

## Louisiana School Counselors' Daily Activities and the American School Counselor Association National Model: A Complex History and a Hopeful Future

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### Abstract

This mixed-methods, concurrent nested study was designed to explore the extent to which one state's school counselors reported daily activities that align with the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model. Despite federal and state legislation, state policies, and a state model supporting school counseling practices, a significant number of school counselors in this study (approximately 25%) reported barriers to the implementation of comprehensive models. Barriers included a disproportionate amount of duty, testing, and the coordination of specialized services. Yet, three out of four school counselors in this sample reported knowing about and implementing elements of the ASCA National Model. Thus, there is hope that school counseling in Louisiana will eventually meet national and state standards.

**Keywords:** School counselor; School counseling; Duties; Activities; Non-counseling

### Introduction

The school counseling profession has developed and changed over time, and school counselors' roles have also evolved. School counseling has been influenced by significant sociocultural, economic, political, and legislative changes. In Louisiana, school counselors engage in activities shaped by the profession's history.

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## Federal legislation

Federal legislation throughout the twenty-first century has impacted school counseling. The launch of Russia's Sputnik in 1957 spurred the "space race" (Gysbers, 2010; Picchioni, 1980), which saw the passage of the National Defense Education Act (NDEA; 1958). The NDEA (1958) dedicated substantial funds to school counseling programs (Picchioni, 1980) and, in 1964, was expanded to provide school counseling funds for elementary schools (Gysbers, 2010; Picchioni, 1980). Elementary school counseling was later supported in Title X, Part A of the Improving America's Schools Act (1994).

Unemployment and poverty in the 1960s prompted the passage of the Vocational Education Act (1963) and emphasized the need for school counselors to understand careers and the world of work (Pope, 2000). The Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act (1984) provided support for K–12 guidance and counseling, and the School-to-Work Opportunities Act (1994) focused on employability skills, career exploration, and counseling beginning in seventh grade (Gysbers, 2010; Schenck, Anctil, Smith, & Dahir, 2012). The Carl D. Perkins Vocational-Technical Education Act Amendments (1998) shifted the definition of career guidance and counseling to career and academic counseling focused on students' occupational and educational futures (Gysbers, 2010).

In 2001, the school counselor's role was greatly influenced by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001). Under the NCLB, schools focused on improving academic achievement and de-emphasized career guidance (Schenck et al., 2012). School counselors shifted to accountability management as they were called upon to coordinate schools' testing programs (Gysbers, 2010; Wright, 2012). However, Section 5421 of the NCLB, Elementary and Secondary School Counseling Programs (ESSCP), provided school districts with grants to establish or expand school counseling programs to meet the needs of all students (Gysbers, 2010).

Still, access to postsecondary opportunities remained inequitable. In 2014, First Lady Michelle Obama announced her Reach Higher (n.d.-a, n.d.-b) initiative, designed to inspire students to complete postsecondary education, and school counselors were a vital focus of this work. In 2015, President Obama signed the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA, 2015) into law, a reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (1965). Title IV, Part A of the ESSA (2015) provided funding so districts might expand school counseling programs.

## The American School Counselor Association

In the 1960s, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) studied the role of the school counselor (Gysbers, 2010). Two policy statements emerged in 1964, including a position and role statement that promoted interventions to support the personal, social, educational, and career development of students (Gysbers, 2010). These statements helped clarify the role of secondary school counselors (Gysbers, 2010).

Yet, school counselors have been ascribed many titles that have contributed to role confusion through the years. Titles such as guidance counselor, vocational counselor, and school counselor were prevalent into the 1980s. In 1990, the ASCA (2005) governing board unanimously agreed to officially call the profession "school coun-

seling.” ASCA (2005) followed up by publishing an updated role statement that reflected the change in the professional title.

In 1995, the ASCA delegate assembly asked participants from all 50 states to respond to a pilot survey assessing attitudes and beliefs regarding the development of national standards (Campbell & Dahir, 1997). Following the pilot, the survey was distributed nationally to 2,000 ASCA members. The input from those members led to the development of the *ASCA National Standards for Students* (Campbell & Dahir, 1997), which was later replaced by *Mindsets and Behaviors for Student Success: K-12 College- and Career-Readiness Standards for Every Student* (ASCA, 2014).

School counseling models from the 1980s were updated in the early 2000s (Gysbers, 2010). The ASCA (2003) National Model was created as a framework for states, districts, and schools to develop comprehensive counseling programs (Cinotti, 2014); revised versions were released in later years (ASCA, 2005, 2012, 2019).

### **School counselor certification in Louisiana**

By 1971, certification standards went into effect for Louisiana school counselors (Chilton, 1982). Later, school counseling was defined by the Louisiana Legislative Act 45 (1994), which provided clarity on the roles and responsibilities of school counselors (Louisiana Department of Education [LDOE], 1998). The definition also delineated non-counseling duties, including substitute teaching, the administration of discipline, and clerical tasks (LDOE, 1998).

Subsequently, the Louisiana School Counseling Model (LDOE, 1998) was released and included content standards to increase all students’ career and academic plans. The Louisiana model (LDOE, 1998) defined the school counselor’s role, included the ASCA Ethical Standards (1992), defined state policies related to school counseling, explained comprehensive school counseling, and provided a glossary of terms and school counselor resources (LDOE, 1998). This model was subsequently revised twice (LDOE, 2002, 2010).

The Louisiana Blue Ribbon Commission for Educational Excellence (BRCEE) was an effort to improve education that impacted school counseling. The BRCEE (2011) met annually beginning in 2000–2001 and was later charged with making changes in counselor education, certification, and school counseling services. These changes were meant to increase graduation rates, postsecondary enrollment, and industry-based certification among high school students (BRCEE, 2011). Although numerous recommendations were made, those that were adopted included: a) using an annual evaluation tool specific to the school counselor’s role, b) having a certification requirement of graduating from an accredited program, c) requiring a minimum passing score on the School Counselor Praxis Exam, and d) a renewal requirement of continuing education (BRCEE, 2011). These changes remain in place today (Louisiana, 2020a; Louisiana, 2020b).

