	
And our 2017 School Counselor of the Year, Terri Tchorzynski, is a perfect example. As you heard, Terri works at the Calhoun Area Career Center, a career and technical education school in Michigan. And here's what Terri's principal said about her in his letter of recommendation. He said, "Once she identifies a systemic need, she works tirelessly to address it." So when students at Terri's school reported feeling unprepared to apply for higher education, Terri sprang into action to create a school-wide, top-to-bottom college-readiness effort. Under Terri's leadership, more students than ever before attended workshops on resume writing, FAFSA completion -- yes, I can now say FAFSA -- (laughter) -- and interview preparation. I can barely say it. (Laughter.) They did career and personal -- personality assessments. They helped plan a special college week. And they organized a Military Day, hosting recruiters from all branches of our armed forces. And because of these efforts, today, 75 percent of Calhoun's seniors now complete key college application steps, and Terri's school has won state and national recognition.	The national school counselor of the year works at a career and technical school in the Midwest. Her principal notes she works tirelessly to address the systemic needs of students and cites her college-readiness effort that offers student workshops on resume writing, applying for financial aid, and interviewing skills. Her school facilitated personality and career-interest assessments, college week, and military recruiting opportunities for students--earning the school state and national recognition for its success.
And all of this is just one small part of what Terri does for her students each day. I can go on and on about all the time she spends one-on-one with students, helping them figure out their life path. Terri told us -- as you heard, she told us about one of those students, so we reached out to Kyra. And here's what Kyra had to say in her own words. Kyra wrote that "Mrs. Tchorzynski has helped me grow to love myself. She helped me with my doubts and insecurities." She said, my life has	A student shared feedback with S1's staff regarding the school counselor of the year; noting she help the student overcome doubts and insecurities that led to self-acceptance and better overall life circumstances.

changed "for the better in all aspects." Kyra said, "She held my hand through my hardest times." She said, "Mrs. Tchorzynski is my lifesaver." That's what Kyra said. (Laughter.)	
And this is what each of you do every single day. You see the promise in each of your students. You believe in them even when they can't believe in themselves, and you work tirelessly to help them be who they were truly meant to be.	S1 speaks directly to the school counselors in the audience to acknowledge the importance of their work: seeing potential in students, encouraging them, and working hard to help them achieve goals and personal fulfillment.
And you do it all in the face of some overwhelming challenges –- tight budgets, impossible student-counselor ratios -- yeah, amen -- (laughter) -- endless demands on your time. You all come in early, you stay late. You reach into your own pockets -- and see, we've got the amen corner. (Laughter.)	S1 notes the challenges associated with school counseling responsibilities: limited funding, high student/counselor ratios, and high workload demands that require significant amounts of time. S1 acknowledges the sacrificial way in which many school counselors work beyond their expected work hours and spend their own money on initiatives to support students.
You stick with students in their darkest moments, when they're most anxious and afraid. And if anyone is dealing with a college [high school] senior or junior, you know what this feels like. These men and women show them that those kids matter; that they have something to offer; that no matter where they're from or how much money their parents have, no matter what they look like or who they love or how they worship or what language they speak at home, they have a place in this country.	School counselors support students during their most difficult experiences with anxiety and fear. School counselors help students realize their value and ability to contribute, regardless of their economic status, ethnicity, religious affiliation, or appearance.
And as I end my time in the White House, I can think of no better message to send our young people in my last official remarks as First Lady. So for all the young people in this room and those who are watching, know that this country belongs to you –- to all of you, from every background and walk of life. If you or your parents are immigrants, know that you are part of a proud American tradition –- the infusion of new cultures, talents and ideas, generation after	S1 encourages young people to believe and appreciate that America is their country regardless of ethnicity or background. Addressing immigrants and children of immigrant parents specifically, S1 notes that America is the greatest country in the world because of its diversity. This event marks her last event as first lady in the White House and she notes the importance of her message.

