

WHAT ROLE DO MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL COUNSELORS PERCEIVE THEY  
SHOULD ADOPT IN DROPOUT PREVENTION?

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## ABSTRACT

CHRISTINE V.CARR: What Middle and High School Counselors Perceive Their Roles to be in Dropout Prevention? (Under the direction of Dr. John Galassi)

This study investigated the role school counselors perceived they should adopt in dropout prevention and ways to assess their effectiveness. The ASCA National Model's theme and element definitions (advocacy, collaboration/teaming, leadership, systemic change, delivery system, and accountability) were adapted to support a dropout prevention focus. Three domains recommended by the What Works Clearinghouse -- staying-in-school, progressing-in-school, and completing-school -- served as the lens for exploring the accountability element.

Counselors perceived delivery system to be the primary role they should adopt followed by advocacy, collaboration, systemic change, and leadership. They did not indicate a preference for one assessment domain except when comparing the completing-school and progressing-in-school domains. The progressing-in-school domain was the preferred method of assessing effectiveness in providing dropout prevention services.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### *Statement of the Problem*

Historically, education has been viewed as a luxury to be provided to those with privilege, which often excluded minority groups and women. The first Compulsory Education Law was introduced in the mid-nineteenth century (Russo, 2006). Massachusetts was the first state to enact a compulsory attendance law. One of the justifications for enacting compulsory attendance laws involved the principle “*parens patriae*” meaning literally “father of the country,” under which state legislatures have the authority to enact reasonable laws for the welfare of their residents/citizens (Russo, 2006).

Today legislatures across the country have enacted compulsory education laws that require students to remain in school until a specified age. In North Carolina that age is 16. There is only one piece of federal legislation that directly focuses on the importance of addressing low graduation rates in schools across the country. This piece of legislation is No Child Left Behind (NCLB), Public Law 107-110, which was signed into law by President George Bush in January 2002. NCLB advocates for school reform to include a focus on (a) accountability for results; (b) more choices for parents (c) greater local control and flexibility; and (d) an emphasis on doing what works based on scientific research (Milliken, 2007). One of the areas covered in the reform act includes addressing the issue of accountability for students graduating from high school. NCLB requires that states report their on-time graduation rate. On-time graduation is “the measure of the proportion of students who graduate within four years of entering high school” (Stallings, 2007, p.85). Schools are required to report the number of students graduating on-time by race, gender, and disability/non-disability status.



Stallings (2007) described recent changes in the reporting of on-time graduation for North Carolina. North Carolina is in the process of using cohort graduation rates as a more exact method of determining on-time graduation rates. A cohort graduation rate reflects how many students that enter high school as freshmen graduate in four years. In the past, North Carolina, along with many states, have had difficulty in accurately reporting the number of students dropping out compared to the number of students graduating in four years. Three other forms of collecting dropout data and graduation data have been used: event rates, status rates, and completion rates. The event rate is the number of students dropping out of school in a specific time period and for a specific group of students. The standard period of time used to measure the event rate is one year. The status rate is the number of students that drop out of school for a given span of years (for example, grade 8 through grade 12). Finally, the completion rate is the measure of students in a certain age range and asks how many of those students (percentage) completed high school.

In 2006, the N.C. General Assembly enacted S.B. 571 (school counselors and dropout prevention/study), which mandates the State Board of Education report on the role of school counselors in providing dropout prevention and intervention services to secondary students (Stallings, 2007). This study builds on the school counselor and dropout prevention study (S.B. 571). This study investigates the role North Carolina middle and high school counselors perceive they should adopt in dropout prevention.

Three values that are focused on in the dropout prevention discourse include: efficiency, equity, and resiliency. Efficiency arguments focus on the premise that students that drop out of school become a financial burden on society therefore states should create dropout prevention legislation. Equity arguments focus on what leads students to drop out of school and on

addressing those inequities as states seek to reduce the dropout rate. Finally, the resiliency argument urges students and parents to find successful individuals that have overcome adversity to act as positive role models. These role models are seen as a way to inspire students to complete school and further their education after high school. As states look for more ways to assist students in graduating from school, it will be more important to find ways to address these values, and school counselors will be one important group in the dropout prevention discourse.

With society changing and students choosing more and more to exercise their rights to drop out, the business community and economists have challenged legislatures to re-examine compulsory education laws and to enact dropout prevention legislation. The North Carolina General Assembly is currently in the process of studying the impact of students dropping out of school and ways to increase the number of students graduating in four years from high school. The Senate proposed a bill (S.B.571) in 2006, which required the State Board of Education to determine the role of school counselors in dropout prevention (Stallings, 2007).

### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study was to investigate the role North Carolina middle and high school counselors believe that they should adopt in dropout prevention. After presenting a review of the literature about dropouts, a description will be provided regarding the risk factors/indicators for students that drop out of school as well as the most effective strategies for preventing students from dropping out of school. Then, the literature that discusses the role school counselors should adopt in dropout prevention will be discussed. The literature about the school counselor's role in dropout prevention is organized into seven main categories: (1) individuals guiding early intervention of at-risk students, as well as group counselor facilitators, (2) student advocates, (3) collaborators and coordinators, (4) mental health services providers,

(5) school safety advisors, (6) school leaders and (7) systemic change agents. This study blended the literature on dropout prevention role recommendations with the results obtained from this research into the ASCA National Model (American School Counselor Association, 2003) recommendations to help guide the role of school counselors in dropout prevention.

### *Conceptual Framework*

This study used the ASCA National Model (American School Counselor Association, 2003) to explore the role school counselors should adopt in dropout prevention. The ASCA National Model consists of four main themes that are part of the framework for this study: advocacy, collaboration/teaming, leadership and systemic change. There are four main elements of the National Model: foundation, delivery system, management system and accountability. The two primary elements related to dropout prevention are the delivery system and accountability. The delivery system element is featured as one of the five roles throughout the study.

Three domains recommended by the 2008 What Works Clearinghouse (<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/September2008>) serve as the lens for exploring the accountability element within the ASCA National Model. The domains are: staying-in-school, progressing-in-school and completing-school. The staying-in-school domain measures: whether the student remained enrolled in school or dropped out of school without earning a high school diploma or GED certificate, as well as the number of school days enrolled. The progressing-in-school domain includes the credits earned, grade promotion, whether the student is making normal progress toward graduation, and highest grade completed. The final accountability domain completing-school measures whether the student earned a high school diploma or received a GED certificate.

### *Research Questions*

The research questions were: (1) What should be the primary role of school counselors in dropout prevention; (2) Does that role differ as a function of the school level, middle or high school, at which the counselor is working; (3) What is perceived to be the most appropriate ways for assessing the school counselor's effectiveness in dropout prevention; and (4) Does it vary as a function of school level?

### *Definitions*

ASCA: American School Counselor's Association

ASCA National Model: "Provides the mechanism with which school counselors and school counseling teams will design, coordinate, implement, manage and evaluate their programs for students' success" (ASCA, 2003, p.9).

Drop out: Students in public schools that left school before receiving the necessary credits to receive a high school diploma.

School Counselors: Individuals that have completed a master level program in school counseling.

Traditional School: Schools that operate 10 months of the year with students enrolled from August to June

Leadership: Leadership involves school counselors leading in identifying students at-risk for dropping out of school using data about known risk factors or serving as the individual guiding in the identification of students at-risk for dropping out of school using data about known risk factors.

Advocacy: Advocacy involves school counselors working proactively to remove barriers to learning and advocating for needed services for students at-risk for dropping out of school.

Collaboration/Teaming: Collaboration involves school counselors working with outside agencies to provide services to at-risk students and serving as a member of a school's dropout prevention team.

Systemic change: Systemic change involves school counselors working for changes at the school level that will assist at-risk students in graduating. Identifying and proposing evidenced-based, national drop-out prevention interventions that the school/school system could adopt.

Delivery System: Delivery system involves school counselors providing individual and group counseling to students at risk of dropping out and providing a comprehensive National Model guidance program to all students.

Accountability: "Responsibility for one's actions, particularly for objectives, procedures and results of one's work and program; involves an explanation of what has been done.

Responsibility for counselor performance, program implementation and results" (American School Counselor Association, 2003, p. 150). Accountability refers to the 2008 What Works

Clearinghouse domains: staying-in-school, progressing-in-school and completing-school used to measure the effectiveness of school counselors efforts in implementing dropout prevention strategies and interventions.

Staying-in-school: The staying in school domain includes measures of whether the student remained enrolled in school or dropped out of school without earning a high school diploma or GED certificate, as well as the number of school days enrolled.

Progressing-in-school: The progressing in school domain includes measures of credits earned, grade promotion, whether the student is making normal progress toward graduation, and highest grade completed.

Completing-school: The completing school domain includes measures of whether the student

earned a high school diploma or received a GED certificate.

### *School Counselor Job Description*

The North Carolina School Counselor Job Description (approved by the North Carolina State Board of Education on June 1, 2006) notes that school counselors report to principals. The major functions under the duties and responsibilities section of the job description include: development and management of a comprehensive school counseling program; delivery of a comprehensive school counseling program; and accountability. The North Carolina School Counselor Job Description does not mention explicitly the role of school counselors in dropout prevention (see Appendix A for North Carolina School Counselor Job Description).

### *Views of the School Counselor's Role by Professional Counseling Organizations*

This section will provide information from school counselor organizations and school counselor preparation organizations regarding their perspectives on the role of school counselors in dropout prevention. The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) 2009 Standards were created to educate and prepare students to become professional school counselors. The CACREP 2009 Standards notes under the academic development section that school counselors should “understand the concepts, principles, strategies, programs, and practices designed to close the achievement gap, promote student academic success, and prevent students from dropping out of school” ([www.cacrep.org/2009standards.html](http://www.cacrep.org/2009standards.html) September 2009 p. 43). In order to close the achievement gap, promote student academic success and prevent students from dropping out of school, school counselors should conduct programs designed to enhance student academic development, implement strategies and activities to prepare students for a full range of postsecondary options and opportunities, and implement differentiated instructional strategies that draw on subject

matter and pedagogical content knowledge and skills to promote student achievement (www.cacrep.org/2009standards.htmlSeptember2009).

The American School Counselors' Association (ASCA) created a National Model to provide standards for how professional school counselors are to function in their practice. "The purpose of ASCA's National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs is to create one vision and one voice for school counseling programs" (American School Counselor Association, 2005). The National Model provides school counselors with a tool to design, coordinate, implement, manage and evaluate school counseling programs to ensure all students are successful. "It provides a framework for the program components, the school counselor's role in implementation and the underlying philosophies of leadership, advocacy and systemic change" (p. 9). By using a system such as the ASCA National Model, school counselors are provided a map to working more efficiently.

According to the National Model, "The ultimate goal of a school counseling program is to support the school's academic mission" (ASCA, 2003, p. 52). Given this strong emphasis on the school counselor's academic role in the mission of schools in the National Model, it is curious that no explicit mention was made about how school counselors should go about reducing the dropout rate. The organization's perspective on the role of the school counselor in dropout prevention appears to be almost an oversight as it is mentioned only briefly and in passing on the ASCA website in a position statement about the school counselor's role not in dropout prevention but with at-risk students. The position statement reads as follows:

The school counselor, in conjunction with other school staff members, identifies potential dropouts and other students considered at risk and works closely with them to help them stay in school or find alternative means of completing their education. The professional school counselor provides consultation in defining and identifying at-risk students. Professional school counselors work with other educators and community resources to provide early identification and

intervention for potential dropouts and other students who may be considered at-risk through a comprehensive, developmental, k-12 counseling program ([http://asca2.timberlakepublishing.com//files/PS\\_Dropout%20Prevention.pdf](http://asca2.timberlakepublishing.com//files/PS_Dropout%20Prevention.pdf)March2010).

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction has made it a priority to investigate how middle and high school counselors in particular can reduce the state's dropout rate. In efforts to do so, they commissioned EDSTAR, a research corporation, to study this phenomenon.

#### *NCDPI School Counseling Program Review*

##### *EDSTAR 2005 Study*

In October 2005, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction commissioned EDSTAR, Inc. to assess the role of middle and high school counselors in dropout prevention. The study by EDSTAR included the following components: a school counseling program review to learn how school counselors perform their duties, what their duties are, how they determine which students to serve, how they serve students, what effect school counseling services are having on student outcomes, and what challenges they face (The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2007).

EDSTAR used a combination of interviews and surveys to gather data. "We began our research by surveying district school counseling directors and school counselors. More than 500 school counselors and nearly 60 district directors responded to the initial survey (p.54)."

Participants were given the option of taking the surveys online or completing them on paper.

EDSTAR found that the majority of school counselors surveyed indicated they spent an inordinate amount of time on non-counseling duties that are not outlined in the North Carolina School Counselor Job Description. Moreover, spending time on these other duties prevents them from implementing comprehensive school counseling programs that have a dropout prevention focus. "Surveys of school counselors who indicated non-counselor activities as below 10% of



their time present a higher likelihood of implementation of dropout intervention strategies being marked as ‘intermediate’ or ‘high’(p.47)”. The majority of school districts also responded that they do not have one employee whose main responsibility is to provide school-based dropout prevention and intervention services. Overall it was evident that districts are overlooking the most highly trained professionals, school counselors, to address dropout prevention in schools. School counselors are instead overburdened with high student-to-counselor ratios and other non-counseling assigned duties and responsibilities.

In response to the findings outlined above, the following recommendations were made to assist the Department of Public Instruction in enhancing the role of school counselors in dropout prevention: remove testing facilitator duties; clarify counselors’ roles before school counselors accept the position; reduce non-counseling duties; provide training in the use of computers and technology; ensure training is basic enough for all counselors to understand; facilitate counselors’ use of data; ensure counselors know how to keep records; and change terminology of at-risk students to a term that implies why the student is at-risk (instead of connoting a stereotype unrelated to their actual status).

### *Significance of the Study*

This study sets forth new expectations for school counselors as schools attempt to reduce their dropout rates. The recommended role for school counselors in dropout prevention role is framed around the ASCA National Model’s elements and themes, where the ASCA National Model did not reflect how to address dropout prevention prior to this study. Middle and high school counselors have provided their opinions regarding possible options (the three 2008 What Works Clearinghouse domains for dropout prevention) for tracking their successes with students as they employ dropout prevention interventions. Finally, legislators and state departments of

education have the documentation needed that illustrates ways to utilize school counselors in addressing the dropout crisis.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

#### *Introduction*

The North Carolina General Assembly is currently in the process of studying the impact of students dropping out of school and ways to increase the number of students graduating from high school in four years (Stallings, 2007). The Senate proposed a bill (S.B.571) in 2006 that required the State Board of Education to study and determine the role of school counselors in dropout prevention. The study examined the role of school counselors in addressing dropout prevention by reviewing the current literature surrounding the policies and procedures guiding the dropout discourse, the definition of a dropout, factors that contribute to students dropping out of school, effective dropout prevention strategies, and the role of school counselors in dropout prevention.

The current study goes beyond the study commissioned by the General Assembly and explored the role middle and high school counselors perceive they should adopt in dropout prevention using the ASCA National Model as a guide. This study also investigated the assessment domains middle and high school counselors believe should be used to measure their efforts in preventing students from dropping out of school. The 2008 What Works Clearinghouse domains were used to guide the assessment portion of the study. The discussion begins by examining the current dropout prevention policies and procedures.

There are three arguments that support the need for dropout prevention action: efficiency, equity, and resiliency arguments. As we examine the role of school counselors in dropout prevention, it is important to understand why many stakeholders are demanding schools take

action to increase the number of students graduating from high school. Each argument will be discussed in this next section.

### *Reasons for Dropout Prevention Action*

#### *Efficiency Arguments*

Since international events such as Sputnik and reports such as “A Nation At-Risk,” much attention has been given to the impact of student failure on the nation’s ability to be globally competitive (Milliken, 2007). Milliken (2007) discussed how the dropout crisis is not just an issue for educators. The focus of how students that drop out impact society is highlighted “America’s 3.5 million dropouts ages 16 to 25 are truly have-nots: They don’t have a high school diploma, and as a result they have little hope for a decent future” (Milliken, 2007, p.xxii). Milliken discussed how dropouts are more likely to be unemployed, live in poverty, and experience serious health problems, become dependent on government assistance and finally end up going to jail. His point is emphasized by the statistic that half of all inmates have dropped out of school (more young male dropouts can be found in prisons than on job sites). Statistics are provided to illustrate how society suffers as a result of students dropping out of school. “Dropouts are costing us billions of dollars in lost wages and increased social supports, including medical care and welfare benefits...The combined income and tax losses from a single year’s dropouts is about \$192 billion—1.6 percent of the gross domestic product” (Milliken, 2007, p.xxii).

Business, economists and chambers of commerce across the country believe dropouts are affecting the nation’s level of international competitiveness, by preventing America from being able to recruit an adequate workforce, while losing one-third of its youth due to dropouts (Milliken, 2007). “In 20 years, the impact of fiscal failure and social division will be felt keenly

by the haves, as U.S. global economic leadership dwindles and the nation is unable to pay its huge 'bill' generated by the have-nots" (Milliken, 2007, p.xxiii). Collectively the picture looks very negative for society and the economy based on views from the business community and economists, but researchers from the critical theorists' perspective see the dropout issue in a different light.

### *Equity Arguments*

The use of the label "at-risk" has been seen by critical theorists as a way to exploit children and families from disadvantaged backgrounds in the quest for political gains. Politicians are accused of focusing on efficiency issues at the expense of "at-risk" children. The political agenda of politicians have been questioned as they seek to promote legislation to address the dropout challenges of the nation. Fine (1991) stated that the policies are not intended to improve the academic success of at-risk students, but rather to exploit at-risk students for political gains.

With the image of 'youth at risk' comes the litany of threats now saturating the popular, policy, and academic literatures. The arguments go as follows: Unless public education in the United States improves....the Japanese will conquer the international marketplace....hardworking Anglo-Americans will be swallowed by non-white, non-educated, non-workers.....too few will be able or willing to support 'us' through Social Security payments....city streets will grow increasingly unsafe.....out-of-wedlock births will swell....And on it goes (Fine, 1991, pp. 76-77).

The voices of those who have dropped out and those who work closest with students that drop out, have been silenced (Fine, 1991). The rhetoric that is used to promote dropout legislation paints at-risk students in a negative light accusing them of the failures of the school system and society. Lesko (1994) discusses how most of the discussion around dropouts focuses on the personal characteristics of disadvantaged youth and how they will not successfully realize the transition to independence (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989; Dryfoos,

1990; Hamburg, 1993). Critical theorists challenge policy makers to create legislation and best practices around the needs of at-risk students instead of the needs of Anglo-Saxon society. As the nation and state examine the dropout phenomena, it will be important to address the needs of those closest to the problem, at-risk students.

### *Resiliency Arguments*

Cosby and Poussaint (2007) focus on the importance of using positive role models to motivate at-risk students to complete high school. They reject many of the equity arguments and instead insist that even with inequitable circumstances minority students and students from poverty should pick themselves up and use the success stories of those that have overcome adversity. The authors traveled from city to city doing call-outs in which mainly African American males tell their inspiring stories of how they fought out of hardships and made successes of their lives. Cosby and Poussaint give legislators, students, parents, and educators another way of looking at the dropout dilemma, while addressing the needs of those that dropout most often (minority males).

Dropout prevention is a policy issue that affects students, parents, instructional staff, administrators, and student support services staff. The North Carolina General Assembly has recognized the importance of examining how school counselors can best be utilized in reducing the student dropout rate. This dissertation explored the primary roles school counselors should adopt in dropout prevention using the ASCA National Model as a framework. This study also investigated dropout prevention assessment measurements using the 2008 What Works Clearinghouse domains to document the effectiveness of dropout prevention efforts. Before delving deeper into the literature about dropout prevention, this study examines what educators

are referring to when they reference dropouts. The National Center for Education Statistics describes a dropout as a student who:

- was enrolled in school at some time during the previous school year, which is the reporting year;
- was not enrolled on day 20 of the current school year;
- has not graduated from high school or completed a state or district approval educational program and does not meet any of the following reporting exclusions:
  - transferred to another public school district, private school, home school or state/district approved educational program,
  - temporarily absent due to suspension or school approved illness, or
  - death

(Stallings, 2007, p.84).