### **Statement of the problem**

The school counselor’s role is often disparate from professional training and the ASCA (2019) National Model. This disconnect can lead to distress, confusion, and role dissatisfaction (Cervoni & DeLucia-Waack, 2011; Pyne, 2011; Randick, Dermer, &

Michel, 2018). Although states such as Louisiana have adopted programs and policies that align with the ASCA (2019) National Model (Martin, Carey, & DeCoster, 2009), there often is a lack of cohesion between model(s) and the implementation of recommended practices. To date, however, little is known about the degree to which school counselors in Louisiana have implemented the ASCA (2019) National Model.

## Research questions

1. How do Louisiana school counselors' daily activities compare to the activities school counselors should perform daily according to the ASCA (2019) National Model?
2. How prepared are Louisiana school counselors for implementing the ASCA (2019) National Model?

## Methods

To answer the research questions, a mixed-methods study with a concurrent nested design was employed (the survey included open-ended questions for content analysis; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). The rationale for this design choice was the need to gather a baseline measure of what counselors in Louisiana were reporting as their daily activities as well as their preparation and professional development for implementing the ASCA (2019) and Louisiana (LDOE, 2010) counseling models. An effort was made to collect rich, qualitative data that would add complementarity and expansion to the quantitative results, thereby offering a more detailed explanation of why school counselors may or may not perform daily activities aligned with these models and why they may or may not perceive they are prepared to implement these models (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

Participants were able to give extended open-answer typed responses (the qualitative portion of this study) throughout the questionnaire. In a concurrent nested design, one data set is analyzed first (in this study, the quantitative questionnaire data), and then the second is analyzed (in this study, the participants' typed comments were analyzed through content analysis, coded, and then used as the second, qualitative data set). The data sets are then merged, as the second data set is utilized for interpretation, complementarity, and to expand understanding of the data from the quantitative data set (Creswell & Plano, 2017). Both researchers coded the content analysis. The participants' typed responses were analyzed for themes and codes.

## Procedures

Louisiana's education system is complicated. Still under a federal desegregation order, there are private, parochial, public, and charter schools. These school systems have different reporting structures. Unfortunately, Louisiana does not have a singular system that tracks all its school counselors.

For the survey, a questionnaire was distributed via email to the Louisiana School Counselor Association (LSCA) and an LDOE newsletter directory. Duplicate emails and non-counselors (e.g., principals, district coordinators, graduate students, and retired school counselors) were removed. In total, emails soliciting participation were sent to 2,306 school counselors. The email request for participation was sent three times. All data were captured and analyzed in Qualtrics (2018). Tailored Design

Method practices were followed to elicit the best possible rate of return for electronic surveys (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2014).

## **Ethical considerations**

This study was approved by an Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the governance board of the LSCA. The informed consent included in the survey required an electronic signature; therefore, participants were confidential but not anonymous. Participants' names were not associated with the captured data.

## **Participants**

A total of 339 respondents out of 2,306 solicited school counselors began the survey, for a response rate of 15 percent. While a larger response rate is preferred to avoid non-response bias, social science research does not have a minimally acceptable response rate (Saldivar, 2012; Stapleton, 2019). Not all surveys were completed and 40 had to be discarded, leaving 299 completed surveys. Of those participants completing the survey, 77 percent ( $N = 231$ ) identified as white, 21 percent ( $N = 63$ ) as black or African American, one percent as Hispanic ( $N = 3$ ), and one percent ( $N = 2$ ) as American Indian or Alaskan Native. In regard to gender, eight percent of participants identified as men ( $N = 24$ ), 92 percent ( $N = 274$ ) identified as women, no participants identified as transgender or gender non-conforming, and one participant chose not to answer this question. Participants' years of experience ranged from one to fifteen-plus years. Specifically, seven percent ( $N = 21$ ) had one year or less experience, 27 percent ( $N = 80$ ) had two to five years of experience, 26 percent ( $N = 78$ ) had six to ten years of experience, 17 percent ( $N = 50$ ) had 11 to 15 years of experience, and 23 percent ( $N = 70$ ) had more than 15 years of experience. Participants' ages ranged from 24 to over 64. Of those participants who responded with their ages, 26 percent ( $N = 77$ ) were 24 to 34, 30 percent ( $N = 88$ ) were 35 to 44, 27 percent ( $N = 80$ ) were 45 to 54, 14 percent ( $N = 43$ ) were 55 to 64, and three percent ( $N = 8$ ) were older than 64. Participants reported the amount of time they had held their school counseling master's degree: 3.4 percent had it for one year or less ( $N = 10$ ), 17.2 percent ( $N = 51$ ) had it for two to five years, 27.6 percent ( $N = 82$ ) had it for six to ten years, 16.5 percent ( $N = 49$ ) had it for 11 to 15 years, 23.2 percent ( $N = 69$ ) had it for over 15 years, 7.7 percent ( $N = 23$ ) did not have a master's degree in counseling, 4.4 percent ( $N = 13$ ) had alternate certification, and 0.6 percent ( $N = 2$ ) chose not to answer this question.

The questionnaire also collected data on other professional experiences, training, and credentials. For this sample, 60 percent ( $N = 180$ ) had teaching experience before becoming a school counselor and 40 percent ( $N = 119$ ) did not. Participants' professional credentials included licenses and certifications. In particular, 83 percent ( $N = 247$ ) were certified as school counselors, 32 percent ( $N = 95$ ) were licensed professional counselors (LPCs), nine percent ( $N = 26$ ) were provisionally licensed professional counselors, four percent ( $N = 13$ ) were LPC supervisors, and three percent ( $N = 8$ ) were licensed marriage and family therapists. Additionally, participants in the sample held numerous certifications: 39 percent ( $N = 118$ ) were nationally certified counselors, 17 percent ( $N = 51$ ) were nationally certified school counselors,

21 percent ( $N = 64$ ) were certified teachers, and two percent ( $N = 7$ ) were certified in educational leadership. One participant was a registered social worker.

