

Secondary School Counselors' Perceptions of Service-Learning: Gaps between State Policy, Counselors' Knowledge, and Implementation

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was a state-level investigation of school counselors' knowledge of their role in the implementation of service-learning policy using survey research methods. The respondents reported having little knowledge of the policy, not having implemented it statewide, and not having been trained in service-learning pedagogy. Based on these results, this article provides implications for consideration when states develop educational policies that impact school counselors' work.

Keywords: Service-learning; Policy; School counseling; Developing agency; Leadership

Introduction

Service-learning in K–12 classrooms holds great promise for developing agency and capacity for young children, adolescents, and young adults, as well as improving instructional competence for educators (Baldwin, Buchanan, & Rudisill, 2007). Service-learning provides opportunities for students to expand their cultural horizons and frames of reference, while simultaneously providing a reciprocal benefit to service recipients; within service-learning, structured opportunities are provided that synthesize course objectives while engaging in service activities. Typically, course objectives are matched to common needs to the mutual benefit of students, faculty, K–12

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institutions, and community agencies (Tai-Seale, 2001). For marginalized youth, their families, and their communities, service-learning may be implemented to effectively address self-identified needs (Cipolle, 2010; Picower, 2012). Within higher education, service-learning promotes active learning, increases civic engagement, and encourages social action (Berger Kaye 2010; Cipolle, 2010; Deeley, 2010).

Service-learning is a high-impact practice and a type of experiential education that allows students to learn by doing within their community. Service-learning engages students by fostering civic responsibility, personal growth, and academic learning (Freeman & Swick, 2003), while investing in and supporting community assets and strengths. Service-learning experiences allow university students to access significant, enhanced educational opportunities.

Within teacher education, service-learning enjoys a rich tradition as a pedagogical pathway for successful teacher preparation (Boyle-Baise, 2002; Boyle-Baise & Kilbane, 2000; Sulentic Dowell & Bach, 2012; Sulentic Dowell & Meidl, 2016). Specifically, service-learning implemented into teacher education expands frames of reference, develops pre-service teachers' dispositions, and enhances civic learning and social justice (Brannon, 2013; Furco, 2000; Root, Callahan, & Sepanski, 2002; Sulentic Dowell, Barrera, Meidl, & Saal, 2015). In teacher education programming, service-learning intersects with many disciplines, such as literacy (Sulentic Dowell, 2008, 2009; Sulentic Dowell & Bach, 2012), social studies, science (Blanchard & Sulentic Dowell, 2010), and health (Carson & Raguse, 2014). However, based on the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Education Programs (CACREP, 2016), counselor education programs (e.g., school counseling) are not required to integrate service-learning to train future school counselors, even in states where policy dictates its use. Because service-learning is not a CACREP (2016) requirement based on the standards, it is possible that it is not a focus for counselor educators.

As the field of teacher education has shifted and created standards to embrace diversity and the role of teacher-family relationships, teacher education programs have embraced service-learning as a vehicle to authentically prepare preservice teachers for the realities of their work. While counselor education is not teacher education, both roles are relationship focused. Also, counselors are in direct contact with and are at the intersection of teacher-family relationships.

The purpose of this study was to investigate practicing Louisiana school counselors' knowledge and practices regarding state law and the corresponding policy for a service-learning diploma endorsement. Further, it examined school counselors' understanding of their role in implementing and tracking the endorsement. Finally, it analyzed the data and report implications for policy development.

Context of the current study

Culled from a larger study, three engaged scholars/teacher educators from three distinct states and geographical areas of the United States—Louisiana, Maryland, and Wisconsin—investigated their respective states' policy positions on service-learning in K–12 classrooms and examined how these policies impacted both teacher preparation and practice (Saal, Sulentic Dowell, & Meidl, 2016, 2017). Particularly in the

original comparative case study, each case identified either a bifurcation or dichotomy of policy and teacher preparation/practice. The results suggested strong implications for teacher preparation and practice. In the Louisiana case, Louisiana school counselors' knowledge and practices regarding service-learning were concerning; particularly in regard to Act 295 of 2012 and service-learning diploma endorsements. These concerns led to the current study and a foray into the intersectionality of counselor education and service-learning.