generation, that has made us the greatest country on earth.	
If your family doesn't have much money, I want you to remember that in this country, plenty of folks, including me and my husband –- we started out with very little. But with a lot of hard work and a good education, anything is possible -- even becoming President. That's what the American Dream is all about. (Applause.)	S1 notes that hard work and a good education can lead to any potential future--even becoming president--regardless of the amount of money an individual or family possesses.
If you are a person of faith, know that religious diversity is a great American tradition, too. In fact, that's why people first came to this country –- to worship freely. And whether you are Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Sikh -- these religions are teaching our young people about justice, and compassion, and honesty. So I want our young people to continue to learn and practice those values with pride.	Religious diversity is a great American tradition since the country's beginnings. S1 encourages young people to be proud of their religious heritage and the values of justice, compassion, and honesty they promote.
You see, our glorious diversity -- our diversities of faiths and colors and creeds -- that is not a threat to who we are, it makes us who we are. (Applause.) So the young people here and the young people out there: Do not ever let anyone make you feel like you don't matter, or like you don't have a place in our American story -- because you do. And you have a right to be exactly who you are.	Diversity of faith and skin colors is an essential aspect of America. S1 encourages young people to embrace their uniqueness and to not allow others to make them feel like they don't have value.
But I also want to be very clear: This right isn't just handed to you. No, this right has to be earned every single day. You cannot take your freedoms for granted. Just like generations who have come before you, you have to do your part to preserve and protect those freedoms. And that starts right now, when you're young.	S1 encourages young people to value their freedoms and to defend them through education and civic engagement.
Right now, you need to be preparing yourself to add your voice to our national conversation. You need to prepare yourself to be informed and engaged as a citizen, to serve and to lead, to stand up for our proud American values and to	S1 encourages young people to get the best education possible in order to think critically, communicate effectively, work productively, and become informed citizen-leaders in their communities.

honor them in your daily lives. And that means getting the best education possible so you can think critically, so you can express yourself clearly, so you can get a good job and support yourself and your family, so you can be a positive force in your communities.	
And when you encounter obstacles -- because I guarantee you, you will, and many of you already have -- when you are struggling and you start thinking about giving up, I want you to remember something that my husband and I have talked about since we first started this journey nearly a decade ago, something that has carried us through every moment in this White House and every moment of our lives, and that is the power of hope -- the belief that something better is always possible if you're willing to work for it and fight for it. It is our fundamental belief in the power of hope that has allowed us to rise above the voices of doubt and division, of anger and fear that we have faced in our own lives and in the life of this country.	S1 encourages young people to never give up hope when they encounter obstacles and hardships. Hope has allowed S1 and her husband to succeed in spite of doubt, anger, and fear they have faced.
Our hope that if we work hard enough and believe in ourselves, then we can be whatever we dream, regardless of the limitations that others may place on us. The hope that when people see us for who we truly are, maybe, just maybe they, too, will be inspired to rise to their best possible selves. That is the hope of students like Kyra who fight to discover their gifts and share them with the world. It's the hope of school counselors like Terri and all these folks up here who guide those students every step of the way, refusing to give up on even a single young person. Shoot, it's the hope of my -- folks like my dad who got up every day to do his job at the city water plant; the hope that one day, his kids would go to college and have opportunities he never dreamed of.	S1 describes the power of hope, hard work and self-belief in achieving our dreams and pushing past the limitations others put in the way of success. This hope is shared by students, school counselors, and parents like her father.

That's the kind of hope that every single one of us -– politicians, parents, preachers –- all of us need to be providing for our young people. Because that is what moves this country forward every single day -– our hope for the future and the hard work that hope inspires.	S1 asserts that all leaders need to facilitate hope in young people because the future of the country will be more successful because of the hard work that hope inspires.
So that's my final message to young people as First Lady. It is simple. (Applause.) I want our young people to know that they matter, that they belong.	S1's final message as first lady is to share with young people that they have value and rightfully belong in America.
. So don't be afraid –- you hear me, young people? Don't be afraid. Be focused. Be determined. Be hopeful. Be empowered. Empower yourselves with a good education, then get out there and use that education to build a country worthy of your boundless promise. Lead by example with hope, never fear.	S1's final message as first lady is to share with young people that they have value and rightfully belong in America.
And know that I will be with you, rooting for you and working to support you for the rest of my life. And that is true I know for every person who are here -- is here today, and for educators and advocates all across this nation who get up every day and work their hearts out to lift up our young people.	S1 promises to support young people, educators, and advocates for the rest of her life in their pursuit of future goals.
And I am so grateful to all of you for your passion and your dedication and all the hard work on behalf of our next generation. And I can think of no better way to end my time as First Lady than celebrating with all of you. So I want to close today by simply saying thank you. Thank you for everything you do for our kids and for our country.	S1 thanks the school counselor attendees for their passion, dedication to the work, and service to children and America.
Being your First Lady has been the greatest honor of my life, and I hope I've made you proud. (Applause.)	Being the first lady has been the greatest honor of S1's life.