Participants were asked to report the school level they currently work with. Of the participants that responded to this question, 22 percent ( $N = 66$ ) worked in elementary school; 14 percent ( $N = 41$ ) worked in middle school; the majority of participants, 39 percent ( $N = 117$ ), worked in high school; six percent ( $N = 17$ ) worked in K–8; 10 percent ( $N = 29$ ) worked in K–12; and nine percent ( $N = 27$ ) worked in other school structures (e.g., ninth-grade academies). Participants reported that the approximate counselor-to-student ratio in their schools ranged from 1:50 to 1:800-plus.

## Results

Participants’ responses to the questionnaire survey and qualitative, coded text are reported in Table 1. The survey is broken into four sections: a) administrative and district support for the implementation of a comprehensive model; b) counselor education and preparation, training, and professional development for implementing a comprehensive model; c) self-report of direct service delivery of comprehensive counseling model components; and d) self-report of delivery of services outside of the role of the school counselor. The first three sections have items ranging on a Likert-type scale with seven categories: *strongly agree*, *agree*, *somewhat agree*, *neither agree nor disagree*, *somewhat disagree*, *disagree*, and *strongly disagree*. The last section includes didactic (yes/no) responses, reported in Table 2. All questions feature text-box-response (type-in) capability for additional explanation.

**Table 1. Questionnaire results**

Item	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<b>Section A</b>							
My administration knows the ASCA model	5.71% $N = 16$	8.93% $N = 25$	25.71% $N = 72$	8.57% $N = 24$	10.36% $N = 29$	22.14% $N = 62$	18.57% $N = 52$
My school district provides regular meetings for school counselors where we talk about professional issues relevant to our work	18.28% $N = 51$	21.15% $N = 59$	20.43% $N = 57$	3.23% $N = 9$	9.32% $N = 26$	16.85% $N = 47$	10.75% $N = 30$
I am evaluated as a school counselor in my annual performance reviews	29.03% $N = 81$	31.18% $N = 87$	14.34% $N = 40$	3.58% $N = 10$	4.30% $N = 12$	5.02% $N = 14$	2.15% $N = 6$
<b>Section B</b>							
I learned about the ASCA National Model in my counselor education program	36.39% $N = 115$	25.00% $N = 79$	8.54% $N = 27$	3.80% $N = 12$	3.48% $N = 11$	7.59% $N = 24$	3.80% $N = 12$
I received professional development on the ASCA National Model	19.64% $N = 55$	27.86% $N = 78$	14.29% $N = 40$	4.29% $N = 12$	5.36% $N = 15$	13.21% $N = 37$	3.57% $N = 10$
I was trained in my counselor education program on the Louisiana School Counseling Model	18.77% $N = 52$	27.44% $N = 76$	10.11% $N = 28$	8.66% $N = 24$	3.61% $N = 10$	15.88% $N = 44$	6.14% $N = 17$
I received professional development on the Louisiana School Counseling Model	16.07% $N = 45$	21.79% $N = 61$	14.29% $N = 40$	6.79% $N = 19$	5.71% $N = 16$	21.43% $N = 60$	7.14% $N = 20$
I received professional development on the ASCA Ethical Standards	29.24% $N = 81$	31.05% $N = 86$	7.22% $N = 20$	6.14% $N = 17$	2.89% $N = 8$	11.91% $N = 33$	3.97% $N = 11$

**Table 1 (continued)**

Item	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Section C							
I review data when designing my school counseling program	15.47% N = 43	33.45% N = 93	21.94% N = 61	10.07% N = 28	5.04% N = 14	3.60% N = 10	3.96% N = 11
In my role as a school counselor, I have implemented a comprehensive counseling curriculum that meets ASCA standards for students' career, academic, and socio-emotional development	12.95% N = 36	23.74% N = 66	25.90% N = 72	10.07% N = 28	11.51% N = 32	10.07% N = 28	5.76% N = 16
I provide parent workshops	14.34% N = 40	31.54% N = 88	21.15% N = 59	5.73% N = 16	6.81% N = 19	8.60% N = 24	2.15% N = 6
I provide small group counseling services	18.21% N = 51	26.07% N = 73	17.50% N = 49	4.29% N = 12	6.43% N = 18	12.50% N = 35	3.57% N = 10
I provide faculty in-service	14.64% N = 41	38.93% N = 109	22.86% N = 64	2.50% N = 7	3.57% N = 10	5.36% N = 15	2.50% N = 7
I facilitate peer or cross-age programs	6.86% N = 19	19.86% N = 55	14.44% N = 40	11.91% N = 33	7.22% N = 20	25.63% N = 71	7.94% N = 22
I have a school counseling program advisory committee	3.58% N = 10	8.60% N = 24	9.68% N = 27	8.24% N = 23	8.24% N = 23	35.48% N = 99	26.16% N = 73
I am tasked with work outside the role of a school counselor	44.93% N = 124	22.10% N = 61	6.16% N = 17	0.72% N = 2	1.81% N = 5	3.62% N = 10	1.81% N = 5

**Table 2. Didactic Responses**

Item	Yes	No	Did not answer
I serve as my school's test coordinator	62.4% N = 174	37.6% N = 105	20
I serve as my school's 504 coordinator	43.7% N = 122	56.3% N = 157	20
I serve as my school's IEP coordinator	13% N = 36	87% N = 241	22
I have been asked to provide substitute teaching when a teacher is absent	24.7% N = 69	75.3% N = 210	20
I provide (choose one): · No duty · 15 minutes or less per day of duty · 15 minutes or more per day of duty	119 95 64		

**Administrative and district support**

The first item in Section A of the questionnaire was “My administration knows the ASCA model.” This item was meant to discern the degree to which school counselors perceived their administrators knew what their role *should* be. Responses ranged from strongly agree, agree, to somewhat agree (N = 113, 40%); neither agree nor disagree (N = 24, 9%); and somewhat disagree, disagree, to strongly disagree (N = 143, 51%). Item two stated, “My school district provides regular meetings for school counselors where we talk about professional issues relevant to our work.” Answers ranged from strongly agree, agree, to somewhat agree (N = 167, 60%); neither agree nor disagree

( $N = 9$ , 3%); and somewhat disagree, disagree, to strongly disagree ( $N = 103$ , 37%). The third item stated, “I am evaluated as a school counselor in my annual performance reviews.” The majority ( $N = 208$ , 83%) strongly agreed, agreed, or somewhat agreed; 10 participants (4%) neither agreed nor disagreed; and 32 participants (13%) somewhat disagreed, disagreed, or strongly disagreed.

As previously mentioned, participants’ comments in each section were coded and collapsed into themes. The three themes in this section were: 1) administration is supportive, 2) administration is unsupportive, and 3) administration is clueless. The written text responses ranged across these categories.

### **Administration is supportive**

Within this theme, counselors believed their administration understood their role to a degree and made an effort to support the implementation of the ASCA (2003, 2005, 2012, 2019) model. Administrators were viewed as open to change and appeared to foster a school environment that supported students. School counselors indicated that principals had been trained on the ASCA (2003, 2005, 2012, 2019) model. One participant noted, “I definitely think my principal understands the model. I would estimate that 90%, if not more, of what I do falls within the ASCA National Model role for school counselor,” which was typical of comments in this section.

It is noteworthy that school counselors appeared to perceive their school-level administrators as supportive and their districts as moving toward supportive if they were evaluated as school counselors. Comments such as, “My supervisor conducts an annual review and I am reviewed as a school counselor, not a teacher,” reflected this sentiment. This distinction, being evaluated as a school counselor, seemed to signify that the principal understood and valued the uniqueness of the counselor’s role.

### **Administration is unsupportive**

More often, comments were negative and reflected how principals did not appear to understand the counselor’s role or relegated counselors to duties outside of the ASCA (2019) National Model. Within this theme, counselors mentioned being evaluated as a teacher. Counselors stated that when they were evaluated outside the role of school counselor (e.g., evaluated as a teacher), they perceived that the principal did not know what they actually do. “My principal evaluates me with a teacher rubric, doing counselor things. It doesn’t make any sense,” reported one counselor. Another counselor noted that she no longer received evaluations, “I haven’t been evaluated in years, I don’t know what I’m supposed to make of it,” while others noted they were evaluated on inappropriate roles, “I’m evaluated for my work as a test coordinator.” Some participants commented that principals were subjective in their evaluation or unfair in their delegation of responsibilities. One participant wrote,

My principal is so much of the problem. I honestly don’t know what she evaluates me on. . . . She has not discussed my responsibilities with me in any performance evaluation meeting. I do testing, I fill in for teachers, I enroll students in online classes. I do a lot of things I shouldn’t because the principal won’t make the teachers do what they are supposed to do. It’s easier to dump it on me.



When principals used correct documentation (i.e., the state's school counselor performance evaluation rubric), participants expressed frustration stemming from being evaluated as a school counselor but not fully functioning within a counseling role. This quote captured this concern, "The majority of my time is spent as a [school building level committee] chair, and we are not evaluated for that. So I'm not evaluated on how I'm forced to spend the majority of my time."

### **Administration is clueless**

Within this theme, school counselors lamented that principals and/or district leadership lacked adequate knowledge about the ASCA (2019) National Model or understanding of the school counselor's role. One participant summed up the comments in this theme, "I question if my supervisor even knows what I do." Stress, role conflict, and, at times, a sense of helplessness were reflected among participants' comments.

I doubt my district or principals know what I should be doing. I am the counselor for 9 alternative sites! I have little time with the students. I am a glorified secretary, administrator. ... I don't think anyone in leadership has heard of the ASCA model.

In the above quote, the counselor referred to herself as a "glorified secretary," a phrase that occurred numerous times in this study's data. Participants used this term to describe being relegated to duties seen as outside the scope of school counseling practices.

Finally, some school counselors indicated that administrators understood only pieces or parts of their roles. These counselors wanted their principals and district leadership to have a greater sense of their impact on students' lives.

### ***Education, preparation, training, and development***

Section B of the questionnaire included five items. Item one stated, "I learned about the ASCA National Model in my counselor education program." A total of 280 participants answered this item, and four out of five ( $N = 221$ , 79%) strongly agreed, agreed, or somewhat agreed; four percent ( $N = 12$ ) neither agreed nor disagreed; and 17 percent ( $N = 47$ ) somewhat disagreed, disagreed, or strongly disagreed. Item two stated, "I received professional development on the ASCA National Model." Only 247 participants responded to this item, and scores ranged from strongly agree, agree, to somewhat agree ( $N = 173$ , 70%); neither agree nor disagree ( $N = 12$ , 5%); and somewhat disagree, disagree, to strongly disagree ( $N = 62$ , 25%). Item three stated, "I was trained in my counselor education program on the Louisiana School Counseling Model." A total of 251 participants responded, and responses ranged from strongly agree, agree, to somewhat agree ( $N = 156$ , 62%); neither agree nor disagree ( $N = 24$ , 10%); and somewhat disagree, disagree, to strongly disagree ( $N = 71$ , 28%). Item four was, "I received professional development on the ASCA Louisiana state school counseling model." A total of 261 participants responded, and responses ranged from strongly agree, agree, to somewhat agree ( $N = 146$ , 56%); neither agree nor disagree ( $N = 19$ , 7%); and somewhat disagree, disagree, to strongly disagree ( $N = 96$ , 37%). Finally, item five stated, "I received professional development on the ASCA Ethical Standards." A total of 256 participants responded, and responses ranged from strongly agree, agree, to somewhat agree ( $N = 187$ , 73%);

neither agree nor disagree ( $N = 17, 7\%$ ); and somewhat disagree, disagree, to strongly disagree ( $N = 52, 20\%$ ).

With regard to open text responses, two major themes emerged: 1) counselor education and preparation and 2) professional development. The first theme, counselor education and preparation, had three subthemes that captured the majority of participants' comments: a) I graduated before there was a model, b) I did not graduate from a school counseling program, or c) my program taught the model. Within the theme of professional development, two subthemes emerged: a) I seek my own professional development and b) the district does not meet my needs.

### **Counselor education and preparation**

On the subject of counselor education and preparation, participants' responses spanned a spectrum from not knowing school counseling models to knowing school counseling models based on what they learned in their graduate programs. In the first subtheme, comments reflected that participants had graduated from a program before the ASCA (2003, 2005, 2012, 2019) model was published. In the second subtheme, participants noted that they were either alternatively certified, did not graduate from a school counseling program, or in some cases, did graduate from a school counseling program. For example, one participant noted, "I have a degree in school counseling but only took one or two courses that actually emphasized school counseling. Most of my courses focused on mental health counseling." For the third subtheme, participants signified that they were taught the model and often indicated frustration about not implementing it in their schools. This participant summed up this subtheme: "I was taught the model and believe it is important. To not be able to put it in action is stressful. I'm not getting to do what I trained for and want to do."

### **Professional development**

Within this theme, counselors overwhelmingly noted that their schools or districts did not sponsor their professional development (PD) on the appropriate role of the school counselor or the national and state models. The first subtheme, I seek my own, was used to code the many cases where school counselors indicated that they paid for their own PD opportunities. Notably, many who commented seemed to take pride in having sought their own PD. They expressed wanting quality PD, wanting to learn more about comprehensive school counseling models and ethics, and wanting to network with other school counselors. This comment from a participant was typical, "My district does not provide training on the ASCA National Model, but I have personally paid to attend myself because I consider it an investment in my development." Unfortunately, other school counselors noted not being able to afford to attend counseling conferences. When school counselors could not afford to attend PD, they would attempt to self-train on the ASCA (2003, 2005, 2012, 2019) model and ethics. One participant wrote, "I educated myself on these independently." It is unknown if school counselors who self-taught these materials were able to implement the models successfully.

The second subtheme, the district does not meet my needs, had a lot of participant comments. Some counselors noted that their districts were planning to evaluate

their performance based on the Louisiana (1998, 2002, 2010) or ASCA (2003, 2005, 2012, 2019) models but that the districts did not provide training on the models. In a few cases, counselors received only materials with little to no explanation of how to use them. One example included this participant's statement, "I have not received any formal professional development in my district on the ASCA National Model; however, our annual evaluations are based off the model, so I was provided with the ASCA model handbook from my district." It is difficult to discern from this statement how the school counselors in that district moved forward with learning the model without having adequate training. It is unclear whether principals charged with evaluating these counselors were given training on these models. Another participant noted an example of handing out materials in lieu of training, "Our district sent us copies of the Louisiana Model handbook... But there was no letter, explanation or expectations ... just handbooks sent to our school counseling program." In this case, the school counselors were left to question what they were supposed to do with the materials they were given.

Other comments within this subtheme described districts that gave their counselors training that promoted roles for the counselor outside of the ASCA (2003, 2005, 2012, 2019) National Model. For example, participants in this sample referenced district training on test coordination, 504 planning, and dyslexia screenings. This participant's text summarized the general sentiments, "My district does not provide professional development related to school counseling; instead, we focus on how to administer gifted screenings, testing, and 504 information." Notably, this participant was from a district that evaluated school counselors based on the ASCA (2003, 2005, 2012, 2019) model but allowed principals to decide their daily duties (which this participant described as 90% outside the scope of the model) and provided PD for tasks outside the model.

### ***Elements of a comprehensive counseling program***

Section C of the questionnaire had eight items meant to measure participants' perceptions of whether they provided elements of an ASCA model in their program. Item one was, "I review data when designing my school counseling program." A total of 260 participants answered this item. Three out of four strongly agreed, agreed, or somewhat agreed ( $N = 197$ , 76%); 11 percent ( $N = 24$ ) neither agreed nor disagreed; and 13 percent ( $N = 35$ ) somewhat disagreed, disagreed, or strongly disagreed. Item two was, "In my role as a school counselor, I have implemented a comprehensive counseling curriculum that meets ASCA standards for students' career, academic, and socio-emotional development." A total of 278 participants responded to this item, and responses ranged from strongly agree, agree, to somewhat agree ( $N = 174$ , 63%); neither agree nor disagree ( $N = 28$ , 10%); and somewhat disagree, disagree, to strongly disagree ( $N = 76$ , 27%). Item three stated, "I provide parent workshops." A total of 252 participants answered this question, and responses ranged from strongly agree, agree, to somewhat agree ( $N = 187$ , 74%); neither agree nor disagree ( $N = 16$ , 6%); and somewhat disagree, disagree, to strongly disagree ( $N = 49$ , 19%). Item four was, "I provide small group counseling services." A total of 248 participants responded to this item, and responses ranged from strongly agree, agree, to somewhat agree

( $N = 173$ , 70%); neither agree nor disagree ( $N = 12$ , 5%); and somewhat disagree, disagree, to strongly disagree ( $N = 63$ , 25%).

Item five stated, "I provide faculty in-services." A total of 253 participants responded to this item, and responses ranged from strongly agree, agree, to somewhat agree ( $N = 214$ , 85%); neither agree nor disagree ( $N = 7$ , 3%); and somewhat disagree, disagree, to strongly disagree ( $N = 32$ , 13%). Item six stated, "I facilitate peer or cross-age programs." A total of 260 participants responded to this item, and responses ranged from strongly agree, agree, to somewhat agree ( $N = 114$ , 44%); neither agree nor disagree ( $N = 33$ , 13%); and somewhat disagree, disagree, to strongly disagree ( $N = 113$ , 43%). Item seven stated, "I have a school counseling program advisory committee." A total of 279 participants responded to this item, and responses ranged from strongly agree, agree, to somewhat agree ( $N = 61$ , 22%); neither agree nor disagree ( $N = 23$ , 8%); and somewhat disagree, disagree, to strongly disagree ( $N = 195$ , 70%). Finally, item eight stated, "I am tasked with work outside the role of a school counselor." Only 224 participants responded to this item, and responses ranged from strongly agree, agree, to somewhat agree ( $N = 202$ , 90%); neither agree nor disagree ( $N = 2$ , 1%); and somewhat disagree, disagree, to strongly disagree ( $N = 20$ , 9%).