Literature review

The literature was examined in progression from teacher preparation to counselor education regarding service-learning, with a particular focus on how service-learning and counselor education intersect to further the goals of both fields of study. Additionally, counselor training standards were reviewed.

The conceptualization of school counselor responsibility

Based on the American School Counselor Association's (ASCA, 2012) National Model, school counselors are tasked with providing comprehensive support for career, academic, personal, and social growth for all K–12 students. In support of this model, ASCA (2014) published *Mindsets and Behaviors for Student Success*, a guide that operationalized and denoted standards for the development of classroom curriculum, individual academic advisement, and career and college counseling. Indeed, preparation for career and college is an essential, and increasingly predominant, component of school counselors' roles in terms of policy, professional identity, and training, as explicated in federal law such as the "Every Student Succeeds Act" (ESSA, 2016), which is the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA, 1965). However, due to the accountability pressures of high-stakes testing and administrative overloads in K–12 schools in Louisiana, school counselors are typically required to do tasks outside of the scope of school counseling.

The impact of these increased workloads for school counselors has been evidenced in their work with students. Chenoa Woods and Thurston Domina (2014) found that large caseloads of students, beyond ASCA's recommended ratio of 1:250, had very real consequences for students' college preparation. In schools where counselors have high caseloads, or too many responsibilities beyond school counseling, the researchers reported that, after controlling for student and school characteristics, "students ... are less likely to speak with their counselors, less likely to formulate and act on college plans, and less likely to attend four-year college" (Woods & Domina, 2014, p. 23). In Louisiana, the setting for the current study, the school counselor to student ratio is 1:442 (U.S. Department of Education, 2013–2014). This means, on average, each school counselor is responsible for the academic, career, and personal/social development of 442 students each year, while also managing duties outside the realm of counseling.

Role ambiguity and role conflict have arisen when counselors, particularly novices, are asked to perform duties outside the scope of their training and knowledge (Bickmore & Curry, 2013; Curry & Bickmore, 2012). Further, ASCA (2012) decisively listed duties that were considered inappropriate to the school counselor's

role including: addressing discipline; covering classes when teachers are absent; registration and scheduling duties; and administering standardized tests, which includes clerical record keeping and data entry. Daniel Cinotti (2014) noted that much of the role conflict that is experienced by school counselors is due to their unique position as both a counselor and an educator. Although wanting to meet students' counseling needs, counselors often recognize that students have educational needs that merit equal or greater attention. This competing tension and intersectionality between the school counselor's role as both a counselor and educator likely increases the role stress experienced and may lead to school counselors acquiescing to tasks that are not within the scope of their job responsibilities (Cinotti, 2014). This same tension and intersectionality may lend itself to the applicability of service-learning as a pedagogical stance.

Dee Hann-Morrison (2011) highlighted the dual position of school counselors as educators and counselors. She noted school counselors often address barriers to student learning even when the scope of these issues is outside of the expectations of counselors. Some examples might include helping students with social skills and hygiene; coping with parental drug/alcohol addiction; or finding coats, food, and other resources for the child and family. In rural settings, the school counselor may be the only local practitioner with advanced mental health training and may thereby be overtaxed to provide mental health services in the school (Hann-Morrison, 2011).

In a study conducted by Kasim Karatas and Ismet Kaya (2015), principals acknowledged that it was not appropriate to ask school counselors to serve in non-counselor duties, such as substitute teaching, lunchroom duty, or cafeteria monitoring. The researchers also noted that the administrators in their study preferred to have more counselors and would have provided sufficient private offices for school counselors had funding been available. Similar to Hann-Morrison (2011), Karatas and Kaya (2015) advocated for school counselors' primary roles to be in student-service capacities.