#### *Factors that Contribute to Students Dropping Out of School*

North Carolina reported 19,184 dropouts in grades 9-12 for 2008-2009, a decrease of 3,250 from the 22, 434 reported in 2007-08. High schools in North Carolina reported a dropout rate of 4.27% (event rate), a substantial decrease from the 4.97% rate reported from 2007-08. In 2008-09, as in past years, students dropped out most frequently at grade 9 (32.8%), followed by grade 10 (26.0%), grade 11 (22.7%), and grade 12 (15.3%). The grade with the largest percentage decrease in dropouts from 2007-08 to 2008-09 was the 11<sup>th</sup> grade (-17.2%), followed by the 9<sup>th</sup> grade (-14.8%)

([www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/research/discipline/reports/consolidated/2008-09/consolidated-report.pdf](http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/research/discipline/reports/consolidated/2008-09/consolidated-report.pdf) March 2010).

In 2008-09 all ethnic groups contributed to the decrease in the number of reported dropouts. The dropout rate for American Indian students declined for the fifth consecutive year. Males accounted for 59.0% of the reported dropouts. The dropout rate (event rate) by ethnicity group was as follows in 2008-2009: Asian 1.83%, Caucasian 3.61%, Multi-racial 4.48%, African Americans 5.26%, American Indians 5.47%, and Hispanics 5.71% ([www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/research/discipline/reports/consolidated/2008-09/consolidated-report.pdf](http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/research/discipline/reports/consolidated/2008-09/consolidated-report.pdf) March 2010).

For the fifth consecutive year, there was an increase in students enrolling in community colleges and schools documenting attendance as the reason students dropped out of school (accounting for 42% of all dropouts). The top five reasons reported for students dropping out of school included: (1) attendance (42%), (2) enrollment in a community college (21.1%), (3) unknown (8.3%), (4) academic problems (6.1%), (5) moved, school status unknown (4.4%) ([www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/research/discipline/reports/consolidated/2008-09/consolidated-report.pdf](http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/research/discipline/reports/consolidated/2008-09/consolidated-report.pdf) March 2010).

North Carolina reported 22,434 dropouts in grades 9-12 for 2007-2008, a 4.7% decrease from the count reported during the 2006/2007 school year. The grade 9-12 dropout rate in 2007-2008 was 4.97%, which was down from the 5.24% rate reported during the 2006/2007 school year. This 0.27 percentage point decrease in the dropout rate was a 5.2% overall reduction ([www.ncpublicschools.org/research/dropout/reports/2008/0708report.pdf](http://www.ncpublicschools.org/research/dropout/reports/2008/0708report.pdf) February 2010).

In 2007-2008 data showed that students dropped out most frequently in grade 9 (32.6%), followed by grade 10 (25.2%), grade 11 (23.3%), and grade 12 (14.8%). This was close to the 2006-2007 school year trends. In 2007-2008, all racial groups contributed to the decrease in dropouts reported except for multiracial students. The dropout rate (event rate) by ethnicity



group was as follows in 2007-2008: Asian 2.15%, White 4.25%, Multiracial 5.06%, Black 5.95%, Hispanic 6.92% and American Indian 6.99%. The top five reasons students reported dropping out of school in 2007-2008 were for attendance 48.0%, enrollment in a community college 16.4%, academic problems 7.2%, moved school status unknown 6.4%, and choice of work over school 3.4%

([www.ncpublicschools.org/research/dropout/reports/2008/0708report.pdf](http://www.ncpublicschools.org/research/dropout/reports/2008/0708report.pdf), February 2010).

In addition to considering race and gender as risk factors, Hammonds, Linton, Smink, and Drew (2007) investigated four domains for identifying students at-risk for dropping out of school

([www.dropoutprevention.org/resource/major\\_reports/communities\\_in\\_schools.htm](http://www.dropoutprevention.org/resource/major_reports/communities_in_schools.htm), March 2010).

The four domains came from a review of the research that focused on high school graduation or school dropout as the main goal of analysis. The researchers found that students tended to drop out of school for a variety of factors that could be grouped into four areas or domains:

individual, family, school, and community factors. It is important to note that Hammonds, et al. found no single risk factor that could be used to accurately predict students that were at risk for dropping out of school. Students that had multiple risk factors were found to be more likely to drop out of school compared to students with only one risk factor. Dropping out of school was found to be a process, not a sudden incident. Students dropped out across subgroups (race, gender, rural, and suburban areas). Disengagement from school was reported to begin in the early years of schooling for most of the students who dropped out of school.

Twenty-one studies (dated from 1974-2002) from twelve different data sources were analyzed in determining the most significant risk factors associated with students dropping out of school. The studies examined differences in factors studied, measures, populations, and

statistical methods, etc. To control for variation, factors were “paired down to only those found to be significantly ( $p \leq .10$ ) related to school dropout in multivariate analysis and significant in at least five data sources” (Hammonds, et al. 2007, pp. 2-3). The majority of factors influencing the decision for students to drop out of school were located in the individual domain, which was comprised of sixty factors and the family domain which was comprised of forty factors. The study revealed four consistent factors across elementary, middle, and high school groups that contribute to students dropping out of school: poor attendance, retention, low achievement, and low social economic status.

Suh and Suh (2007) studied risk factors and levels of risk for high school dropouts. The purpose of their study was to identify the factors contributing to high school dropout rates and the extent of their impact on the likelihood of dropping out of school. They found three main factors that contributed to high school students dropping out of school: low grade point average (GPA), low socioeconomic status and behavioral problem. Sparks, Johnson, and Akos (2010) also conducted a study to identify forces driving dropout rates. They studied 9<sup>th</sup> graders in a large southeastern U.S. school district and found three main areas that contributed to students dropping out of school: (1) scoring below grade level on grade 8 standardized reading test, failing Algebra I, (2) receiving a long-term suspension (10 days or more) in either the 8<sup>th</sup> grade or 9<sup>th</sup> grade, and (3) being retained in any grade, kindergarten through 9<sup>th</sup> grade. The researchers noted these indicators were more accurate in predicting whether or not a student would drop out of school than race and socio-economic status and other demographic data.

Bridgeland, Dilulio, and Morison (2006) took a different approach to find out why students are dropping out of school. The researchers were commissioned by the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation to find out from dropouts why they drop out of school. The purpose

of the study was to approach the dropout problem from the student's perspective, a perspective that had not been considered in past studies. The researchers conducted focus groups with ethnically and racially diverse 16-24 year olds in Philadelphia and Baltimore in August 2005. They conducted interviews with in September and October 2005 with 467 ethnically and racially diverse students aged 16-25 who had dropped out of public high schools in 25 different locations. All of which were located in large cities, the suburbs, or small towns. All of the locations were places with documented high dropout rates.

The final report noted the top five reasons students reported as major factors for leaving school: (1) 47 % stated classes were not interesting; (2) 43% stated they missed too many days and could not catch up; (3) 42% stated they spent time with people who were not interested in school; (4) 38% stated they had too much freedom and not enough rules in their life; and (5) 35% stated they were failing in school. The students also shared strategies that they felt would improve students' chances of staying in school.

#### *Effective Strategies to Reduce the Dropout Rate*

Bridgeland et al. (2006) results revealed six different strategies schools could employ to help keep students from dropping out of school: (1) 81% stated schools should increase the opportunities for real-world learning to make classrooms more relevant (internships, service learning, etc.); (2) 81% stated schools should hire better teachers who keep classes interesting; (3) 75% stated schools need smaller classes with more individual instruction; (4) 71% stated schools should have better communication between parents and get parents more involved; (5) 71% stated parents should make sure their children go to school every day; and (6) 70% stated schools should increase the level of supervision at school to ensure students attend classes. These were recommendations from high school dropouts in cities with high dropout rates. The

researchers made a number of recommendations to help students stay in school, based on the students' responses.

Bridgeland et al. (2006) state the teaching curricula must be relevant to the lives of the students in the classroom. Classroom activities should tie into what students are interested in doing outside the classroom. Bringing in outside study opportunities can help bridge the gap between school and job, which may convince more students to stay in school. The classrooms must also be smaller with more one-on-one instruction, involvement, and feedback. Students would benefit from stronger adult-student relationships within the schools. Bridgeland et al. (2006) note that if students perceive their teachers to be of a higher quality, there is a lower likelihood that the students will drop out.

The study showed more qualified teachers who could keep class interesting would improve students' chances for graduating. Schools need to keep in contact with parents regarding their student's attendance in school as well as how the student is doing academically and socially. Increasing parent and school communication by monitoring and regulating student's activities, talking with students about their problems, encouraging individual decision-making and being more involved in general in school can make students less likely to drop out of school. Finally, schools must work to minimize school disruptions and to improve overall school climate. Students drop out of school when they do not feel safe. Measures should be taken to eliminate violence and to make schools places where all students can learn (Bridgeland et al., 2007).

The National Dropout Prevention Center/Network (NDPC/N) (with the assistance of Jay Smink and Franklin P. Schargel) features 15 effective strategies synthesized from existing research findings that have been shown to have the greatest impact on the high school graduation

rate ([www.dropoutprevention.org/ndpcdefault.htm](http://www.dropoutprevention.org/ndpcdefault.htm)March2010). The proposed strategies can be used in isolation but for maximum benefit NDPC/N recommends school districts develop a program that encompasses most or all of these strategies. The strategies have proven successful in all grade levels and in rural, suburban, and urban school settings.

The fifteen effective strategies were identified and placed into four distinct categories: basic core strategies, early interventions, making the most of instruction, and the school and community perspective. The basic core strategies include: mentoring/tutoring, service-learning, alternative schooling, and after-school opportunities. The early intervention categories encompass three strategies: family engagement, early childhood education, and early literacy development. Making the most of instruction includes: professional development, active learning, educational technology, individualized instruction, and career and technical education. Finally, the school and community perspective is comprised of the following three strategies: systemic renewal, school-community collaboration and safe learning environments.

Smink and Schargel (2004) state, that schools should use as many of the 15 effective strategies a possible when trying to reduce the dropout rate. Sustained change comes from utilizing a number of interventions that include community and school collaboration. All interventions/strategies should be evaluated to measure their effectiveness in achieving positive student outcomes. Smink and Schargel (2004) attempt to address the roles of educators in reducing the number of students that drop out of school, but fail to mention the role of school counselors in dropout prevention.

Most recently, Edwards and Edwards (2007) have attempted to define the role of principals in dropout prevention and have created seven key principles that principals should follow in order to achieve systemic renewal (one of the fifteen strategies mentioned above). The

seven key principles are: (1) identify students early; (2) closely examine new and existing school policies and procedures (3) build strong community partnerships and personalize your school (4) reduce social isolation; (5) manage school transitions; (6) create options and implement creative interventions; and (7) build parent/family relationships.

The research highlighted by Edwards and Edwards (2007) is somewhat unclear as how to organize staff's roles and responsibilities in implementing multiple strategies in an efficient and effective manner. Edwards and Edwards (2007), as well as The National Network for Dropout Prevention, have for the most part left school counselors out of the solution to the dropout crisis. The literature noted by the National Network for Dropout Prevention fails to acknowledge that school counselors have a significant role to play in dropout prevention.

In North Carolina, the majority of dropout prevention programs include supplemental services for at-risk students, alternative education programs, and school restructuring efforts (Stallings, 2007). Supplemental services for at-risk students usually involve dropout prevention counseling and offering special extracurricular activities to students. Some of the most widely used alternative education programs include: alternative schools, Eckerd Therapeutic Camps, The Futures for Kids Program, and middle college programs. School restructuring efforts in North Carolina have involved enacting the smaller schools' initiative; block scheduling, restrictions on driver's licensure, student information management, and caring leadership that makes dropout prevention a priority.

The What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) (2008) explored 22 dropout prevention programs 16 of which met WWC evidence standards for effectiveness. Each program was evaluated on three outcome domains: (1) staying- in-school; (2) progressing-in-school; and (3) completing-school. Each program was rated using a scale with 6 possible rating outcomes. "The

ratings characterize evidence in a domain taking into account the quality of the research design, the statistical significance of the findings, the size of the difference between participants in the intervention and comparison conditions, and the consistency in findings across studies. The rating scales are as follows: (1)  $\boxed{++}$  Positive effects: strong evidence of a positive effect with no overriding contrary evidence; (2)  $\boxed{+}$  Potentially positive effects: evidence of a positive effect with no overriding contrary evidence; (3)  $\boxed{+-}$  Mixed effects: evidence of inconsistent effects; (4)  $\boxed{0}$  No discernible effects: no affirmative evidence of effects; (5)  $\boxed{-}$  Potentially negative effects: evidence of a negative effect with no overriding contrary evidence; and (6)  $\boxed{--}$  Negative effects: strong evidence of a negative effect with no overriding contrary evidence”  
(<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/March2010p.2>).

In looking at the three outcome domains for the 16 interventions, four interventions had positive or potentially positive effects in two domains:

- Accelerated Middle Schools had potentially positive effects on staying-in-school and positive effects on progressing-in-school.
- ALAS (Achievement for Latinos through Academic Success) had potentially positive effects on staying-in-school and on progressing-in-school.
- Career Academies had potentially positive effects on staying-in-school and on progressing-in-school.
- Check & Connect had positive effects on staying-in-school and potentially positive effects on progressing-in-school

(<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/> September 2008 p.1).

*Innovative dropout prevention strategies/interventions*

Kopperrud (2006) stated, recent reports from “the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, the Educational Testing Service, the Harvard Civil Rights Project and Educational Trust have estimated that about a third our students have such severe school attendance problems that they end up leaving school entirely before graduation” (p.30). This suggests that the traditional focus on standards-based curriculum, test data, and instruction to close the achievement gap has not been enough to ensure the education of a staggering number of students who are disappearing many of our schools. Within this State, Superintendent Jack O’Connell has worked with superintendents to discover ways to help students remain in school until graduation. One method has been to focus on tracking student attendance through the use of a results-based attendance supervision program. Schools are encouraged to identify attendance problems early and accurately and to devise effective interventions. Superintendent O’Connell has recommended that county and district school boards adopt a policy and administrative regulations consistent with requirements already in law (Kopperrud, 2006).

California is beginning the use of School Attendance Review Boards (SARB). School Attendance Review Board members meet with persistently absent students or students with persistent behavior problems and their families. The Board has the duty of developing individual solutions for students using school and community resources. California is one step closer to reducing its dropout rate by collecting accurate information on the number of SARB referrals and interventions. Pursuant to Education Code Section 48273, counties such as San Diego and San Bernardino have the data they need to develop strategies for meeting the unique needs of students who are at risk of dropping out of school (Kopperrud, 2006).



In addition to intervening early with at risk students, Miller (2006) has taken an approach to help reduce the dropout rate developed around the experience of other successful practitioners. Miller (2006) interviewed several New England educators (teachers, principals, and counselors) who had success working with marginalized at risk for dropping out of school regarding tools and strategies they have found effective in helping their students remain in school. The educators shared seven basic strategies: increasing personal communication, putting the passion back in learning, instilling trust and patience, providing each student with a taste of success, holding students accountable, leaving the comfort zone, and turning struggle into strength (Miller, 2006).

In the area of personal communication educators interviewed shared that they helped students identify short and long-term goals. Staff members served as role-models for the students and actually helped them reach their goals. One example of this is the advisor-advisee relationship, which is a one-on-one relationship with a student and teacher or counselor. They meet for 30 minutes every single day, and, during that time the student knows that at least one adult in the school is checking up on his/her progress and cares how he/she is doing. This relationship helps foster personal attention and recognition and prevents students from feeling disconnected and invisible. More marginalized students remained in school as a result of teachers, counselors, and administrators increasing their level of personal communication (Miller, 2006).

New England educators interviewed stated that students really needed to have the passion put back into learning. Students that were failing did not need to be viewed as lazy or labeled but rather needed their interest sparked and to be proud of the work which they did in class.

Providing students with hands on activities that tie into their areas of interest is a way of bringing the students back into the learning experience (Miller, 2006).

Trust and patience are two things needed to help students from disadvantaged backgrounds/settings. Many of the students the educators worked with had problems trusting adults and had many experiences of injustices from adults. Students needed to know the adults in the classroom really cared about them and could be trusted. The educators needed to learn this process required lots of patience and did not happen overnight. It was most useful to adopt a holistic approach to assisting the students, one in which the school works with students not just on academics but on social and emotional issues that may be barriers to the learning process.

Once trust was gained by the student, educators reported that it was important for students to taste success. At every possible opportunity, educators should single out a student for positive attention and feedback. This taste of success was found to make a true difference in helping marginalized students want to remain in school. Students and families were told of the positive successes the students had accomplished throughout the day which led to a positive school attitude.

Miller (2006) reported that it is important to hold students accountable for their lives and to make expectations clear. Having fair, balanced and rigorous attendance policies is one way educators suggest accomplishing this intervention. School social workers can make calls home daily to absent students and work closely with families to help students come to school on a regular basis.

Sometimes the educators pointed out to Miller that it was important to take students out of their comfort zones. Educators found taking students on field trips brought out the best in many marginalized students. Great conversations came out of moving students out of their

familiar surroundings. Taking inner city students camping was one example of a field trip that the educators found to really make a difference with students that were not used to being away from home. The result was the students were able to resolve disputes, talk about their dreams, their families and return renewed.

Finally, the last strategy suggested by the New England educators was to turn student struggles into strengths. The educators stress the importance of giving students a voice and empowering them to make choices for themselves. As they make choices for themselves they will sometimes make mistakes but these can be learning opportunities for students. Overall, by employing all the strategies/interventions mentioned by Miller (2006), school counselors will be able to empower educators to assist marginalized students to remain in school thus reducing the dropout rate.

The literature on leadership and dropout prevention not only discusses strategies/interventions that are tried and true but also ones that have failed over time. One such discussion in education has been around the topics of social promotion or retention? The research by Parker (2001) highlights the fact that, even though social promotion did not work, retention also does not work in helping students stay in school. In fact with the traditional retentions:

- Approximately 60 percent of students retained once drop out of school by grade 12.
- An average of 30 percent of students retained once drop out of school by grade nine.
- Students retained twice have a 90 percent chance of dropping out before graduating.

Parker (2001) recommends adopting Maltz's 1960's Psycho-Cybernetics three principles of strategic schooling (1) Targets (both students and content), (2) Feedback (a system of daily, weekly, and/or monthly assessments) used more frequently with the most struggling students is crucial for acceleration. Results need to be shared with students and their parents; (3) Know-how (both organizational and classroom research-based strategies, activities and materials aligned with standards).

Targets include assisting the groups that the law requires school districts target for retention policy: struggling, at risk of retention, and retained. Under targets there should be assessments and remedies in place to accelerate the learning of each student, by name and group. The content should be related specifically to the standards that the student did not master. With this in mind, it is important for school districts and educators to prioritize and select the minimum and most important standards necessary to meet grade-level requirements (Parker, 2001).

The second key element in strategic schooling is feedback. Students must be provided daily, weekly, and monthly assessments and more frequently with the most struggling students. Results need to be shared with fellow educators, the students themselves, and their parents.

The third and final key in strategic schooling is know-how: both organizational and classroom. Classroom know-how would include the best research-based strategies/activities that are aligned with the state standards. Because the teacher cannot do it all, the school must provide organizational know-how to support its neediest students. This can be accomplished through programs during school, before and after school, during intercession, on Saturdays, and in the summer. The interventions can include on-target meetings with staff, students, parents and student study teams, and grade level meetings to discuss best practices, content, and kids. It is

also important for students to be referred for health and social services when needed to remove obstacles impeding their learning. The goal of these interventions should be an acceleration of about two to three year's progress in a year. This is possible if all three elements are in place for each child.

The next innovative program for discussion is entitled the solution shop (Cook & Kaffenberger, 2003). The solution shop is a data-driven counseling and study skills program that works with assisting students of color who are underachievers and economically disadvantaged. The solution shop program is designed to assist middle school students who are failing two or more grades. A professional school counselor meets with ten students a day for one period for one semester to develop individual academic and personal goals. Students participate in solution-focused group counseling and study skill instruction for part of the period, and, for the remainder of the time the students receive individualized tutoring opportunities. "At the end of the first year of the program, of the 35 students who participated, 57% improved their GPA. Parents and teachers were involved in the referral and remediation process. The majority of the teachers and administrators who were surveyed state that they believe 75% of the students they worked with benefited from the program (Cook & Kaffenberger, 2003).