This section was coded, and yielded three major theme categories: 1) I do not have time or support, 2) I do not really understand this element, and 3) I am not actually providing this service. With the exception of facilitating cross-age and peer programs and having an advisory committee, the majority of school counselors in this study (i.e., greater than 60% in most cases) reported providing major elements of a comprehensive school counseling program. In some cases, school counselors listed in detail the kinds of services they provided. An example came in the form of listing small groups school counselors facilitated (e.g., divorce, incarceration, study skills, self-esteem, social skills, anxiety management). For those that did not, they used the text boxes in the questionnaire to explain why not, and these are represented in the first theme: I do not have time or support. The comments brought up additional concerns regarding the participants who did report providing elements of a school counseling program. Often, the comments given by those participants were reflected in two major themes: 2) I do not really understand this element or 3) I am not actually providing this service. Examples of these themes ran across the various elements.

### **I simply do not have time or support**

In this theme, school counselors expressed that they did not have the time to provide direct services. In some cases, other professionals provided these services to students. This example, where a counselor explains why he did not provide small group counseling, underscores the dilemma described by many counselors,

I would love to serve my students by providing group counseling if I could, but I have so much testing and paperwork I cannot. People from agencies come in and to do the counseling and it's a shame because that's what I was trained to do.

Similarly, another participant explained why she strongly disagreed with providing classroom lessons, "Testing consumes my ability to get into classrooms, run small

groups, and see students individually. It's simply not possible with the time that I have to give to testing." This same individual was spending an hour and a half per day on morning, lunchroom, and dismissal duties.

Administrative support was another resource school counselors needed. When asked about an advisory group, one counselor stated, "My administration does not allow me to do this." Repeatedly, this answer came up about various program elements. It appeared that administrators possibly had different reasons for blocking school counselors from delivering classroom lessons, small group counseling, individual counseling, faculty in-service, and parent workshops. Principals conveyed two main messages to our participants: 1) academics are the most critical thing, time is precious, and 2) we cannot ask teachers or parents to do more. These messages left counselors with no way to provide direct resources to students, and it gave principals a justification for using the school counselors' time for activities outside of the counseling role. Additionally, one school counselor gave this reason she could not run groups, "I don't have a space to run groups so a social worker comes to the school and does it instead." This begs the question: what space does the social worker use?

### **I do not really understand this element**

Occasionally participants did not know what an advisory committee was or what peer or cross-age programs were. This lack of understanding was often demonstrated through their comments. When it came to data, participants did not seem to understand data use from either the ASCA (2003, 2005, 2012, 2019) or Louisiana (1998, 2002, 2010) models. One participant stated, "I ... address the needs in front of me versus data collection. I agree that data is useful. It's just not always at the forefront of my daily planning." The participant's belief that data was for daily planning rather than program planning was a concern. She appeared to think she needed to collect data rather than review and analyze it to determine her students' needs. Many schools have data readily available for counselors to use for program planning purposes.

Another participant wrote, "I review standardized test scores, I send out entrance and exit surveys to seniors to see how I can best help them, and I give out a Faculty Needs Assessments to new teachers." It was not clear how this counselor captured data on existing faculty and students. Another participant strongly agreed that he conducted parent workshops, then explained, "I've met with PTO [Parent Teacher Organization] parents and went to Parent Night Events." Although important, it does not explain how he conducted parent workshops related to the counseling program or reached parents who did not attend PTO meetings. Another counselor agreed that she provided small group counseling but wrote, "I don't do small group counseling in formal ways. If I have a group of kids in my office at recess, we discuss certain topics so they can bounce ideas off one another." Although she understood this was not actual group counseling, she had agreed that she provided small group counseling. It is not clear how this was presented to stakeholders. Did parents give consent for their children to attend these informal groups?

At times, counselors noted that the administration expected them to provide a service that placed them in a role conflict. Several participants agreed or strongly

agreed they provided faculty in-service but included text clarifying that it was “only on testing procedures.” Although they provided a service within the ASCA (2019) National Model, it was for a role *outside* of the model.

### **I am not actually providing this service**

Often, counselors somewhat agreed or agreed with a statement that they were providing one of the comprehensive service elements but then indicated they were not actually providing the service or program. Although it is not clear why they answered this way, either they likely believed their intention to provide the service in the future or the fact the service was provided through someone else was evidence enough. For example, a participant who agreed that she provided parent workshops wrote this: “I don’t provide parent meetings but do provide information to parents on different topics at parent meetings that teachers host.” Another participant who agreed that she provided parent workshops wrote, “This is being planned for next year.” Many participants also somewhat to strongly agreed that they were providing faculty in-service but would write something similar to this participant, “At the beginning of the year I give about a 10-minute presentation on my services to the faculty.” Although orienting faculty to the counseling program is useful, it is not the same as providing the faculty with consistent, planned in-service that enhances faculty skills to assist students’ career, academic, or socio-emotional well-being. Another participant wrote a similar comment about small group counseling after she strongly agreed she provided it, “My intern provided a grief group, but small group counseling is a focus for next year.” Another participant strongly agreed she provided small group counseling, but it appeared she was no longer running groups. She noted, “I used to do a lot of small groups years back ... However, there are over 1100 students and I’m the only counselor. It’s hard to schedule these services with everything else.”

For those who understood and perhaps were providing the services, many commented that they only did so minimally. A school counselor who somewhat agreed she provided faculty in-service was an example, “I held one on PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports) and have more planned for next year.” The somewhat agreed notation demonstrated that she understood she was not fully providing this service.