Megan Kimber and Marilyn Campbell (2014) (in tandem with Cinotti, 2014; Hann-Morrison, 2011; Karatas & Kaya, 2015) postulated that the differences in the responsibilities between principals and other administrators compared to school counselors could add to some of the role stress experienced by school counselors. In particular, these researchers studied ethical dilemmas faced by principals and school counselors and reported that, although both parties approached dilemmas morally, they had a different viewpoint or perspective on whom they served (Kimber & Campbell, 2014). Principals and other administrators focused on the school as a whole, whereas school counselors tended to focus on individuals. This difference in perspective might be summed up as doing what is best for the greater good (principal view) versus doing what is best for the good of the individual (counselor view).

In yet another study, principals-in-training who received specific professional development in the ASCA (2005) National Model were able to differentiate between appropriate and inappropriate performance-related roles and functions as recommended by ASCA (Chata & Loesch, 2007), a significant finding. Most importantly, knowledge of the ASCA (2005, 2012) model and having an understanding of school counselors' roles has a major impact on principals' views of how school counselors'

time should be allocated (Leuwerke, Walker, & Shi, 2009). Yet, due to the lack of exposure during their training, many principals never learn about the appropriate roles of school counselors. Principals also have many demands on their time, which necessitates the distribution of their administrative workload. Because of their accessibility and varied training, school counselors are often targeted as the accountability source in district-level policies and state and federal acts. An understanding of how policy impacts school counselors is also helpful in understanding their roles and responsibilities.

Policy complications

The ambiguity of the daily role of school counselors' daily is further complicated by the fact that policies related to school counselors do not always match the realities of the contemporary issues facing schools in the 21st century. For example, in a policy review Patrice Keats and Daniel Laitsch (2018) noted that mental health issues were a predominant problem for students in British Columbia; yet, hiring policies allowed for untrained professionals in school counseling positions. This policy meant that individuals occupying school counseling positions may have been largely unprepared to identify, assess, and accurately refer students in need of mental health services. Keats and Laitsch (2018) compared data on regulations with 24 other professions (e.g., occupational therapy, psychology, physical therapy) under the Health Professions Act. It is noteworthy that policies for teachers and other helpers, from criteria for licensing to regulation, were far more stringent than for school counselors, regardless of the mental health needs presented by students, which school counselors needed proper training to address. Similarly, Ian Martin and John Carey (2014) used multiple systematic reviews of journal articles to research the state-level adoption of comprehensive school counseling models and policy implications. The researchers found that although students in states and countries with these policies had positive outcomes (e.g., behavioral/engagements), the policies were not as effective as they could have been if an implementation policy were included (as suggested by Martin, Carey, & DeCoster's 2009 research).

A study of Utah's statewide school counseling data project initiative (Bitner, Kay-Stevenson, Burnham, Whiteley, Whitaker, & Sachse, 2009) examined the implementation of a data policy for school counselors. The purpose of the study was to review the effectiveness of the policy. Practices implemented in the policy included having counseling leaders involved in the planning of the policy; providing data training for the school counselors, and allowing time for them to plan, analyze, and share data results with their school and school board members; requiring counselors to submit a data activity report and a results report annually in order to receive incentive funding; and posting their data results on a statewide home page. The number of participants varied by year. For example, in 2003, 196 elementary school counselors participated in the data training and review process. In 2004, 547 secondary school counselors participated. The authors suggested that school counselors were most successful when they: a) received consistent feedback, b) started data projects at the beginning rather than the end of the year, and c) had the support of district leaders regardless of the results (i.e., positive or negative) (Bitner et al., 2009).

In sum, there is little research overall on educational policy and school counseling practice. School counseling legislation, policy, and practice appear to be cohesive across the states, inasmuch as there is a deliberate effort to ensure that a streamlined process exists, such as the data initiative in Utah (Bitner et al., 2009). However, in other cases (e.g., Keats & Laitsch, 2018), legislation, policy, and reality do not necessarily match the needs of students and communities. Other researchers have suggested that more systematic research of policies, both within and across states, may be helpful in determining policy efficacy related to school counseling practices (e.g., McLendon, Heller, & Lee, 2009). The current study examines one state where legislation, which was enacted as education policy, did not translate effectively into school counseling practice for myriad reasons.