Regarding high schools, research has found that schools have had great success keeping students in school using career and technical education programs. According to Peckham (2008), high schools with integrated rigorous academic and career and technical education programs are able to reduce the dropout rate. The literature indicates that high schools that had students participating in highly integrated rigorous academic and career and technical education programs showed higher achievement in reading, mathematics, and science than was seen in less integrated

programs. This is promising news for high school counselors in search for strategies to reduce the dropout rate.

The former CEO of Chicago Schools, Arne Duncan, has found an innovative way of keeping high school students in school with the creation of a waiver called the Consent to Withdraw from School. This form allows students and parents the opportunity to acknowledge in writing the devastating impact that dropping out of school entails. The form was developed in association with the school reform group, The Black Star Project, which is based on statistics that the majority of prisons are made up of inmates that have dropped out of school (the premise is also that dropouts can only expect to average around \$16,000 a year in employment income). The Consent to Withdraw from School form reads as follows:

#### Consent to Withdraw from School

I, (student name), acknowledge that by dropping out of school, I am voluntarily giving away my educational rights, privileges, and opportunities. By dropping out of school, I further acknowledge that:

1. I will be less likely to find good jobs that pay well, bad jobs that don't pay well, or maybe any jobs.
2. I will not be able to afford many things that I will see others acquiring.
3. I will be more likely to get caught up in criminal activity and illegal behaviors.
4. I will be more likely to spend time in jail or prison.
5. I will be likely to rely on the state welfare system for my livelihood.
6. I will not have many choices about where to live.
7. I will be considerably less able to properly care for and educate my children.

I, (student name), confirm that I am over the age of 16, I also have read and fully understand the consequences of my dropping out of high school. Yet, I choose to withdraw from school.

( ) Student signature

I, (parent/guardian name), confirm that my child is over the age of 16; I also have read and fully understand the consequences of my child dropping out of high school. Yet, I will allow my child to withdraw from school.

( ) Parent/Guardian signature

The above-named individuals have been fully informed of the consequences of dropping out of high school. I have also informed them of alternative and adult educational services that are available in the community.

( ) Principal signature

It's Not Too Late to Stay in School

This form is an effort to have students and parents to think twice about dropping out of school or allowing their students to drop out of school. It allows administrators and school counselors an innovative way to conduct an exit conference while helping the student and parent(s) process the consequences of their decision (Curriculum Review, 2004).

Middle and high school transition programs have been found to help middle and high school students move toward successfully meeting graduation requirements. Cohen and Smerden (2009) discuss the importance of addressing the social and emotional development as well as contextual factors that affect adolescents during the crucial transition years, sixth grade to ninth grade. The researchers highlight relevant research in the area of adolescent development and transitions (Akos & Galassi, 2004; Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Mizelle & Irvin, 2000). The findings reveal that students experience physical and emotional changes when transitioning into

middle and high school. Puberty plays a significant role in the transition process combining physical and chemical or hormonal changes with social and emotional changes. Students have a heightened amount of academic fear (Mizelle & Irvin, 2000). The effects of transition often include achievement loss in the areas of GPA and standardized achievement tests. Students are also less engaged and have decreased attendance by the end of the ninth grade. The emotional stability of a student can be affected by transitions (Alspaugh, 1998; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999).

Akos and Galassi (2004) found that transitions are especially difficult for females and minority students. Female students were found to feel less connected to their high schools than boys and expressed more concerns regarding social and academic changes during the transition period. There were also more concerns noted in the areas of social and academic changes during the transition period. When following Latino students through the transition process, the researchers found significant achievement losses for Latino students compared to that of White and African American students who were also transitioning. The researchers believe the losses were likely attributed to differences related to language and literacy skills gaps (Akos & Galassi, 2004).

Some potential solutions to transitions that may apply to the role of school counselors in dropout prevention include implementing transition programs for all incoming students. These programs can range from one-time informational assemblies for incoming students to comprehensive monthly meetings which involve teachers, counselors, and administrators at both schools (the middle and the high school). Other transition program models include informational parent meetings, student shadowing programs, panel discussions, and high school course advising sessions. Schools should wholly involve students, parents, and faculty from both the middle and high school to accomplish complete support and achieve the greatest positive effect



on high school retention (Cohen & Smerdon, 2009). In order to achieve school wide reform and reduce the dropout rate school wide, Cohen and Smerdon (2009) recommend schools consider adopting an innovative whole school reform model called Diploma Now in addition to middle and high school transition programs.

The Diploma Now program, in Philadelphia is an innovative program that blends whole-school reform with social services and an early-warning system to help identified at risk students remain in school. Gewertz (2009) reports how the Diploma Now program is an innovative program that includes 750 middle school students who are at-risk for dropping out of school.

The model blends whole-school reform with social services and an early-warning system. It uses elements of the Talent Development school design developed at John Hopkins University, in Baltimore, which emphasizes structuring a school in smaller units so that teams of teachers oversee manageable numbers of students. Professional development and peer coaching for teachers, customized academic help for students, and added instruction in math and literacy are also part of the model (Gewertz, 2009, p.16).

Attendance, behavior and course failures are tracked and detected early by staff using a computerized data-based system. Research out of Johns Hopkins and the Philadelphia Education Fund found that early identification was critical in the dropout prevention process since 6<sup>th</sup> graders were found to have a 75% chance of dropping of high school that had serious troubles in even one of the following areas: attendance, behavior or course work. It costs about \$400,000 to \$500,000 annually to operate the Diplomas Now program per school, but schools can use a good portion of a school's allotment of federal Title I funds for disadvantaged students. Overall, the program is being expanded to include 11 more middle and high schools in Chicago, Los Angeles, New Orleans, Philadelphia, and San Antonio as a result of the dramatic improvements in attendance, behavior and course-passing rates in 2008. The national expansion is funded by three year grant from the PepsiCo Foundation for a total of five million dollars (Gewertz, 2009).

## *Professional Literature about the Role of School Counselors in Dropout Prevention*

### *Individual Guiding Early Identification of At-Risk Students*

Neild, Balfanz, and Herzog (2007) support the use of early identification procedures for reducing the dropout rate. They found that it was very important for schools to create programs that supported early identification. Neild et al. (2007) found that high school students that drop out often sent out distress signals years prior to dropping out of school. They urge educators to tune into these distress signals as soon as possible and to create appropriate interventions. Data that educators can use to discover the distress signals can come from: test scores, report card grades, behavior marks, attendance records, special education status, English language learner status, and demographic categories. The researchers found that the earlier a student first sends a signal, the greater the risk that he or she will drop out of school.

When looking at a middle school cohort group of 6<sup>th</sup> grade subjects from Philadelphia, with even one of the following four signals the researchers found that students had at least three in four chances of dropping out of high school:

- A final grade of F in mathematics.
- A final grade of F in English.
- Attendance below 80 percent for the year.
- A final “unsatisfactory” behavior mark in at least one class.

The researchers found that students with more than one distress signal had an even higher probability of dropping out within six years. It is interesting to note that the distress signals that have the most predictive power relate to student action or behavior in the classroom, rather than to a particular status, such as receiving special education services. This study is powerful in that eighty percent of the dropouts studied in Philadelphia sent signals in the middle grades or during

the first year in high school. Interestingly enough the majority of U.S. high school dropouts are enrolled in similar large high schools like the ones studied in Philadelphia. Thus, adopting early identification systems could identify at least by 9<sup>th</sup> grade the large majority of future drop outs nationwide (Neild et al., 2007). Praport (1993) stated:

The key to success, however, lies in early identification (it has been estimated that a student who fails first or second grade has an 80% chance of dropping out). If school counselors and teachers can recognize potential dropouts, show them approval and love, provide educational experiences for them that they cannot get at home, ensure some degree of success in their work, and help them overcome their academic handicaps, they may actually prevent them from one day making the tragic mistake of dropping out (p. 310).

#### *Group Counseling Facilitators*

Blum and Jones (1993) stress the importance of combining home, school and community efforts to reduce the high dropout rate of high school students. Blum and Jones focused on conducting effective counseling groups and mentoring programs to keep potential dropouts in school. Group counseling is one of the most often mentioned methods for counselors to contribute to reducing the number of students dropping out of school. Amrod (1989), Beck and Muia (1980), Larsen and Shertzer (1987), O'Hara, Reed, and Davenport (1978) all discuss the importance of counselors helping potential dropouts form positive self-concepts through the use of group counseling.

#### *Student Advocates*

The role of the school counselor as student advocate is to bring about social justice and equality for all students. School counselors in particular must serve as student advocates for students of color and students from low socioeconomic (SES) backgrounds (Bemak & Chung, 2005). Advocating for students may involve confronting teachers or administrators that may hold low expectations for students of color, or students from low SES backgrounds. It also may

involve confronting policies and practices that are overtly or covertly non-supportive of all students within the school. Student advocacy requires special skills that can be acquired through pre-service and in-service trainings. School counselors are encouraged to work closely with their district supervisor when working as a student advocate. Bemak, (2000) and Erford, House, and Martin (2003) recommend 13 guidelines for school counselors to follow when becoming student advocates:

1. Define one's role as contributing to academic success for all students. All roles, responsibilities, and tasks should lead toward this goal.
2. Emphasize social and educational equity and equal opportunity for all students. This requires equal and fair treatment, support, and time allocation, an equal distribution of resources; and advocacy for each and every student in one's school.
3. Given the large ratios of students assigned to each counselor, refocus intervention strategies to work with groups of students, parents, and teachers. Individual counseling is not conducive to limited time and assigned student caseloads. The same holds true for individual consultations with teachers and parents on a regular basis. Adjust accordingly, emphasizing the work with groups of students, teachers, and parents, and larger community, rather than with individuals.
4. Teach students and parents about their rights and provide them with the tools to promote constructive changes for themselves that lead toward social justice, equal opportunities, and parity.
5. Formulate partnerships with students who may lack the requisite skills and knowledge to advocate for themselves.
6. Align with parents who may lack the skills and knowledge about how to gain access to existing resources within the school and community. This requires knowledge about

organizational systems and school that may be helpful in promoting positive and healthy change toward educational and academic equity.

7. Forge partnerships with principals and administrators in schools and school systems who will assist in working toward social change and decreasing the achievement gap for poor and ethnic minority youth.

8. Utilize data to change one's role and incorporate advocacy. It is not enough to approach administrators and suggest that one redefines one's role as an advocate. Rather, gather data and factual information that support the changing role and actually advocate for that change.

9. Get training in leadership and advocacy skills. This requires knowledge about organizational change how school systems work, the politics of change in educational arenas, and leadership skills. School counselors can encourage school counseling district coordinators to build this into the in-service training programs, while students in graduate training programs can advocate within their universities to include advocacy, social change, and leadership in their programs.

10. Join with other school counselors in one's own school and larger school system to compile data that can be presented to school-based administrators and central office administration. The transformation of the role requires advocacy at the system level as well as in one's own school.

11. Volunteer and participate in school reform efforts.

12. Understand how to promote social action within a sociopolitical context.

13. Become highly active in collaborating with community agencies that provide other services. Agencies provide additional services such as counseling, social support, and prevention programs that school counselors do not have time for in their hectic days. Having clear and good working relationships with outside resources generates a team approach to meeting the needs of all students and more effectively contributing to their academic success (p.200).

### *Collaborators and Coordinators*

When exploring ways for school counselors to better collaborate with outside community agencies, Ho (2001) discusses the importance of schools adopting a family-centered integrated services model. This model encourages school counselors to collaborate with other agencies such as mental health and social services in ensuring schools provide students and families with support services that increase the chances of student success. The National Institute of Mental Health in 1998 outlined important ways school counselors could deliver services in an integrated services model. “The services are to include preventative and comprehensive educational, mental health, and social services for all children and families who are considered ‘at-risk’, which in low-income school communities could be more than 50% of the youth” (Ho, 2001, p.1). Schools are encouraged to allow school counselors to work more closely with outside support agencies, and university school counseling preparation programs are encouraged to include mental health support services as well as best practices around a family-centered integrated services model in their dropout prevention programs.

As students face multiple-challenges and many that expand beyond the expertise of teachers and student support personnel, educators have found the need to create new support networks. Full-service community schools are examples of support networks involving collaboration that have been connected to reducing the dropout rate (Dryfoos & Maguire, 2002). Many full-service community learning schools or centers include school-based health centers. School-based health centers can offer a variety services to include: vision and hearing and other health screenings, routine physicals, individual, and group counseling services, and appropriate referrals made for severe and chronic physical and mental health needs. The principles behind the success of full-service community schools include providing students, and family’s easy, and

affordable access to primary, and behavior support services within their communities at convenient times. This is achieved by linking agencies such as mental health, department of social services, and the health department with the school system to provide health, and social related services to at-risk students as well as preventive services for all students. Partnership agreements are used to create seamless systems that support the collaboration between outside agencies, and the school system (Dryfoos & Maguire, 2002).

A theme that is seen throughout the literature on dropout prevention is the importance of schools collaborating with families and the community. The solution to our dropout problem from a collaboration perspective must move beyond placing school-based health centers in school buildings to include a full continuum of interventions ranging from primary prevention through early-onset interventions to treatment of individuals with severe, pervasive, and chronic problems. Schools must move from inadequate two component models of just working with the school and home (a model that currently dominates the school reform movement) to a three component framework that guides the weaving together of school, home and community resources (Taylor & Adelman, 2000). Collaboratives are considered any group designed to connect a school, the families of its students, and other entities from the surrounding neighborhood.

The role of school counselors as collaborators should be guided by six key areas of function:

1. Classroom-focused programs
2. Support for transitions
3. Student and family assistance
4. Community outreach

5. Crisis response and prevention
6. Home involvement in schooling (Taylor & Adelman, 2000, p. 303).

Taylor and Adelman (2000) note that school counselors should play a greater role, more specifically a leadership role, in helping schools and communities restructure support programs and services to create comprehensive, multifaceted approaches to ensure all students are successful. As school counselors collaborate to restructure support programs, they must establish well-redesigned organizational and operational mechanisms that can provide the means to (1) arrive at wise decisions about resource allocations; (2) maximize systematic and integrated planning, implementation, maintenance, and evaluation of enabling activity; (3) reach out to create formal working relationships with community resources to bring some to a school and establish special linkages with others; and (4) upgrade and modernize interventions to reflect the best models and use of technology (Adelman, 2002).

Giles (2005) conducted three narratives with basic patterns underlying the roles and relationships between parents and educators in urban schools: the deficit, in loco parentis (in the place of the parent), and relational narratives. The deficit and in loco parentis narratives place parents in more limited and passive roles, whereas the relational narrative offers opportunities for both parents and educators to take on more active roles in which they can bring improve overall student success. Giles concludes that parent/educator relationships are very valuable to the academic and social and emotional development of students. Encouraging strong parent/educator relationships increases the chances students will be more successful in the areas of academics and extracurricular activities at school, which is key in preventing students from dropping out of school.

#### *Mental Health Services Providers*



Several researchers (Aviles, Bradley, Guerrero, & Barajas, 1999; Cranston-Gingras & Anderson, 1990; Lockhart & Keys, 1998) have made recommendations to address ways school counselors can be more involved in preventing students from dropping out of school. Lockhart and Keys (1998) asserted the importance of school counselors attending to the mental health needs of students using a more traditional responsive approach to counseling that includes addressing students' personal and social concerns by providing individual and group counseling services. With the diminishing capacity of the public system of mental health services and the rising number of students and families needing mental health services, school counselors are more than ever needed to assist with the voids now present. Lockhart and Keys (1998) discussed the need for school counselors to acquire additional skills to assist students with behavior and emotional challenges that interfere with their academic success and result in students dropping out of school.

A report from the National Institute of Medicine indicates that 15% to about 22% of the nation's 63 million children have mental health problems that are severe enough to warrant treatment (National Advisory Mental Health Council, 1990). In contrast, only about 20% of these children are receiving any type of mental health services. The mental health problems are also being seen at much earlier ages (Costello, 1990; Tuma, 1989; Zill & Schoenborn, 1990). "Despite this ever pressing need for counselors to provide mental health counseling services, school counselors are often limited in this role by school system policies" (Lockhart & Keys, 1998, p.4). The authors recommended that school counselors be allowed to address the individual needs of students and be provided the additional training to adequately work with students and families with mental health needs. Lockhart and Keys believe the role of school

counselors is to provide quality mental health services to students at-risk for dropping out of school.

Adelman and Taylor (2006) propose school counselors use an integrated behavior support services model. This model strives to enable student learning through a comprehensive, multifaceted and cohesive system which addresses barriers to learning. The integrated behavior support services model is innovative and encourages positive family and peer relationships while increasing the capacity of staff and students to effectively problem-solve academic and behavior challenges. There are three components to the integrated behavior support services model: an instructional development component, a learning support component, and a management component. In integrated behavior support programs, continuums of services are provided that include prevention, early intervention and systems of care. If school counselors are to effectively reduce the dropout rate using an integrated behavior support services model, they must adhere to the following six recommendations called core content areas: (1) enhancing teacher capacity for addressing problems and for fostering social, emotional, intellectual and behavioral development; (2) responding to, minimizing impact, and preventing crises; (3) enhancing school capacity to handle the variety of transition concerns confronting students and their families; (4) enhancing home involvement; (5) reaching out to the community to build linkages and collaboration and; (6) providing special assistance for students and families. Integrated behavior support services model are one mean of providing mental health care services to students and thus allowing more students to remain in school. When we address the mental health concerns of our students schools often become healthier and safer environments for all students.

*School Safety Advisors*

The National Defense Education Act identified school counselors as important agents of change in a time of school reform (Herr, 2002). The Act acknowledged the important skills school counselors possess to address the problems of economically disadvantaged students and those at risk; sexual and racial discrimination; the choosing of curricula, postsecondary education, and jobs by students; Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA); career education; physical and sexual abuse; and the reduction of school vandalism, underachievement, and school dropouts (Herr, 2002). School counselors are encouraged to monitor schools discipline systems and safety procedures to ensure students feel safe while on school grounds.

Based on school counselor training school counselors have an ethical and legal obligation to prevent clear and imminent danger to others (ASCA, 1998; ACA, 1995). Herman and Finn (2002) list fourteen recommendations for how school counselors can prevent school violence, which range from keeping up-to-date on effective violence prevention activities, risk assessment techniques, and interventions when the potential for violence exists, to assessing each threat by considering the language and context of the threat, students' previous violent activities and suicidal ideation, and other corroborating evidence. Several roles are missing in the dropout prevention discourse surrounding the role of school counselors in dropout prevention: leadership and systemic change/school reform.

### *School Leaders*

Leadership is a role that has not traditionally been a part of the school counselors' duties and responsibilities. The ASCA National Model has identified leadership has an important theme school counselors should embody as they implement comprehensive counseling programming that promote academic, career and personal/social development in students. In the ASCA National Model the role of school counselors in leadership is defined as school counselors

working toward systemic change to ensure student success. School counselors are encouraged to assist in closing the achievement gap, whenever found among students of color, poor students or underachieving students and their more advantaged peers. Ways to become effective leaders include: collaborating with other professionals in the school to influence system-wide changes and to implement school reform (American School Counselor Association, 2003).

For this study's purpose, we have investigated the leadership role school counselors should adopt in dropout prevention, which would include school counselors identifying students at-risk for dropping out of school by using data about known risk factors. The school counselors' leadership role in dropout prevention has not been well developed in the literature and therefore we must look to the existing educational leadership literature to help shape that role. We will discuss ways to develop this role further in chapter five.

#### *Systemic Change Agents/School Reform Agents*

##### *Restructuring Schools and School Systems*

In addition to leadership, school reform has been an additional role that school counselors have been asked to implement as part of the ASCA National Model to help students meet their academic, career, and personal/social developmental needs. In order for school counselors to better assist students in the area of dropout prevention they must learn more about their role as systemic change agents. The current literature is limited on the role of school counselors as systemic change agents in the area of dropout prevention; therefore we will look for guidance from the educational leadership field to help shape this role.