### **Responsibilities assigned outside the school counselor’s role**

The questionnaire’s final section had didactic (yes/no) questions with fill-in text boxes, the same as the previous sections. Item one stated, “I serve as my school’s test coordinator,” and 279 participants responded. Of those, 62.4 percent ( $N = 174$ ) responded “Yes,” and 37.6 percent ( $N = 105$ ) responded “No.” Item two stated, “I serve as my school’s 504 coordinator,” and 279 participants responded. Of those, 43.7 percent ( $N = 122$ ) responded “Yes,” and 56.3 percent ( $N = 157$ ) responded “No.” Item three stated, “I serve as my school’s IEP coordinator,” and a total of 277 participants responded. Of those, 13 percent ( $N = 36$ ) responded “Yes,” and 87 percent ( $N = 241$ ) responded “No.” Item four stated, “I have been asked to provide substitute teaching when a teacher is absent,” and a total of 279 participants responded. Of those, 24.7 percent ( $N = 69$ ) responded “Yes,” and 75.3 percent ( $N = 210$ ) responded

“No.” Of the 278 participants, 95 (34%) provided 15 minutes per day or less of duty (e.g., providing supervision of students during recess, carpool, lunch, arrival, dismissal, and other times), 64 (23%) provided greater than 15 minutes per day of duty, and 119 (43%) reported having no duty.

Participants were asked about other services they provided outside of their school counselor roles. In this section, the many responsibilities the school counselors wrote were listed rather than coded. They reported a plethora of responsibilities, including serving as coordinators of school building level committees, 504, special needs, the Duke Talent Search, positive behavior intervention support, and response to intervention; dyslexia and Dibels screening; lice patrol; scheduling; testing; curriculum verification and response data; student discipline; developmental reading assessments; clerical/office duty; yearbook advisor; and substitute teaching. The tone of written responses from participants about their responsibilities outside of school counseling could be described as a continuum spanning from exasperated to resigned. One participant summarized,

I'm the catch-all. There are responsibilities a secretary could perform that I am tasked with. They do not require a master's degree. I don't get to do things I was trained to do. It's sad, because it costs the kids a school counselor.

This quote captured the sentiment that counselors were the individuals assigned to responsibilities that no one else wanted or had time to do. As a result, counselors felt their role was diminished, and their work was devalued despite their degrees and training.

Further, participants had the opportunity to explain the type of duty they were assigned. The most positive comment came from a counselor who reported this about her district, “Our parish does not allow counselors to have duty because we need to be available for students and parents before and after school.” Others reported variations from two days per week of minimal duty to 15–30 minutes per day of duty or more. Some counselors appeared resentful about the time they were assigned to duty when it was extensive, such as this participant, “The counselors at my school do 2.5 hours per day of duty because we give teachers breaks. We basically babysit for that time.” Another participant shared, “I have duty for 30 minutes every morning and 40 minutes at noon for lunch/recess. Then I watch the front desk [for] an additional 30 minutes while the secretary takes lunch break.” This participant was the sole counselor for nearly 500 students. Undoubtedly, there were other ways that her time might have been spent.

Finally, there was an open text box where participants were asked to note how many members of their school counseling team (or what percent of their team) supported being a full ASCA model program. Although many participants expressed a desire for a model program, others seemed defeated, as though it was impossible to implement such a program in their school. One participant wrote, “A comprehensive school counseling model is just a dream.” Another echoed this sentiment when she indicated that the counselors at her school supported the model but it could not work, “100%, totally support it, but honestly it's more of a pipe dream.” Resignation was also a problem. Numerous counselors reported that they wanted the model but

had school counseling colleagues who did not. One participant stated, “There are four counselors in my office, two are not interested in completing the work required to follow a comprehensive program.” One participant admitted that she did not want to pursue a comprehensive model. When asked how many members of her counseling team wanted a comprehensive program, she wrote, “3, not me.—ASCA [National Model] didn’t exist when I got my master’s.” For her, the lack of counselor preparation was a valid reason not to move forward with a comprehensive program.

Notably, some counselors reported 100 percent support within their counseling department. Even when acknowledging challenges, some participants stated that they would support a comprehensive program. One participant wrote, “100% of my school counseling department supports a school counseling model despite the inability to execute the model 100% of the time.” For those counselors, moving toward a comprehensive program may not necessarily mean implementing it with fidelity; however, introducing more of the model each year might be possible.

## Discussion

This study provided baseline data on one state’s implementation of the ASCA (2019) National Model. Despite federal and state support for the school counselor’s role, results suggested that many of Louisiana school counselors’ day-to-day activities were overshadowed by mandates for accountability and outcome measures. Often, when someone needed to be assigned to testing, 504 coordination, scheduling, or other similar tasks, it frequently fell to the school counselor. Other researchers have had similar findings (Fye, Miller, & Rainey, 2018; Hilts, Kratsa, Joseph, Kolbert, Crothers, & Nice, 2019; Randick et al., 2019). Asking school counselors to do activities outside of the roles they were trained for has been shown to lead to stress, emotional exhaustion, burnout, role conflict, and career dissatisfaction (Holman, Nelson, & Watts, 2019; Kim & Lambie, 2018; McCarthy, Kerne, Calfa, Lambert, & Guzman, 2010; Semmer, Jacobshagen, Meier, Elfering, Beehr, Kälin, & Tschan, 2015).

Alongside these responsibilities, nearly a fourth of this sample was asked to do a disproportionate amount (defined as exceeding 15 minutes per day) of daily duty at their school. Some of these counselors were spending up to two and a half hours per day doing duty and were unable to complete school counseling tasks as a result. Although it is acceptable for school counselors to contribute to duty as a member of the school community, the amount of duty should be in line with what other members of the school community are asked to contribute. When school counselors’ duty expectations were out of line with what was expected of others’ in the same building (e.g., one to two hour per day), they could not provide comprehensive services to students and reported experiencing reduced feelings of personal accomplishment. This echoes other researchers’ findings that show a correlation between school counselors assigned non-counseling duties and higher instances of burnout, which negatively impact services to students (Holman, Nelson, & Watts, 2019).

The majority of participants in this study did know the ASCA (2019) model, either owing to their counselor education programs (nearly three out of four participants) or through professional development (PD). A majority had received some training or PD on the ASCA (2019) model through their districts. Encouragingly, 80



percent of this sample reported being evaluated as school counselors, likely due to a policy change requiring administrators to implement such a performance evaluation (Louisiana, 2019a, 2019b). The state's evaluation tool focused on appropriate school counseling tasks (e.g., individual student planning, counseling, referrals) as indicated in the Louisiana School Counseling Model (LDOE, 2010) and the ASCA (2019) National Model.

A concerning finding is that when school counselors did report implementing elements of the ASCA (2019) National Model, they did not always appear to be implementing them with fidelity or, in some instances, to understand fully what the element was (e.g., peer programs). Because of this lack of understanding, at times, school counselors in this study thought they were providing a specific service or program but, based on their own comments, did not appear to actually be doing so. This finding underscored the need to provide ongoing PD on these models. It is possible that school counseling graduate students gain a basic understanding of the model during their program but need continuing PD to continue to apply their skills effectively (Alger & Luke, 2015; Burkard, Gillen, Martinez, & Skytte, 2012).

Another major finding was that about half of the participants did not believe their administrators knew the ASCA (2019) model. This finding has been supported in the literature (Lane, Bohner, Hinck, & Kircher, 2020; Lowery, Quick, Boyland, Geesa, & Mayes, 2018), and it may also explain why some counselors were assigned so much duty. Perhaps their principals did not understand the school counselor's role and how best to utilize their time. Moreover, in Louisiana, principals primarily serve as the supervisors and performance evaluators of school counselors. These evaluations are largely subjective if principals do not understand the role of school counselors. Most principals understand the roles of other faculty and staff in their buildings (e.g., teachers, media specialists). Louisiana should make a concerted effort to train principals on the appropriate role of school counselors so that they are investing wisely in their schools by using their resources as effectively as possible.

## Limitations

The results of this study are informative; however, there are limitations. First, this study reports results from one state. It is unknown how representative the sample is as there is no statewide data on the total number of school counselors, the type of work settings they represent, or how many schools employ school counselors in Louisiana. Without a baseline measure for the population of school counselors in the state, it is difficult to fully generalize this study's results, although the results still hold import for a larger discussion of practices. Research is needed to replicate this study with a larger sample of Louisiana school counselors. Research focusing on the schools' characteristics, the school counselors that have implemented comprehensive school counseling in Louisiana, and the degree of student success at those schools is needed.

## Implications

The findings in this study carry implications for school counselor policy and practice. When school counselors implement comprehensive programs, students benefit

(Carey, Harrington, Marin, & Hoffman, 2012). Researchers have found that comprehensive, data-driven school counseling programs impact English and math achievement at the elementary level (Wilkerson et al., 2013), graduation rates (Salina, Girtz, Eppinga, Martinez, Blumer Kilian, Lozano, Martinez, Crowe, De La Barrera, Mendez, & Shines, 2013), SAT, ACT WorkKeys, and college enrollment rates (Jones, Ricks, Warren, & Mauk, 2019). Recognizing these benefits, federal and state legislation has been passed, certification requirements have been strengthened, and time and resources at the state level have been dedicated to supporting comprehensive school counseling programs in schools. However, these investments have not come to full fruition throughout schools.

Administrators assign roles and responsibilities and evaluate school counselors; thus, they need to understand the training and appropriate roles of school counselors to meet students' needs and support student achievement. Therefore, school counseling models should be included in educational leadership preservice programs. A collaborative curriculum for school counselor and educational leader programs was designed and implemented at the university level that may be used as a model (Boyland, Geesa, Lowery, Quick, Mayes, Kim, Elam, & McDonald, 2019). Although a course or unit on school counseling is ideal, a brief presentation on the ASCA model has been shown to increase understanding of the school counselor role for preservice school administrators (Bringman, Mueller, & Lee, 2010).

Beyond teaching preservice administrators about school counseling programs, practicing administrators need professional development. State departments of education, professional organizations for administrators, and local school districts may offer this training. School counseling professionals can advocate for and provide these development opportunities.

The results of this study demonstrated that administrators were not alone in misperceiving the benefits of school counseling programs. Although school counseling models have been around for almost twenty years (ASCA, 2005, 2012, 2019), many school counselors in this study indicated they attended graduate school before such models were published or they did not attend a school counseling program. Other participants indicated they had not received professional development unless they sought it at their own initiative and expense. Professional development is needed to maintain industry standards. The LDOE and local school districts should provide ongoing, systematic PD for school counselors on school counseling programs.

School counselors with training in comprehensive school counseling programs need to advocate. These practitioners can use their leadership and communication skills to persuade educational leaders of the importance of implementing programs with fidelity while eliminating the non-counseling duties that prevent them from providing services to meet students' needs. Stacey Havlik, Marie Ciarletta, and Emily Crawford (2018) found that when school counselors explained how non-counseling tasks limited their effectiveness and expressed their value and responsibilities, they affected how others perceived the benefits of providing a school counseling program.

The implications for school counseling education programs include the need to teach the ASCA (2019) National Model and state models of school counseling programs to preservice school counselors. Additionally, counselor educators should

teach school counselors to advocate for themselves and the profession, partner with educational leadership programs to cross-train school counselors and administrators, and provide professional development at conferences and educational leaders' workshops. School counselor educators can work with state legislators and policymakers to advocate for school counseling during legislative sessions and board meetings.

## Conclusion

This research comprised an exploratory sequential, mixed-methods study of Louisiana's implementation of comprehensive school counseling models. Despite legislation, policies, and national and state models, school counseling has struggled to develop a professional identity. In this study, school counselors reported being responsible for testing, 504, and myriad other duties outside of the school counseling role. Additionally, 25 percent reported having a disproportionate amount of duty (defined as exceeding 15 minutes per day, but some participants reported up to hours per day) that prohibited service delivery to students. Yet, 80 percent of school counselors in Louisiana are now evaluated as school counselors, not teachers. This is a step forward and offers hope that principals and other leaders will gain an understanding of the counselor's role. Great strides have been made at the national and state level, demonstrating a greater understanding of and supporting the school counselor's role. This study provided a baseline understanding of current progress on the implementation of a comprehensive school counseling model in Louisiana and some of the challenges. Progress should continue so that school counselors can best serve students through school counseling programs.

## Website

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