Appendix B

Semi-Structured Interview Format

1. Please share your title and explain the responsibilities associated with your position.
   a. How long have you served in this role?

2. Please describe your education and training.
   a. What else prepared you for a counselor leadership role?

3. What is your understanding of school counselor leadership?
   a. How does your personal or professional identity influence your description of school counselor leadership?

4. What are your expectations of school counselors serving as building-level leaders?
   a. What do school counselors bring to a building-level leadership team that is unique from the leadership of principals, assistant principals, or teacher leaders?
   b. Can you share examples that typify this for you?

5. What opportunities are available in your school division that help to facilitate the leadership development of school counselors?
   a. Other than professional learning opportunities, describe other ways in which school counselors grow their leadership skills.
   b. Are there specific examples that stand out to you?

6. What aspects of school counselor leadership do you consider to be critically important?

7. What are some of the ways you advocate for high quality school counseling services in your school division?

8. How is social justice advocacy an aspect of school counselor leadership?
   a. Do you have specific examples of this?

9. What barriers have you experienced addressing opportunity gaps with school counselors in your school division?
   a. Are there specific examples that come to mind?

10. What have we not talked about that you think is relevant to this discussion of school counselor leadership?

<div align="center">**Appendix C**</div>

<div align="center">**Recruitment Script**</div>

District-Level School Counseling Supervisor--

Good morning! My name is Tom Mitchell. I am a school counseling supervisor in Spotsylvania County Public Schools and a doctoral candidate in the counselor education program at Virginia Commonwealth University. I'm reaching out to see if you are interested in participating in an approximately 45-minute interview about school counselor leadership. Specifically, I am researching the experiences of district-level school counseling supervisors in facilitating leadership development with professional school counselors. Our interview will occur over Zoom and I will share the interview questions with you in advance. This interview is being conducted for research purposes, and your participation is completely voluntary.

If you are interested, please click here to complete a brief REDCap survey with your contact information so that I can share with you more details. Participation criteria includes one year of experience serving as a district-level supervisor of school counselors and master's-level training as a school counselor. If you have questions, you can reply to this email or call me at 804-761-4492 if you would prefer to talk by phone.

Thanks very much--

Tom Mitchell

Appendix D

Informed Consent

Research Focus: The experiences of district-level school counseling supervisors in facilitating leadership development with professional school counselors

Lead Researcher: Thomas Mitchell
                     Mitchelltm4@vcu.edu
                     804-761-4492

- I understand that the lead researcher is conducting a research study about the experiences of district-level school counseling supervisors in facilitating leadership development with professional school counselors.

- I understand that the lead researcher is a doctoral student at Virginia Commonwealth University and is completing this study as a required component of earning a doctoral degree in counselor education.

- I understand that the lead researcher will conduct an interview via videoconference (Zoom). I understand that my interview will be recorded and that I will have the opportunity to review my interview transcript once it is transcribed. Interview recordings will be destroyed upon completion of the study.

- I understand that identifying information including my name, the names of others discussed in my interview, and places of work will be changed to promote confidentiality.

- I understand that the interview process is expected to take approximately 45 minutes of my time.

- I understand that participation in this study is completely voluntary and that I may notify the researcher of my desire to withdraw at any time.

- I understand that I am encouraged to ask any additional questions about which I may be unsure or unclear prior to signing this form or participating in the study.

By continuing to schedule my interview, I consent to participate in this research.