McMahon, Mason, and Paisley, (2009) have tried to help school counselors, or, as the researchers refer to them throughout their work, as, school counselor educators, define their role as systemic change agents. The researchers have encouraged school counselor educators to work

toward achieving change from an ecological perspective. School counselors should address social justice issues at the micro-level (i.e. within their colleges), at the meso-level (with district-level school counseling supervisors), and at the macro-level (within education and/or government). “Only through such systemic interventions can school counselor educators create sustainable change and help education move toward a more socially just system where all students can succeed” (McMahon et al., 2009).

The role of school counselors in dropout prevention will involve not only being able to restructure the way schools operate but also to change the way services are delivered to at-risk students to remove learning barriers and promote success. Petersen (2005) states, “children who are poor or of color or from families with little formal education experience a disproportionate level of academic failure, violence, underage pregnancy, drug use, adolescent crime, and incarceration. He cites research findings that connect poverty with other maladaptive behaviors (i.e. drug abuse, violence, and disinvestment in schools). Schools often respond to these social problems with piece meal programs. Some solutions to help reform schools should include helping students and families deal with stressors as well as helping to build social capital for students and their families. “Social capital can be defined as established social networks of trust and relationships that are exercised between individuals in a group, communities, or organization. These social networks are composed of social norms, sanctions, trust, and collaboration” (Petersen, 2005, p.471). School should work on addressing the three dimensions of social capital.

- Bonding social capital: The strong ties connecting family members, neighbors, close friends, and business associates. These ties connect people who share similar demographic characteristics.

- Bridging social capital: The weak ties connecting individuals from different ethnic and occupational backgrounds. Bridging implies horizontal connections to people with broadly comparable economic status and political power.
- Linking social capital: The vertical ties between poor and people in positions of influence in formal organizations. This dimension captures a vitally important additional feature of life in poor communities: that their members are usually excluded – by overt discrimination or lack of resources – from participating in major decisions relating to their welfare (Petersen, 2005, p.473).

Schools must recognize the importance of social capital and its effects on the development of social institutions that assist in the removal of barriers to learning. When school leaders work to build student social capital they increase the individual's level of personal and social empowerment thus providing the student a chance to escape from poverty and its damaging effects. As school counselors adopt the role of systemic change/school reform it will be important for school counselors to scale up efforts in the area of bridging social capital in an effort to reduce the dropout rate (Petersen, 2005).

### *Summary*

School counselors are noted to be one of the most important contributors in improving the attitudes of students toward school (Halliwell, Musella & Silvino, 1970). Unfortunately much of the literature surrounding dropout prevention is over ten years old and lacking a real focus on what school personnel can do specifically to address the dropout crisis. The literature surrounding the role of school counselors in dropout prevention per se is limited and focuses mainly on using group counseling techniques, early identification, and using various modes of

counseling (i.e., a traditional service delivery as opposed to a leadership school counseling role) to address factors that contribute to students dropping out of school.

### *Critique of the Literature and Conceptual Framework*

Like much of the literature on dropout prevention, the EDSTAR study failed to address what the primary role(s) of middle and high school counselors should be in dropout prevention. There is also no mention regarding how to assess the success of school counselor's efforts in implementing dropout prevention strategies/interventions. The questions crafted by EDSTAR were not developed around what school counselors are trained to do or the recommendations from the National Model, but rather the 15 effective strategies outlined by the national dropout prevention network (which fails to recognize the role of school counselors). The present study used the ASCA National Model as a framework to further explore the role of middle and high school counselors in dropout prevention and provided information regarding how school counselors think the success of their efforts in that role should be assessed.

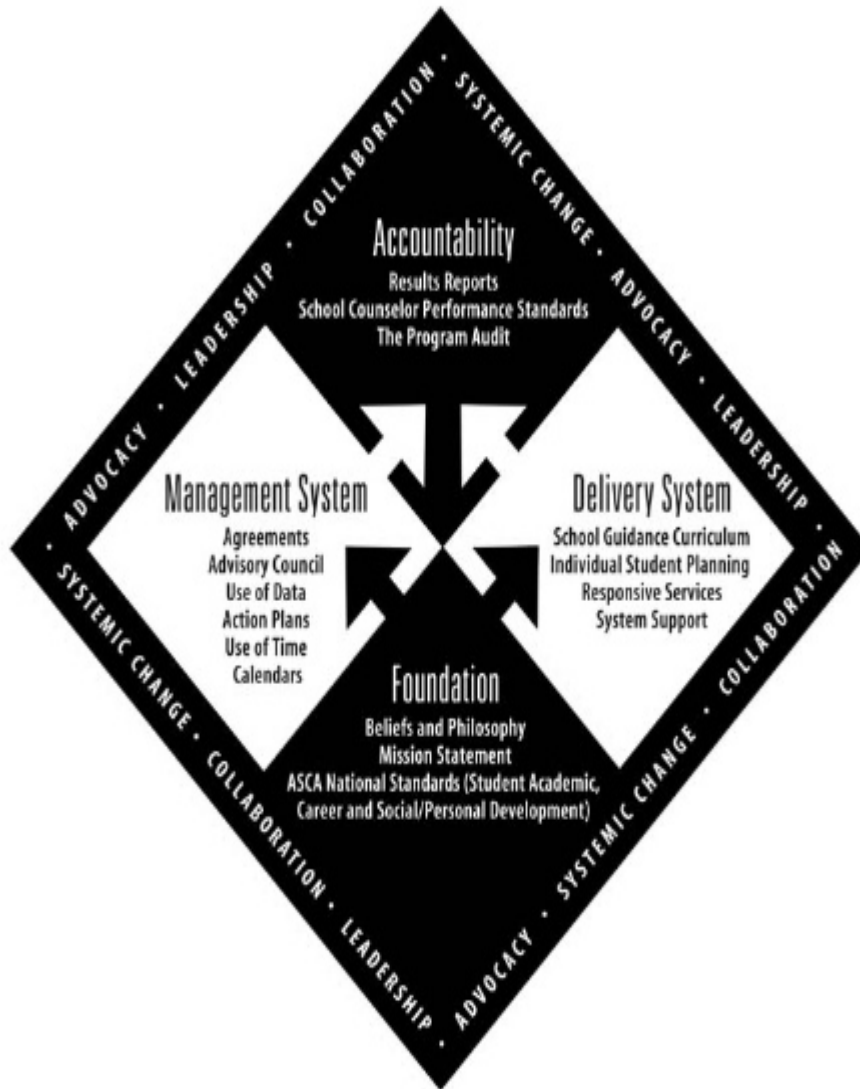
### *Conceptual Framework*

The ASCA National Model moves beyond exploring the role of school counselors to focus on how students benefit from the counseling services they receive. The model was created through ideas generated from ASCA collaborating with state, district and site models across the country. The model outlines how school counselors should spend their time. One example is that high school counselors should spend 15%-25% of their time on guidance curriculum, 25% - 35% individual student planning, 25%-35% responsive services, and 15%-20% on building system supports for students and their families. The outlined time allocation directs that school counselors spend 80% of their time providing direct services to students, staff and families and the remaining 20% on program management (American School Counselor Association, 2003).

Four major themes are featured in the ASCA National Model: leadership, advocacy, collaboration and systemic change. On the following page is a diagram of the ASCA National Model graphic.



# ASCA's National Model



The definitions for the themes/elements were adapted from the ASCA National Model original definitions which had a focus on academics, career, and personal/social development. The new definitions include definitions with a focus on what school counselors can do to reduce the dropout rate (American School Counselor Association, 2003).

#### *ASCA Themes and Elements*

**Leadership (definition in ASCA National Model):** School counselors serve as leaders by collaborating with other professionals in the school, resulting in system-wide change, and school reform (American School Counselor Association, 2003). “Leadership is the capacity or ability to guide others; counselors use their leadership skills in their department and in their advocacy role” (American School Counselor Association, 2003, p. 151).

**Leadership (dropout prevention):** Leadership involves school counselors leading in identifying students at-risk for dropping out of school using data about known risk factors or serving as the individual guiding the identification of students at-risk for dropping out of school using data about known risk factors.

**Advocacy ( definition in ASCA National Model):** School counselors advocate for students’ educational needs, work to ensure that these needs are addressed at every level of the school experience, and work to help remove barriers to learning (American School Counselor Association, 2003). “Advocacy is actively supporting causes, ideas or policies that promote and assist student academic, career and personal/social needs. One form of advocacy is the process of actively identifying underrepresented students and supporting them in their efforts to perform at their highest level of academic achievement” (American School Counselor Association, 2003, p.150).

Advocacy (dropout prevention): Advocacy includes school counselors working proactively to remove barriers to learning and advocating for needed services for students at-risk for dropping out of school.

Collaboration/Teaming (definition in ASCA National Model): School counselors work with school personnel, and outside agencies to develop and implement responsive educational programs that support the achievement of the identified goals for every student (American School Counselor Association, 2003). “Collaboration consists of a partnership where two or more individuals or organizations actively work together on a project or problem” (American School Counselor Association, 2003, p. 150).

Collaboration/Teaming (dropout prevention): Collaboration/teaming involve school counselors working with agencies outside of the school system that provide services to at-risk students and serving as a member of a school’s dropout prevention team.

Systemic change (definition in ASCA National Model): School counselors are able to use qualitative and quantitative data to guide the development and modification of critical policies and procedures that help eliminate systemic barriers to academic success, ensuring equity and access to a rigorous curriculum, and increasing post-secondary options (American School Counselor Association, 2003). “Systemic change is change affecting the entire system; transformational; change affecting more than an individual or series of individuals; focus of the change is upon the dynamic of the environment, not the individual” (American School Counselor Association, 2003, p.152).

Systemic change (dropout prevention) involves working for changes at the school level that will assist at-risk students in graduating and identifying and proposing evidenced-based, national drop-out prevention interventions that the school/school system could adopt.

The ASCA National Model focuses on facilitating three main domains of student development: academic, career, and personal/social development (American School Counselor Association, 2003). Each year school counselors are expected to set measurable goals for each of the domains noted above. Each domain has standards, competencies, and indicators. There are four main elements of the National Model: foundation, delivery system, management system and accountability. The two primary elements relating to dropout prevention are the delivery system and accountability. This study used the delivery system element as part of its framework.

**Delivery System (dropout prevention):** The delivery system involves providing individual and group counseling to students at risk of dropping out and providing a comprehensive National Model guidance program to all students.

**Delivery System (definition in ASCA National Model):** The delivery system entails how school counselors will implement the school counseling program. Several topics included under the delivery system include: guidance curriculum, individual student planning, responsive services, and systems of support (American School Counselor Association, 2003).

- **Guidance Curriculum:** “The school guidance curriculum component consists of a written instructional program that is comprehensive in scope, preventative and proactive, developmental in design, coordinated by school counselors and delivered, as appropriate, by school counselors and other educators” (ASCA, 2003, p.40). The guidance curriculum uses the following strategies: classroom instruction, interdisciplinary curriculum development, group activities, and parent workshops and instruction.

- Individual Student Planning: “Individual student planning consists of school counselors coordinating ongoing systemic activities designed to help individual students establish personal goals and develop future plans” (ASCA, 2003, p.41). Individual student planning consists of the following strategies: individual or small-group appraisal, and individual or small group advisement.
- Responsive Services: “The responsive services component of the school counseling program consists of activities to meet students’ immediate needs and concerns” (ASCA, 2003, p. 42). Responsive services are provided using the following strategies: consultation, individual and small-group counseling, crisis counseling, referrals, and peer facilitation.
- System Support: “System support consists of management activities that establish, maintain and enhance the total school counseling program” (ASCA, 2003, p.43). System support involves the following: professional development, consultation, collaboration and teaming, and program management and operations.

Accountability (definition in ASCA National Model): The accountability system involves school counselors evaluating the effectiveness of their program. The topics covered in accountability include: results reports, school counselor performance standards and program audit (American School Counselor Association, 2003). “Accountability is responsibility for one’s actions, particularly for objectives, procedures and results of one’s work and program; involves an explanation of what has been done. Responsibility for counselor performance, program implementation and results” (American School Counselor Association, 2003, p. 150).

Accountability (dropout prevention): Accountability will be explored using the three domains recommended by the What Works Clearinghouse for evaluating dropout prevention programs.

The framework for the assessment portion of this study used the three domains recommended by the What Works Clearinghouse for evaluating dropout prevention programs (<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc>). The three domains include: staying-in-school, progressing-in-school, and completing-school.

- Staying-in-school: “The staying in school domain includes measures of whether the student remained enrolled in school or dropped out of school without earning a high school diploma or GED certificate, as well as the number of school days enrolled” (<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc>/ September 2008 p.3).
- Progressing-in-school: “The progressing in school domain includes measures of credits earned, grade promotion, whether the student is making normal progress toward graduation, and highest grade completed” (<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc>/ September 2008 p.3).
- Completing-school: “The completing school domain includes measures of whether the student earned a high school diploma or received a GED certificate” (<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc>/ September 2008 p.3).

The present study defined the primary roles middle and high school counselors should adopt using the ASCA National Model’s five themes/elements as a guide. It moved beyond the roles identified by the literature to align with the current ASCA National Model themes and elements with a focus on dropout prevention. This study asked middle and high school counselors what they believed was the most appropriate way to measure their effectiveness in dropout prevention. The 2008 What Work Clearinghouse domains were used as the measurements for assessing their effectiveness.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHOD

#### *Introduction*

The purpose of this study was to investigate what school counselors perceive their primary role to be in dropout prevention, the extent to which that role varies as a function of whether they are practicing at the middle or high school levels, and what they perceive to be the most appropriate way to evaluate their effectiveness in that role. The ASCA National Model provided the conceptual framework for this study. Although that Model emphasizes the school counselor's role in the academic, career, personal and social development mission of schools, surprisingly, it does not prescribe or even explicitly mention a role for the school counselor in dropout prevention.

Should the school counselor function primarily in a service delivery mode (i.e. provide a comprehensive school program that includes providing group and individual counseling services)? Such a role would be consistent with one out of the four elements (delivery system) of the National Model and reflects many of the traditional recommendations in the literature for the school counselor in dropout prevention. Or should the primary role of the school counselor reflect one or more of the newer themes-leadership, advocacy, collaboration/teaming, and/or systemic change - espoused in the National Model?

Finally, accountability is another of the four elements of the National Model. What do school counselors perceive as the most appropriate way to measure their effectiveness in dropout prevention - e.g. the percentage of students who ultimately graduate from high school, the number of students who dropped out of school in a given year? This study investigated how school counselors' believe that their effectiveness (accountability) in dropout prevention should

be assessed. The study examined these beliefs using the 2008 What Works Clearinghouse measurement (<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/September2008>) domains: staying-in-school, progressing-in-school, and completing-school.

### *Participants*

Participants in the study included school counselors from four school districts that focus substantial resources on dropout prevention initiatives. These districts employ approximately 135 middle school counselors and 155 high school counselors. These 290 school counselors were asked to participate in the dropout prevention study. The total population of middle and high school counselors in North Carolina is approximately 2,321 (Department of Public Instruction, 2007).

The number that made up the study sample that was administered the survey represented 12.49% (290) of the total population of middle and high school counselors. The total number of school counselors that participated in the study was 170. The total response rate was 59% (170/290). The researcher's goal was to have a response rate of at least 50% of the middle school counselors and at least 50% of the high school counselors to complete the survey from the participating four school districts. The middle school counselors' response rate was 50.4% (68/135). The high school counselors' response rate was 65.8% (102/155). The sites and participants for this study were chosen using a convenience sampling method (Howell, 2007). All of them were involved in a five district consortium, which was focusing on reducing their dropout rates. The five school districts are located within 60 miles of one another. Table 1 provides data about the five districts (A-E). However, District E, which had the lowest cohort graduation rate opted not to participate in the study.



Table 1 features district wide data describing the middle and high schools, as well as graduation rates. District A has the highest four year cohort graduation rate 87.9%. District E has the lowest four year cohort graduation rate 63.0%. District D was the largest school district in the study with approximately twenty-eight middle schools and twenty-five high schools. District B was the smallest school district to participate in the study with only three middle schools and two high schools.

*Table 1*

*District Data*

District	4-Year Cohort Graduation Rate	#Middle Schools	Size of Middle	#High Schools	Size of High Schools
District A	87.9%	4	655	3	1,201
District B	76.3%	3	543	2	1,064
District C	75.1%	11	614	8	1,060
District D	78.6%	28	964	25	1,544
District E	63.0%	7	655	7	864

Table 2 contains the school counselor data. The table illustrates how many counselors are in the participating school districts as well as how many of those school counselors participated in the study. District A had the highest participation percentage 93%. District E opted not to participate in the study. District B had the lowest participation percentage 19%. The majority of the sample came from District D (108 participants out of the 170 total).

Table 2

*School Counselor Data*

District	#Middle School Counselors	#High School Counselors	#Total Participants	%Total Participants (w/in district)	% Total Participants (sample)
District A	6	8	13	93%	7.6%
District B	12	15	5	19%	2.9%
District C	33	32	44	68%	25.9%
District D	84	100	108	59%	63.5%
District E	21	28	0	0%	0%

Table 3 illustrates the overall demographic data. The majority of participants were Caucasian (129) females (136). The mean years of school counseling experience of the total sample were 10.35 years ( $SD = 7.31$ ).

Table 3

*Overall Demographic Data*

Gender		Race						School Level	
Male	Female	Ca	AA	His	Am	As	M-R	Middle	High
34	136	129	35	4	0	1	1	68	102

Note:

Ca=Caucasian, AA= African American, His= Hispanic, Am= American Indian, As= Asian, M-R= Multi-Racial

Table 4 highlights the middle school counselor demographic data. The middle school counselors that responded to the survey were predominantly Caucasian (54) females (59). The mean years of school counseling experience of the middle school counselor participants was 11.45 years ( $SD = 7.31$ ).

Table 4

*Middle School Demographic Data*

Gender		Race						n
Male	Female	Ca	AA	His	Am	As	M-R	
9	59	54	14	0	0	0	0	68

Note:

Ca=Caucasian, AA= African American, Hi= Hispanic, Ai= American Indian, As= Asian, M-R= Multi-Racial

Table 5 shows the high school counselor demographic data. The high school counselors that responded to the survey were also predominantly Caucasian (75) females (77). The mean years of experience of the high school counselor participants were 9.61 years ( $SD = 6.97$ ).

Table 5

*High School Demographic Data*

Gender		Race						n
Male	Female	Ca	AA	His	Am	As	M-R	
25	77	75	21	4	0	1	1	102

Note:

Ca=Caucasian, AA= African American, His= Hispanic, Am= American Indian, As= Asian, M-R= Multi-Racial

*Instrument*

The survey used in this study included three sets of statements. The first set of statements, which consisted of 5 items, covered demographic information about the sample such as their years of experience working as a school counselor, gender, race, current level of practice

(middle or high school), and their current school district. The second set of statements, which consisted of 10 items, discussed what school counselors believed the primary role of school counselors should be in dropout prevention. The statements were created based on the recommendations in the literature about the prescribed role for school counselors in dropout prevention and fit into either an element or theme featured in the ASCA National Model. In this section there were two statements that represented each of the following themes: leadership, advocacy, systemic change and collaboration/teaming. Two statements represented the element, delivery system.

Finally the last set of statements, which consisted of 6 items, discussed the best way to measure the effectiveness of school counselors' efforts in dropout prevention. The survey statements were created based on the 2008 What Works Clearinghouse domains that have been used to measure the effectiveness of dropout prevention programs (<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/September2008>.). This section consisted of 6 items, two statements to represent each of the following domains: staying-in-school, progressing-in- school, and completing-school. All items in this survey used a five-point Likert-scale format (see Appendix B for the survey).

A pilot study was conducted with a panel of graduate students studying to become school counselors to assess the face validity of each survey item (see Appendix C for pilot survey). The survey was piloted with twenty-four graduate students in a school counseling program at a university in North Carolina. The graduate students were chosen because they were studying the ASCA National Model. The graduate students served as judges, making sure items measured what they were intended to measure.