Discernment of service-learning

Differentiating between community service, community engagement, and service-learning experience is important. Community service is one-dimensional. The service providers may experience a sense of accomplishment or satisfaction; however, what is gained through service does not truly encompass deep learning. Community engagement is also one-sided. Although beneficial, the benefits from engagement or engaged service do not likely evolve from a community need, as perceived by the community members (Sulentic Dowell & Meidl, 2016).

Service-learning differs from both community service and community engagement in that service-learning experiences are mutually beneficial (Furco, 2000). These kinds of experiences and components are not formulaic; however, commonalities exist. First, service-learning experiences and components are based on community needs. The needs might exist within a classroom, school, school system, community agency, or within the larger community (Meidl, Saal, & Sulentic Dowell, 2018). Second, the community needs match critical experiences among service providers that, in turn, become more knowledgeable about education as a means to enact culturally relevant practice (Boyle-Baise & Zevin, 2009). Finally, opportunities for experience and a chance to reflect on what is learned are requisite (Eyler, Giles, & Schmiede, 1996). The use of service-learning promotes the authentic application of knowledge—content, pedagogical, racial, cultural, and political knowledge—from the classrooms to communities, including learning to work within any specific context (Boyle-Baise, 2002).

As a distinct field of inquiry, service-learning is viewed as both a powerful pedagogical tool and a potent learning strategy (Meidl, Saal, & Sulentic Dowell, 2018). A hallmark of service-learning is the mutuality of addressing critical community needs and building learners' capacities while simultaneously reinforcing course content. Carefully crafted experiences, structured to the mutual benefit of both partners but based on community need, is the impetus for service-learning course components. Within the classroom space, service-learning enriches student learning by raising questions about real-world concerns and promoting critical thinking about civic responsibility and community engagement. Service-learning facilitates a deep understanding of the needs of both service providers and service recipients (Furco, 2000). In addition, service recipients' needs are matched to critical developmental needs among service providers.

Historically and currently, issues of race, culture, economics, privilege, and political power are carefully sequenced into service-learning course components, especially but not restricted to teacher education, with a goal of expanding pre-existing cultural frames of reference (Boyle-Baise, 2002; Boyle-Baise & Kilbane, 2000; Sulentic Dowell, 2009; Sulentic Dowell & Bach, 2012; Sulentic Dowell & Meidl, 2018). Service-learning course components are purposeful and meaningful for the community partner. In limited instances, service-learning elements have also been applied as means to increase multicultural counseling competency (Baggerly, 2006; Burnett, Hamel, & Long, 2004). Despite its applications to varied learning contexts, service-learning has hallmark characteristics, including the reflection of developing dispositions and practice (Hatcher & Bringle, 1997).

In the field of school counseling scholarship, service-learning has been applied, but sparingly, (Stott & Jackson, 2005; Wilczenski & Schumacher, 2008). Considering the wide application of service-learning to teacher education and the paucity of service-learning studies established within school counseling preparation, led us to this timely study.

The current study is based on a larger, cross-case analysis conducted Leah Saal, Tyneisha Meidl, and Margaret Mary Sulentic Dowell (2015, 2016) comparing service-learning policies across three states. The original study included a review of documents such as state laws, policies, data from websites maintained by schools of education and state departments of education, and university policies. During that investigation, Louisiana’s Community Service-Learning Endorsement was discovered as a unique case for investigation within the context of school counseling practice. The current study is based on an examination of school counselors’ understandings of the Louisiana ACT 295 of 2012 in regards to service-learning, and school counselors’ role in the implementation of the endorsement.

The current study

In Louisiana, although there is no explicit requirement of service-learning for graduation, the Community Service Diploma Endorsement was authorized by Act 295 of 2012. Representative Regina Ashford Barrow originally introduced this law in a regular session of the Louisiana Legislature. However, the policy did not mandate service-learning as a specific pedagogical model to attain this endorsement and it only applied to grades 9 through 12. Table 1 delineates the number of participation hours required for the Louisiana Community Service Diploma Endorsement.

Table 1: Number of hours required by grade for Louisiana Community Service Diploma Endorsement

Grade	Number of hours required
9	10
10	20
11	25
12	25

Based on the framework outlined on the Louisiana Department of Education’s (LA DoE) (www.louisianabelieves.com) school counselors were charged with the su-

pervision and management of this endorsement. Unfortunately, in Louisiana, most school counselors are tasked with the responsibility of accountability and test administration in public schools. On secondary campuses, where counselors serve anywhere from 400 to 750 students, the escalation of high-stakes testing may overshadow other components of school counselors' work. Although in policy the LA DoE appeared to account for community service as an extension of the school counselor's role, an examination of the DoE's website revealed limited resources in the form of electronic links (www.louisianabelieves.com). The ability for counselors to actually oversee community service efforts was also limited and unclear. Scrutinizing those electronic resources revealed a Counselor Resource Library, which only listed the following community service resources: 1) two documentation/tracking forms, one for students and another for districts/schools; 2) guidelines for describing endorsement requirements; and 3) a list of 12 community service categories: a) animals, b) arts and culture, c) community, d) crisis support, e) disaster relief, f) education/literacy, g) environment, h) faith-based, i) health, medicine, and wellness, j) homeless, housing, and hunger, and k) veterans/military.

Research questions

Based on both the findings of the Louisiana case in the original study and further inquiry about this specific case (the current study), specific research questions were developed. These questions focused on Louisiana school counselors' knowledge and practices regarding the local state law for service-learning diploma endorsement. More precisely, the research questions aimed to examine the school counselors' role in implementing and tracking the endorsement.

1. Are Louisiana school counselors aware of Act 295 of 2012 and its provisions for students?
2. Are Louisiana school counselors aware of their roles and responsibilities related to service-learning endorsements?
3. Have Louisiana school counselors been provided professional development to recognize quality pedagogy for service-learning?

Methods

Survey methods were employed via a questionnaire designed by the researchers. Total design method was used for each level of data collection (Dillman, 2011). The questionnaire was distributed to all secondary school counselors through the Louisiana School Counselor Association membership listserv. An initial email was sent to inform potential participants about the study, and then three subsequent reminders were sent to ensure maximum participation. As part of the first author's institutional review board approval, informed consent was obtained as part of the survey. Questions focused on the Louisiana school counselors' knowledge and practices of service-learning and their role in the implementation of the state's service-learning endorsement.

Procedures

The questionnaire was delivered through Qualtrics™ (Qualtrics, Provo, UT) survey

software technology, including informed consent to participate in the questionnaire and demographic questions. The questionnaire was disseminated to secondary school counselors only through the Louisiana School Counselor Association website. A potential 643 participants were initially sent a request to participate. Participation was voluntary.

Data collected

Various data sources were used to gather information for this study including questionnaire responses, the primary data source, and artifacts Documents were considered artifacts. For instance, the authors examined state websites regarding this endorsement as well as state law archives. Specifically, the authors searched for the following: reference to knowledge of ACT 295, mentions of counselors' role in ACT 295, and evidence of implementation of ACT 295.

Sampling

According to Kathleen Collins, Anthony Onwuegbuzie, and Qun Jiao (2007), a multitude of purposive sampling schemes can be utilized for research studies. For this study, two schemes—criterion and convenience—were appropriate. The criteria was that the participating counselors must be employed the secondary school level; convenience was also appropriate, as target participants were working in Louisiana public-school systems.

Participants

A total of 643 school counselors in the Louisiana School Counselor Association were invited to participate in a questionnaire. Out of that number, nearly 20 percent did not meet participation criteria, as they were elementary school counselors or graduate students. Of the remaining 539 potential participants, 164 volunteered to respond to the electronic invitation. Of the initial 164 who did respond, 157 agreed to participate and responded to the questionnaire (approximately 29%). However, not all 157 completed each question, therefore, the number of reported responses for each question is provided for each individual question in the results section. This study utilized Qualtrics™ survey software to assure anonymity of participants and integrity of data.

Respondents self-reported their years of practice as a school counselor ($r = 1-29$ years of practice, $M = 12$ years). The questionnaire also probed whether those who responded had taught, and how many years they had worked as a teacher. Of those responding, 56 percent ($N = 89$) reported having teaching certification, and 44 percent ($N = 71$) reported having no prior teacher certification. For those that had taught, the years of teaching were also reported ($r = 0-33$ years, $M = 6$ years). Respondents' educational background was also reported, 72 percent had a master's degree, 19 percent also had Plus 30, six percent were education specialists and three percent had doctoral degrees. Respondents' self-reported racial identity, which included 15.63 percent African American ($N = 25$); 81.88 percent White and Non-Hispanic ($N = 131$); 1.25 percent Native American/Alaska Native ($N = 2$); and 0.63 percent Hispanic/Latinx ($N = 1$). Respondents were also asked to self-identify gender. Gender breakdown

among respondents included 8.0 percent male ($N = 13$) and 92 percent female ($N = 148$). Respondents indicated the type of settings in which they were currently working. These settings included a variety of school types and settings such as: urban, rural, suburban, public, private, religious, charter, and academic/magnet.

Results

Results were analyzed with chi-squares because data were binary and from one population. The following section discusses non-demographic binary questions from the questionnaire (item numbers 13–23). Questions and chi-square analyses follow:

Binary Question 1: In my graduate degree programs in counselor education, I received training in pedagogy involving community service, community engagement, or service-learning. A total of 143 participants responded (62 = yes, 81 = no). Chi-square = $df = 1$; $p = .05$; $3.84 < 72.8$.

Binary Question 2: I have received in-service training in pedagogy involving community service, community engagement, or service-learning. A total of 143 participants responded (49 = yes, 94 = no). Chi-square, $df = 1$; $p = .05$; $3.84 < 79$.

Binary Question 3: To my knowledge, since 2012, teachers at my school have received in-service training in pedagogy involving community service, community engagement, or service-learning. A total of 141 participants responded (37 = yes, 104 = no). Chi-square, $df = 1$; $p = .05$; $3.84 < 86.41$.

Binary Question 4: Since the passage of ACT 295 in 2012, I have gone to classrooms or have presented information to students about the Community Service Diploma Endorsement. A total of 143 participants responded (12 = yes, 131 = no). Chi-square, $df = 1$; $p = .05$; $3.84 < 120$.

Binary Question 5: Since the passage of ACT 295 in 2012, I have presented information to faculty about the Community Service Diploma Endorsement. A total of 143 participants responded (7 = yes, 136 = no). Chi-square, $df = 1$; $p = .05$; $3.84 < 129.34$.

Binary Question 6: Since the passage of ACT 295 in 2012, I was informed that I might have a role in providing students with information about the Community Service Diploma Endorsement. A total of 143 participants responded (23 = yes, 120 = no). Chi-square; $df = 1$; $p = .05$; $3.84 < 6.5$.

Binary Question 7: Since the passage of ACT 295 in 2012, I presented information to parents about the Community Service Diploma Endorsement. A total of 143 participants responded (13 = yes, 130 = no). Chi-square; $df = 1$; $p = .05$; $3.84 < 119.18$.

Binary Question 8: Since the passage of ACT 295 in 2012, I have had students approach me and request information about the Community Service Endorsement. A total of 143 participants responded (12 = yes, 131 = no). Chi-square; $df = 1$; $p = .05$; $3.84 < 121.01$.

Binary Question 9: Since the passage of ACT 295 in 2012, I have had parents approach me and request information about the Community Service Diploma Endorsement. A total of 143 participants responded (8 = yes, 135 = no). Chi-square; $df = 1$; $p = .05$; $3.84 < 127.9$.

Binary Question 10: I am certain to whom I should report the Community Service Diploma Endorsement graduates to at the Louisiana department of education annually. A total of 142 participants responded (13 = yes, 129 = no). Chi-square; $df = 1$; $p = .05$; $3.84 < 117.5$.

Discussion

As noted by Theodore Lowi (2003), “Law is formal; policy is real” (p. 500). In other words, policy makes the formal regulations of law tangible and applicable to real life. Public policy typically denotes that activities are initiated and undertaken by a government entity in order to solve problems and/or advance the lives of its citizens. The policymaking process includes multiple stages, from agenda building to formulation and from adoption to implementation. In the *policy formulation* stage, stakeholders typically derive various solutions for an existing problem—in this case, implementation and accountability for a legislatively imposed policy regarding high school students’ opportunity to participate in service-learning as a potential endorsement. The goal of the endorsement may have been to give students an advantage in the college application process or to develop community engagement and personal dispositions (e.g., empathy). However, the involvement of stakeholders in the development of policy is critical; in particular, involving the school counselors was necessary to: 1) promote the ideals of the purpose of the endorsement; 2) explain program requirements; 3) ensure the program was implemented with true fidelity; and 4) assist in the evaluation of the program. For example, in a study of teachers, Kees Jongmans, Douwe Beijaard, and Harm Biemans (1998) found that in-service training policies were most effective in schools where teachers were involved in the policymaking process. In a qualitative study, Waheed Hammad (2017) similarly found that teachers wanted decision-making input on educational policies, particularly in areas affecting curriculum and student discipline. Both curricula and discipline are largely related to the work that teachers do, as is student academic advisement; so it can be inferred that school counselors would also want some decision-making involvement in policies that might affect their work with students.

In the *formulation and adoption* stage of the policy-formulation process, the policy is drafted and codified through statute or code. Any statute is generally very broad and leaves the procedures of implementation up to the government agencies charged—in this case, the LA DoE. In a final stage of policymaking, a statute is implemented as written. However, often, the government institution charged with carrying out, or implementing, a statute is not the same institution that adopted the statute. This transition of power is the cause of frequent complications in the implementation phase and results in tensions. For example, in this study, while the LA DoE did provide some resources for implementation, they failed to consult with those at the building level whose jobs were impacted prior to policy implementation. Further, no follow-up support was offered, such as professional development about the service-learning endorsement and how to implement it. Lastly, no evaluation of the effectiveness of this statute has been undertaken by the legislative body that enacted it. As revealed in responses to research question 10, an overwhelming number of respondents, 129 out of 142, was unclear about reporting mechanisms or how to report completion rates for any students who had completed endorsement requirement.

Three research questions grounded in an awareness of the processes of public policy were used to guide the development of this study. Research question one asked the most basic question: Are Louisiana school counselors aware of Act 295 of

2012 and its provisions for students? Based on the results collected and analyzed from this sample, respondents in the sample were not aware of the policy. Input from educators is a necessary element for educational policy to be fully enacted, understood, and implemented (Martin, et al., 2009). In this study, school counselors' lack of knowledge about the existence of a Louisiana law hampered its robust implementation. Further, the lack of a cohesive implementation plan, including training, outcome measures, and follow-up with stakeholders prohibited school counselors from informing students and families about the diploma endorsement opportunity (Bitner et al., 2009).

While this policy was likely well-intentioned, the results of this study indicated that counselors, at the point of service-delivery, and students and their families—the intended recipients of the policy—were not adequately informed of the policy. Therefore, the intention did not merit results. Because Louisiana does not, and has not had a state-level school counseling coordinator since 2012, it is not surprising that policy information is not shared in a timely and effective manner. The absence of a state coordinator in a state with high-poverty student populations speaks volumes as to the prioritization of this position.