As can be seen in Table 6, the results of the pilot study indicated that the overwhelming majority of graduate students judged that eight of the ten items in section II measured the school counseling role in dropout prevention that they were intended to measure. However, two of the statements (seven and nine) seemed to be rather confusing, rendering inconsistent responses. The original statement number seven, which was intended to measure leadership, read: To serve as the individual in charge of identifying students at-risk for dropping out of school using data about known risk factors. In statement number seven, participants had a difficult time deciding between leadership and systemic change; as a result, the statement was changed to distinctly signify leadership. In order to eliminate the confusion, the statement was amended to read: To lead in identifying students at-risk for dropping out of school using data about known risk factors. The second ambiguous statement in section II of the pilot survey was number nine. The original statement number nine, which was intended to measure systemic change, read: To guide school reform efforts that assist at-risk students in graduating. In statement number nine, participants had a difficult time deciding between leadership and systemic change. As a result, the statement was changed to distinctly signify systemic change. The statement was amended to read: To work for changes at the school level that will assist at-risk student in graduating. The changes ensured that each of the statements represented a distinct ASCA theme or element.

Table 6 displays the pilot survey results.

With respect to section III of the survey, the pilot data revealed that the overwhelming majority of graduate students judged that each of the items did measure the type of dropout prevention outcome – staying in school, progressing in school, or completing school – for which it was intended. As a result, no changes were made in the wording of any of these items.

Table 6

Pilot Survey Results

Section II

	Leadership	Collabor./Teaming	Advocacy	System.Change	Delivery
Statement 1.	22	0	2	0	0
Statement 2.	0	22	1	0	1
Statement 3.	0	0	23	0	1
Statement 4.	2	0	1	20	1
Statement 5.	0	0	0	0	24
Statement 6.	0	24	0	0	0
Statement 7.	7	1	5	9	2
Statement 8.	2	0	2	1	19
Statement 9.	8	1	4	9	2
Statement 10.	1	0	18	4	1

Section III

	Staying in School	Progressing In School	Completing School
Statement 1.	0	1	23
Statement 2.	21	1	2
Statement 3.	1	23	0
Statement 4.	21	3	0
Statement 5.	0	0	24
Statement 6.	4	19	1

### *Procedure*

Before beginning the data collection process, the researcher obtained Internal Review Board (IRB) approval from the University and consent from the participating school districts, as well as, the participating middle and high school counselors (see Appendix D for consent letter). The data collection process consisted of surveying middle and high school counselors in four out of five of the school districts in a local networking consortium.

In District A, the researcher met with each middle and high school counselor individually and distributed the consent form and the survey. All counselors within the district except for one high school counselor that was not yet hired completed the survey. The response rate in District A was 93% with 13/14 school counselors, seven middle school counselors and six high school counselors completing the survey. In District B, the researcher had a much lower response rate (19%) because she was not able to meet with the counselors directly due to district policy and was not able to be a part of one of their scheduled meeting to distribute the survey. As a result, the survey had to be put in email format and sent out to the counselors with the consent form via the Student Services Director. Only 5/27 school counselors responded (19%) to the survey (two middle school and three high school counselors). The survey was sent out only one time by the Student Services Director to all the middle and high school counselors.

In District C, the researcher was allowed to be a part of the middle and high school counselors regularly scheduled meeting. During the meetings, the researcher was able to discuss the purpose of the research, and distribute consent forms and the surveys. In District C, there was a high response rate of 68% with 44/65 school counselors (nineteen middle and twenty-five high school counselors) responding to the survey. In District D, the researcher was not able to meet personally with the school counselors due to district policy. The researcher was advised to

send out the consent form and survey to all the middle and high school counselors via email with the assistance of the Student Services Director of the district. The Student Services Director sent the survey out twice, and the result was a fairly high response rate of 59% with 108/184 school counselors (forty middle and sixty-eight high school counselors) responding to the survey.

District E opted not to participate in the study.

### *Design*

The data collection method involved a survey and a descriptive quantitative design. There was one independent variable, counseling setting with two levels (middle or high school) and two sets of dependent variables (school counselor dropout prevention role statements and indicators of dropout prevention effectiveness). Other variables used in the study were as follows: participants' gender, race, years of school counseling experience, and school district. These variables were used to describe the sample.

The descriptive quantitative design was chosen because it allowed the investigator to measure differences in responses among two major groups: middle and high school counselors as well as explore variability among those groups. "In quantitative research, the investigator identifies multiple variables and seeks to measure them" (Creswell, 2008, p.139).

### *Research Questions*

The following questions guided this study: What should the primary role of school counselors be in dropout prevention? Does that role differ as a function of the school level – middle or high school – at which the counselor is working? And what is perceived to be the most appropriate ways for assessing the school counselor's effectiveness in dropout prevention, and does it vary as a function of school level?

### *Statistical Analysis*



The survey responses were analyzed using version 17 of SPSS for windows analysis software (Amos Development Corporation, 2008). The SPSS software allowed the researcher to obtain descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations), *F* values, as well as, repeated measures analysis of variance.

A multivariate analysis of variance was performed in order to determine whether perceptions of the counselor's role varied as a function of the school level at which they worked. Based on the results of that analysis which indicated that there were not differences in role perception as a function of school level, a univariate repeated measures analysis of variance was then performed in order to determine whether the counselors assigned the same or different priorities to each of the five different counseling roles in dropout prevention. Subsequent to a significant *F*, post-hoc comparisons using Fisher's Least Significant Difference Procedure (LSD) (Howell, 2007) with Bonferroni- Holm's (1979) adjustment for alpha level for each comparison were employed to locate significant differences with respect to perceived importance (i.e. mean differences) among the five roles in dropout prevention. Instead of performing each post-hoc comparison at the same alpha level as would be done in a standard Bonferroni comparison, the Bonferonni-Holm's procedure is more conservative and adjusts the alpha level on sequential comparisons in order to reduce the likelihood of increasing the overall type one error rate in the study as a result of making multiple post-hoc comparisons.

The same logic and set of analyses were performed on the proposed methods for measuring the effectiveness of school counselors in dropout prevention. Thus, a MANOVA was run to determine whether there were any differences between middle and high school counselors in their perception of how the effectiveness (i.e. staying in school, progressing in school, or completing school measures) of school counselors in dropout prevention should be measured.

Given that differences were not found, a univariate repeated measures ANOVA was performed to determine whether an overall significant difference existed in their perceptions of the best way to measure effectiveness. Post-hoc comparisons, as described above, were then used to pinpoint the significant difference(s). The results of all the analyses are reported in chapter four.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

#### *Background*

The purpose of this study was to investigate what school counselors perceived their primary role to be in dropout prevention, the extent to which that role perception varied as a function of whether they were practicing middle or high school counselors and their view about the most appropriate way to evaluate their effectiveness in that role. The ASCA National Model provided the conceptual framework for this study. A survey was created by grouping responses into either one of the four main ASCA themes (leadership, advocacy, collaboration/teaming, or systemic change). Participants were also able to choose responses that fell into the ASCA element category of delivery system. Ten questions (two for each ASCA themes/element) were used to assess the counselors' responses. Six statements were used to measure the alternatives recommended to evaluate the effectiveness of what middle and high school counselors do in dropout prevention. The statements (two per each of the three domains) were based on the three What Works Clearinghouse domains (2008) (staying-in-school, progressing-in-school, and completing-school) for evaluating the effectiveness of dropout prevention initiatives.

The survey was distributed to a total of 290 school counselors. The total population of school counselors for this study consisted of 135 middle school counselors and 155 high school counselors from four school districts (one school district, district E, opted not to participate in the study). The total number of school counselors that participated in the study was 170. The total response rate was 59% (170/290). The middle school counselor response rate was 50.4 % (68/135). The high school counselor response rate was 66% (102/155).

Do school counselors' views of their primary role in dropout prevention vary as a function of school level in which they are employed?

Table 7 presents the means and standard deviations for the middle school counselors, the high school counselors, and the total sample of school counselors for the five dependent variables that measure what they believe their primary role should be in dropout prevention. The results of the analysis to answer the first question are presented after the table.

Table 7  
*Means and Standard Deviations for the Role Dependent Variables*

Dependent Variable	School Level	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Leadership	Middle	66	6.91	1.66
	High	95	6.52	1.83
	Total	161	6.68	1.77
Collaboration	Middle	66	8.88	1.10
	High	95	8.74	1.15
	Total	161	8.80	1.13
Advocacy	Middle	66	8.94	1.32
	High	95	8.94	1.19
	Total	161	8.94	1.24
Systemic Change	Middle	66	8.09	1.30
	High	95	7.98	1.41
	Total	161	8.02	1.36
Delivery	Middle	66	9.09	1.15
	High	95	9.20	1.17
	Total	161	9.16	1.16

In order to determine whether differences in recommended roles existed between middle and high school counselors, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted using the five dependent variables with school level as the independent variable. The result of the analysis indicated that there were no significant differences in the way that middle and high school participants perceived the primary role of the school counselor in dropout prevention,  $F(5,155) = 0.893$ , Pillai's Trace = 0.28,  $p = 0.488$ .

What should be the primary role of school counselors in dropout prevention?

Because there was no difference in perceptions as a function of school level, the data for middle and high school counselors were then pooled in order to answer this question. A repeated measures analysis of variance (i.e. randomized block design) was performed on the five dependent variables in order to determine if school counselors accorded differential importance to one or more of the five roles in dropout prevention. Results of this initial analysis indicated that they did [ $F(4,157) = 79.159$ , Pillai's Trace = .669,  $p = .000$ .], but also revealed a violation of the assumption of sphericity of the variance-covariance matrix,  $X^2(9) = 138.357$ , Mauchly's  $W = 0.418$ ,  $p = .000$ . Nevertheless, each of the possible adjustments to this statistical test for this violation indicated that the results were still significant, e.g., lower-bound adjustment correction,  $F(1, 160) = 165.295$ ,  $p = .000$ . Thus, school counselors accord differential importance to one or more of the five primary roles in dropout prevention.

In order to determine where the significant difference(s) were in counselors' views of what should be their primary dropout prevention role, post-hoc comparisons for each of ten possible unique pair-wise comparisons (leadership with collaboration, with advocacy, with delivery system, and with systemic change; collaboration with advocacy, with delivery system, and with systemic change; advocacy with delivery system and with systemic change; and

delivery system with systemic change) were performed. As can be seen in Table 8, the sequential post-hoc comparisons were conducted using Fisher's Least Significant Difference (LSD) test with Bonferroni-Holm adjustments (i.e., values ranging from .005 - .05).

Table 8

*Role Pair-Wise Comparisons Using Fisher's LSD Test with Bonferroni-Holm Adjustments*

Comparison	<i>p</i> values	Mean Difference	Sign.
Leadership/collaboration	.05/10 = .005	-2.118	.000
Leadership/advocacy	.05/9 = .0056	-2.261	.000
Leadership/delivery	.05/8 = .00625	-2.478	.000
Leadership/systemic change	.05/7 = .0071	-1.348	.000
Collaboration/delivery	.05/6 = .0083	-.360	.000
Collaboration/systemic change	.05/5 = .01	.770	.000
Advocacy/systemic change	.05/4 = .0125	.913	.000
Delivery/systemic change	.05/3 = .0167	1.130	.000
Advocacy/delivery	.05/2 = .025	-.217	.005
Collaboration/advocacy	.05/1 = .05	-.143	.098

Results indicated that all of the pair-wise comparisons were significant except the collaboration-advocacy comparison. More specifically, the school counselors believe their primary emphasis in dropout prevention should be in the delivery system area (i.e. providing individual and group counseling to students at risk of dropping out and providing a comprehensive National Model guidance program to all students). Conversely, they believe that the least amount of time should be spent in providing leadership for dropout prevention efforts (i.e. leading in identifying students at-risk for dropping out of school using data about known

risk factors or serving as the individual guiding the identification of students at-risk for dropping out of school using data about known risk factors).

The school counselors view collaboration and advocacy as equal in importance as far as a primary emphasis in dropout prevention, but both are seen as significantly less important than delivery system; yet significantly more important than the leadership role. Collaboration involves working with agencies outside of the school system that provide services to at-risk students and serving as a member of a school's dropout prevention team, while advocacy includes working proactively to remove barriers to learning and advocating for needed services for students at-risk for dropping out of school.

Finally, systemic change, although regarded as a significantly more important role than leadership, is seen as the second least important role for school counselors to adopt in dropout prevention. The systemic change role involves working for changes at the school level that will assist at-risk students in graduating and identifying and proposing evidenced-based, national drop-out prevention interventions that the school/school system could adopt.

Given that service delivery is the primary role in dropout prevention endorsed by these school counselors, the researcher explored the idea of conducting a post-hoc comparison for the two delivery system items (items five and eight) to find out if there was a difference in the type of delivery model they preferred. Item five – providing direct individual and group counseling to **students at-risk for dropping out** – reflects a more traditional service provision mode, whereas item eight – providing a comprehensive counseling program as described in the American School Counselors' Association (ASCA) National Model **to all students** is consistent with a contemporary view of the school counselor's role. However, an inspection of the means and standard deviations indicated that there were not an appreciable difference between the two items

and that an inferential statistical test was not warranted (see Table 9). As a result, no further tests were done on the role variables.

Table 9  
*Mean and Standard Deviations of the Delivery Items*

Dependent Variable	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Role 5 (Traditional)	170	4.45	1.04
Role 8 (ASCA Model)	170	4.48	.925

Does the most appropriate way to assess the school counselor's effectiveness in dropout prevention vary as a function of school level?

Table 10 presents the means and standard deviations for the middle school counselors, the high school counselors, and the total sample of school counselors for the three dependent variables that measure what they believe should be the way to assess the effectiveness of their dropout prevention efforts. The results of the analysis to answer the question are presented after the table.

Table 10  
*Means and Standard Deviations of Assessment Dependent Variables*

Dependent Variables	School Level	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Progressing	Middle	64	5.94	1.70
	High	96	6.11	2.00
	Total	160	6.04	1.88
Completing	Middle	64	5.70	1.62
	High	96	5.73	1.91
	Total	160	5.72	1.79
Staying In	Middle	64	5.91	1.84
	High	96	5.86	2.03
	Total	160	5.88	1.95



In order to determine whether differences in recommended assessment options existed between middle and high school counselors, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted using the three dependent variables with school level as the independent variable. The result of the analysis indicated that there were no significant differences in the way that middle and high school participants believe their effectiveness in dropout prevention should be assessed,  $F(3,156) = .438$ , Pillai's Trace = .008,  $p = .726$ .

What is perceived to be the most appropriate way of assessing the school counselor's effectiveness in dropout prevention?

Because there was no difference in perceptions as a function of school level, the data for middle and high school counselors were then pooled in order to answer this question. A repeated measures analysis of variance (i.e., randomized block design) was performed on the assessment's dependent variables in order to determine if school counselors accorded differential importance to one or more of the three assessment domains. Results of this initial analysis indicated that they did [ $F(2, 158) = 4.286$ , Pillai's Trace = .051,  $p = .015$ ]. but also revealed a violation of the assumption of sphericity of the variance-covariance matrix,  $X^2(2) = 6.054$ , Mauchly's  $W = .962$ ,  $p = .048$ . Nevertheless, each of the possible adjustments to this statistical test for this violation indicated that the results were still significant, e.g. lower-bound adjustment correction,  $F(1, 159) = 4.556$ ,  $p = .011$ . Thus, school counselors accord differential importance to one or more of the three assessment domains.

In order to determine where the significant difference(s) were in counselors' views of what should be used to assess the effectiveness of school counselors' dropout prevention efforts, post-hoc comparisons for each of three possible unique pair-wise comparisons (staying-in-school with progressing-in-school, and with completing-school [graduating]; and progressing-in-school

with completing-school) were performed. As can be seen in Table 11, the sequential post-hoc comparisons were conducted using Fisher's LSD test with Bonferroni-Holm adjustments (i.e. values ranging from .005 - .05).

Table 11

*Assessment Variable Pair-Wise Comparisons Using Fisher's LSD Test with Bonferroni-Holm Adjustments*

Comparisons	<i>p</i> values	Mean Difference	Sign.
Progressing/completing	.05/3 = .0167	.325	.004
Staying/progressing	.05/2 = .025	-.163	.095
Staying/completing	.05/1 = .05	.162	.153

The result indicated that the only significant comparison was for progressing-in-school versus completing-school  $p = .004$ . Thus, school counselors thought that it was more appropriate to evaluate their effectiveness in dropout prevention based on whether students made progress in school (i.e. the number of credits earned in a given year by students identified as at-risk for dropping out and/or the highest grade completed by students at-risk for dropping out) than by whether students completed school (i.e. the number or percentage of students who earned a high school diploma and/or the number or percentage of students who earned a GED).

However, they did not assign greater importance to measuring their effectiveness in terms of students progressing-in-school versus students merely staying-in-school (i.e. by the number of students who dropped out in a given year and/or by number of days students identified as at-risk for dropping out were enrolled in a given year). In addition, they did not favor staying-in-school measures of dropout prevention effectiveness over completing-school measures or vice versa. Thus, of the three possible assessment domains progressing-in-school was chosen over the

completing-in-school comparison by school counselors to be important enough to use to measure dropout prevention effectiveness.

### *Summary*

The quantitative data analysis for this study revealed that the middle and high school counselors from the four participating school districts did not differ in what they perceived their primary role to be in dropout prevention, however, school counselors as a whole did show differences in how they perceived each of the five dropout prevention roles compared to each other. School counselors put the least emphasis on leadership and the most emphasis on delivery system followed by both collaboration/teaming and advocacy and then systemic change.

When looking at how the middle and high school counselors thought that their efforts should be assessed, the results once again indicated no significant difference between how middle and high school counselors believed their efforts should be assessed. For the counselors as a whole, only one significant difference was found when comparing the 2008 What Works Clearinghouse domains to one another, the only difference being in favoring the progressing-in-school measures of effectiveness over the completing-school measures. School counselors believe the best way to measure their dropout prevention effectiveness was students' progress in school (i.e., credits earned, grade promotion, whether the student is making normal progress toward graduation, and highest grade completed). Implications for policy and practice, as well as ideas for further study, will be examined in Chapter Five.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

#### *Introduction*

The purpose of this study was to investigate the role North Carolina middle and high school counselors believe that they should adopt in dropout prevention. This study used the ASCA National Model as the conceptual framework and adapted the theme and element definitions to support a dropout prevention focus. The ASCA National Model consists of four main themes: advocacy, collaboration/teaming, leadership and systemic change. There are four main elements of the National Model: foundation, delivery system, management system and accountability. The two primary elements relating to dropout prevention are delivery system and accountability. These two primary elements were used as part of the conceptual framework throughout this study.

Three domains recommended by the 2008 What Works Clearinghouse served as the lens for exploring the accountability element within the ASCA National Model. The domains included: staying-in-school, progressing-in-school, and completing-school. The staying-in-school domain measures: whether the student remained enrolled in school or dropped out of school without earning a high school diploma or GED certificate, as well as the number of school days enrolled. The progressing-in-school domain includes the number of credits earned, grade promotion, whether the student is making normal progress toward graduation, and highest grade completed. The final accountability domain, completing-school, measures whether the student earned a high school diploma or received a GED certificate.

The research questions explored were: (1) What should be the primary role of school counselors in dropout prevention?, (2) Does that role differ as a function of the school level,

middle or high school, at which the counselor is working?, (3) What is perceived to be the most appropriate ways for assessing the school counselor's effectiveness in dropout prevention?, (4) Does it vary as a function of school level?

Participants for the study included school counselors from four school districts that focus substantial resources on dropout prevention initiatives. These districts employ approximately 135 middle school counselors and 155 high school counselors. These 290 school counselors were asked to participate in the dropout prevention study. The total population of middle and high school counselors in North Carolina is approximately 2,321 (Department of Public Instruction, 2007).

The number that made up the study sample that was administered the survey represented 12.49% (290) of the total population of middle and high school counselors. The total number of school counselors that participated in the study was 170. The total response rate was 59% (170/290). The researcher met her goal of having a response rate of at least 50% of the middle school counselors and at least 50% of the high school counselors to complete the survey from the participating four school districts. The middle school counselors' response rate was 50.4% (68/135). The high school counselors' response rate was 65.8% (102/155). The sites and participants for this study were chosen using a convenience sampling method. All of them were involved in a five district consortium, which was focusing on reducing their dropout rates. The five school districts are located within 60 miles of one another. The results for the research questions are discussed in the following paragraphs.

The quantitative data analysis for this study revealed that the middle and high school counselors from the four participating school districts did not differ in what they perceived their primary role should be in dropout prevention. However, school counselors as a whole did show

differences in how they perceived each of the five dropout prevention roles compared to each other. School counselors put the least emphasis on leadership and the most emphasis on delivery systems followed by both collaboration/teaming and advocacy and then systemic change.

When looking at how the middle and high school counselors thought that their dropout prevention efforts should be assessed, the results once again indicated no significant difference between how middle and high school counselors believed their efforts should be assessed. For the counselors as a whole, only one significant difference was found when comparing the 2008 What Works Clearinghouse domains to one another, the only difference being in favoring the progressing-in-school measures of effectiveness over the completing-school measures. School counselors believe progressing-in-school to be a preferred assessment domain to use compared to the completing-in-school domain to measure how effective they implement dropout prevention efforts with students. Progress in school includes school counselors looking at student's credits earned, grade promotion, whether the student is making normal progress toward graduation, and highest grade completed. The staying-in-school/completing-school comparisons basically yielded equal results, as did the progressing-in-school/staying-in-school comparisons basically yielded equal results, meaning participants did not report any difference in importance.

### *Explication of Results*

This section will explore the results of the data by dividing the findings into two sections primary roles and then assessment/evaluation. Under each section, findings will be highlighted and related back to the literature surrounding the role of school counselors in dropout prevention. In addition, this section will discuss why participants may have responded accordingly to each section of research statements.

### *Primary Roles*

The findings indicated that there were no significant differences in what middle and high school counselors from the four participating school districts perceived their primary role to be dropout prevention. This was somewhat surprising in that middle and high school counselors seem to have different priorities to address based on student developmental or age-appropriate needs (Dahir, 2004). Dahir's (2004) research suggest that middle school counselors tend to put more emphasis on personal/social growth dealing with such issues as helping students resolve conflicts and problem-solve other school and home situations (which would fall under the role of delivery system), while high school counselors would be expected to put more emphasis on systemic change efforts than middle school counselors, (which would fall under the role of systemic change). When the responses were pooled and comparisons were made pairing each role one with another, significant differences did emerge between the various dropout prevention roles.

The participants in general found delivery system to be the primary role that best allowed them to help keep students in school. This finding is not surprising in that school counselors have traditionally used the delivery system as a means of assisting students in school counseling programs. Individual and group counseling techniques have traditionally been used in the school counseling profession. Group counseling is one of the most often mentioned methods for counselors to use in reducing the number of students dropping out of school (Blum & Jones, 1993). Amrod (1989), Beck and Muia (1980), Larsen and Shertzer (1987), and O'Hara, Reed, and Davenport (1978) all discuss the importance of counselors helping potential dropouts from positive self-concepts through the use of group counseling. The results support a portion of the ASCA position statement which reads as follows: "Professional school counselors work with

other educators and community resources to provide early identification and intervention for potential dropouts and other students who may be considered at-risk through a comprehensive, developmental, K-12 counseling”

([http://asca2.timberlakepublishing.com//files/PS\\_Dropout%20Prevention.pdf](http://asca2.timberlakepublishing.com//files/PS_Dropout%20Prevention.pdf)March2010p.16).

The ASCA position statement supports the need for a strong emphasis on delivery system. The significance of the current finding is that school counselors certainly endorse the importance of delivery system, but they may need to expand their knowledge of the other role areas as they seek to help students stay in school.

The tendency to prefer delivery system over the other roles may possibly be attributed to lack of knowledge/skill or lack of comfort/confidence in the areas of leadership and systemic. Or it may indicate that despite the emphasis on these newer themes in the ASCA National Model school counselors still view their role in dropout prevention primarily from a delivery service mode. It will have to remain for further research to determine whether lack of knowledge/skill and/or comfort/confidence in the areas of leadership and systemic change are instrumental in school counselors’ preference for delivery system as their primary role in dropout prevention.

Regardless, school counselors providing delivery system services should do so in the context of a comprehensive counseling program. The ASCA position statement encourages school counselors to work with other educators and community resources to provide early identification and intervention for potential dropouts and other students who may be considered at-risk through a comprehensive, developmental, k-12 counseling program in efforts to reduce the dropout rate

([http://asca2.timberlakepublishing.com//files/PS\\_Dropout%20Prevention.pdf](http://asca2.timberlakepublishing.com//files/PS_Dropout%20Prevention.pdf)March2010).



Lapan et al. (1997) conducted a study with approximately 30,000 high students in Missouri who had attended school in which comprehensive developmental high school programs were implemented to students and compared those students' academic progress to students that did not have comprehensive counseling programs. Research by MacDonald and Sink (1999) found comprehensive guidance programs to be vital mechanisms for helping all students personalize and obtain the most benefits from their educational experiences.

The results of the current study demonstrated that advocacy and collaboration follow delivery system regarding the primary roles school counselors believed they should adopt to help prevent students from dropping out of school. School counselors rated advocacy slightly (but not significantly) higher in importance regarding primary role than collaboration. The literature supports the use of school counselors as student advocates to help remove barriers that contribute to students dropping out of school. The role of the school counselor as student advocate is to bring about social justice and equality for all students. School counselors in particular must serve as student advocates for students of color and students from low socioeconomic (SES) backgrounds (Bemak & Chung, 2005). Advocating for students may involve confronting teachers or administrators that may hold low expectations for students of color, or students from low SES backgrounds. It also may involve confronting policies and practices that are overtly or covertly non-supportive of all students within the school. Student advocacy requires special skills that can be acquired through pre-service and in-service trainings. School counselors are encouraged to work closely with their district supervisor when working as a student advocate. As student advocates, school counselors are encouraged to work closely with supportive outside agencies.

Taylor and Adelman (2000) state school counselors working with school, home and community resources can help solve the dropout prevention problem. They add the role of school counselors as collaborative should be guided by six key areas of function: (1) classroom-focused programs, (2) support for transitions, (3) student and family assistance, (4) community outreach, (5) crisis response and prevention, and (6) home involvement in schooling. As school counselors work in the areas of advocacy and collaboration it will be important to consider research-based models such as such as full-service community schools (Dryfoos & Maguire, 2002), and integrated behavior support services models (Adelman & Taylor, 2006) that have been connected to dropout prevention. By advocating for students who have been marginalized, and collaborating with outside agencies to provide counseling services, school counselors will be able to help those students who have traditionally been overlooked by the system to strive academically in the future.

The last two dropout prevention roles with the least amount of support were systemic change and leadership. School counselors did not feel providing systemic change and leadership services to students made as significant an impact in keeping students in school compared to the other three roles. Systemic change did receive a higher rating compared to leadership. The literature regarding the role of school counselors as systemic change agents is limited. The systemic change literature focuses primarily on the role of principals in systemic change (Brown, 2005; Fullan, 2009; Fullan & Levin, 2009). There is research that supports the role of school counselors in building social capital in at-risk students and their families in an effort to reduce the dropout rate. Petersen (2005) stresses that school counselors should help bridge the social capital, meaning the weak ties connecting individuals from different ethnic and occupational backgrounds in an effort to remove barriers that contribute to students dropping out of school.

Systemic change and leadership are closely tied in the literature. However, in this study leadership received less support in regards to its importance as a primary role school counselors believed they should adopt in dropout prevention, compared to the other four dropout prevention roles.

Leadership received the least amount of support when compared to the other four dropout prevention roles. School counselors indicated they were not sure if leadership should be the primary role they should adopt in dropout prevention. This finding could be attributed to the participants not having much knowledge in how to implement services in the area of leadership or in their confidence in their ability to do so. Most of the literature surrounding leadership and dropout prevention is directed toward the role of principals in leadership not the role of school counselors in leadership (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2010; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000 & 2005; Marks & Printy, 2003). Given that the ASCA National Model stresses the importance of school counselors serving as leaders, the findings in this study indicate both new and existing school counselors may benefit from additional training (pre-service training and in-service training) in how to develop their leadership role in dropout prevention.

#### *Assessment/Evaluation Domains*

In the area of school counseling, there has been an increasing demand for accountability. This is expressed in the ASCA National Model as one of the essential elements school counselors should include in their comprehensive counseling programs.

Accountability and evaluation of the school counseling program are absolute necessities. School counselors and the school counseling program must answer the question, 'How are students different as a result of the school counseling program?' Now more than ever, school counselors are challenged to demonstrate the effectiveness of their programs in measurable terms. School counselors must collect and use data that support and link the school counseling programs to students' academic success (American School Counselor Association, 2003, p.59).

The ASCA National Model discusses how school counselors should report results over time (impact over time); the model outlines the 13 school counselor performance standards and provides ways school counselors can audit their school counseling programs. The ASCA National Model does not provide school counselors a means for measuring the effectiveness of their efforts in providing interventions and strategies particularly in the area of dropout prevention.

This study provided school counselors with three domain areas to use in measuring their effectiveness in dropout prevention. The areas were the 2008 What Works Clearinghouse domains: staying-in-school (measures whether the student remained enrolled in school or dropped out of school without earning a high school diploma or dropped out of school without earning a high school diploma or GED certificate, as well as the number of school days enrolled), progressing-in-school (measures the number of credits earned, grade promotion, whether the student is making normal progress toward graduation, and highest grade completed), and completed-schooling (measures whether the student earned a high school diploma or received GED certificate).

In investigating how middle and high school counselors thought that their efforts should be assessed, the results indicated no significant difference between the two groups. In essence, both middle and high school counselors preferred their efforts of providing students with dropout prevention strategies and intervention be evaluated overtime and connected to credits earned or grades completed, etc. The only significant difference occurred when comparing the completing-school domain with the progressing-in-school domain. The progressing-in-school domain was preferred over the completing-school domain by the participating school counselors.

Some reservations for using the staying-in-school domain might be that it would only consider a student's attendance as an indicator of progress. If school counselors chose to use the completing-school domain, they would need to wait until a student earned (or failed to earn) a high school diploma or received a GED certificate to establish that their dropout prevention strategies and interventions were either successful or unsuccessful with the student. Therefore both the staying-in-school and completing-school domains have considerable limitations.

The progressing-in-school domain allows students, parents, and administrators to see short-term successes on a daily, month, or quarterly basis. There are several documents or records that support the progressing-in-school domain that school counselors have ready access to: transcripts, and report cards. Even though the comparison data (once participants paired assessment domains to one another) showed a preference for the progressing-in-school domain there was data support for the other two domains as well. All three domains can be used to help school counselors assess or evaluate how they are providing strategies and interventions in their primary role(s) in dropout prevention. Progress-in-school allows for changes to be made in the interventions and strategies as students move from one semester to the next.

### *Beyond the Comfort Zone*

School counselors chose delivery system to be the primary role they believed they should adopt in dropout prevention. Well, it is not surprising that school counselors would go back to doing what they have felt comfortable doing since the conception of the counseling profession, which began in the 1900s. In the 1900s, Jesse B. Davis set up the first systemic guidance program in public schools (Gladding, 2000). School counselors began as vocational counselors and have evolved over the years to address all children in the comprehensive domains of academic, career, and personal/social development (American School Counseling Association,

2003). The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) was founded in the 1910s. In the 1970s, the licensure of counselors began (Gladding, 2000). Comprehensive guidance and counseling programs emerged in the 1970s and 1980s (American School Counseling Association, 2003). In the 1980s the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs was formed. The ASCA National Model was adopted in 2003 and edited in 2005. It added new roles for school counselors in addition to the traditional service delivery roles of individual and group counseling. The results of this study reveal that school counselors still believe they should remain in their comfort zone of what they have been doing since the beginning of the profession, some 100 years ago.

As educators, leaders, and individuals concerned about the needs of students at-risk of dropping out of school, perhaps we should not accept this status quo approach to school counseling as in the best interest of at-risk students. If school counselors are not going to move beyond what they have been doing for the last 100 or so years how are they going to grow as a professionals and how are they going to reduce the dropout rate significantly? This section will not provide solutions to that question, but it will at least explore important reasons why school counselors might feel so comfortable functioning in the delivery system role as compared to the other four roles, (advocacy, collaboration/teaming, systemic change and leadership). There are seven main reasons that might account for the results of this study and that may be inhibiting the progress of middle and high school counselors as they try to help students remain in school until graduation.

- Schools primarily operate to serve the needs of the middle class, and school counselors tend gravitate to a role (delivery system) that addresses the needs of the majority

population more than those of marginalized students (the primary population dropping out of school).

- Politically, it is difficult for student services directors to advocate for school counselors implementing the ASCA National Model when principals have their own agendas.
- Principals do not allow school counselors to implement the roles prescribed in the ASCA National Model.
- New school counselors are socialized to continue the traditional role of delivery system and to avoid adopting the new ASCA National Model roles.
- School counselors just refuse to do the work it takes to adopt the new roles described in the ASCA National Model.
- School counselors do not have the skills to perform the new roles described in the ASCA National Model.
- School counselors have the skills, as described in the ASCA National Model, but they do not feel comfortable implementing the skills.

Schools primarily operate to serve the needs of the middle class, and school counselors tend gravitate to a role (delivery system) that addresses the needs of the majority population more than marginalized students (the primary population dropping out of school). Individual and group counseling services address a number of issues but fail to address the systemic issues that prevent many marginalized students from progressing in school. School counselors must look beyond the comforts of service delivery to reach students outside of the middle class and try to relate to the needs of marginalized students. This means learning and adopting other roles such as advocacy, collaboration/teaming, systemic change, and leadership in addition to delivery system. Systemic change and advocacy should be high priorities when looking to

assist marginalized students, since those are the students dropping out of school at the highest rates.

Politically, it is difficult for student services directors to advocate for school counselor implementing the ASCA National Model when principals often have their own agendas. There is an inequity of power between student services directors and building level principals that often prevents student services directors from being able to advocate effectively for school counselors performing their trained roles. If student services directors ask principals to allow school counselors to implement the ASCA National Model, a principal does not have to comply with the request. School counselors are required to follow what the principal asks them to do, thus giving the principal much greater power and influence over the school counselor's duties and responsibilities as compared to student services directors. This power differential between the building principal and the student services director is a problem that must be addressed if school counselors are to grow in the espoused roles of the ASCA National Model. "The process of influencing role development occurs through exchanges between principals and a school counselor (Clemens, Milsom, & Cashwell, 2009, p77)."

New school counselors are socialized to continue the traditional role of delivery system and to avoid adopting the new ASCA National Model roles. It is very easy to follow the leader in schools. As new counselors come into a school and see veterans continuing the tried and true delivery system role, they assume that is what they should be doing. It is more difficult and even risky for new school counselors who are seeking tenure and job security to branch off and do something different even when they have had the training in the other ASCA National Model roles.



Alternatively, some school counselors may just refuse to do the work it takes to adopt the new roles described in the ASCA National Model. Adopting new roles and trying new counseling techniques requires more work as well as taking risks to try new behaviors, and some school counselors may just refuse to put the time and effort it takes to change what they have been doing for year. Therefore they maintain the same role, delivery system. Delivery system becomes their default role, even when systemic change and leadership could be better alternatives to help reduce the dropout rate.

Another possibility is that school counselors may not actually have acquired the skills to perform the new roles described in the ASCA National Model. Many of the school counselors have received limited training in the ASCA National Model roles. This could account for them feeling more comfortable with the traditional delivery system role. As they receive more training at the pre-service and in-service levels, they will better understand how the other four roles, in particular systemic change and leadership, can best assist students in graduating from high school.

Finally, some school counselors may have acquired the skills as described in the ASCA National Model, but they do not feel comfortable implementing those skills at the school level with students. If school counselors are receiving the training at the university level and do not feel comfortable using the skills in the various roles, they will revert to the most comfortable role, which is often a delivery system role. These counselors will need to be provided opportunities to see how their skills can be put into practice in the field and to develop more confidence in using those skills.

Regarding the preference for the progressing-in-school domain measures of dropout prevention effectiveness, once again school counselors may be opting for the 'easy road' instead

of the path that would be in the best interest of students. By looking at student progress to gauge how a school counselor is preventing students from dropping out of school, you only measure increments of how the student is progressing overtime. To really help students remain in school one would want to measure how many students are actually completing-school rather than progressing in or just staying-in-school. Therefore, school counselors may need to move beyond their comfort zones to do what is in the best interest of marginalized students, the students most likely to drop out. That may involve adopting the more risky, non-traditional roles of systemic change and leadership and measuring their effectiveness in terms of whether students actually complete (graduate) school and not just progress in or stay in school.

#### *Implications for Practice*

School counselors' services in the five roles related to dropout prevention should seek to address the following risk factors contributing to students dropping out of school: poor attendance, retention (Hammond et al., 2007), behavioral problems (Suh & Suh, 2007), long-term suspensions (10 or more days) in either 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> grade, and students that fail the standardized reading test in grade 8 (Sparks et al., 2010). School counselors should work with school administrators and teachers to incorporate as many of Smink and Schargel's (2004) fifteen effective dropout prevention strategies as possible in their efforts to reduce the dropout rate. School counselors can help match at-risks students with mentors and tutors. They can also provide students opportunities to work in service learning projects. Alternative learning programs provide school counselors opportunities to work one-on-one with at-risk students and to provide group counseling services to students facing similar challenges. In the core area of early intervention, school counselors can work closely with families to include them in as many school counseling processes as possible and to connect parents to the school environment and

staff. School counselors are encouraged to incorporate career and technical education opportunities in the schedules of students as much as possible.

Finally, in the area of school and community perspective, it is important for school counselors to work with school leaders in restructuring schools to remove barriers to learning by implementing programs and strategies that have been proven to build on the strengths of students and their families. School and community collaboration should be a focus of the comprehensive school counseling program. By working with outside agencies and providing students with accessible primary and behavioral support services school counselors will be able to provide students with safe learning environments (Smink & Schargel, 2004). Other interventions that can assist schools in reducing the dropout rate include: reducing the use of tracking in middle school, increasing the use of after-school programs that include extracurricular enrichment and using transition programs (Sparks et al., 2010). These strategies/interventions have been proven to help reduce the dropout rate.

#### *Delivery System*

When school counselors consider their delivery system, they should do so in the context of a comprehensive school counseling program, one that is aligned with the ASCA National Model. School counselors should combine home, school, and community efforts to reduce the dropout rate. This can be accomplished by intervening early using effective counseling groups and mentoring programs (Blum & Jones 1993).

To help serve the most disenfranchised or marginalized students in the delivery system role, school counselors should try to use counseling techniques that support the needs of all students. “A school counseling program delivery system, including the guidance curriculum, individual student planning, and responsive interventions, should be congruent with the cultural

composition of the school” (Villalba et al., 2007, p. 467). Classroom guidance should be organized around topics students struggle with such as: ways to deal with discrimination, expanding post-graduation plans, learning a new language, learning tolerance, respecting others, the detrimental effects of stereotyping, and education and career planning. School counselors should work to build strong relationships and include families and the community in the delivery of services (Villalba et al., 2007). At the building level to help reduce the dropout rate, school counselors may consider implementing promising dropout prevention programs such as transition programs (Akos & Galassi, 2004; Cohen & Smerdon, 2009; Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Mizelle & Irvin) and adopting school-wide school reform models such as Diploma Now (Gerwertz, 2009) to help make meaningful changes for at-risk 6<sup>th</sup> graders - 9<sup>th</sup> graders, as these have been shown to be the transition years in which students often fall behind academically.

#### *Advocacy and Collaboration*

The role of the school counselor as student advocate is to bring about social justice and equality for all students. School counselors in particular must serve as student advocates for students of color and students from low socioeconomic (SES) backgrounds (Bemak & Chung, 2005). Bemak, (2000) and Erford, House, & Martin (2003) recommend 13 guidelines for school counselors to follow when becoming student advocates:

1. Define one’s role as contributing to academic success for all students. All roles, responsibilities, and tasks should lead toward this goal.
2. Emphasize social and educational equity and equal opportunity for all students. This requires equal and fair treatment, support, and time allocation, an equal distribution of resources; and advocacy for each and every student in one’s school.