Research question two asked: Are Louisiana school counselors aware of their roles and responsibilities related to service-learning endorsements? Naturally, if the school counselors were unaware of Act 295, it follows that they were also unaware of their roles and responsibilities related to the service-learning endorsement. Overwhelmingly, the school counselors in this sample lacked fundamental knowledge that they were responsible for these endorsements. This lack of knowledge manifested in their practices. School counselors in this sample generally had not shared information about the service-learning endorsements with students on their campuses, nor had they sought out opportunities for students to participate in service-learning activities in order to receive the service-learning endorsement. They also had not shared information with administrators or parents. Because the school counselors were unaware, they may appear remiss to administrators or other stakeholders who may be in a position to hold them accountable. In other words, it may appear they were simply not doing their job, when in reality they were uninformed as to the expectations based on this law. In schools with the most vulnerable populations of students (i.e., underrepresented minorities, low socioeconomic status, first-generation college students), those seeking information about college access, career development, and academic advisement need opportunities to access as much accurate information as possible. When the individuals who broker resources (e.g., school counselors) do not have accurate information to provide counseling and advisement, students are inevitably left disadvantaged.

The final research question asked: Have Louisiana school counselors been provided professional development to recognize quality pedagogy for service-learning? The predominant response was that they had not been given systematic professional training and development on service-learning. Therefore, a law or policy asking school counselors to be the gatekeepers of this endorsement seems ill-guided. Moreover, although some of the school counselors had participated in service-learning in their degree programs, this is not the same as having had intentional training

in the delivery or evaluation aspect of such programs. As this is not an expectation of CACREP accreditation (2016), it is unlikely that school counselors will receive training in this type of pedagogy in the near future.

With all that school counselors are tasked with doing in Louisiana, it seems that their primary mission of focusing on students' career and college readiness, social/emotional development, and academic planning (ASCA, 2012) is often compromised due to other duties assigned in the school environment. These other assignments (e.g., test preparation, test delivery), although important, are not the most strategic use of school counselors' time. When a task is given to school counselors that may be aligned with their role, such as service-learning endorsements, if it is not implemented with knowledge, commitment, and fidelity, it is not likely to succeed—as has been demonstrated in this study.

School counselors' earnestness and willingness to do their jobs well is not at question here; rather, this article considers how service-learning policy that aligned to the counselors' role might have been more effectively crafted if school counselors had been involved and a coordinator or liaison been appointed at some point in the process. By affording greater transitional and professional support to individuals implementing legislation and policy, we might presume that such policies will be more effectively instituted and have greater impact in the future.

Implications

Activities such as service-learning hold great promise for educational practice if research, practice, and policy are observed. Service learning, as both powerful pedagogy and a compelling learning approach, has the potential to add to educators' resources, especially given its history of addressing critical community needs while simultaneously building learners' capacity. However, when policy is designed, produced, and enacted without input from the very individuals charged with its implementation, gaps in access are bound to exist. As with this study, individuals charged with the responsibility of enacting this learning opportunity—school counselors—were unaware of the policy's existence. Therefore, further research in school counseling and service-learning policies and the successful implementation of both is needed. Likewise, legislators and policy developers should utilize this research to inform the development of laws and policies.

Further, in regard to practice, an understanding of service-learning pedagogy is also warranted before such practices are implemented. Educators need thorough comprehension, including training, resources, and outcome expectations, to competently integrate educational activities that are meaningful and impactful. As with this study, short-sighted implementation may lead to poor results.

The role of counselor educators is a further issue of concern. Although not the focus of this study, counselor educators are tasked with training school counselors to meet the unique needs of students in their particular geographical area, as well as addressing the CACREP (2016) standards. Creating avenues where counselor educators are made aware of legislative mandates and policy changes that impact their role is critical. In states where there is no liaison for school counselors at the state department of education, this lapse of communication may cause significant prob-

lems. Rather than wait on the department of education to create such a liaison position, counselor educators in each state should ensure they have their own ambassadors and processes established to ensure they are receiving the most accurate and up-to-date information from state boards of education.

This article is a cautionary tale. Students in any community, state, or country are that locality's most precious resource. Efforts on students' behalf cannot be squandered due to a lack of coordination by the state department of education, the genesis of policy enactment. School counselors are often the targets of legislation to enact positive change for students; it is imperative that educators have input on policy development for services they will be responsible for providing for students.

Website

Qualtrics, <https://www.qualtrics.com>

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