3. Given the large ratios of students assigned to each counselor, refocus intervention strategies to work with groups of students, parents, and teachers. Individual counseling is not conducive to limited time and assigned student caseloads. The same holds true for individual consultations with teachers and parents on a regular basis. Adjust accordingly, emphasizing the work with groups of students, teachers, and parents, and larger community, rather than with individuals.
4. Teach students and parents about their rights and provide them with the tools to promote constructive changes for themselves that lead toward social justice, equal opportunities, and parity.
5. Formulate partnerships with students who may lack the requisite skills and knowledge to advocate for themselves.
6. Align with parents who may lack the skills and knowledge about how to gain access to existing resources within the school and community. This requires knowledge about organizational systems and school that may be helpful in promoting positive and healthy change toward educational and academic equity.
7. Forge partnerships with principals and administrators in schools and school systems who will assist in working toward social change and decreasing the achievement gap for poor and ethnic minority youth.
8. Utilize data to change one's role and incorporate advocacy. It is not enough to approach administrators and suggest that one redefines one's role as an advocate. Rather, gather data and factual information that support the changing role and actually advocate for that change.
9. Get training in leadership and advocacy skills. This requires knowledge about organizational change how school systems work, the politics of change in educational arenas, and leadership skills. School counselors can encourage school counseling district coordinators to build this into

the in-service training programs, while students in graduate training programs can advocate within their universities to include advocacy, social change, and leadership in their programs.

10. Join with other school counselors in one's own school and larger school system to compile data that can be presented to school-based administrators and central office administration. The transformation of the role requires advocacy at the system level as well as in one's own school.

11. Volunteer and participate in school reform efforts.

12. Understand how to promote social action within a sociopolitical context.

13. Become highly active in collaborating with community agencies that provide other services.

Agencies provide additional services such as counseling, social support, and prevention programs that school counselors do not have time for in their hectic days. Having clear and good working relationships with outside resources generates a team approach to meeting the needs of all students and more effectively contributing to their academic success (p.200).

Taylor and Adelman (2000) encourage school counselors to use a three component framework that involves the weaving together of school, home and community resources in efforts to reduce the dropout rate. They identify six key areas that should guide the collaborative role:

1. Classroom-focused programs
2. Support for transitions
3. Student and family assistance
4. Community outreach
5. Crisis response and prevention
6. Home involvement in schooling (Taylor & Adelman, 2000, p. 303).

School counselors can use full-service community schools (Dryfoos & Maguire, 2002) and, integrated behavior support behavior models (Adelman & Taylor, 2006) to work effectively with outside agencies, while assisting the most at-risk students, to help address barriers to learning.

### *Leadership*

The leadership and systemic change roles were rated lowest with respect to the primary role school counselors believe they should adopt in dropout prevention. These low ratings could be attributed to lack of knowledge about how to serve as a leader and how to initiate systemic change. School counselors can benefit from receiving pre-service and in-service training in both of these areas. School counselors will also benefit from reading the literature surrounding leadership and systemic change/school reform that is found in the field of educational leadership.

The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards that explicitly apply to the area of school counseling and dropout prevention include: standards 2-4 (Ubben, Hughes, & Norris, 2004). Standard 2: A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth. Standard 3: A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment. Standard 4: A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interest and needs, and mobilizing community resources. The school counselors' role in leadership should be to work to develop the following areas to address

the above standards: (1) strong advisor/advisee systems (ISLLC Standard 2 & 3), (2) organized counseling activities (ISLLC Standard 2), and (3) a student referral system (ISLLC Standard 4).

Ubben et al. (2004) state that school counselors should work with teachers and other staff members to develop advisor/advisee systems in which one adult in the school has direct contact with every student in the school on a regular basis. The school counselor serves as the leader over all the advisors, and each advisor has no more than 15-20 students. The staff members help students work through academic and social problems. Advisors are encouraged to meet with their advisee (students) at least four hours a week. School counselors provide in-service training for staff members to prepare them for their roles and responsibilities as an advisor. Advisors are also provided monitoring tools to document contacts and share student progress with the school counselor.

There are three basic counseling activities that are identified in the educational leadership literature that should be included in a counseling program: group counseling, individual student counseling, and parent conferences. Groups counseling topics should cover a variety of areas to assist students in developing academically, socially and emotionally. Individual school counseling provides students an opportunity to work on a one-on-one basis with an adult serving in the capacity as a confidant. Individual counseling sessions provide opportunities for frequent program planning and evaluation conferences. Ubben et al. (2004) suggest school counselors meet with students at least biweekly. Regular parent conferences are an important component in establishing a positive learning climate. School counselors are encouraged to conduct parent/student conferences two or three times a year.

School systems have a number of specialists serving the needs of students within the school and outside of the school. School counselors are the appropriate school leaders to serve as



the referral agent to determine needs for services, as well as for identifying the proper source for those services. School counselors can be the staff member to share a list of providers to family members and to bridge the gap between community agencies and the school (Ubben et al., 2004).

Research in the field of educational leadership (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000 & 2005; Marks & Printy, 2003) has identified key elements in the development of an effective instructional leader. These elements can be applied to school counselors as they try to develop their role as school leaders in dropout prevention. The key elements have been adapted to meet the needs of school counselors. The key elements that closest apply to school counselors leadership role in dropout prevention include: (1) working directly with teachers to enhance their ability to deliver instruction in the classroom. This is accomplished through evaluation, supervision, modeling, and by providing support; (2) providing resources and professional development to improve instruction; (3) coordinating and evaluating guidance curriculum, and assessment; (4) regularly monitoring counseling practices and student progress; and (5) developing and maintaining shared norms and expectations with students, students, staff, and families in the school.

As school counselors become effective leaders, they will be able to implement school-wide changes that provide systemic reform. Brown (2005) states that school leaders must be vision-driven, action-oriented, and work collectively to instigate reform. As school counselors move into a leadership role, they must realize that school leaders lead from within the center. This last statement means that school leaders must work jointly with students, teachers, parents, families, and community members in the decision-making process. Schools must move from a power –over to a power-with approach representing a change toward moral leadership, professional empowerment, and collegial interdependence. As moral leaders, school counselors must work to remove barriers to learning.

### *Systemic Change/School Reform*

McMahon, Mason, and Paisley (2009) have tried to help school counselor educators define their role as systemic change agents. The researchers have encouraged school counselor educators to work toward achieving change from an ecological perspective. School counselor educators should address social justice issues at the micro-level (i.e., within their colleges), at the meso-level (with district-level school counseling supervisors), and at the macro-level (within education and/or government). “Only through such systemic interventions can school counselor educators create sustainable change and help education move toward a more socially just system where all students can succeed” (McMahon et al., 2009).

Petersen (2005) recommends school counselors work to build social capital as a way of providing meaningful school reform. Social capital refers to the established social networks of trust and relationships that exist between individuals in a group, community, or organization. “The fundamental elements of social capital are rooted in the social relations and basic social networks of individuals, leading to social trust” (Petersen, 2005, p.471). It is important that school counselors help build social capital in students and their families and scale up efforts in the area of bridging social capital (the weak ties connecting individuals from different ethnic and occupational backgrounds) in an effort to reduce the dropout rate.

Fullan (2009) states, for effective school reform to take place, job-embedded learning, and organization-embedded learning must be accompanied by system-embedded learning. Job-embedded learning school leadership development consists of developing on the job training experiences. Organization-embedded leadership development focuses on improving the culture, structure and processes of the organization. School counselors in particular can make a difference at the organization-embedded leadership development level. This can be done by

helping the school to create a culture that encourages multiple-learning settings for various types of students facing scheduling challenges that prevent them from completing school (attendance challenges). For example high schools could be encouraged to extend their hours to have night classes for students that were older and had jobs and families but needed and desired to finish high school.

Schools could be structured to have smaller classes so that students had more one-on-one attention, which would be especially helpful in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade Algebra I courses and English I courses that are difficult for many students that tend to drop out of school. Finally, school counselors should work to change how things are done on a day to day basis to make sure students and families' needs are being met. School counselors can develop check-in-systems to monitor student progress on a regular basis to make sure students are making adequate progress academically and socially. Families should be invited to be a part of the student planning process and home visits should be encouraged if students stop coming to school. The key is organizational processes must be in place to respond to the academic and behavior needs of the students.

The term, system-embedded leadership development, refers to the entire education system, which expands beyond the individual school. The school system can include the whole state, a province, or country, but the school district is a key component in its self. Research (Louis et al., 2009) has shown that, when school personnel know they are working toward a common goal and are collectively responsible for results, their collective efficacy increases in that they can together figure out how to make progress. System-embedded leadership development is an interactive activity that involves people learning from one another and identifying with one another's experiences (Fullan, 2009). It will be important for school

counselors to seek support from institutions of higher education and their local professional development departments for further assistance in the areas of leadership and systemic change.

### *Assessment and Evaluation*

As school counselors develop in their leadership role, it will be important to employ an accountability system to regularly monitor practices and student progress (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000 & 2005; Marks & Printy, 2003). There are some advantages to school counselors using the 2008 What Work Clearinghouse progressing-in-school domain compared to the other two domains (staying-in-school and completing-school).

The progressing-in-school domain allows school counselors to measure if a student is making normal progress toward graduation by looking at short-term time spans. When students are not making progress, school counselors are able make appropriate changes to a student's action plan. This falls under the area of individual student planning in the delivery system role. In the ASCA National Model, school counselors are recommended to meet with students at least yearly to develop and revise students' academic plans (American School Counselor Association, 2003). Using the progressing-in-school assessment criteria, school counselors can develop a schedule to meet with students on a more frequent basis to evaluate the effectiveness of their student action plans that include dropout prevention strategies/interventions.

Accountability systems should be put in place to make sure all students, especially the most disenfranchised and undereducated, are making adequate academic and social/behavior progress. When considering accountability and outcome-based approaches Scheurich & Skrla (2003) suggests school counselors use program equity audits to uncover issues of inequity in the area of dropout prevention by examining dropout data trends. Program equity audits makes sure all students regardless of race, socioeconomic status, or whether or not they speak English as

their primary language are proportionately graduating from high school at the same rate as their other majority peers. To use program equity audits school counselors set a target percentage of students they want to graduate (i.e., in 2011 a goal of a 10% increase for each ethnicity group). When the data is examined during the year and inequities occur the staff can examine why there are inequities and put interventions in place to address the inequities. Scheurich & Skrla (2004) provide a five step process to address inequities in the school or district:

Step 1: Choose an area to examine and disaggregate your data, but do all of this collaboratively; involve teachers, administrators, parents, and other community members in this process.

Step 2: Analyze to figure out why the inequitable pattern is happening. What is causing it? Where does it start within the educational system: Do this collaboratively.

Step3: Devise a possible solution. Do this collaboratively.

Step 4: Implement the solution.

Step5: Monitor the results. If the solution works, celebrate. If it does not, return to Step 2 above and repeat the process (Scheurich & Skrla, 2004, p.92-93).

Herr (2002) points out that in a time of limited resources it is important to move beyond outcomes to show that what school counselors are doing with students to prevent them from dropping out of school is cost effective. School counselors should evaluate the cost effectiveness of the interventions and strategies they are using with students compared to the results they are receiving. As school counselors look toward cost-benefit analyses of outcomes, they must remember that in order to work efficiently they must include all stakeholders (students, parents and the community) in efforts to reduce the dropout rate.

*Implications for School Counselor Preparation Programs and In-Service Training at the District Level*

*School Counselor Preparation Programs*

Because school counselors entering the school counseling field prior to 2003 have not received formal training at the university level in the ASCA National Model, it will be important for school counseling education programs to educate school counselors on how to use the model to assist students especially in the area of dropout prevention. This could be accomplished by showing them the current ASCA National Model, then showing how the five dropout prevention themes/elements can be used to support students. School counseling preparation programs' training opportunities should focus on strategies and interventions in the five identified primary role areas of dropout prevention that are aligned with the ASCA National Model. The areas that school counselors have noted as having the least familiarity in the area of dropout prevention include: leadership and systemic change. School counseling preparation programs should spend an appropriate amount of time developing these areas of concern. The literature from the educational leadership field should be used as a guide to lead in the discussions and the development of curriculum. School counseling student interns can benefit from working collaboratively with educational leadership student interns in the field, sharing experiences in the area of leadership and ways to incorporate systemic change. They should be encouraged to participate in a variety of shared activities such as working on district-wide leadership teams, and developing district-wide strategic plans jointly.

Darling-Hammonds et al. (2010) conducted research that could be useful to school counselors as they develop their leadership skills. However her research was done to support principals. Her research found that principals who participated in preparation and professional development programs that were chosen to be exemplary reported being significantly better prepared, holding more positive attitudes, and engaging in more effective practices on average

than their peers in the relevant comparison groups. These findings will be summarized and then a discussion will follow how they can be applied to school counselors.

Graduates of initial preparation programs from the eight participating programs rated themselves significantly better prepared for leading instruction and school improvement. These areas included: creating a collaborative learning organization, planning professional development, using data to monitor school progress, engaging staff in decision making, leading change efforts, engaging in planning for and engaging in continuous learning. Those in this group that became principals were significantly more likely than the comparison group to think positively about the principalship. They were more likely to stay at their jobs regardless if their jobs involved working with low-income students and they had more challenging work experiences. This particular group reported spending more time on instructional focused activities that were associated with stronger school performance (tasks like building a professional learning community among staff, evaluating and providing feedback to teachers, and using data to monitor school progress). As school counselors it will be important to include some of the same common elements found in exemplary pre-service principal programs, but with a focus on counselor development: (1) a comprehensive and coherent school counseling curriculum; (2) a program philosophy and curriculum that emphasize leadership of instruction and school improvement; (3) active, student – centered instruction employing school counseling practices that facilitate the integration of theory and practice, problem-based learning, action research, field-based projects, journal writing, and portfolios that feature ongoing feedback along with self-, peer, and faculty assessment; (4) faculty who are knowledgeable in their subject areas, including expert scholars and practitioners who have had experience in counseling and school leadership field; (5) vigorous, carefully targeted recruitment and selection processes that

proactively bring expert school counselors with potential for leadership into the school counseling profession; and (6) well-designed and supervised school counseling internships with opportunities for candidates to work in leadership roles for substantial periods of time under the tutelage of expert veterans.

#### *In-Service Training Programs at the District Level*

Districts will need to work with school counselors to develop all five roles, but particularly the roles of leadership and systemic change. It will be important that administrators match school counselors with other school counselors that have had success in demonstrating success in the areas of leadership and systemic change. This can be accomplished through peer coaching.

Darling-Hammonds et al. (2010) found that exemplary in-service programs provided learning opportunities grounded in theory and practice that were well connected. Darling-Hammonds et al. (2010) focused on principals. A brief summary of her findings will be presented and then a discussion will follow on how school counselors can benefit from some of the same strategies.

The exemplary programs Darling Hammonds et al. (2010) studied offered organized continuous learning programs aimed at the development and implementation of specific professional practices (such as the monitoring of student progress) required of instructional leaders. Other supports that could be typically offered include: mentoring, participation teaching networks, and study groups, collegial school visits, and peer coaching. Three main features emerged in the findings for exemplary in-service district programs. Their efforts included:



- (1) A learning continuum operating systematically from pre-service preparation through induction and throughout the career, involving mature and retired principals mentoring others.
- (2) Leadership learning grounded in practice, including analyses of classroom practice, supervision, and professional development using on-the job observations connected to readings and discussions and organized around a model of leadership and;
- (3) Collegial learning networks, such as teaching networks, study groups, and mentoring or peer coaching, that create communities of practice and sources of ongoing support for problem-solving.

It is important to explore how school counselors can benefit from some of the same best practices. School counselors can benefit from working at the district level in induction programs that are a continuation of what they learned from pre-service preparation. This should continue throughout the school counselor's career and involve mature and retired school counselors, mentoring others. There should be opportunities for school counselors to get on the job opportunities to experience leadership through learning that aligns with what was learned at the pre-service level and that is connected to a particular model of leadership. Finally, school counselors should take advantage of networking activities with one another, such as mentoring and peer coaching. These learning activities create communities of practice and sources of ongoing support for problem-solving.

As school counselors gain more skills in the areas of leadership and systemic change, they will be able to provide a more holistic model of dropout prevention services. School counselors will be able to work with administrators to use the 2008 What Work Clearinghouse domains to create accountability systems to measure the effectiveness of their intervention and

strategies. This can be accomplished through workshops on using progress tracking systems and by stressing the importance of accountability. Schedules can be developed to decide when progress should be documented and reported to the designated personnel and stakeholders. School counselors should be encouraged to share feedback with students and families on a regular basis (Parker, 2001). With the assistance of school counseling education programs and local school administrators, school counselors will be more prepared to be leaders in assisting students to graduate from high school and becoming productive citizens.

### *Implications for Policy*

The 2006 North Carolina General Assembly enacted S.B. 571 (school counselors and dropout prevention/study), which mandates the State Board of Education report on the role of school counselors in providing dropout prevention and intervention services to secondary students (Stallings, 2007). This study provides valuable information that can be used to help shape the role of middle and high school counselors as legislators and state education agencies attempt to eliminate the dropout epidemic.

This study applied the following five ASCA National Model themes/elements to dropout prevention: (1) delivery system, (2) collaboration/teaming, (3) advocacy, (4) systemic change, (5) leadership, and (6) accountability. These themes/elements were stated in the form of primary roles school counselors should adopt in dropout prevention. In addition this study provided ways to assess the effectiveness of these roles. The 2008 What Works progressing-in-school assessment domain was one of the preferred domain selected compared to completing-school domain (while all other domain comparisons were viewed as equally as important). Therefore it could be used as an effective evaluation criteria by policy makers if all three domains are not used (staying-in-school, progressing-in-school and completing-school) to show how effective

school counselors are in implementing the espoused dropout prevention roles. With the information provided in this study, a dropout prevention policy could be crafted and presented to the North Carolina General Assembly that was guided by responses from practicing middle and high school counselors around the recommended ASCA National Model.

The results of this study have implications for school counseling practice. Legislative bodies like the General Assembly could work with school counselor leaders such as ASCA governing board and chairpersons to incorporate the dropout prevention recommendations into the ASCA National Model so that the ASCA National Model reflects a dropout prevention component. The ASCA National Model could add the now proposed dropout prevention components, delivery system, collaboration/teaming, advocacy, systemic change, and leadership, which include additional definitions pertaining to dropout prevention. Relevant dropout prevention strategies and intervention from the literature that have been discussed in this study could accompany each of the theme/element areas to help guide school counselors in their dropout prevention efforts. There could be a specific section in the manual which school counselors could seek, which outlines strategies and interventions that support each of the five dropout prevention roles. School counselors would then have a dropout prevention model to follow when trying to help keep students stay in school that is consistent with the current ASCA National Model.

The results of this study clearly point to an emphasis on the delivery system area. School counselors believe this area could have an important impact in keeping students in school. School district leaders should be encouraged to remove non-counseling duties/responsibilities so that school counselors can focus efforts on providing direct services to students that can assist students in graduating from high school. Policy makers should develop ways to enforce policies

that state 80% of a school counselor's time must be spent providing direct services to students so that it becomes a reality not just words on a piece of paper.

Policy makers should provide additional resources to the state to lower counselor to student ratios. The North Carolina average counselor-to-student ratio in grades 6 through 12 is one school counselor for each 319 students (The Department of Public Instruction, 2007). This caseload reduction would permit school counselors to provide a comprehensive school counseling program to all students as well as more individual and group counseling services to at-risk students in efforts to keeping them from dropping out of school. With high student to counselor ratios, school counselors are unable to provide quality direct services to students, especially to the most at-risk students.

Additional funds are needed to provide pre-service and in-service trainings in the five dropout prevention role areas, as well as ways to assess the effectiveness of those efforts. Institutes of higher education and local school districts will need additional funding to support school counselors as they learn more about their new roles in dropout prevention and how to evaluate the progress of students. The additional funds will pay off when more students graduate from school and become productive citizens. By investing in students today we will be investing in the future of our nation.

#### *Recommendations for Future Study*

While it was important for this study to focus on middle and high school counselors' perceptions of their primary role in dropout prevention, future research could benefit from the exploration of how to better assess/evaluate the effectiveness of what school counselors are doing in the area of dropout prevention. Roles have been proposed but it is important that methods are in place to evaluate how those roles are being implemented. School counselors will

benefit from having effective assessment in place as they account for how they spend their time and as they share their results with stakeholders.

Another area for future study would be what do school counselor leaders (i.e., developers of the ASCA National Model, ASCA governing board, presidents and other leaders of state and national school counseling organizations and committee chairpersons) believe the primary role of school counselors should be in dropout prevention and how do they think their efforts should be assessed or evaluated? Since these individuals helped in the development of the ASCA National Model and are instrumental in setting future directions for the field, their input would be important in shaping the role of school counselors in dropout prevention. The school counseling profession would benefit from receiving input from leaders in the school counseling field especially those familiar with the ASCA National Model themes and elements.

On the local school level, what do school district leaders (superintendents, assistant superintendents, student service directors, principals, and assistant principals) believe the primary role of school counselor should be in dropout prevention and how do they think their efforts should be assessed or evaluated? It would be interesting to find out if school counselors as practitioners view their role in dropout prevention differently from school counseling leaders and school district leaders. These questions would allow the school counseling field to get a better perspective about what is needed to support school counselors from various points of views. School counselors and students will benefit from this because of the different perspectives that may emerge to develop different roles that support keeping students in school.

Finally a study could be conducted assessing training needs of new and existing school counselors in the area of dropout prevention. The findings of this study may suggest that school counselors may need to enhance their knowledge/skills in the areas of leadership and systemic

change. Future studies could explore what type of training could best help support developing these areas in new and existing school counselors. The benefit would be school counselors that felt more prepared to perform these roles in dropout prevention and thus help more students reach the goal of graduation.

#### *Limitations of the Study*

The issue of dropout prevention is complex and as a result the scope of this study has been narrowed to only address the role of school counselors as indicated in the ASCA National Model as it relates to the elements (delivery system and accountability) and the four themes (leadership, advocacy, collaboration/teaming and systemic change), within the context of dropout prevention. This study was limited to investigating the role of middle and high school counselors in dropout prevention in four school districts in North Carolina. The role of middle and high school counselors was examined excluding counselors at the elementary school level. Elementary school counselors were excluded in order to concentrate on the same population, middle and high school counselors, which the General Assembly is currently focusing on in dropout prevention (S.B. 571). All schools in this study were classified as public schools, which excludes private, and charter schools.

Each of the schools participating in the study is located within a 60 mile radius of one another, which limits the study to a small region of North Carolina. The schools participating are from four school districts. The four school districts that were involved in the study were chosen using a convenience sampling technique. Participating schools are a part of the local networking group, which focuses on high school reform. The specific areas of focus for this initiative are dropout prevention and the primary role(s) school counselors should adopt in dropout prevention, as well as ways of school counselors should assess the effectiveness of their dropout

prevention efforts. Because a convenience sample of schools and counselors in North Carolina was employed, generalizability of the results to North Carolina or beyond may be limited.

### *Summary*

Overall this study provided valuable information to assist policy makers, school administrators, school counselors, school counselor educators in providing dropout prevention efforts. The quantitative data analysis for this study revealed that the middle and high school counselors from the four participating school districts did not differ in what they perceived their primary role to be in dropout prevention. However, school counselors as a whole did show differences in how they perceived each of the five dropout prevention roles compared to each other. School counselors put the least emphasis on leadership and the most emphasis on delivery system followed by both collaboration/teaming and advocacy and then systemic change.

When looking at how the middle and high school counselors thought that their efforts should be assessed, the results once again indicated no significant difference between how middle and high school counselors believed their efforts should be assessed. For the counselors as a whole, only one significant difference was found when comparing the 2008 What Works Clearinghouse domains to one another, the only difference being in favoring the progressing-in-school measures of effectiveness over the completing-school measures. School counselors indicated the progressing-in-school domain to be a preferred method of assessing progress compared to the completing-in-school domain. Progress in school includes credits earned, grade promotion, whether the student is making normal progress toward graduation, and highest grade completed. They believed the staying-in-school domain and completing-school domains were comparable. They also believed the progressing-in-school and staying-in-school domains were comparable when compared to one another.

There are several contributions that can be made to the field of school counseling. The ASCA National Model now has the content needed to support students in the area of dropout prevention. The ASCA National Model can now add a dropout component to the existing model to include additional definitions in the areas of: delivery system, collaboration/teaming, advocacy, systemic change, and leadership. There could be a specific section in which school counselors could turn to in the ASCA National Model and find strategies and interventions that support each of the five roles outlined that are supported by research. The result would be school counselors would have a model to follow when trying to help students graduate that is comparable to that of the current model. Prior to this study there was no mention of dropout prevention in the ASCA National Model.

With these recommendations, legislative bodies like the North Carolina General Assembly can recommend that state departments of education define the role of school counselors in dropout prevention around the ASCA National Model themes and elements. State agencies are encouraged to align their dropout prevention model with the five roles outlined in this study and support those roles with strategies mentioned throughout the literature in helping keep students in school. Progress-in-school can be one of the primary ways lawmakers choose to track the success of their programs in the future.

In closing, the entire country is affected by the dropout crisis. President Obama addressed the nation on March 10, 2009 with the following message:

Of course, no matter how innovative our schools or how effective or how effective our teachers, America cannot succeed unless our students take responsibility for their own education. That means showing up for school on time, paying attention in class, seeking out extra tutoring if it's needed, and staying out of trouble. And to any student who's watching, I say this: don't even think about dropping out of school. As I said a couple of weeks ago, dropping out is quitting on yourself, it's quitting on your country, and it is not an option—not anymore. Not when our high school dropout rate has tripled in the past 30 years. Not when high school dropouts earn about half as much as college graduates. And



not when Latino students are dropping out faster than just about anyone else. It is time for all of us, no matter what our background, to come together and solve this epidemic (Education Digest, 2009, p.16).

This study responds to the call to action by helping define the role of middle and high school counselors believe they should adopt in dropout prevention. This study also provides school counselors ways to assess/evaluate their effectiveness in those dropout prevention roles. The findings will hopefully inspire others in the field of school counseling to continue to work toward solving the dropout crisis thus helping all students graduate and become productive citizens.

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**APPENDIX A**

**NORTH CAROLINA SCHOOL COUNSELOR JOB DESCRIPTION**

**School Counselor  
Student Services  
Job Description**

**Outline**

**Position:** School Counselor

**Reports to:** Principal

**Purpose:** Utilizing leadership, advocacy, and collaboration, school counselors promote student success, provide preventative services, and respond to identified student needs by implementing a comprehensive school counseling program that addresses academic, career, and personal/social development for all students.

The major functions of the school counselor job description incorporate the North Carolina State Board of Education priorities of High Student Performance, Healthy Students in Safe, Orderly and Caring Schools, Quality Teachers, Administrators and Staff, Strong Family, Community, and Business Support and Effective and Efficient Operation.

*\*Note: As of September 2006, subsequent to the approval of this job description, the State Board of Education adopted new strategic goals of NC public schools that will produce globally competitive students, NC public schools will be led by 21<sup>st</sup> Century professionals, NC public school students will be healthy and responsible, Leadership will guide innovation in NC public schools and NC public schools will be governed and supported by 21<sup>st</sup> Century systems.*

**Duties and Responsibilities**

**Major Function:** Development and Management of a Comprehensive School Counseling Program

*Plans and Maintains an Effective Comprehensive School Counseling Program*

**Major Function:** Delivery of a Comprehensive School Counseling Program

*Guidance Curriculum*

*Individual Student Planning*

*Preventive and Responsive Services*

*System Support*

**Major Function:** Accountability

*Designs a Comprehensive School Counseling Program that is Data-Driven.*

**APPENDIX B**  
**DROPOUT PREVENTION SURVEY**

## Dropout Prevention Survey

### Demographic Information

Please indicate your total years of experience as a school counselor \_\_\_\_\_

Please indicate your gender by circling the appropriate response below.

Male                  Female

Please indicate your race category by circling the appropriate response below.

Caucasian      African American      Hispanic      American Indian      Asian      Multiracial

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Please indicate if you are a practicing middle or high school counselor by circling the appropriate response below.

Middle School Counselor                  High School Counselor

Please indicate the school district in which you are employed by circling the district below:

Chapel Hill-Carrboro                  Orange County

Durham                  Johnston County

Wake County

**What do you believe the school counselor's primary role should be in dropout prevention?**

Please circle the response that best represents your belief about the role in each of the statements below.

**The school counselor's primary role in dropout prevention should be:**

1. To serve as the school's leader or coordinator (i.e., the person in charge) for the school's initiatives in dropout prevention.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Not sure      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

2. To serve as a member of a school's dropout prevention team.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Not Sure      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

3. To serve as an advocate for needed services for students at-risk for dropping out of school.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Not Sure      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

4. To identify and propose evidenced-based, national drop-out prevention interventions that the school/school system could adopt.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Not Sure      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

5. To provide direct counseling (individual and/or group) services to students at risk for dropping out.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Not Sure      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

6. To collaborate with agencies outside of the school system which provide services to students at risk for dropping out of school.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Not Sure      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

7. To serve as the individual in charge of identifying students at-risk for dropping out of school using data about known risk factors.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Not Sure      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

8. To provide a comprehensive counseling program as described in the American School Counselors Association (ASCA) National Model to all students.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Not Sure      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

9. To guide school reform efforts that assist at-risk students in graduating.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Not Sure      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

10. To work proactively to remove barriers to learning for at-risk students.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Not Sure      Disagree      Strongly Disagree



**What do you believe is the most appropriate way for assessing the school counselor's effectiveness in dropout prevention?**

*Please circle the response that best represents your belief about the most appropriate way of assessing the school counselor's effectiveness in each of the statements below.*

**The most appropriate way to measure the school counselor's effectiveness in dropout prevention is:**

1. The number or percentage of students who earned a high school diploma.

Strongly Agree    Agree            Not Sure            Disagree            Strongly Disagree

2. By the number of students who dropped out in a given year.

Strongly Agree    Agree            Not Sure            Disagree            Strongly Disagree

3. The number of credits earned in a given year by students identified as at-risk for dropping out.

Strongly Agree    Agree            Not Sure            Disagree            Strongly Disagree

4. The number of days students identified as at-risk for dropping out were enrolled in a given year.

Strongly Agree    Agree            Not Sure            Disagree            Strongly Disagree

5. The number or percentage of students who earned a GED.

Strongly Agree    Agree            Not Sure            Disagree            Strongly Disagree

6. The highest grade completed by students at-risk for dropping out.

Strongly Agree    Agree            Not Sure            Disagree            Strongly Disagree

**APPENDIX C**  
**PILOT SURVEY**

## Pilot Dropout Prevention Survey

### Part I

*The purpose of this exercise is to verify that the items used in the research study actually measure what they were intended to measure. Listed below are four definitions of ASCA National Model themes and one definition of an ASCA National Model element. Please match the statements below with the one theme or element that best describes each statement by circling the appropriate response. Please circle only one response (the best response) per statement. There are a total of 10 statements.*

### Definitions

Four major themes are featured in the ASCA National Model: leadership, advocacy, collaboration and systemic change.

**Leadership:** School counselors serve as leaders by collaborating with other professionals in the school, resulting in system-wide change, and school reform.

**Advocacy:** School counselors advocate for students' educational needs, work to ensure that these needs are addressed at every level of the school experience, and work to help remove barriers to learning.

**Collaboration/Teaming:** School counselors work with school personnel, and outside agencies to develop and implement responsive educational programs that support the achievement of the identified goals for every student.

**Systemic Change:** School counselors are able to use qualitative and quantitative data to guide the develop and modification of critical policies and procedures that help eliminate systemic barriers to academic success, ensuring equity and access to a rigorous curriculum, and increasing post-secondary options.

ASCA National Model element (delivery system)

**Delivery System:** The delivery system involves how school counselors will implement a comprehensive counseling program. Several interventions are included under the delivery system.

- Individual Student Planning: Individual student planning to establish personal goals and future plans consists of the following strategies: individual or small-group appraisal, and individual or small group advisement.
- Responsive Services: Responsive services meet students' immediate needs and services and are provided by: individual and small-group counseling, crisis counseling, referrals, consultation, and peer facilitation.
- Guidance Curriculum: The guidance curriculum is comprehensive in scope, preventative and proactive, developmental in design, coordinated by school counselors and delivered, as appropriate, by school counselors and other educators and uses the following strategies: classroom instruction, interdisciplinary curriculum development, group activities, and parent workshops and instruction.

### Statements

(Please circle the best response)

The school counselor's primary role in dropout prevention should be:

1. To serve as the school's leader or coordinator (i.e., the person in charge) for the school's initiatives in dropout prevention.

Advocacy      Collaboration/Teaming      Delivery System      Leadership      Systemic Change

2. To serve as a member of a school's dropout prevention team.

Advocacy      Collaboration/Teaming      Delivery System      Leadership      Systemic Change

3. To serve as an advocate for needed services for students at-risk for dropping out of school.

Advocacy      Collaboration/Teaming      Delivery System      Leadership      Systemic Change

4. To identify and propose evidenced-based, national drop-out prevention interventions that the school/school system could adopt.

Advocacy      Collaboration/Teaming      Delivery System      Leadership      Systemic Change

5. To provide direct counseling (individual and/or group) services to students at risk for dropping out.

Advocacy      Collaboration/Teaming      Delivery System      Leadership      Systemic Change

6. To collaborate with agencies outside of the school system which provide services to students at risk for dropping out of school.

Advocacy      Collaboration/Teaming      Delivery System      Leadership      Systemic Change

7. To serve as the individual in charge of identifying students at-risk for dropping out of school using data about known risk factors.

Advocacy      Collaboration/Teaming      Delivery System      Leadership      Systemic Change

8. To provide a comprehensive counseling program as described in the American School Counselors Association (ASCA) National Model to all students.

Advocacy      Collaboration/Teaming      Delivery System      Leadership      Systemic Change

9. To guide school reform efforts that assist at-risk students in graduating.

Advocacy      Collaboration/Teaming      Delivery System      Leadership      Systemic Change

10. To work proactively to remove barriers to learning for at-risk students.

## Part II

*Listed below are three definitions of accountability domains recommended by What Works Clearinghouse. Please match the statements below with the domain that best describes each statement by circling the appropriate response. Please circle only one response (the best response) per statement. There are a total of 6 statements.*

### Definitions

The three accountability domains are: staying in school, progressing in school, and completing school.

**Staying in school:** The staying in school domain includes measures of whether the student remained enrolled in school or dropped out of school without earning a high school diploma or GED certificate, as well as the number of school days enrolled.

**Progressing in school:** The progressing in school domain includes measures of credits earned, grade promotion, whether the student is making normal progress toward graduation, and highest grade completed.

**Completing school:** The completing school domain includes measures of whether the student earned a high school diploma or received a GED certificate.

### Statements

**(Please circle the best response)**

1. The number or percentage of students who earned a high school diploma.

Completing School                      Progressing in School                      Staying in School

2. By the number of students who dropped out in a given year.

Completing School                      Progressing in School                      Staying in School

3. The number of credits earned in a given year by students identified as at-risk for dropping out.

Completing School                      Progressing in School                      Staying in School

4. The number of days students identified as at-risk for dropping out were enrolled in a given year.

Completing School                      Progressing in School                      Staying in School

5. The number or percentage of students who earned a GED.

Completing School                      Progressing in School                      Staying in School

6. The highest grade completed by students at-risk for dropping out.

Completing School                      Progressing in School                      Staying in School

**APPENDIX D**  
**CONSENT LETTER**



**University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill**

**Consent to Participate in a Research Study**

**Adult Participants**

**Social Behavioral Form**

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**IRB Study #** 09-1041

**Consent Form Version Date:** 6-11-09

**Title of Study:** What Type of Role Do School Counselors Perceive They Should Adopt in Dropout Prevention?

**Principal Investigator:** Christine Carr

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**What are some general things you should know about research studies?**

You are being asked to take part in a research study. To join the study is voluntary.

You may refuse to join, or you may withdraw your consent to be in the study, for any reason, without penalty.

Research studies are designed to obtain new knowledge. This new information may help people in the future. You may not receive any direct benefit from being in the research study. There also may be risks to being in research studies.

Details about this study are discussed below. It is important that you understand this information so that you can make an informed choice about being in this research study.

You will be given a copy of this consent form. You should ask the researchers named above, or staff members who may assist them, any questions you have about this study at any time.

**What is the purpose of this study?**

The purpose of this study is to investigate what school counselors perceive their role to be in dropout prevention, the extent to which that role varies as a function of whether they are practicing at the middle or high school levels, and the way to evaluate their effectiveness in that role. The ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2005) provides the conceptual framework for this study. Although that Model emphasizes the school counselor's role in the academic mission of

schools, surprisingly, it does not prescribe or even explicitly mention a role for the school counselor in dropout prevention. Should the school counselor function primarily in a service delivery mode (i.e., provide a comprehensive school program that includes providing group and individual counseling services)?

Such a role would be consistent with one the four (delivery system) elements of the National Model and reflects many of the traditional recommendations in the literature for the school counselor in dropout prevention. Or should the primary role of the school counselor reflect one or more of the newer themes- leadership, advocacy, collaboration/teaming, and/or systemic change espoused in the National Model? Finally, accountability is another of the four elements of the National Model. What do school counselors perceive as the most appropriate way to measure their effectiveness in dropout prevention-e.g., the percentage of students who ultimately graduate from high school, the number of students who dropped out of school in a given year? This study asks, should school counselor's effectiveness (accountability) in dropout prevention be measured differently for middle and high school counselors? The study will look at counselor effectiveness in dropout prevention using the What Works Clearinghouse domains: staying in school, progressing in school, and completing school.

You are being asked to be in the study because you actually work in the field of counseling and we feel you could provide valuable insight into uncovering what role middle and high school counselors should adopt in dropout prevention.

**How many people will take part in this study?**

If you decide to be in this study, you will be one of approximately 336 people (156 middle school counselors and 180 high school counselors) in this research study.

**How long will your part in this study last?**

Participants will need to set aside about 20 minutes to read the directions and complete the three sections of the survey. There will be no follow-up interviews involved in this study.

**What will happen if you take part in the study?**

Before beginning the data collection process the researcher will obtain IRB approval and consent from the participating school districts, as well as the participating middle and high school counselors. The data collection process will consist of surveying all the middle and high school counselors in a regional consortium using a Likert-scale with closed ended statements. The surveys will be administered during one of the school counselor monthly meetings, which the researcher will attend. The researcher will directly administer the surveys to each participant that provided consent to participate in the study. In this study the survey will take about twenty minutes to complete. After thirty minutes all surveys will be collected and placed in sealed envelopes.

**What are the possible benefits from being in this study?**

Research is designed to benefit society by gaining new knowledge. You may not benefit personally from being in this research study.

**What are the possible risks or discomforts involved from being in this study?**

There are no known risks.

**How will your privacy be protected?**

Participants *will not* be identified in any report or publication about this study. Although every effort will be made to keep research records private, there may be times when federal or state law requires the disclosure of such records, including personal information. This is very unlikely, but if disclosure is ever required, UNC-Chapel Hill will take steps allowable by law to protect the privacy of personal information. In some cases, your information in this research study could be reviewed by representatives of the University, research sponsors, or government agencies for purposes such as quality control or safety.

**Will you receive anything for being in this study?**

You will not receive anything for taking part in this study.

**Will it cost you anything to be in this study?**

There will be no costs for being in the study

**What if you have questions about this study?**

You have the right to ask, and have answered, any questions you may have about this research. If you have questions, or concerns, you should contact the researchers listed on the first page of this form.

**What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**

All research on human volunteers is reviewed by a committee that works to protect your rights and welfare. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Institutional Review Board at 919-966-3113 or by email to IRB\_subjects@unc.edu.

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**Title of Study:** What Type of Role Do School Counselors Perceive They Should Adopt in Dropout Prevention?

**Principal Investigator:** Christine Carr

**Participant's Agreement:**

I have read the information provided above. I have asked all the questions I have at this time. I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Research Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Research Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

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Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent