

A MIXED METHODS STUDY OF NORTH CAROLINA PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS OF  
THE ROLES OF SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS

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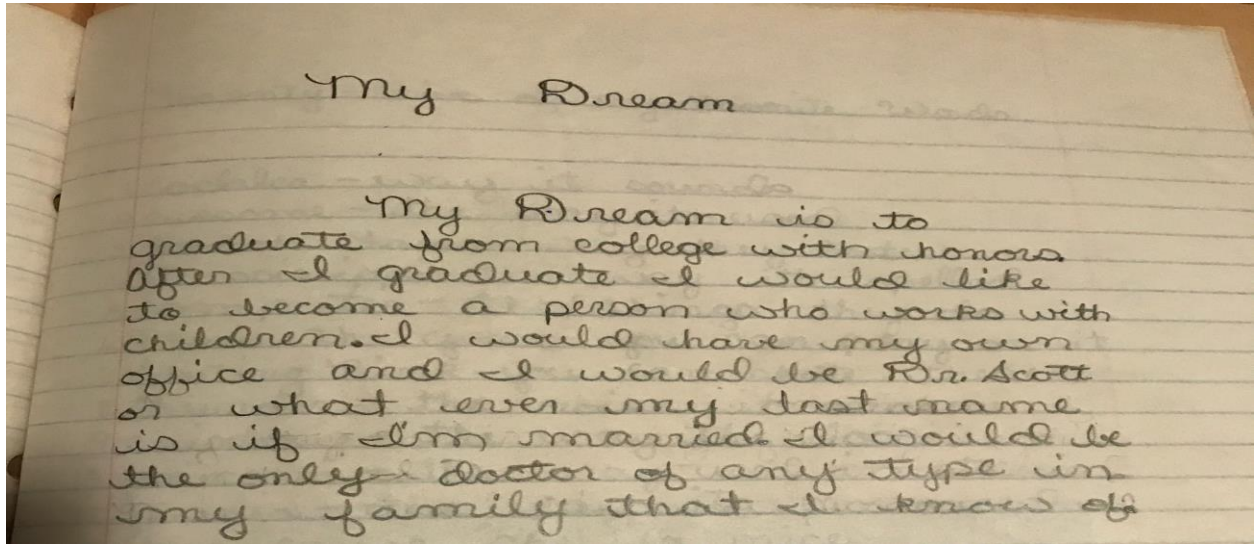
## **ABSTRACT**

Deirdre Natasha Scott: A Mixed Methods Study of North Carolina Principals' Perceptions of the Roles of School Social Workers  
(Under the Direction of Fenwick English)

This dissertation examined North Carolina (NC) principals' perceptions of the roles of school social workers through the lens of an Ethic of Care (EoC). The researcher argues that principals may not fully understand the role for a variety of reasons. One such reason is that the role developed outside of the school setting. Role clarity is needed to ensure the strategic and effective use of the role. The findings were used to define the role of school social workers in terms of the roles most important to the educational outcomes of students. Also, the study analyzed principals' perceptions to determine if factors about the school (i.e., grade span, locale type) and/or factors about the principal (prior experience with school social workers, years of experience, race/ethnicity, and gender) yielded statistically significant differences. Furthermore, the study examined principals' perception of caring as the most important role of school social workers. The researcher used two research strategies: quantitative analysis of closed-ended questions and qualitative analysis of open-ended questions. Survey research methodology was performed to collect data from a self-administered online survey. The findings indicated that principals' perceptions are impacted by factors about the school and the principal, but only for certain roles. Also, NC principals defined the role in terms of social casework and liaison activities. Insofar as role clarity leads to the creative and strategic use of the roles of school

social workers, the researcher hopes that stakeholders will utilize this information to prepare school administrators and school social workers for effective interdisciplinary practice.

To girls and boys that dare to dream the unthinkable. It is also a reminder to mothers, fathers, and educators of the importance of nurturing our children's dreams.



Written by: Natasha Scott, March 13, 1986

Julia Morrison's Fifth Grade Class, *Me, Myself, and I* Writing Assignment

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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Thankfully, there were numerous people that supported me along this journey. First, this study would not be possible without the assistance of the 39 school district administrators that granted approval of this study. From this grand gesture, 281 public school principals completed my survey. Time is a precious commodity and your personal sacrifice is not taken lightly.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### Context of the Problem

The school is not a social services agency; however, the school must respond when social problems present barriers to teaching and learning. Every day, students enter the schoolhouse not ready to learn due to the detrimental effects of social problems such as poverty. Rothstein's *Class and Schools* (2004) and Lareau's *Unequal Childhoods* (2011) argue that the social context (socioeconomic status, parenting styles, adequate and stable housing, health care, language use, etc.) of children's lives significantly impact educational outcomes. Research documents a relationship between one's level of education and socio-economic status (Palley, 2008).

Poverty increases the risk that children will experience health issues, developmental delays, and school failure (Allen-Meares, 2010c). For example, children living in impoverished neighborhoods are more likely to be exposed to toxic substances such as lead, to be separated from their parents, and to witness family violence (Allen-Meares, 2010c; Rothstein, 2004). They are also more likely to live in substandard housing, to experience multiple residential moves, and to lack proper medical care (Allen-Meares, 2010c; Rothstein, 2004). Poverty itself does not create school failure; however, it facilitates low academic achievement due to barriers such as poor school attendance (Allen-Meares, 2010c).

Educational policies such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) attempt to level the playing field by requiring academic success for all students (Lagana-Riordan & Aguilar, 2009). However, NCLB does not account for the diverse situations of students (Lagana-Riordan &

Aguilar, 2009). It merely implies that even children from difficult circumstances such as poverty must demonstrate performance on education standards (Lagana-Riordan & Aguilar, 2009). In 2012, 25% of school-aged students in the United States lived in poverty (Kena et al., 2014). In the same year, 25% of children in North Carolina lived in low-income homes as well (National Center for Children in Poverty, n.d.). Principals have a tremendous responsibility, considering that poverty impacts one in four students. Classroom instruction, increased accountability, and standards-based testing are not enough to ensure equity and excellence for all students. In a commentary on poverty, elementary school principal, Ericka Guynes of Earl Boyles Elementary School in Portland, Oregon eloquently described the principal's role: "Poverty is like a bone-chilling cold draft that seeps into an old home. We have to be innovative and holistic leaders to insulate our most precious valuable gift: our children" (Guynes, Jackson, Mercer, & Cox, 2014).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Schools have a greater purpose than meeting state curriculum standards (Noddings, 1984; Noddings, 2005a; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001). Educators must learn to apply the same caring that occurs in their private lives to the school setting (Beck & Cassidy, 2009). Policymakers recognize the need for public schools to support vulnerable students (Kober & Usher, 2012). A low-quality education and school failure have lifelong implications (Palley, 2008). For this reason, educational policy attempts to ensure equal educational opportunities for all students (Richard & Villarreal Sosa, 2014; Palley, 2008). Federal mandates require schools to provide additional educational services to economically disadvantaged, migrant, neglected, delinquent, limited English proficient, homeless, and disabled children (Kober & Usher, 2012; Palley, 2008).

Specifically, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and NCLB identify professionals with specialized training to address the individual needs of students (Atkins-

Burnett, 2010; P.L. 107-110). For instance, IDEA affords *related services* to students with disabilities (Atkins-Burnett, 2010). Related services supplement the educational process by addressing the individual needs of students through developmental, rehabilitative, and supportive services (Atkins-Burnett, 2010). Examples include transportation, physical therapy, speech therapy, counseling, psychological services, and social work services (Atkins-Burnett, 2010). Social work services include writing social histories, providing individual and group counseling, linking students and families to community resources, and serving as a liaison between the home and the school (Richard & Villarreal Sosa, 2014).

The NCLB Act (2001) designates pupil services personnel to provide supportive services to students:

The term “pupil services personnel” means school counselors, school social workers, school psychologists, and other qualified professional personnel involved in providing assessment, diagnosis, counseling, educational, therapeutic, and other necessary services (including related services as that term is defined in section 602 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) as part of a comprehensive program to meet student needs (P.L. 107-110).

The composition and name of pupil services personnel vary by the individual school and by district (Nealis, 2013; Walsh et al., 2014). The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) collectively refers to school social workers, school counselors, and school psychologists as student support services and student services (NCDPI, n.d.-b). Following the nomenclature established by the NCDPI, this study references this group of professionals as *student services professionals* and *student services* as the services provided by these professionals.

Student services professionals support the social and emotional needs of students from the lens of their unique training (NCDPI, 1987). They also foster the development of a positive school climate (NCDPI, 1987). These professionals have a shared agenda to identify and remove barriers to learning (Radin & Welsh, 1984). Similarly, Gilligan and Noddings' conception of the ethic of care (EoC) emphasizes relationships and responding to the needs of others (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 2005a, 2005b, 2012a, 2012b; 2013). If caring positively impacts the educational process, then principals can leverage the roles of student services professionals to strengthen care in schools. However, limited exposure to student services professionals may impact principals' perceptions and utilization of these professionals (Louis & Gordon, 2006; Shoffner & Williamson, 2000; Tower, 2000; Williams & Wehrman, 2010). Student services professionals have unique and overlapping roles that work together to contribute to the academic success of students. More research about the context of comprehensive student services programs and best practices for interdisciplinary collaboration is needed. Nonetheless, the roles of school social workers are the focus of the study.

Principals may not fully understand the role of school social workers for a variety of reasons. For starters, school administrators are typically recruited from the teaching force, which means they have little exposure to the work and training of student services professionals (Louis & Gordon, 2006; Shoffner & Williamson, 2000; Williams & Wehrman, 2010). In turn, leaders define the roles of student services professionals based on earlier experiences (internship or previous positions) and the most visible tasks (scheduling, academic testing, home visits, etc.) completed by these professionals (Louis & Gordon, 2006; Shoffner & Williamson, 2000; Tower, 2000; Williams & Wehrman, 2010). According to the National Center for Education Statistics, less than half of the public schools in the United States employ school social workers (SASS,

2008). Therefore, it is likely that many principals do not have experience working with school social workers. Again, principals' limited exposure to school social workers perpetuates role misperception and the underutilization of these professionals (Tower, 2000).

The origins of school social work practice have also impacted principals' exposure to school social workers and have limited principals' influence in the development of the role. Educators did not strategically plan the implementation and development of school social work practice (Louis & Gordon, 2006). Instead, school social work practice developed outside of the school system through social forces such as women's groups, settlement houses, and psychology clinics during the 1906-1907 school year (Allen-Meares, 2010b; Louis & Gordon, 2006; Shear, 1965; Watson, 1985). For example, settlement houses and psychology clinics in Boston, Hartford, and New York hired school social workers to provide liaison services between the home, school, and community as a strategy to improve the academic outcomes for at-risk students (Allen-Meares, 2010b).

The economic and political context of the country has contributed to the development of school social work practice (Shear, 1965). For instance, the emergence of compulsory attendance laws and the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (EACHA) forced American schools to address the needs of diverse learners (Allen-Meares, 2010b). As a result, school principals and teachers were required to respond to issues outside their scope of expertise to provide an equal educational opportunity to all students (Richard & Villarreal Sosa, 2014; Watson, 1985). Educators cannot meet the needs of students alone (Allen-Meares, 1994). Legislation such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) provided funding for additional services in order to meet the needs of at-risk students (Richard & Villarreal Sosa, 2014). The implementation of social work services in schools was one strategy

for providing additional services to improve student outcomes (Allen-Meares, 1994; Richard & Villarreal Sosa, 2014).

Principals and superintendents are change masters in the school setting (Louis & Gordon, 2006). Their understanding and vision of the roles of school social workers are critical to positioning these professionals to make contributions to student outcomes. For this to occur, principals must understand the role of the school social worker. Besides, principals must know how to strategically align school social work tasks to support the mission of the school and meet the needs of all students. Including principals' perceptions in the role development of school social workers is one way to maximize the utilization of these professionals in schools to meet student needs.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine principals' perceptions toward the roles of school social workers. It also seeks to determine if a relationship exists between principals' perceptions of the roles of school social workers and other variables such as prior experience working with school social workers, years of experience, gender, race, grade span, and locale type. A review of the literature and the data gathered in this study may enable a preliminary foundation of improved clarity of school social work practice located within an EoC framework.

This study seeks to contribute to the literature in the fields of educational leadership and social work. Meeting the needs of diverse students (economically disadvantaged, disabled, limited English proficient, academically gifted, etc.) is a task for principals. To do so, principals must collaborate with professionals from various backgrounds to meet the complex needs of all students. School social workers are in a unique position to assist principals in understanding and addressing the social and emotional needs of students. A deeper understanding of principals'

perceptions towards the roles of support personnel such as school social workers may offer insight to educators in educational leadership programs regarding relevant content for school administration courses and internship experiences. For example, interdisciplinary collaboration at the pre-service level would likely contribute to future administrators' appreciation of the roles and contributions of professions other than classroom teachers.

Social work educators and school social workers may benefit from the findings of this study as well. The literature indicates that school social work practice needs further role development to reflect the current trends in social work and education practice. A deeper understanding of principals' perceptions may provide an added dimension to social work research that appears to be lacking. Furthermore, an examination of school social work practice from the perspective of principals may assist school social workers in prioritizing and aligning their activities with the most pressing needs of the school. This study assumes that knowledge, exposure, and perceptions are interrelated. As such, school social workers may use these findings to shape and improve principals' perceptions towards the roles of school social workers and move towards an enhanced EoC in their schools. The next section outlines the research questions and the methodology for this study.

### **Research Questions and Methodology**

Although school social work practice has existed for over 100 years, social work scholars continue to work towards defining the roles and contributions of school social workers. The role of school social workers has changed in response to social forces (Richard & Villarreal Sosa, 2014). Furthermore, the role has developed with limited input from school principals. This study assumes that school social work services contribute positively to student outcomes. If principals are required to provide an equal opportunity for all students, they must effectively utilize all

resources that are available to the school. To do so, principals must understand the roles and contributions of the various specialists assigned to schools. More information about principals' perceptions of the roles of school social workers is needed.

School social workers and school principals spend a considerable amount of time working with parents, teachers, and the community (Shoffner & Williamson, 2006). Although each profession has a common goal to address the concerns of students effectively, they tend to use different mechanisms (Shoffner & Williamson, 2006). The primary reason is that these professionals are trained separately (Shoffner & Williamson, 2006). The philosophical differences between these groups can lead to conflict, confusion, and wasted energy (Williams & Wehrman, 2010). On the other hand, school principals who appreciate the functions of school social workers are likely to utilize collaborative leadership practices to promote successful school improvement efforts (Reese, 2010). Collaborative leadership practices refer to the skills, knowledge and the disposition to work collaboratively with other professionals who support the academic mission (Reese, 2010). The principals' knowledge of the roles of school social workers is critical towards ensuring that the work of these professionals is aligned to the academic mission of the school (Dahir et al., 2010).

The primary question for this study concerns North Carolina public school principals' perceptions of the roles of school social workers and the extent to which exposure to school social workers impacts principals' perceptions toward the role. Also, the study seeks to understand if variables about the school (grade span and locale type), and variables about the principal (gender, prior experience with school social workers, years of experience, race) inform those perceptions as well. Outlined below are the research questions and the corresponding hypotheses.



## **Research Questions**

- RQ1.** How do principals define the importance of the roles of school social workers to the educational success of students?
- RQ2.** Do principals' perceptions towards the school social workers' role in the development of a caring school environment differ depending on whether the principal has prior experience working with school social workers?
- RQ3.** Do principals' perceptions towards the school social workers' role in the development of a caring school environment differ depending on the principals' years of experience?
- RQ4.** Do principals' perceptions towards school social workers' role in the development of a caring environment differ depending on the principals' gender?
- RQ5.** Do principals' perceptions towards school social workers' role in the development of a caring environment differ depending on the principals' race?
- RQ6.** Do principal's perceptions towards the school social workers' role in the development of a caring school environment differ depending on the grade span of the school?
- RQ7.** Do principals' perceptions towards the school social workers' role in the development of a caring school environment differ depending on the locale type of the school?

## **Hypotheses**

The hypothetical propositions for this study are:

- H1.** There is no hypothesis for the first research question.

- HA<sub>2</sub>.** There is a difference in principals' perceptions towards the school social workers' contributions to the development of a caring school environment as the most important role when the principals' prior experience working with school social workers is considered.
- HA<sub>3</sub>.** There is a difference in principals' perceptions towards the school social workers' contributions to the development of a caring school environment as the most important role when the principals' years of experience are considered.
- HN<sub>4</sub>.** There is no difference in principals' perceptions towards the school social workers' contributions to the development of a caring school environment as the most important role when the principals' gender is considered.
- HA<sub>5</sub>.** There is a difference in principals' perceptions towards the school social workers' contributions to the development of a caring school environment as the most important role when the principals' race is considered.
- HA<sub>6</sub>.** There is a difference in principals' perceptions towards the school social workers' contributions to the development of a caring school environment as the most important role when the grade span of the school is considered.
- HA<sub>7</sub>.** There is a difference in principals' perceptions towards the school social workers' contributions to the development of a caring school environment as the most important role when the locale type of the school is considered.

## **Research Design**

The researcher used the literature to develop an appropriate research design for the current study. For instance, Tower's mixed methods study of the attitudes of special education teachers and principals in Nevada inspired the research design for this study (2000). Closed-

ended questions gauged principals' knowledge of the tasks completed by school social workers; while, open-ended questions asked principals to share information about their experiences and perceptions of school social workers in their own words (Tower, 2000). Through content analysis, Tower found that the qualitative findings supported the quantitative findings (2000). A significant finding of the study is that a relationship exists between principals' knowledge and their exposure to school social workers (Tower, 2000). The study also found that educators with exposure to school social workers had a significantly more positive perception towards the roles of these professionals (Tower, 2000).

The current study also utilized a basic mixed methodology research design. The mixed methodology allowed the researcher to draw from the strengths of quantitative and qualitative research methods (Creswell, 2015). For example, quantitative data was used to determine the current attitudes of North Carolina principals assigned to public schools. It may also allow the researcher to generalize the findings (Creswell, 2015). Qualitative data provided the researcher with details about the context that formed principals' attitudes about the roles of school social workers (Creswell, 2015).

A convergent parallel design was implemented to gather and analyze data. A self-administered survey was created to allow the researcher to collect quantitative and qualitative data concurrently through open-ended and closed-ended questions. It measured principals' perceptions towards the roles of school social workers at a point in time. Principals assigned to public schools in North Carolina at all grade spans completed the cross-sectional survey. Furthermore, a self-administered survey facilitated the need to gather the opinions of several principals across the state at minimal expense to the researcher.

The survey allowed the researcher to collect quantitative and qualitative data concurrently. However separate quantitative and qualitative analysis were performed on the data (Creswell, 2015). Quantitative analysis was conducted to determine if principals' perceptions towards the roles of school social workers differed when variables that may influence those perceptions were considered. Qualitative methods were used to explore principals' experiences with school social workers that have shaped their views about the role. Finally, the data were merged and compared to explain the similarities or differences in the quantitative and qualitative findings (Creswell, 2015). Where appropriate, this comparative information was used to draw conclusions, and a descriptive summary was written to describe how principals define the role of school social workers. The EoC was the theoretical framework for analyzing the data.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Of the studies examined by the researcher, role theory (Richard & Villarreal Sosa, 2014), attitude theory (Tower, 2000), or no theory were used to analyze the data. The researcher selected the EoC as the construct for this study because social work practice and the EoC have similar goals. Both emphasize the importance of relationships and responding to the needs of others. Conceptualizing the role of school social workers through the lens of the EoC allows principals to rethink the relevance of care to student success and the role that school social workers play in caring for students in the school setting (Lloyd, 2006).

The EoC is not a set of rules or guidelines (Noddings, 1984). Rather, it is a theoretical framework that values diversity and interpersonal skills such as observing, listening, and responding to others (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001). From this perspective, addressing the needs and interests of individual students, relationships with others, and building connections are concerns of principals (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001). Principals that embrace the EoC create

positive school climates that allow students to thrive (Beck & Cassidy, 2009; Cassidy & Bates, 2005).

Leadership based on the EoC also includes designing and maintaining structures that facilitate caring (Beck and Cassidy, 2009; Cassidy & Bates, 2005; Courtney & Noblit, 1994; Noddings, 2012a). For example, organizational structures and staff should be situated to establish care as a priority in schools (Noddings, 1984; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001). As helping professionals, school social workers are in a unique position to support principals in the development of caring school environments by addressing the health, social, and emotional needs of students that interfere with teaching and learning (Adelman & Taylor, 2006; Kober & Usher, 2012; Louis & Gordon, 2006). Providing a safety net at school may be an effective school improvement strategy for students that fail to receive the maximum benefit of a basic education due to the impact of social problems such as poverty. That being the case, principals may partner with school social workers to address some of the nonacademic needs of students that interfere with teaching and learning.

At the bottom, however, we know that, even if achievement scores are not thereby improved, a caring society should still be sure that everyone has decent housing, adequate childcare, medical insurance, and a living wage. We don't provide these things so that achievement scores will go up. We provide them because people need them, and caring people respond to the need. (Noddings, 2005a, p. 154)

Several assumptions and limitations will guide the data analysis of this study. They are listed below.

## **Assumptions**

- Principals that experience ongoing contact with school social workers have at least a minimal working knowledge to prioritize the tasks of school social workers to support student needs.
- Role ambiguity of school social workers negatively influences principals' perceptions of the roles of school social workers.
- Principals may not fully understand the skills and competencies of school social workers.
- Generally speaking, effective school social work practice positively impacts student outcomes.
- Knowledge, exposure, and perceptions are positively correlated.
- Implementing organizational structures that support caring positively impacts student outcomes.

## **Limitations**

- This study was limited to public school principals in North Carolina. The findings may not be generalizable to some of the working contexts of schools in other states. However, a clear and explicit description of the study sample increases the validity of any claimed generalizations (Robinson, 2014).
- Respondents in school districts that approved the study were invited to participate. Although the district approved participation in the study, respondents participated voluntarily in a self-administered survey. As a result, self-selection bias may have occurred (Olsen, 2008). The findings may not be generalizable since the respondents may not represent the entire target population (Olsen, 2008).

- School social workers are often hired to provide services to multiple schools within the LEA (Allen-Meares, 1994). In fact, social workers may be perceived as part-time employees (Staudt, 1991). As a result, principals may not consider the roles of school social workers as a significant part of the school improvement process because of the part-time status (Staudt, 1991).
- Some principals have limited professional experience working with school social workers.
- All districts do not provide school social work services (C. Minard, personal communication, March 30, 2015). The relatively small number of school social workers available in North Carolina public schools limits principals' exposure to these professionals.
- Individual school districts use a variety of job titles to refer to school social workers (C. Minard, personal communication, March 30, 2015). As such, it is difficult to track the status of school social workers in North Carolina (C. Minard, personal communication, March 30, 2015). Variant job titles may be an indicator of the diverse roles and educational training of school social workers.

### **Definition of Terms**

Next, terms used throughout this dissertation are explained. The terms are defined to promote clarity and to ensure that the reader understands the terms within the context of this study.

#### Aesthetic Care

Aesthetic care refers to ethical caring about ideas and things (Danin, 1994; Noddings, 1984).

### Authentic Care

Authentic care refers to the caring that exists in reciprocal relationships such as teachers and students (Courtney & Noblit, 1994; Noddings, 1984).

### Care

Care is an ambiguous term that can be defined as a set of activities (Beck, 1992; Tronto, 1987). Gilligan described care as a responsibility and commitment to recognize and respond to the needs of self and others (Beck, 1992; Marshall et al., 1996; Tronto, 1987).

### One Caring

“One caring” refers to the person in the caring relationship that listens, observes, and recognizes the expressed needs of the one cared-for (Beck & Cassidy, 2009; Noddings, 2012a; Noddings, 2012b).

### One Cared-For

The “one cared-for” refers to the person receiving the care (Beck & Cassidy, 2009; Noddings, 2012a; Noddings, 2012b). Within the caring relationship, the cared-for must respond in a way that acknowledges that the caring was received and recognized (Beck & Cassidy, 2009; Noddings, 2012a; Noddings, 2012b). The existence of a caring relation is dependent upon this response from the cared-for (Beck & Cassidy, 2009; Noddings, 2012a; Noddings, 2012b).

### Ethic of Care

The ethic of care is a theoretical framework developed in the 1980s by Carol Gilligan to explain moral development (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001; Tronto, 1987). It is a relational ethic based on the activities of the one caring and the one cared-for (Beck, 1992).



### Locale Type

Locale type refers to the physical location of schools and districts (NCES, n.d.). It is a classification system created and utilized by the federal government (NCDPI, 2010). A few examples of locale types are “large city” and “rural” (NCES, n.d.).

### Principals

Principals are the executive heads of schools as defined by North Carolina General Statute 115C-5.

### School Social Worker

School social workers are trained mental health professionals that provide services related to the academic, social, emotional, and behavioral achievement of students. These professionals are liaisons between the home, the school, and the community. Local educational agencies (LEA) hire school social workers to work in schools within that district. In the state of North Carolina, school social workers possess a minimum of a bachelor's degree in social work and are licensed by the NCDPI. Also, they must follow the School Social Work Professional Standards established by the NCDPI and the National Association of Social Workers' (NASW) Code of Ethics (NCDPI, n.d.-b).

### Student Services Professionals

The term student services professionals refers to school social workers, school counselors, and school psychologists as a collective group (NCDPI, n.d.-b). According to the National Alliance of Specialized Instructional Support Personnel (NASISP), these professionals provide intervention and prevention services to students (2013).

## Student Services

Student services refers to the services provided by student services professionals (NCDPI, n.d.-b). The functions of student services professionals can be classified into three categories: (1) direct services and instruction; (2) coordination, development, leadership related to programs, services, resources, and systems; and (3) enhancement of connections with community resources (Adelman & Taylor, 2006, p.6).

## **Summary**

While poverty does not cause school failure, it creates barriers to teaching and learning for many students. Caring principals can support learning for all students by implementing structures that counter the effects of social problems such as poverty, homelessness, and child maltreatment (Noddings, 1984; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001). School social workers are in a unique position to partner with principals to establish caring as a priority in schools (Adelman & Taylor, 2006; Kober & Usher, 2012; Louis & Gordon, 2006). However, the role of school social workers continues to be developed and is subject to the context of social forces (Richard & Villarreal Sosa, 2014). Furthermore, principals typically have limited exposure to school social workers and may not fully understand the roles and potential contributions of these professionals (Tower, 2000). The principals' input is a missing component in the current literature on the role development of school social workers. Role clarity is needed to ensure that the tasks completed by school social workers are prioritized to meet the needs of all students. The next section will review the current social work and EoC literature as it relates to this study.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Introduction**

The focus of this study is principals' perceptions of the roles of school social workers. The literature review will outline the current knowledge on the topic and identify gaps in the research. It will first outline the EoC as a theoretical framework. The literature on the EoC will explain the historical development and key ideas of the theory. The literature will also explore the connection between caring and school social work practice. Next, it will review the role development of school social work practice in American schools, identify common tasks completed by school social workers, describe the context of school social work practice in North Carolina, and explore principals' perceptions of the role.

### **The Ethic of Care**

Many school administration programs prepare principals to use military and business tactics to resolve school problems (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001). However, many aspects of schoolwork are based on relationships and addressing unmet needs (Courtney & Noblit, 1994). Not surprising, military and business tactics alone are neither sensitive nor interested in the importance of addressing unmet needs to the human experience (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001). From this perspective, creating policies, rules, and procedures is often seen as possible resolutions to dilemmas (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001). Marshall et al. (1996) suggested that an alternative to traditional leadership models such as rational/scientific management, mechanistic/bureaucratic management, organic/collegial management, and bargaining/political

management is needed to empower educators to nurture children and to teach them to be caring. The EoC is such a model.

Carol Gilligan introduced care ethics in the 1980s in response to Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001; Tronto, 1987). Cognitive-development theory informed Kohlberg's theory, which stipulated that moral development occurs through a series of stages (Noddings, 1984; Tronto, 1987). Moral reasoning develops in tandem with the cognitive ability to understand the nature of moral relations (Noddings, 2013; Tronto, 1987). Kohlberg's findings highlighted differences in the moral development of men and women (Noddings, 2013; Tronto, 1987). He asserted that girls achieved lower stages of moral development than boys (Noddings, 1984; Tronto, 1987). Gilligan examined Kohlberg's work for gender bias and offered care ethics as an alternative explanation of the moral development of women (Noddings, 2013; Tronto, 1987). Her findings established the EoC as a feminist theory (Tronto, 1987). Care ethics describes morality as relationships and responsibility, an activity of care, and the lived experiences of real people (Tronto, 1987).

Noted scholar Nel Noddings contributed significantly to the understanding of care in the school setting (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001). Noddings work offers the fundamental ideas of the theory and applies the theory to education. Relationships and attending to the needs of others are the primary moral concepts of EoC (Beck & Cassidy, 2009; Noddings, 1984; Noddings, 2005a). Caring occurs through the relationship between the *one cared-for* and the *one caring* (Beck & Cassidy, 2009; Noddings, 1984). Ethical caring occurs when the one caring perceives the needs of the one cared-for and responds to those needs (Noddings, 1984; Noddings, 2012b). The act of caring is not complete until the one cared-for responds to the caring in a way that indicates that the care was received (Noddings, 1984; Noddings, 2012b). If the one cared-for does not

acknowledge the caring relation, the one caring must try something else (Noddings, 1984, Noddings, 2012b). On the other hand, when caring is accepted it provides the one caring with information about the needs and interests of the cared-for. The response opens the door for more caring to occur in the future (Noddings, 2012b).

Beck offered a conceptual framework for understanding the EoC as it relates to educational leadership (Beck, 1992). She supports her argument by citing the work of scholars such as Noddings, Gilligan, Buber, Mitchell, Fromm, and others (Beck, 1992). According to Beck, caring happens within the context of relationships, and relationships build a sense of community (1992). Caring can be understood based on the goals it hopes to achieve and the three activities of caring (1992). The goals of caring are promoting human development and responding to the needs of others (Beck, 1992). The activities of caring are receiving the perspective of others, responding to the needs of others, and remaining in the relationship as long as care is needed (Beck, 1992). Beck (1992) demonstrates the place for the EoC in educational leadership by comparing the EoC to the economic and the legal/judicial model.

An economic model that emphasizes academic dominance and prosperity as fundamental purposes of education frames many educational policies (Beck, 1992). This model values personal and global competitiveness as a means to increase academic achievement (Beck, 1992). Beck (1992) argues that the economic model is not an appropriate perspective for school administrators. For one, this model does not provide guidance in dealing with situations that require value judgments (Beck, 1992). Second, there is no evidence that a business model is effective in the school setting (Beck, 1992). In comparison, an EoC assumes that promoting human and community development are the primary goals of education (Beck, 1992). Academic achievement and wealth are valued in as much as they contribute to personal and community

wellness (Beck, 1992). From the perspective of the EoC, school administrators frame their actions around creating a nurturing and supportive environment for teachers and students (Beck, 1992). In short, the EoC in educational leadership places value on people as opposed to the competitiveness that is emphasized in the economic model (Beck, 1992).

Beck (1992) further explains the role of the EoC in educational leadership by comparing the EoC to the legal/judicial model. Unlike the EoC, a legal/judicial model places little emphasis on the human aspects of education and seeks to solve complex social problems through educational policies and programs (Beck, 1992). To the contrary, an EoC in educational leadership seeks resolutions that consider the needs of individual students and the community as a whole (Beck, 1992). Democratic values such as equality, justice, fairness, and equity are a means of promoting personal and community wellness as opposed to an end (Beck, 1992). Whereas the legal/judicial model may foster the implementation of quick fixes, the EoC seeks to maximize the capacity of individuals within their community (Beck, 1992).

To adequately respond to the needs of others, administrators develop and value their relationships with others. School administrators that frame their actions within an EoC listen to the concerns and needs of the people in the school community (Beck, 1992). As the “one caring,” school administrators take on an attitude that allows them to hear truly the perspectives of the one cared-for (Beck, 1992). Caring principals, involve students and teachers in the problem-solving process and allow students and teachers to have access to the decision-making mechanisms within the school (Beck, 1992). Furthermore, school administrators respond to the needs of students and teachers in a way that demonstrates awareness of their needs (Beck, 1992). As such, at times the administrator may place the needs of students and teachers over policies and mandates (Beck, 1992).

According to Beck (1992), the EoC can also influence the way school administrators organize schools. From an EoC framework, administrators use facilitative strategies (Beck, 1992). In other words, administrators use their power to build the capacity of students and staff rather than control them (Beck, 1992). The EoC encourages administrators to implement organizational structures that promote professional autonomy, collaboration between professionals, and communication that includes all stakeholders (Beck, 1992). Caring relationships are the basis for creating a school built on these structures (Beck, 1992).

All caring relations do not involve interpersonal relationships (Courtney & Noblit, 1994; Noddings, 1984). Principals are called to care about the employees, students, and the school as an institution (Courtney & Noblit, 1994). While principals develop authentic caring relationships with some staff and students, they also provide care in indirect ways through their leadership (Courtney & Noblit, 1994). Abstract and objective forms of caring such as aesthetic caring must be considered to fully understand the place of caring in educational leadership, (Danin, 1994; Noddings, 2013). Aesthetic caring is caring about ideas and things (Danin, 1994; Noddings, 2013). Through aesthetic caring, principals seek to create a culture that expects and empowers teachers to care about students (Courtney & Noblit, 1994). Also, principals implement structures that facilitate caring (Beck and Cassidy, 2009; Cassidy & Bates, 2005; Courtney & Noblit, 1994; Noddings, 2012a). For instance, principals may increase caring in schools through the effective use of school social services. Increasing student services in schools foster the creation of an environment that provides student support services to all students rather than a crisis-oriented approach in which only the neediest students are served (Walsh et al., 2014).

The impact of social problems such as divorce, single parenthood, child maltreatment, and childhood obesity often find their way into schools (Dempster & Berry, 2003). As such,

principals are often faced with increasingly complex moral dilemmas (Dempster & Berry, 2003; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001). In an Australian study, 55% of the principals reported that a considerable amount of their time is spent dealing with social problems (Dempster & Berry, 2003). Time focused on social problems could be directed towards instructional leadership (Dempster & Berry, 2003). In an era of tight fiscal times and accountability, principals must maximize the use of all existing resources and the contributions of every staff member (Dahir, Burnham, Stone, & Cobb, 2010). Increasing principals' understanding of the roles of school social workers through the EoC may allow principals to place some of the demands of managing social problems in the hands of competent school social workers. Furthermore, caring is a fundamental value of social work practice; that places these professionals in an ideal position to partner with principals to enhance caring in the school setting.

### **The Ethic of Care as it Relates to School Social Work Practice**

Since Carol Gilligan and Nel Noddings introduced the EoC, there appears to be a slow but steady campaign to incorporate care as a valid school improvement effort. Some scholars argue for the implementation of care in principal leadership (Bass, 2012; Beck, 1992; Beck & Cassidy, 2009; Courtney & Noblit, 1994; Danin, 1994; Kropiewnicki & Shapiro, 2001; Marshall, Patterson, Rogers, & Steele, 1996), while others focus on teachers' use of care through instruction (Beck & Cassidy, 2009; Cassidy & Bates, 2005; Noddings, 2012a; Owens & Ennis, 2005). Although these studies reference the importance of student services activities such as counseling and responding to the social and emotional needs of students, the voice or role of student services professionals is missing. However, this study attempts to define the role of school workers from the perspective of the EoC and principals' perception of the role. The EoC



is an ideal framework for defining the roles of school social workers since caring for others is a primary function of social work practice (Rhodes, 1985).

Social work has a professional identity as a helping profession (Morales & Sheafor, 1992). Helping professions emerged in the United States to address human needs not adequately addressed by natural supports such as the family (Morales & Sheafor, 1992). Physical needs, emotional needs, intellectual needs, spiritual needs, and social needs are categories of needs (Morales & Sheafor, 1992). Specifically, social work's roots stem from the emergence of charitable organizations in the late 1800s with the purpose of addressing social problems (Morales & Sheafor, 1992; Morris, 1978). For example, in 1886 and 1889, settlement houses were developed in New York and Chicago respectively to meet the needs of immigrants (Morales & Sheafor, 1992). As a result, social work became known for its commitment to help vulnerable and underserved populations to improve their quality of life (Morales & Sheafor, 1992). Caring continues to be a primary function of social work practice (Ellis, Ellett, & DeWeaver, 2007; Morales & Shaefer, 1992; Morris, 1978; Rhodes, 1985).

Social work grew from the need to create a "caring society" to deal with social problems that arose from industrialization (Rhodes, 1985). However, there are other similarities between social work practice and the EoC. For one, the history of social work practice and the EoC started with women. For example, Gilligan (1982) developed the EoC to explain the moral development of women. Likewise, social work developed in the United States and England from the efforts of women to provide charity to the community (Rhodes, 1985). Second, social workers address the needs of others through the context of relationships (Ellis et al., 2007; Rhodes, 1985). Through casework, social workers work directly with individuals to improve their situation (Rhodes, 1985). Addressing the needs of others through the context of

relationships is a key moral principle of the EoC (Beck & Cassidy, 2009; Noddings, 1984; Noddings, 2005a). Moreover, like the EoC, social work promotes personal development (Beck, 1992).

There is also a connection between the EoC's activities of caring and the actions of social workers (Ellis et al., 2007). If we think of the one caring as the social worker, it is easy to see the connection. According to the EoC, the one caring perceives a need that must be addressed on behalf of the one cared-for (Ellis et al., 2007, 2007; Noddings, 1984). Social workers conduct assessments to determine the needs of clients. Next, the one caring commits to caring for the one cared-for (Ellis et al., 2007; Noddings, 1984). The social worker selects an intervention to address the needs of the client. The EoC also asserts that the act of caring is not complete until the one cared-for acknowledges receipt of the care (Noddings, 1994; Noddings 2012b). If the one cared-for does not accept the caring, the one caring considers alternatives (Noddings, 1994; Noddings 2012b). However, when the one-cared for accepts the caring, it provides additional information about the needs and interests of the one cared-for for future use (Noddings, 1994; Noddings 2012b). Likewise, school social workers use outcome data to determine the effectiveness of interventions and logical next steps based on the client's response to the intervention. Again, the similarities between the EoC and social work practice make the EoC an appropriate framework for defining the roles of school social workers. The next section reviews the development of social work practice in schools.

### **The Development of Social Work Practice in Schools**

School social work emerged from outside sources that pushed school social workers into the school setting (Allen-Meares, 2010b; Torres, 1996). A trace of its history demonstrates that principals did not have a direct influence on the emergence of the school social work profession

(Allen-Meares, 2010b; Louis & Gordon, 2006; Shear, 1965; Watson, 1985). The role of school social workers seems to reflect the social and economic forces of the time (Richard & Villarreal Sosa, 2014).

Social trends and movements at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century engendered the development of school social work practice in schools (Allen-Meares, 2010b). For example, by 1918 all 48 states had enacted compulsory attendance laws that required all students to attend school (Allen-Meares, 2010b). During this period in United States history, children were allowed to work outside of the home for a wage, and the child labor movement was growing (Allen-Meares, 2010b; Phillippo & Blosser, 2013). As such, schools were unfamiliar places for some children (Phillippo & Blosser, 2013). Keeping students enrolled and engaged was a real concern for educators (Phillippo & Blosser, 2013).

Compulsory attendance laws changed the way schools looked and operated. Urban development, immigration, and industrialization created an incredibly diverse population of students (Allen-Meares, 2010b; Phillippo & Blosser, 2013). Educators assisted children with the transition to formal schooling (Phillippo & Blosser, 2013). A primary education consisted of social skills training, literacy, and academic instruction (Phillippo & Blosser, 2013). The diversity of students created a necessity for services that principals and teachers could not fill. School social work emerged as a strategy to provide an equal educational opportunity to all students (Allen-Meares, 1994; Allen-Meares, 2010b; Phillippo & Blosser, 2013).

School social work is a specialty practice area of social work that began during the 1906-1907 school year (Allen-Meares, 2010b; Torres, 1996). School social workers were first known as visiting teachers (Allen-Meares, 2010b; Phillippo & Blosser, 2013; Torres: 1996). The title changed from visiting teachers to school social workers in the 1960s (Allen-Meares, 2010b).

Private agencies in Boston, New York, and Hartford employed visiting teachers to support the needs of at-risk students (Allen-Meares, 2010b). For example, the Women's Education Association in Boston hired visiting teachers to serve as the liaison between the home and the school (Allen-Meares, 2010b). In New York City, Hartley House and Greenwich House employed two settlement workers to increase the collaboration and communication between the home, the school, and the community (Allen-Meares, 2010b). A psychological clinic in Hartford also created a visiting teacher program to implement treatment plans and to gather information about students (Allen-Meares, 2010b).

The implementation of school visiting programs continued to grow in American schools. In 1913, Rochester, New York became the first school district to initiate a school social work program (Allen-Meares, 2010b). The Commonwealth Fund of New York launched a three-year demonstration grant for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency in 1923 that funded 30 visiting teacher positions across the United States (Allen-Meares, 2010b; Phillippo & Blosser, 2013). The grant increased the presence of visiting teachers and support from local boards of education to fund these positions (Allen-Meares, 2010b; Phillippo & Blosser, 2013). The Commonwealth Foundation discontinued the project in 1930 (Allen-Meares, 2010b). However, twenty-one of the demonstration sites financed the position even after the grant ended (Allen-Meares, 2010b). Other cities implemented visiting teacher programs during this same time (Allen-Meares, 2010b). There were about 244 school social workers in 31 states (Allen-Meares, 2010b).

The political context of the country also influenced the focus and development of school social work practice (Shear, 1965). The 1920s mark the beginning of the Mental Hygiene Movement (Allen-Meares, 2010b). The movement described schools as stressful places for children and asserted that all children are at-risk (Phillippo & Blosser, 2013). Visiting teachers

began to change the focus of their work in response to the Mental Hygiene Movement (Allen-Meares, 2010b; Phillippo & Blosser, 2013). The focus moved away from the profession's early roots with social reform, towards treating and preventing the mental health needs of individual students (Allen-Meares, 2010b; Phillippo & Blosser, 2013).

Funding for visiting teacher programs decreased in the 1930s as a result of the Great Depression (Allen-Meares, 2010b; Phillippo & Blosser, 2013). However, the school social work profession continued to grow (Allen-Meares, 2010b; Phillippo & Blosser, 2013). From 1931 to 1969, national, state, and regional associations advocated for the profession, published scholarly works, and the number of university programs to train school social workers increased (Allen-Meares, 2010b; Phillippo & Blosser, 2013). Also, federal legislation sanctioned the need for school social workers in American schools and led to an increase in their numbers (Allen-Meares, 2010b; Phillippo & Blosser, 2013). During this period, the focus of the profession began to change (Peckover, Vasquez, Van Housen, Saunders, & Allen, 2013). The role of school social workers began to shift away from enforcing compulsory attendance laws and serving as a community liaison (Peckover et al., 2013). School social workers began to utilize social casework to address the behavioral and social-emotional needs of individual students (Peckover et al., 2013). From 1940 – 1960, social casework continued to be the focus of school social workers (Peckover et al., 2013).

During the 1970s the role of school social workers was further defined. For one, Alderson identified four models of practice, which provided a common language and purpose for the profession (Peckover et al., 2013). Also, the emergence of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 reinforced social casework as a function of school social workers (Peckover et al., 2013). The legislation identified school social workers as a related service to

address the individual needs of children with disabilities (Allen-Meares, 2010b; Peckover et al., 2013; Phillippo & Blosser, 2013; Tower, 2000). It was the first time that legislation acknowledged school social workers as contributors to the education process (Atkins-Burnett, 2010; Phillippo & Blosser, 2013). By the 1980s amendments to the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1986, and legislation such as the ESEA and IDEA identified school social workers as “qualified personnel” (Allen-Meares, 2010b; Phillippo & Blosser, 2013). Federal legislation of the 1970s and 1980s led to a considerable increase in the number of school social workers (Peckover et al., 2013, Phillippo & Blosser, 2013).

The initial role of visiting teachers was to address concerns with student attendance and behavior, to explain school policies to parents, and to link parents to community resources (Phillippo & Blosser, 2013). Today, school social workers are commonly known for their role as the liaison between the home, the school, and the community (Allen-Meares, 2010b). While this is true, school social workers provide an array of services such as individual and group counseling, consultation, collaboration, education, linking families to services, mediation, advocacy, and crisis intervention (Allen-Meares, 2010b). In fact, school social workers work interchangeably between micro, macro, and mezzo practice through flexibility and specialized skills (Webb, 2011). Also, they assist teachers, principals, and parents by ensuring that students are ready to learn.

Regardless of its origins, the fact that school social workers have provided services to schools for over 100 years points to the value associated with the roles of these professionals. The profession has weathered tight budgets, and the focus of the roles has evolved. Even still, all public schools do not employ school social workers. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), there were 29,880 full-time equivalents (FTE) school social worker

positions in public schools across the United States during the 2011-2012 school year (NCES, 2011-12). During the 2014-2015 school year, federal, state, and local funds were used to allocate 941.9 FTE school social work positions in North Carolina public schools (NCDPI, 2015a). By comparison, there are 115 local educational agencies (LEA) in North Carolina comprised of 2,434 public schools (NCDPI, 2015a). Table 1.0 describes the number of school social work positions allocated to North Carolina schools (NCDPI, 2015a, 2014, 2013, 2012, 2011). Over the last five years, social work services have grown by only 30 FTE positions in North Carolina.

**Table 1.0: Allocation of School Social Workers in North Carolina Based on FTE**

<b>School Year</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Federal</b>	<b>Local</b>	<b>Total</b>
2014-2015	760.62	63.56	117.72	941.90
2013-2014	762.91	71.58	90.83	925.32
2012-2013	763.23	68.13	75.86	907.22
2011-2012	749.98	56.45	102.40	908.83
2010-2011	737.99	108.35	66.56	912.90

The limited availability of school social workers in American schools may impact principals' exposure to these professionals. The relatively small number of school social workers compared to the number of public schools in the state of North Carolina implies that many school social workers provide services to multiple school buildings and that some schools do not employ school social workers.

## **Interstitial Practice or Specialty Practice: Another Look at the Development of School Social Work Practice in Schools**

Through a trace of the history of school social work and content analysis of school social work journal articles, Phillippo and Blosser (2013) offer an alternate perspective on the development of school social work practice. Phillippo and Blosser (2013) initiated their trace based on two claims. One, school social work practice is both a specialty practice area of social work and an area of interstitial practice (Phillippo & Blosser, 2013). Second, it is critical for social work scholars, practitioners, and advocates to understand the interstitial nature of school social practice (Phillippo & Blosser, 2013).

Interstitial emergence theory asserts that when different fields intersect such as the case of social work and education, a new profession emerges (Phillippo & Blosser, 2013). The authors analyzed school social work practice based on Morrill's three stages of interstitial emergence (Phillippo & Blosser, 2013). Those stages are innovation, mobilization, and structuration (Phillippo & Blosser, 2013). Each stage will be defined and illustrated using a few examples from the history of school social work.

Innovation occurs when professional fields innovate or adapt existing practices to solve problems outside their field of expertise (Phillippo & Blosser, 2013). For example, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, compulsory attendance laws, urbanization, immigration, and industrialization increased the number of students enrolled in school (Phillippo & Blosser, 2013). As such, educators were challenged to meet the needs of a very diverse student population (Phillippo & Blosser, 2013). School social work practice emerged as an innovation to address the numerous demands (i.e., poor school attendance, behavior problems, poverty, etc.) that interfered with student learning (Phillippo & Blosser, 2013).



The second stage, mobilization, involves garnering organized support for innovative practices (Phillippo & Blosser, 2013). Mobilization attempts to provide credibility and sanction for innovation (Phillippo & Blosser, 2013). In the case of school social work, organized events such as professional conferences, the publication of journal articles, and the coalition of professional organizations are examples of mobilization (Phillippo & Blosser, 2013). For example, the Commonwealth Fund's Program for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency in 1923 helped to mobilize school social work practice (Phillippo & Blosser, 2013). The project increased the number of school social workers across the United States and generated continued support for the position even after the three-year demonstration project ended (Phillippo & Blosser, 2013). Furthermore, evaluations of the program created research data and publicized findings regarding the tasks of school social workers (Phillippo & Blosser, 2013). The mental hygiene movement of the 1930s and 1940s also mobilized support for school social work practice through its campaign to address the mental health needs of all students (Phillippo & Blosser, 2013). As a result of the mental hygiene movement, state funds were appropriated to support the provision of school social work services (Phillippo & Blosser, 2013).

The final stage, structuration, is also present in school social work's history (Phillippo & Blosser, 2013). Structuration occurs as a field becomes more defined (Phillippo & Blosser, 2013). Structures such as the development of professional organizations and the creation of professional knowledge are examples of structuration (Phillippo & Blosser, 2013). For instance, from 1919 – 1955 the National Association of School Social Workers (NASSW) existed to support the innovation of school social work practice (Phillippo & Blosser, 2013). The NASSW and state and regional associations further developed the infrastructure for school social work practice through the dissemination of field knowledge and facilitated conversations about the

roles and qualifications of school social workers, national and regional conferences, and publications (Phillippo & Blosser, 2013). The NASSW later merged with the larger social work organization, the NASW (Phillippo & Blosser, 2013). A common body of knowledge continued to develop through the development of university-based programs to train school social workers (Phillippo & Blosser, 2013). By 1950 there were 11 programs (Phillippo & Blosser, 2013). Later, the NASSW asked what is currently known as the Council on Social Work Education to accredit school social work training programs (Phillippo & Blosser, 2013). School social work's formal relationship with national associations and the social work accrediting body expanded the infrastructure of the profession (Phillippo & Blosser, 2013).

Interstitial emergence theory holds that the field of education has influenced school social work practice. For example, the EACHA was the first piece of federal legislation to reference school social work practice (Phillippo & Blosser, 2013). Consequently, advocates for school social work framed the profession as an important component of the special education process (Phillippo & Blosser, 2013). As a result, EACHA funding increased the number of school social work positions (Phillippo & Blosser, 2013). By the 1980s, IDEA and ESEA provided more structure to the profession. Both pieces of federal legislation reference school social workers as qualified personnel (Phillippo & Blosser, 2013). In short, IDEA and ESEA gave legal sanction to the profession.

According to Phillippo and Blosser's (2013) findings, school social work practice has qualities of interstitial practice and qualities of a specialty practice area of social work. The fact that the profession has not fully developed into an independent field or interstitial practice is reflective of the profession's strong connection to the larger field of social work (Phillippo & Blosser, 2013). Even still, the interstitial perspective holds that school social workers must

develop and adapt their practices to meet the unique demands of the school setting (Phillippo & Blosser, 2013). In other words, the field of social work and the field of education influence school social work practice (Phillippo & Blosser, 2013). If this is true, a deeper understanding of principals' perceptions of the roles of school social workers is a critical component of the role development of school social workers. Principals are in a unique position to support mobilization and structuration efforts of school social work practice. Again, principals exert a major influence on the nature and provision of student support services in the school setting.

### **Defining the Role of School Social Workers**

The focus of school social work practice has changed since the profession began. The focus has ranged from social change for immigrants and the poor, to enforcement of attendance laws for all children, to social casework to provide mental health services for at-risk students, and group work for target groups of students (Allen-Meares, 2010b). The profession continues to need to define the role of school social workers and to develop a service delivery model (Richard & Villarreal Sosa, 2014). National and statewide empirical studies contribute to the narrative on role development in school social work practice.

Costin (1969) conducted a national survey of 238 school social workers in 40 states and the District of Columbia. The remaining ten states did not employ school social workers. Using the literature, Costin (1969) compiled a comprehensive list of social work tasks. She created a questionnaire of 107 items from this list (Costin, 1969). Respondents were asked to use a 4-point scale (0 = not important; 1 = slightly important; 2 = moderately important; 3 = very important) to rate the importance of each task as a social work goal within schools (Costin, 1969). Factor analysis was completed to determine relationships amongst the items (Costin, 1969). The items were categorized into the following nine categories: Leadership and Policy-Making, Casework

Service to the Child and His Parents, Clinical Treatment of Children with Emotional Problems, Educational Counseling with the Child and His Parents, Liaison between the Family and Community Agencies, Interpreting the Child to the Teacher, Interpreting School Social Work Service, and Case Load Management (Costin, 1969).

Overall, the findings indicated that school social workers defined the role in terms of the social work literature of the 1940s and 1950s (Costin, 1969). School social workers perceived tasks associated social casework as the most important task and those associated with leadership and policy-making as the least important (Costin, 1969). These findings were consistent even when the study controlled for geographic region and school size (Costin, 1969). The focus of the profession was the individual needs of students (Costin, 1969). Whereas, current trends identified in social work and education literature such as the academic concerns of failing students, external factors in the home, school, and community that create barriers to teaching and learning, and best practices for assisting students (Costin, 1969).

Costin's study also highlighted the diverse perspectives of other school staff and the community towards the roles of school social workers (Costin, 1969; Peckover et al., 2013). Administrators and other stakeholders indicated that the most important role of school social workers was to be the liaison between the home, school, and the community (Costin, 1969; Peckover et al., 2013). If school social workers and school administrators are to work collaboratively to increase student achievement, they must have similar beliefs about the roles of school social workers.

Allen-Meares (1977) duplicated Costin's study and extended the purpose (Peckover et al., 2013). This time the study sought to define the role of school workers and the importance of social work tasks. It also attempted to determine if the perceptions of school social workers had

changed since Costin's study in 1968 (Allen-Meares, 1977). In response to several changes in school social work, the study also examined the professions' readiness to differentiate the tasks of social workers based on the social worker's level of education (Allen-Meares, 1977). Allen-Meares modified Costin's questionnaire to reflect the current roles of school social workers based on the literature (Allen-Meares, 1977). The new instrument consisted of 84 items and was administered nationwide to 411 respondents. The data from 269 surveys were analyzed (Allen-Meares, 1977).

Seven categories emerged to describe the tasks of school social workers. The categories are as follows: Leadership and Policy-Making, Educational Counseling with the Child and His Parents, Facilitating the Utilization of Community Resources, Preliminary Tasks to the Provision of School Social Work Services, Clarifying the Child's Problem to Others, Facilitating School-Community-Pupil Relations, and Assessing the Child's Problem (Allen-Meares, 1977). School social workers perceived tasks associated with clarifying the child's problem to others as the most important task and leadership and policy-making as the least important task (Allen-Meares, 1977).

Allen-Meares (1977) defined the role based on the five categories most highly ranked. These activities are associated with liaison activities. The focus of school social workers had changed since Costin's study (Peckover et al., 2013). At this time, school social workers defined the role in terms of home-school-community liaison activities and educational counseling with the child and his parents (Allen-Meares, 1977). Allen-Meares (1977) found that school social workers' perceptions also changed by geographic location. For instance, school social workers from small school districts ranked activities associated with leadership and policy-making significantly higher than school social workers from larger districts (Allen-Meares, 1977). Like

Costin (1969), Allen-Meares (1977) also concluded that the roles of school social workers do not take into account the current problems facing schools. Although Costin and Allen-Meares defined the role differently, the service delivery primarily emphasized the needs of individual students as opposed to identifying target groups of students with similar problems such as truancy (Allen-Meares, 1977). Even still, the findings noted that more social workers were conducting group work, which was a shift away from social casework (Allen-Meares, 1977; Peckover et al., 2013).

In 1994, Allen-Meares analyzed the tasks of school social workers yet again. Rather than generating a list of social work tasks, this national study examined the context of school social work practice. The study described the environments, working conditions, and the populations served by school social workers (Allen-Meares, 1994). The survey instrument examined 104 school social work tasks and clustered those tasks into five categories: relationship with and services to teachers and school staff, relationships and services to children and families, services to other school personnel, administrative and professional tasks, and community services (Allen-Meares, 1994). For each task, respondents indicated the importance of the task for beginning school social workers, the frequency in which the task is performed, and whether the task was mandated, preferred, or both (Allen-Meares, 1994). The overall response rate for the questionnaire was 49.5% (Allen-Meares, 1994).

Through factor analysis, five categories emerged from the list of 104 school social work tasks (Allen-Meares, 1994). Those categories are as follows: leadership and policy-making, educational counseling with children, home-school liaison, administrative and professional tasks, and facilitating and advocating families' use of community resources (Allen-Meares, 1994). Respondents ranked 100 of the 104 items as very important for beginning school social workers

(Allen-Meares, 1994). Again, liaison activities were ranked as significantly more important than leadership and policy-making activities. The study also demonstrated that respondents from small districts rated the importance of leadership and policy-making activities higher than larger school districts (Allen-Meares, 1994). Larger school districts prioritized educational counseling with children and facilitating and advocating families' use of community resources significantly lower than respondents from smaller school districts (Allen-Meares, 1994). Overall, the study indicated that school social workers continued to emphasize social casework as a model of practice (Allen-Meares, 1994; Peckover et al., 2013).

Early studies around the roles of school social workers seem to focus primarily on national trends in school social work practice. These studies offer lists and categories of the tasks completed by school social workers and describe the revolving focus of the profession from liaison activities to social casework. The early studies may be helpful to principals by providing a comprehensive list of the roles and responsibilities of school social workers. However, more recent studies on the roles of school social workers draw knowledge from statewide trends and attempt to extend the literature by describing the context of school social work practice, creating conceptual models for practice, and linking practice to major initiatives in education such as response to intervention (RTI). Although these studies primarily focus on the perspectives of school social workers, these studies provide several implications for principals. The empirical studies that follow reflect this change in the literature.

Kelly et al. (2010) examined the context of school social work practice in the new millennium. At the time, a national study of school social work practice had not been completed in over 15 years (Kelly et al., 2010). Costin (1969) and Allen-Meares (1994, 1977) concluded that school social work practice did not reflect current trends in the social work and education

literature. Kelly et al. (2010) attempted to understand if school social work practice reflected current trends such as ecological theory, RTI, and positive behavior support (PBS).

Survey research methodology was used to describe the practice modalities used by school social workers, student characteristics and utilization of services, respondent characteristics, and the current work settings of school social workers (Kelly et al., 2010). More specifically, the study asked respondents to report the amount of time spent implementing prevention, clinical, and administrative activities (Kelly et al., 2010). Prevention and clinical activities were written based on the three tiers of intervention outlined in RTI and PBS (Kelly et al., 2010). Examples of prevention activities are increasing parent involvement, community engagement, in-service training to teachers, and serving on school-based committees (Kelly et al., 2010). Clinical activities focus on the individual needs of students through activities such as individual and group counseling, classroom groups, family-based approaches, and more (Kelly et al., 2010).

Kelly et al. (2010) defined school social work practice based on the findings. The work setting and characteristics of respondents in the present study mirrored the previous studies (Kelly et al., 2010). Over half of the respondents reported that the majority of their time was spent providing individual counseling (Kelly et al., 2010). Thirty percent reported that most of their time was spent providing group counseling, and 21% reported that the majority of their time was spent doing family work (Kelly et al., 2010). Classroom groups and working with teachers was reported less frequently. Further, school social workers reported that a minimal amount of time was spent on leadership roles (i.e., program planning, serving on school committees, and improving the school culture) (Kelly et al., 2010). However, respondents reported that 30% of their time is spent fulfilling administrative tasks (Kelly et al., 2010). The authors also purport that the provision of mental health services is an important role for school social workers (Kelly



et al., 2010). The majority of the students served by the respondents did not receive individual counseling or other clinical services outside of the school setting (Kelly et al., 2010). Although some school social workers are finding ways to develop programs, to engage in prevention work, and other activities aligned with RTI and PBS, clinical casework appeared to be the primary practice modality of school social workers (Kelly et al., 2010; Peckover et al., 2013).

Richard and Villarreal Sosa (2014) conducted an exploratory and descriptive statewide study of the roles of school social workers in Louisiana. All of the school social workers in Louisiana were invited to participate in the study (Richard & Villarreal Sosa, 2014). Three hundred and seventy-eight school social workers employed by various types of schools (public, charter, school-based health clinics, Recovery School District direct-run public schools, and agencies that contract with schools) completed the web-based survey (Richard & Villarreal Sosa, 2014). The researchers developed the instrument from national and state standards for school social work, the district job description, and existing surveys (Richard & Villarreal Sosa, 2014). The instrument consisted of 45 closed-ended questions on a Likert-type scale and one open-ended question (Richard & Villarreal Sosa, 2014).

The instrument collected information about the tasks completed by school social workers, the number and types of students served, and demographic information about school social workers (Richard & Villarreal Sosa, 2014). School social workers reported that their time was spent providing indirect services (76%), direct services (70%), assessment and evaluation (58%), case management (45%), and professional development and supervision (28%) (Richard & Villarreal Sosa, 2014). The survey collected additional data about the specific activities within each of the program approaches listed above. For instance, school social workers reported that they engaged in indirect activities such as serving on school-wide committees, supporting

parental involvement, linking students and families to community resources, and consulting with stakeholders (Richard & Villarreal Sosa, 2014). The findings indicated that the activities were consistent with the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Standards for School Social Work Services (Richard & Villarreal Sosa, 2014). Other activities included implementing behavior interventions and data-driven decision-making (Richard & Villarreal Sosa, 2014).

Richard and Villarreal Sosa (2014) attempted to extend the current literature on school social work practice by developing a conceptual model to represent school social work practice in Louisiana. The model classified the roles of school social workers into four categories: supervision (i.e., supporting other social workers), macro-practice (i.e., program planning and implementation), micro-practice (i.e., addressing the mental health needs of students), and evaluation (i.e., identifying and providing services to students with special needs) (Richard & Villarreal Sosa, 2014). According to the model, the four practice approaches are connected to core social work values and skills such as advocacy, cultural competency, collaboration with all stakeholders, accountability, and data-based decision-making (Richard & Villarreal Sosa, 2014).

The Richard and Villarreal Sosa (2014) study provides some implications for principals. The demographic data indicated that only 19% of school social workers in Louisiana are supervised by other social workers (Richard & Villarreal Sosa, 2014). As such, principals may be the primary evaluators of school social workers in Louisiana. Furthermore, a variety of evaluation methods are used to evaluate the performance of school social workers (Richard & Villarreal Sosa, 2014). The data also indicated that Louisiana employed school social workers under a variety of job titles (Richard & Villarreal Sosa, 2014). The varying job titles may be indicative of the variation in the roles of school social workers and the need for a conceptual model (Richard & Villarreal Sosa, 2014). The conceptual model identified in this study may not

be helpful to principals tasked with supervising school social workers. The ecological perspective forms the basis for this model (Richard & Villarreal Sosa, 2014) and professional social work jargon. As such, the model may not adequately communicate the role of school social workers in easily accessible language for audiences such as school principals seeking guidance about establishing or evaluating school social work.

Peckover et al. (2013) reviewed the history of school social work practice to identify trends and analyzed the roles of school social workers in Iowa to determine the current status of the profession. Like previous studies, the trace revealed that the roles of school social workers have historically followed a clinical social casework model of practice (Peckover et al., 2013). Generally speaking, the social casework model focuses on the social-emotional and behavioral needs of individual students rather than school-wide efforts to support at-risk students (Peckover et al., 2013).

The mixed methods study replicated an earlier study of school social workers in Iowa that was completed in the 1980s (Peckover et al., 2013). The current study asked school social workers to indicate how much time was spent completing 12 common social work tasks, the importance of each task, and their level of competence completing each task (Peckover et al., 2013). The study also examined school social workers' level of job satisfaction (Peckover et al., 2013). The instrument was specifically designed to allow the researchers to compare the findings to previous studies (Peckover et al., 2013). One hundred seventy-seven or 66% of the sample of school social workers completed the survey (Peckover et al., 2013). Like Costin (1969), Allen-Meares (1994), and Kelly et al. (2010), the researchers found that school social workers primarily utilized social casework methods (Peckover et al., 2013).

School social workers indicated that the majority of their time was spent addressing the behavioral and social-emotional needs of students, consulting with school staff about particular students, individual counseling, and administrative tasks such as completing paperwork (Peckover et al., 2013). Very little time was spent completing leadership activities such as supervising other social workers and interns, providing academic screening and assessments, initiating systems change, providing parent-school collaboration, facilitating school-community collaboration, or receiving and providing professional development (Peckover et al., 2013). Although school social workers indicated that 5% of their time is spent completing academic screenings and assessments, 43% expressed a lack of confidence in their ability to complete this task (Peckover et al., 2013).

Open-ended questions were used to identify areas that school social workers would like more training (Peckover et al., 2013). Behavior intervention, academic assessment, developmentally appropriate therapeutic strategies, behavioral assessment, and interventions to support students experiencing mental illness emerged as common themes (Peckover et al., 2013). The training needs are reflective of how school social workers indicated their time was spent (Peckover et al., 2013). However, it is noteworthy that school social workers would like more training completing academic assessment and screening even though a small amount of their time is dedicated to this area (Peckover et al., 2013). This may be indicative of changing roles and expectations of school social workers (Peckover et al., 2013).

The authors speculated that the new roles emerged in response to educational policies such as IDEA and NCLB (Peckover et al., 2013). Both mandates require school social workers to support the academic and behavior needs of students using research-based interventions (Peckover et al., 2013). Social work research and training often focuses on behavior

interventions; however, the role of school social workers as it relates to academic interventions is not as clearly defined (Peckover et al., 2013).

The statewide study of school social workers in Iowa may provide principals with further insight into school social work practice. The researchers found that Iowa's school social workers (90%) expressed overall satisfaction with their role (Peckover et al., 2013). School social workers indicated areas they would like to change about the job through open-ended questions (Peckover et al., 2013). Respondents expressed concerns about their roles and responsibilities (Peckover et al., 2013). Common themes that emerged are role confusion by supervisors, the wide range of activities that school social workers are expected to undertake, and the absence of a professional identity (Peckover et al., 2013). This study indicates that the role will likely continue to expand in response to federal mandates such as IDEA and NCLB (Peckover et al., 2013). Principals are often in a position to influence which tasks are completed by school social workers. A partnership between school social workers and principals to define the roles of school social workers would likely support social workers efforts to establish a professional identity linked to student success.

### **Barriers and Facilitators to School Social Work Practice**

School principals must create a seamless system of services to support the diverse needs of students (Higy, Haberkorn, Pope, & Gilmore, 2012). A deeper understanding of the role, to include what factors best predict which tasks school social workers complete may be helpful to school principals. In many school districts, school social workers serve multiple schools (Allen-Meares, 1994; Staudt, 1991). As such, principals must find ways to maximize the time that the school social worker is available. An understanding of the factors that influence or create

barriers to the tasks performed may help principals to establish realistic expectations and goals for social work services.

In spite of the influence of educational policies such as IDEA and NCLB, school social workers have historically focused on the needs of individual students through social casework practice (Allen-Meares, 1994; Costin, 1969; Dupper, Rocha, Jackson, & Lodato, 2014; Kelly et al., 2010; Peckover et al., 2013). Even still, some researchers believe that school social workers' focus on the needs individual students have fostered role confusion, underutilization, and a lack of appreciation for the profession (Dupper et al., 2014). A statewide study of school social workers in Tennessee expanded the literature on the roles of school social workers by analyzing which factors predict or influence school social work practice (Dupper et al., 2014).

The quantitative study used snowball sampling to create a sample of 132 school social workers (Dupper et al., 2014). The survey consisted of 21 social work tasks (Dupper et al., 2014). Using previous research, the tasks were organized based on the target of the intervention (Dupper et al., 2014). Tasks focused on intervening with individual students were categorized as individually focused (Dupper et al., 2014). On the other hand, tasks focused on intervening with any system above the individual (i.e., school, family, community agencies, teacher, etc.) were categorized as environmentally (Dupper et al., 2014). Participants were asked to review the list, to identify the tasks they currently perform, and to indicate how often each task is performed (Dupper et al., 2014). Also, the survey gathered data to determine if demographic or geographic characteristics and qualities about the school (i.e., school level) or work overload (i.e., number of schools served) influenced school social work practice (Dupper et al., 2014). Using descriptive statistics, bivariate correlation, and multiple linear regression, the data were analyzed to determine which factors predict which roles school social workers perform (Dupper et al., 2014).

Like previous studies, Dupper et al. found that social casework continues to be the primary practice model for these professionals. School social workers in Tennessee perform individually focused tasks more than environmentally focused tasks (Dupper et al., 2014). Characteristics of the school social worker such as race, gender, education, and grade level served did not seem to impact the school social workers' choice of intervention (Dupper et al., 2014). Instead, organizational and systemic factors seemed to influence the types of interventions performed (Dupper et al., 2014).

The study found that the number of schools served and geographic region (east, middle, west) are significantly correlated to the types of tasks performed at the bivariate level where  $p < .05$  (Dupper et al., 2014). The multiple regression model indicated that even when the number of schools was taken into account, school social workers performed individually focused tasks (Dupper et al., 2014). School social workers that serve a large number of schools are significantly less likely to perform environmentally focused tasks (Dupper et al., 2014). The more schools assigned, the less likely school social workers will perform environmentally focused tasks as a result of work overload (Dupper et al., 2014). The multiple regression model also suggests that geographic region predicts which tasks school social workers perform (Dupper et al., 2014). The researchers assert that numerous political, social, and cultural factors akin to Tennessee explain the differences in the tasks performed by school social workers (Dupper et al., 2014). More research is needed to determine the specific organizational barriers to school social work practice (Dupper et al., 2014).

The findings of the Dupper et al. study should be considered with caution (2014). The researchers were not able to generate a list of all school social workers in Tennessee (Dupper et al., 2014). As a result, the sample may not be representative of school social workers in the state

(Dupper et al., 2014). However, knowledge of the factors that influence the tasks completed by school social workers may enable principals and school social workers to collaborate to maximize the role. For instance, principals are in a position to advocate for change to organizational factors that are counterproductive such as work overload due to the number of schools served by school social workers.

Teasley, Canifield, Archuleta, Crutchfield, and Chavis (2012) conducted a mixed-methods study to identify facilitators and barriers to school social work practice. It is a replication of a previous study that analyzed barriers and facilitators to culturally competent practice (Teasley et al., 2012). A convenience sample of 585 school social workers attending a conference in the Midwest was invited to participate in the study (Teasley et al., 2012). Using a Likert-type scale, 48.2% of the participants completed the survey, which consisted of 115 items derived from previous research and content analysis (Teasley et al., 2012). For each item, participants were asked to indicate the extent to which each item was considered a barrier to school social work practice (Teasley et al., 2012). The qualitative section of the questionnaire asked participants to create a prioritized list of barriers and facilitators (Teasley et al., 2012).

Statistical analysis and content analysis were conducted to analyze the data collected (Teasley et al., 2012). Bivariate analysis was conducted to test the relationship between the barrier-to-practice composite variable and several factors (i.e. years with the agency, years of experience in administration, years of experience as a school social worker, years of experience in direct practice, and the racial breakdown of students) (Teasley et al., 2012). No significant relationships were found (Teasley et al., 2012). Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to analyze the relationship between geographic locations such as urban, suburban, and rural



(Teasley et al., 2012). The researchers did not find a significant relationship between geographic location and barriers to practice (Teasley et al., 2012).

Content analysis was conducted to develop categories to represent common themes related to barriers and facilitators to practice (Teasley et al., 2012). The most frequently listed barrier to practice was time and caseload. This category refers to time to work with clients, staff availability, and/or the size of the caseload (Teasley et al., 2012). Other frequently perceived barriers are the lack of money and the attitudes of teachers and administration (Teasley et al., 2012). This includes but is not limited to: lack of caring by teachers, teachers not understanding the roles of school social workers, administrators not understanding the needs of students, etc. (Teasley et al., 2012). On the other hand, participants perceived collaboration, communication, cooperation, and attitudes of school staff as facilitators of school social work practice (Teasley et al., 2012). The second most frequently perceived facilitator was knowledge, awareness, and training (Teasley et al., 2012). This refers to in-service training, continuing education, and understanding others (Teasley et al., 2012).

Teachers and administrators are major players in the school improvement process (Teasley et al., 2012). However, teachers and administrators need the help of support personnel such as school social workers to meet the diverse needs of students (Richard & Villarreal Sosa, 2014; Watson, 1985). In contrast, school social workers tend to focus on the needs of individual students. The findings suggest that an environment that encourages multidisciplinary practice is ideal (Teasley et al., 2012). Collaboration is a primary facilitator of school social work practice (Teasley et al., 2012). As such, principals may maximize the role of school social workers by establishing structures that encourage interdisciplinary collaboration. In turn, more students will be assisted, and role ambiguity will likely decrease (Teasley et al., 2012).

## **School Social Work Practice in North Carolina**

A review of the literature did not produce a statewide study of school social workers in North Carolina. Torres' (1996) national study of the status of school social workers in America provides some insight. All 50 states and seven additional U. S. education jurisdictions were invited to participate in this study (Torres, 1996). The researcher mailed a short questionnaire to the chief executive officer of each jurisdiction (Torres, 1996). Seventy-nine percent of the respondents completed the survey (Torres, 1996). According to the findings, North Carolina reported that school social worker is the common job title used to refer to the profession and state certification is a requirement for employment (Torres, 1996). Torres analyzed the job descriptions provided by each jurisdiction to determine the common tasks completed by school social workers (1996). The findings were outlined by education jurisdiction. The most common tasks for North Carolina school social workers are as follows: assessment and testing, record keeping, indirect and direct casework, home, school and community liaison, consultation, advocacy, in-service training, and program planning, implementation, and evaluation (Torres, 1996).

Since Torres' (1996) study the North Carolina School Social Work Job Description has been revised. In 2008, NCDPI developed a committee of representatives from local school districts, institutions of higher education, and professional organizations such as the North Carolina School Social Work Association (NCSSWA) to revise the 1987 North Carolina School Social Worker Job Description. The researcher served on the committee as a representative of a local school district. The job description was revised based on feedback from practicing school social workers across the state, North Carolina statutes, and various national and state documents (i.e., NC Standards for the Preparation of School Social Workers approved by the State Board of

Education on November 3, State Board of Education Policy QP-C-006, State General Statutes 115C-333 and 115C-335, the National Association of Social Work Standards for School Social Work, etc.) (NCDPI, 2008).

The 2008 North Carolina School Social Worker Job Description outlines the duties and responsibilities of school social workers. A copy is available in Appendix 1. The document is intended to be a guide for local schools and LEAs that employ school social workers (NCDPI, 2008). The roles of North Carolina school social workers are divided into six major functions that support NCDPI's mission that every student will graduate college and career ready (NCDPI, 2008). The major functions are as follows: Assessment of Student, Family, and School Needs; Direct Services/Service Delivery; Advocacy; Consultation and Collaboration; Program Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation; and Accountability (NCDPI, 2008). Although the primary functions are broad categories of social work practice approaches, the job description provides a concise definition and a list of correlated activities for each major function.

It appears that the tasks of North Carolina school social workers follow similar trends as the studies outlined in this literature review. The job description contains a heavy emphasis on social casework to address the needs of individual students (Allen-Meares, 1977; Costin, 1969; Peckover et al., 2013). For example, the job description describes activities such as individual and group counseling, linking students and their families to community resources, consulting with teachers about individual students, assessing the needs of students and families and developing intervention plans to address those needs. Also, school social workers are expected to serve as the liaison between the home, school, and community (Allen-Meares, 1977, 1994). A small number of leadership tasks are listed under the major functions of Direct Services/Service Delivery and Program Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation (Allen-Meares, 1977, 1994;

Costin, 1969; Peckover et al., 2013). For instance, school social workers are expected to provide in-service training, to assist with the planning and implementation of system-wide and community programs, and to serve on school-community teams. Although the job description reflects an emphasis on social casework and liaison activities, further analysis is needed to determine if the job description is an accurate indicator of the roles of school social workers in North Carolina.

The review of the literature indicates that more work is needed towards clearly defining the roles of school social workers (Peckover et al., 2013; Richard & Villarreal Sosa, 2014). Empirical studies of the perceptions of school social workers reveal that the focus of the profession has changed over time (Allen-Meares, 1977; Peckover et al., 2013; Richard & Villarreal Sosa, 2014). Often, the focus does not reflect the current focus of social work and education literature (Allen-Meares, 1977; Costin, 1969; Peckover et al., 2013). Rather than adjusting to the here and now, school social work practice needs to focus on long-term planning and the current problems facing schools (Allen-Meares, 1977; Costin, 1969). Focusing on target groups of children with similar problems would allow the profession to contribute to the positive outcomes of a larger group of students (Allen-Meares, 1977). Furthermore, focusing the activities of school social workers on larger groups of students would likely make the contributions of school social workers more visible to principals and other stakeholders.

These studies do not reflect a significant contribution from principals towards the role development of school social work practice. Nonetheless, principals influence which student services are offered in schools (Louis & Gordon, 2006). Changing the expectations of principals may influence which tasks school social workers consider to be a priority and their readiness for change (Allen-Meares, 1994; Costin, 1969). More knowledge of the roles of these professionals

may enable principals to assist with the development of a school social work program that is responsive to the most pressing needs of schools.

### **The View from the Principals' Office**

A growing body of descriptive studies exists in social work literature about the roles of school social workers (Costin, 1969; Allen-Meares, 1977; Allen-Meares, 1994; Kelly et al., 2010; Peckover et al., 2013; Richard & Villarreal Sosa, 2014; Staudt, 1991; Tower, 2000). These studies attempt to define the role of school social workers, to identify the tasks completed by school social workers, and to create a service delivery model for the profession as perceived by school social workers (Allen-Meares, 1977; Allen-Meares, 1994; Kelly et al., 2010; Peckover et al., 2013; Richard & Villarreal Sosa, 2014; Staudt, 1991). Very few studies are available regarding the perspectives of principals. The lived reality is that principals most often decide which student services are available in their schools and who provides those services (Bye, Shepard, Partridge, & Alvarez, 2009; Graham, Desmond, & Zinsser, 2011). If school social workers are to be used more effectively, then the critical importance of the person who most often determines the nature of the services social workers provide is underscored. One result might be that a partnership between principals and social workers is fostered to ensure that student needs are met (Graham, Desmond, & Zinsser, 2011; Staudt, 1991).

Role development consists of two components, the skills of school social workers and the perceptions of the people within the work setting (Richard & Villarreal Sosa, 2014). In this instance, the development of the roles of school social workers should include the input of principals. In many school districts, principals hire, evaluate, and supervise school social workers (Allen-Meares, 1994; Richard & Villarreal Sosa, 2014). Again, principals and school social workers should be on the same page about the roles school social workers perform in schools.

Role clarity facilitates interdisciplinary collaboration and establishes boundaries about what roles and tasks school principals can reasonably expect from school social workers (Richard & Villarreal Sosa, 2014). The next section examines studies of other educators' perceptions of the roles of school social workers.

In 1991, Staudt completed a role perception study of school social work practice using quantitative methods. The study analyzed special education teachers and school principals' perception of the frequency and effectiveness of school social work services (Staudt, 1991). Fifty-five principals and 158 special education teachers in an intermediary educational agency completed the 19-item questionnaire (Staudt, 1991). The questionnaire included open- and closed-ended questions (Staudt, 1991). All nine of the school social workers employed by the agency were asked to participate. Overall, 63% of the participants responded to the survey (Staudt, 1991).

All three groups rated tasks associated with the placement of students in special education services (i.e., assessments and meetings), liaison activities, and consultation as the most frequently observed social work tasks (Staudt, 1991). Tasks such as program planning, research, whole group instruction, in-service training for teachers, and parent education groups were the least frequently observed activities (Staudt, 1991). Interestingly, school social workers perceived that group work occurred more frequently than reported by teachers and principals. This same trend was observed for most services (Staudt, 1991). Teachers and principals expressed a desire to see more group work, parent education, family counseling, and consultation regarding specific groups of children more frequently in schools (Staudt, 1991). When asked to prioritize school social work tasks, all three groups ranked counseling, liaison activities, and consultation as most important to student outcomes (Staudt, 1991).

Staudt's finding that school social workers view their role differently from educators may be the result of their itinerant status in each school building (1991). To explain, principals may not be aware of the school social worker's activities in other school buildings (Staudt, 1991). Their responses were most likely limited to what happens in their building (Staudt, 1991). Principals may benefit from developing individual service plans with school social workers as a way to increase role clarity and reasonable expectations about what should be happening in the school building (Staudt, 1991).

Like Staudt, Tower (2000) analyzed educators' perceptions towards the roles of school social workers. Tower's (2000) study utilized mixed methodology to examine the perceptions of special education teachers and school administrators in Nevada. Three hundred sixty-eight respondents completed the questionnaire (Tower, 2000). Statistical analysis was used to determine if a relationship existed between the educators' attitudes and their lived experiences (Tower, 2000). The study examined intervening variables that may influence respondents' attitudes such as gender, age, length of experience, the severity of students' disabilities, and geographic location of the school. Also, the data were analyzed to determine if a relationship existed between special educators' knowledge of the roles of school social workers and the value attributed to those services (Tower, 2000). The findings were compared to determine if a difference existed between the attitudes of special educators and principals. An alpha level of .05 was used for all statistical tests (Tower, 2000).

Tower's (2000) study included one open-ended question. This question explored the rationale for principals' attitudes about the roles of school social workers (Tower, 2000). Content analysis was conducted to locate common themes in the responses (Tower, 2000). The findings supported the quantitative findings of the study (Tower, 2000). Principals' attitudes were linked

to their actual experiences with school social workers (Tower, 2000).

The findings supported Tower's (2000) assumption that exposure impacts perceptions. Most educators in Nevada had limited exposure to school social workers (Tower, 2000). Furthermore, the findings indicated that a relationship exists between exposure, attitudes, and knowledge (Tower, 2000). Only 8% of the respondents had adequate exposure to school social workers. Twenty-seven percent of the respondents were knowledgeable of social work tasks as measured by their ability to identify social work tasks accurately. Compared to principals (20.2%), teachers (30.1%) were significantly more knowledgeable about the roles of school social workers and found school social work tasks to have a significantly higher value (Tower, 2000). Overall, educators in Nevada have an attitude of "mild dislike/no action" to school social workers (Tower, 2000). Tower also noted that participants with exposure to school social workers ranked the value of school social work services significantly higher than those without (Tower, 2000). Again, exposure and experiences with school social workers impact the attitudes of educators.

Bye et al. (2009) compared school social workers and school administrators' perceptions regarding the expected outcomes, contributions, and actual outcomes of school social work services. The researchers analyzed the perceptions of 140 school social workers, 22 principals, and two superintendents in Minnesota from both urban and rural school districts (Bye et al., 2009). The sample represented principals and school social workers from all grade spans; however, principals assigned to elementary schools were more heavily represented (Bye et al., 2009).

Descriptive statistics were conducted to analyze the data collected from the questionnaires. The findings summarized school social workers' activities into five categories



and the amount of time spent completing those activities (Bye et al., 2009). Those categories are direct services, case management, consultation with staff, school-wide interventions, and other (Bye et al., 2009). School social workers indicated that the majority of their time was spent working directly with students and case management activities (referring students to services, multidisciplinary team meetings about students, and paperwork) (Bye et al., 2009). The smallest amount of time was devoted to “Other” activities such as providing in-service training, traveling between schools, court appearances, and school obligations (Bye et al., 2009).

The findings also indicated that school social workers and principals in Minnesota have parallel beliefs about the focus of school social work practice (Bye et al., 2009). Both groups reported increased school attendance and decreased discipline problems as expected primary outcomes for school social work practice (Bye et al., 2009). A statistically significant difference was present at the .05 level in their beliefs about increased parent involvement as an expected outcome of school social work practice (Bye et al., 2009). More school social workers (83%) believed that their services increased parental involvement than principals (50%) (Bye et al., 2009). Outside of the disparity in their beliefs about parent involvement, principals, and school social workers’ beliefs were fairly consistent in all other areas (improved school climate, improved achievement, decreased dropout rate, a decrease in teen pregnancy, other) (Bye et al., 2009).

Content analysis was conducted to offer insight around the benefits of school social work practice (Bye et al., 2009). The researchers concluded that both groups considered the provision of direct services to address the mental health needs of students to be the primary benefit of school social work services (Bye et al., 2009). Both groups also identified training and consultation as a benefit of school social work practice (Bye et al., 2009). The findings

demonstrated that school social workers were more likely to perceive advocacy for student needs as a benefit of school social work practice; whereas principals emphasized the academic success of students and the school climate (Bye et al., 2009).

The researchers also examined whether the expected outcomes were related to the actual outcomes reported by school social workers (Bye et al., 2009). Bye et al. (2009) found that principals and school social workers expected school social work practice to increase school attendance and to decrease student discipline. It is promising that school social workers and principals reported the same expectations of the role. Some school social workers reported that they maintain data, which demonstrates effectiveness in these areas (Bye et al., 2009). Sadly, nearly one-third of the school social workers in this study reported that they do not provide principals with data to demonstrate the impact of their work (Bye et al., 2009). Consistent communication between principals and school social workers around the actual tasks and outcomes of school social work practice may impact principals' knowledge and perceptions of the role in a positive way.

Although the findings will be considered with caution due to the small sample of principals, the study by Bye et al. (2009) provided some implications for practice. The results present an opportunity for principals and school social workers to collaborate to maximize the role of school social workers. If improved school attendance and decreased discipline problems are related to positive student outcomes, principals can harness the roles and responsibilities of school social workers to meet the needs of students with chronic attendance and behavior issues. Furthermore, principals could assist school social workers in developing a method for collecting, using, and reporting data about their work. The data could also be used to demonstrate the contributions of school social workers and to solicit funding for additional social work services.

Other studies of principals' perceptions of the roles of school social workers may create a foundation for building a service delivery model that reflects the input of principals.

Higy et al. (2012) believe that graduate education programs can improve the collaborative relationships between school administrators and school social workers. The researchers conducted a pilot study in southeastern North Carolina with students in a Master of School Administration (MSA) program (Higy et al., 2012). The purpose of the study was to analyze the MSA students' perceptions of the roles of school social workers (Higy et al., 2012). The study assumed that the differing priorities and perspectives of school administrators and school social workers might impede their working relationship due to role misperception (Higy et al., 2012).

An online survey was administered to a convenience sample of school administrator interns in the MSA program (Higy et al., 2012). The survey asked respondents to use a Likert-type scale to indicate which tasks school social workers completed and the frequency in which those tasks were completed (Higy et al., 2012). Also, the survey asked respondents to indicate their perception of how school social workers view school administrators (Higy et al., 2012). The list of tasks was generated from the North Carolina job descriptions for school social workers and school administrators (Higy et al., 2012). The small sample of school administrator interns generated a 93.1 return rate (Higy et al., 2012).

Descriptive statistics were conducted to analyze the survey responses (Higy et al., 2012). The findings indicated that most school administrator interns have favorable perceptions of school social workers (Higy et al., 2012). For example, the majority of the respondents described school social workers as Competent (85%), Essential (85%), and Personable (82%) (Higy et al., 2012). At the same time, the respondents projected that school social workers have

similar perceptions of school administrators in regards to Competence (82%), Essential (89%), and Personable (82%) (Higy et al., 2012). Most school administrator interns perceived that school social workers spend a small percentage of time completing tasks such as truancy, finding resources, meetings, and program development (Higy et al., 2012). The varying responses on how school social workers spend their time may be an indication that school administrator interns' have a limited understanding of the role of school social workers (Higy et al., 2012).

The findings of this study should be interpreted with caution. While 71% of the sampling frame participated in the study, the convenience sample only consisted of 27 school administrator interns (Higy et al., 2012). Also, the study does not include data from social work students (Higy et al., 2012). Only three graduate social work students responded to the request to participate in the study (Higy et al., 2012). Finally, the study only provides descriptive data (Higy et al., 2012). As such, causal inferences cannot be made regarding school administrator interns' perceptions towards school social workers (Higy et al., 2012).

The school consists of an organized set of services, and the principal must understand how these services contribute to the overall mission of the school (Higy et al., 2012). Although the findings are not generalizable, the study is useful in that it indicates that some interest exists in educational leadership programs learning more about school administrators' perceptions of the roles of school social workers. It is also a preliminary step towards establishing the need for interdisciplinary collaboration at the pre-service level for school administrators. For instance, university programs can design their programs to facilitate opportunities for graduate students studying school administration and social work to interact in the classroom through coursework (i.e., role plays, scenarios, case studies) and in the field placement (Higy et al., 2012). Last but not least, the study offers a model for designing a more rigorous study that includes a larger

sample and power statistics.

### **School Social Workers' Contributions to Educational Outcomes**

A limited amount of research exists documenting the contributions of school social workers to the educational outcomes of students (Franklin, Kim, & Tripodi, 2009; Alvarez, Bye, Bryant, & Mumm, 2013). In particular, the number of rigorous experimental studies with well-controlled designs is even fewer (Franklin et al., 2009). Increased pressure to hold schools accountable, coupled with the schools' mission to educate children are compelling reasons for school social workers to evaluate their practice and to share the outcomes with principals (Franklin et al., 2009). Moreover, increasing principals' understanding of the roles and contributions of school social workers may position administrators and school social workers to utilize the role more effectively to improve the educational outcomes of students (Alvarez et al., 2013). The next section presents a cursory review of existing literature.

Franklin et al. (2009) conducted a systemic review of published school social work practice studies using meta-analytic techniques (Franklin et al., 2009). The purpose of the study was to evaluate the effectiveness of school social work practice in helping students to deal with internalizing problems, externalizing problems, and academic and school-related outcomes (Franklin et al., 2009). Internalizing problems are cognitive and emotional problems such as depression and withdrawal (Franklin et al., 2009). Aggression, conduct problems, and self-control are examples of externalizing problems (Franklin et al., 2009).

According to the researchers, a lack of well-controlled studies is an overall weakness in school social work research (Franklin et al., 2009). The researchers conducted an electronic search of databases from 1980 to 2007 to identify studies related to the effectiveness of school social work practice (Franklin et al., 2009). The meta-analysis only included studies conducted

by social work researchers or those in which social workers were primarily responsible for delivering the intervention (Franklin et al., 2009). Also, the review focused on studies with an experimental or quasi-experimental research design to examine the effectiveness of an intervention or a program implemented in a U.S. school setting (Franklin et al., 2009). Of the 68 studies identified, only 21 were included in the meta-analysis (Franklin et al., 2009).

Using the statistical information provided in each study, the effect size was calculated based on a 95% confidence interval. An effect size of zero was reported if the study did not provide detailed statistical information and did not report statistically significant results. Sixty-seven percent of the studies were quasi-experimental designs, and 33% were experimental designs (Franklin et al., 2009). The studies included interventions such as group counseling, individual counseling, and implemented programs outlined in a treatment manual (Franklin et al., 2009). Overall, the study showed that school social work practice has small treatment effects on externalizing problems and medium-sized treatment effects on internalizing problems (Franklin et al., 2009). Large and medium treatment effect sizes were shown for the studies that examined academic outcomes (Franklin et al., 2009). The best outcomes were obtained from mental health and educational interventions designed to change student behavior (Franklin et al., 2009). The results point towards school social work practice having a positive impact on the emotional, mental, behavioral, and academic outcomes of students (Franklin et al., 2009).

Allen-Meares, Montgomery, and Kim (2013) also conducted a systemic review of the literature on the effectiveness of tier one and tier two school social work interventions in the United States and abroad. This study builds on the systemic review conducted by Franklin et al. (2009). Tier one interventions are typically delivered in a classroom setting to all students (Allen-Meares et al., 2013). These interventions are prevention based and are designed to

preempt problem behaviors (Allen-Meares et al., 2013). Tier two interventions are typically delivered in a small group and are more intense than tier one interventions (Allen-Meares et al., 2013). These interventions are designed to provide students with the support needed to be successful in the school setting (Allen-Meares et al., 2013).

The researchers conducted an electronic search of databases to identify the most rigorous studies based on six inclusion criteria (Allen-Meares, 2013). Those criteria were as follows: (1) experimental, quasi-experimental, or pretest-posttest research design; (2) identified social workers as a part of the intervention process; (3) focused on interventions provided during the school day; (4) the study was published prior to February 2012; (5) the study was published in a peer-reviewed journal; and (6) examined social, emotional, and behavioral outcomes (Allen-Meares et al., 2013). Eighteen studies met the inclusion criteria (Allen-Meares et al., 2013). Of those, most utilized a pretest-posttest research design or a quasi-experimental design (Allen-Meares et al., 2013). Also, nearly two-thirds of the studies were completed in the United States (Allen-Meares et al., 2013). A few studies that met the criteria were conducted in Canada, Israel, and the United Kingdom (Allen-Meares et al., 2013). Over half of the studies were conducted with middle and high school students (Allen-Meares et al., 2013). Allen-Meares et al. (2013) reviewed each study to identify the type of intervention provided, the frequency and duration of the treatment, the student population served, and the effect size of the treatment. The researchers calculated the effect size for studies that did not report this information (Allen-Meares et al., 2013).

In this study, social work interventions addressed a myriad of problems. Tier one interventions primarily focused on sexual assault, abstinence, sexually risky behavior, aggression, stress management, and more (Allen-Meares et al., 2013). Conversely, the studies

that implemented tier two interventions targeted more defined concerns for at-risk students (Allen-Meares et al., 2013). These students tended to display at least one or more emotional, behavioral, learning, and/or psychosocial problems (Allen-Meares et al., 2013). In all of the studies, the role of the school social worker was to facilitate the group counseling or to train teachers to implement the intervention (Allen-Meares et al., 2013). The interventions utilized were evidence-based practices and utilized standardized curriculums/programs delivered at least one time per week for several weeks (Allen-Meares et al., 2013).

In summary, Allen-Meares et al. (2013) presented empirical evidence of the effectiveness of social work interventions as it relates to tier one and tier two interventions. Small to large effect sizes were demonstrated for the majority of the studies reviewed (Allen-Meares et al., 2013). Student outcomes included improved attitudes about sexual activity, reduced aggressive behavior, improved self-esteem, and decreased anxiety at the tier one level of intervention (Allen-Meares et al., 2013). The tier two studies reported positive outcomes for anxiety, classroom behavior, social skills, homework completion, school attendance, problem-solving skills, and more (Allen-Meares et al., 2013).

Alvarez et al. (2013) attempted to broaden the existing knowledge of the impact of school social work services on educational outcomes. The researchers analyzed data from the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), National Center for Education Statistics to determine if a correlation exists between the number of school social workers employed in a school district and the high school completion rate (Alvarez et al., 2013). Data were collected about the 100 largest school districts in the United States for the 2008-2009 school year (Alvarez et al., 2013). That data included: city, state, number of high school completers, number of schools, number of students, and poverty rate (Alvarez et al., 2013). The IES data set did not include data about



school social workers (Alvarez et al., 2013).

The researchers contacted each district by telephone and followed up with emails to develop a database of the number of full-time equivalent school social workers employed for the 2008-2009 school year (Alvarez et al., 2013). The data collection was limited to school employees with a title of “social worker” or “school social worker” (Alvarez et al., 2013). According to the data, the 100 largest school districts employed 6,679 school social workers (Alvarez et al., 2013). The number of school social workers in one district ranged from 1,734 to zero (Alvarez et al., 2013). The mean number of school social workers was 67 for one school district (Alvarez et al., 2013). While 77 districts employed 50 or fewer school social workers, 23 districts had none (Alvarez et al., 2013).

Multiple statistical calculations were performed to analyze the data. ANOVA was computed to determine if the number of school social workers in a district impacted the number of high school completers, the dropout rate, and the average freshman graduation rate (Alvarez et al., 2013). The ANOVA results showed that the number of school social workers is a significant predictor for high school completion (Alvarez et al., 2013). Of all factors examined, it was the only significant predictor (Alvarez et al., 2013). The number of students who completed high school increased, as the number of school social workers increased (Alvarez et al., 2013).

Also, bivariate correlations were calculated to determine if a relationship exists between the dependent (number of high school completers) and the independent variables (number of students, number of schools, poverty rate, and number of school social workers) (Alvarez et al., 2013). A statistically significant relationship did not exist between the number of school social workers and the other dependent variables (Alvarez et al., 2013). Multiple regressions were computed to further analyze the relationship between the number of school social workers and

the number of high school completers (Alvarez et al., 2013). The calculation controlled for poverty and the size of the school district (Alvarez et al., 2013). The number of schools was not a significant predictor (Alvarez et al., 2013). However, the remaining independent variables were significant predictors and explained 97% of the variance in high school completers (Alvarez et al., 2013).

This study demonstrated that the number of school social workers in a district has a positive impact on the number of high school students who complete high school (Alvarez et al., 2013). The study does not indicate which interventions or roles of school social workers contributed to the increase in the high school completion rate (Alvarez et al., 2013). Since school social workers perform a variety of roles in a variety of settings, it is very challenging to determine causation (Alvarez et al., 2013). Even still, further research about the roles, interventions, and value of school social work practice is needed.

## **Summary**

This study argues that principals may not fully understand the role of school social workers. The review of the literature provides insight into the activities of school social workers. For instance, national and statewide studies show that school social workers tend to focus on the needs of individual students through social casework and liaison activities (Allen-Meares, 1977, 1994; Costin, 1969; Kelly et al., 2010; Peckover et al., 2013). Previous studies also indicated that some disparities exist between the perceptions of principals and school social workers. Although very little attention has been given to principals' contributions to the development of the role, principals have considerable input regarding what services are provided. Additional information may increase role clarity and reasonable expectations about the roles of school social workers (Staudt, 1991). Furthermore, increased understanding could position principals' to use

the role more strategically to support students.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODS**

### **Introduction**

It is important for principals and student services professionals to have parallel beliefs about the roles and relevance of student services programs (Bye et al., 2009). This study specifically focuses on principals' perceptions towards the roles of school social workers to determine if those perceptions can be differentiated based on gender, race, and years of experience as well as the characteristics of the school (i.e., grade span, locale type). The study also tests Tower's finding that exposure increases principals' appreciation towards the role of school social workers.

An increased understanding of principals' conceptions of the roles of school social workers through the lens of an EoC may improve role clarity for these professionals. Also, findings may point to ways in which principals can amplify caring in schools through the efficient use of school social workers. University preparation programs may use these results to implement practices that prepare school principals for successful interdisciplinary practice and increased appreciation for the vast array of roles in the school setting. School social workers, social work educators, and school administrators may use these findings to prioritize the roles of school social workers to meet the most pressing needs of students and schools. The section that follows outlines the research design for the current study.

## **Study Design**

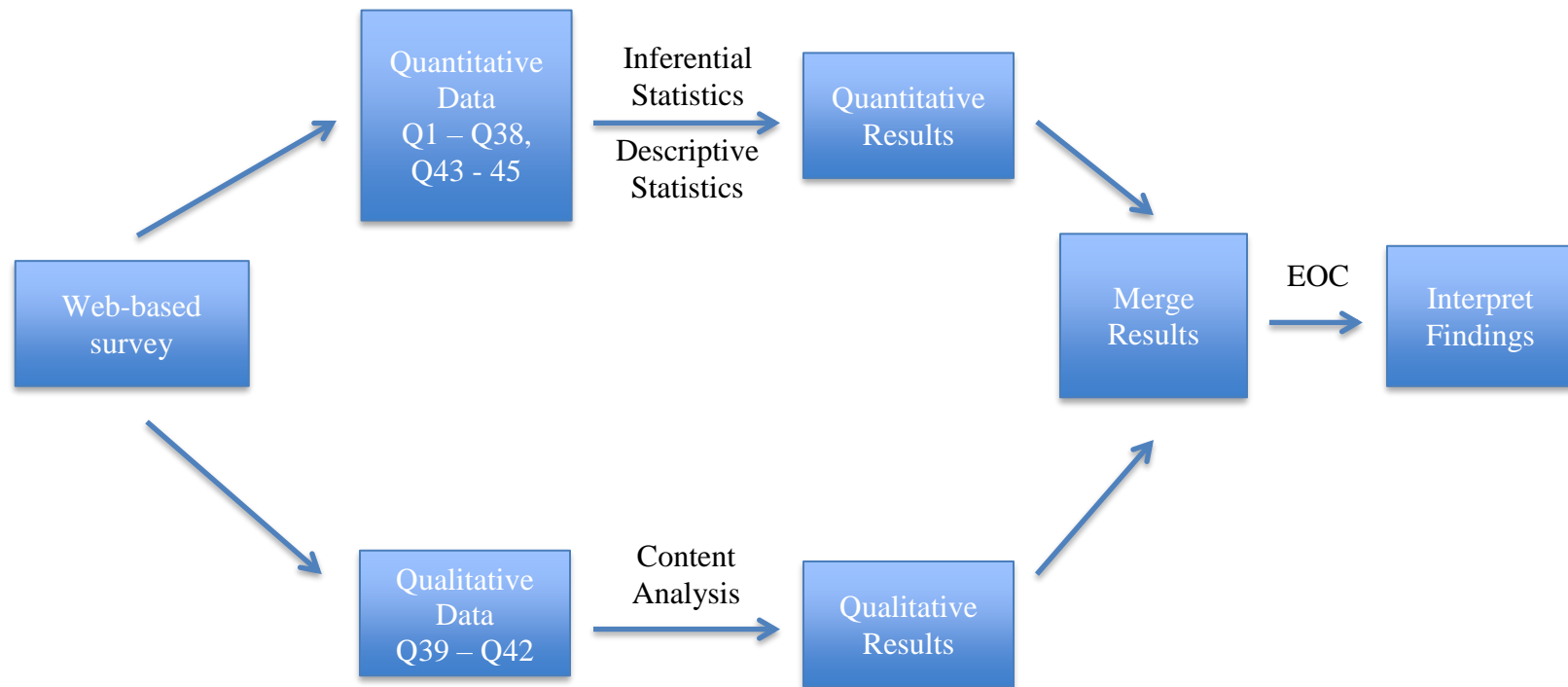
A basic mixed methods research design was utilized to examine principals' perceptions of the roles of school social workers. In the current study, an electronic questionnaire was used to gather quantitative and qualitative data about principals in a single administration.

Questionnaires can be used to capture factual and attitudinal information about the phenomenon in education (Fogelman & Comber, 2007). Tower's mixed methods study of special education teachers and school administrators' attitudes about school social workers (2000) and a thorough literature review inspired the research design and questionnaire for this study.

A mixed methods research design presents an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of principals' perceptions (Creswell, 2015). For instance, the current study used closed-ended questions to gauge principals' perceptions of common school social work tasks as outlined in the North Carolina job description for school social workers (Appendix 1) and the NASW Standards for School Social Work Services (Appendix 2). For each task presented, principals were asked to rate the importance of the task to the educational success of students using a Likert scale. As such, the responses to the closed-ended questions generated numbers that can be statistically analyzed to determine trends (Creswell, 2015). Also, the study used open-ended questions to offer a variety of perspectives on the phenomenon (Creswell, 2015). For instance, open-ended questions asked principals to describe the primary responsibilities of school social workers and the value of these roles from their perspective. Open-ended questions also allowed principals to elaborate on their perceptions towards the roles of school social workers and to include tasks that were not included in the questionnaire. The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods in the current study develops a more in-depth view of principals' perceptions.

According to Creswell (2015), there are basic and advanced models of mixed methods research design. The convergent parallel design, explanatory sequential design, and the exploratory sequential design are basic mixed methods designs (Creswell, 2015). The current study implemented a convergent parallel design for gathering and analyzing data. The self-administered questionnaire gathered qualitative and quantitative data in a single administration. However, the data were merged and analyzed separately (Creswell, 2015). Furthermore, the data were compared to determine similarities and differences within the findings (Creswell, 2015). Figure 1.0 illustrates the convergent parallel design for the current study (Creswell, 2015).

**Figure 1.0: The Convergent Parallel Design**



## **Participants**

### The Sample

The purpose of this study was to gain meaningful information about principals' perceptions towards the roles of school social workers. Due to the exploratory nature of this study, the relatively small number of school social workers employed in North Carolina public schools, and principals' limited exposure to school social workers, all LEAs were invited to participate in this study. Therefore, principals at all grade spans are represented. The context of school social work services and principals' expectations of the role may depend on the developmental needs of students. For instance, elementary school social workers may focus on school attendance and supporting struggling learners; while, high school social workers may focus their attention on dropout prevention initiatives. Also, participants represent the voices of principals assigned to public schools in both rural and urban areas in North Carolina. The majority of schools in North Carolina are located in rural areas (37.4%) and cities (27.9%) (NCES, 2014). The remaining schools are located in suburban areas (23.0%) and towns (10.8%) (NCES, 2014). Common features of rural life may also impact the types of services provided by school social workers and principals' expectations. For example, the needs of urban and rural school districts may be dependent upon the proximity of community resources, the availability of trained professionals, and limited access to high-quality professional development. Consequently, the role of school social workers and what principals' value may look different based on the setting.

A population of principals assigned to public schools in North Carolina was created using the NCDPI's Educational Directory and Demographical Information Exchange (EDDIE) database. EDDIE enables users to create custom reports about schools and LEAs under the



auspices of NCDPI (NCDPI, n.d.). Demographic information such as school name, principal name, locale type, LEA type, grade levels, school address, school telephone number, school type, school designation description, and more are available in EDDIE (NCDPI, n.d.).

Notwithstanding recent hires, retirements, and vacancies, the coverage error for the sample should be minimal. LEA staff updates the database annually (NCDPI, n.d.).

The NCDPI consists of 115 LEAs and 2,655 schools (n.d.). Although all LEAs were invited to participate, schools designated as charter, federal, regional, and other were excluded from this study. NCDPI also classifies schools into four school types: Alternative Education, Career Technical Education, Regular, and Exceptional Children (2010). School type refers to the primary focus of the instruction. For instance, schools designated as Career Technical Education offer a career-related curriculum to prepare students for vocational, technical, and professional occupations (NCDPI, 2010). Schools designated as Career and Technical Education are not included in this study.

### Selected Participants

Currently, there are 2,435 public schools with a regular, alternative, or exceptional children's focus (NCDPI, n.d.). Each school has a principal. A research request was submitted to 115 school systems to create a sample of respondents from all grade spans and locale types. In this case, the sample consisted of principals from 39 school systems in the state based on approvals to conduct research. Thirteen systems denied the request. Sixty-three did not respond to the request. The total number of principals in the school systems that approved the request was 1,087, which was the sampling frame for the survey administration.

The North Carolina State Board of Education (NCSBE) divides the state into eight education districts. Principals from every district are represented in this study. Table 2.0 illustrates the location of the 39 districts approved for this study by district.

**Table 2.0: LEA Approval by NCBSE Education Districts**

<b>Region</b>	<b>Education District</b>	<b>LEA Approvals</b>
Northeast	District 1	5
Southeast	District 2	4
North Central	District 3	3
Sandhills	District 4	5
Piedmont-Triad	District 5	7
Southwest	District 6	4
Northwest	District 7	4
Western	District 8	7
Total		39

### Risk Considerations

Data collection, data security, and monitoring procedures were designed with the protection of human subjects in mind. As such, the University of North Carolina Institutional Review Board (IRB) determined that this study was no more than minimal risk to participants. Also, the researcher adhered to the approval process and policies established by each school system to obtain permission to administer the survey in that system.

A letter of prior notification (Appendix 3) and a small pad of customized post-it notes was provided to all potential respondents one week before the opening of the data collection

window via the US Postal mail. The letter informed respondents of their selection to participate in the study, briefly explained the benefits of the study, announced the date to expect to receive the survey link via email, the amount of time required to complete the study, a point of contact for inquiries, and provided assurance of compliance with IRB and district policies to conduct research projects. Once the survey launched, participants received an email invitation to participate in the survey that contained a web-based link that takes participants directly to the survey. The survey took approximately 15 - 20 minutes to complete. Qualtrics online survey software, offered by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC), was used to gather principals' beliefs about the roles of school social workers. There was no personal cost to participants to complete the survey.

Participation in the study was voluntary. Although the researcher obtained school district approval to conduct research, participants were not coerced to participate in this study. The consent from the district merely allowed the principal investigator to invite participants to participate in the study. Each participant was required to provide active consent. The consent form was embedded into the survey. Upon opening the survey link, participants were presented with the consent form. A forced-response question was included at the end of the consent form, which required each participant to indicate a willingness to complete the survey. Respondents that responded "no" were taken to the end of the survey. Also, subsequent reminders were not provided to participants that elected not to participate in the study. On the other hand, once the survey was started, participants were allowed to stop taking the survey at any point or to skip any questions they did not wish to answer. Furthermore, there was no compensation for the participants in this study.

Data security and monitoring procedures were also implemented to ensure participant confidentiality and to minimize the risk to respondents. The instrument gathered demographic information such as race, gender, years of experience, educational background, and school size. Information about schools which are available through the EDDIE database such as grade span, school type, and locale code was preloaded into Qualtrics rather than asking respondents to answer additional questions. As such, survey responses were confidential, but not anonymous. To ensure confidentiality, the data were maintained in a password-protected file in the Qualtrics program and a password-protected computer. Also, identifiers were removed from all files and deleted after the data were analyzed. This study did not include identifiable school information. The results of this study are presented in aggregate form only. There are no foreseeable risks of deductive disclosure.

## **Instrument**

### Principals' Perceptions of the Roles of School Social Workers Questionnaire

The instrument used in this study is based on Tower's study and the literature. The researcher attempted to contact Tower through the University of Nevada at Reno (UNR) to request permission to utilize the instrument referenced in the article (Tower, 2000). According to an email correspondence from Candice Bortolin, Program Officer for the UNR School of Social Work, Tower is deceased, and it is unclear how to obtain a copy and/or authorization to use the instrument (May 6, 2015). Mary Dugan, UNR General Counsel, researched the matter. In an email correspondence, Dugan noted that she was unable to locate the instrument (May 14, 2015). In turn, the researcher developed a tool to reflect the current literature and the EoC as it relates to the roles of school social workers, *Principals' Perceptions of the Roles of School Social Workers Questionnaire*.

The self-administered questionnaire consisted of 39 closed-ended questions and six open-ended questions. A copy of the questionnaire is available in Appendix 4. Survey questions gauged respondents' exposure to school social workers during their tenure as principals as well as the current school year, the availability of social work services during a typical week, and principal involvement with activities such as hiring and evaluating school social workers' performance. The instrument also asked principals to rate the importance of common school social work tasks to the educational process using a four-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree. Since the questionnaire asked attitudinal rather than factual questions, the response choices were designed to encourage respondents to offer an opinion. Neutral responses such as "neither agree nor disagree" were not options in this study. As such, these questions generated ordinal data (Laerd Statistics, 2015c). Again, the tasks were taken from the North Carolina job description for school social workers and the NASW Standards for School Social Work Services. To further understand principal perceptions, the instrument asked principals to indicate how they learned about the roles of school social workers, how school social work roles are established in their schools, and to assess their knowledge of the roles of school social workers.

### Validity and Reliability

#### *Content Validity*

Evidence was gathered to demonstrate the content validity of the instrument using the process outlined by Kelly et al. (2010). An expert panel was assembled to review the question construction. Scholars and practitioners from the field of social work were invited to review the initial draft of the instrument. Using Qualtrics, each expert was asked to rate each question for clarity and relevance to the study using a scale of one to five where one was the lowest rating

(Kelly et al., 2010). For each question, the average score was calculated. Questions that received an average rating of less than 4.0 for clarity and/or relevance were edited or deleted from the instrument (Kelly et al., 2010). Also, the experts were given the opportunity to provide feedback on each question in the survey, to recommend additional questions, and to provide overall feedback on the survey.

The panel of experts (N = 9) consisted of social work educators, supervisors, and practitioners. Scholars were selected based on their teaching experience and publications related to the area of school social work. The scholars were affiliated with the School of Social Work at the following universities: the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, the University of North Carolina at Pembroke, the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, the University of Illinois, Chicago, and California State University, Monterey Bay. The North Carolina based school social worker and the school social work supervisors each possessed more than twenty years of experience. The school social work practitioner and supervisors represented large and small districts in rural and urban areas of North Carolina (i.e., Alamance, Cumberland, Guilford, and Franklin counties).

Appendix 6 provides a summary of the feedback provided by the social work experts. The document outlines the average rating for clarity and relevance for each question and additional comments provided by each expert. The chart also includes notations from the researcher to indicate changes that were made to the survey. None of the questions received a rating below four for clarity or relevance. Overall, panelists agreed that the survey items were important. The initial draft of the survey contained 17 closed-ended questions and three open-ended questions. The survey was revised based on the recommendations of the experts. The

feedback ranged from pointing out typos, to formatting issues, to question construction, and recommendations for additional questions. The most notable recommendations are as follows:

1. The researcher edited question #9 for clarity: *Are you responsible for providing professional development to the school social worker currently assigned to your school?*

Experts indicated that the term professional development could have several meanings such as in-service training provided to the school social worker by the principal, district-sponsored training opportunities or covering the cost of school social workers to attend local, state, and national conferences. The question was modified to more accurately describe activities principals may complete in regards to school social workers. *Are you responsible for hiring the school social worker currently assigned to your school?*

2. Based on the feedback from two experts, question #11 was edited to clarify the meaning of the term “relevant.” *Indicate your agreement with the following statement. “I have relevant information regarding the roles and responsibilities of school social workers.”*

The question was modified to ask principals if they believe that more information about the roles of social workers is needed.

3. Based on feedback from the dissertation committee, a closed-ended question was added to connect the survey to the EoC theory. The additional question asked principals to indicate their agreement with a statement. *The most important role of school social workers is their contribution to the development of a caring school environment.*

4. Based on feedback from the dissertation committee, an additional open-ended question was added to connect the survey to the EoC theory. The question asked principals to provide examples of how the role of the school social worker can be used to increase caring in schools.

5. Multiple experts inquired about the completeness of the list of common social work tasks represented in Question #13 and referenced the NASW Standards for School Social Work Services for guidance. The researcher compared the North Carolina Job Description and the NASW Standards for School Social Work Services. It is important to note that the North Carolina Job Description was created based on the NASW Standards for School Social Work. As a result, more tasks were added, and others were edited for clarity.
6. One expert speculated that the educational level of the school social worker might impact principals' perceptions of the roles of school social workers. The researcher edited the question that asks principals to indicate the educational level of the school social worker assigned to their school.

The survey was adjusted based on the feedback from the social work experts and the researcher's observations. The revised survey consisted of 16 closed-ended questions and nine open-ended questions.

Next, the revised survey was field tested with a small group of school administrators. A convenience sample (N = 12) of district office personnel with prior experience as a school principal and retired principals was developed. Using Qualtrics, participants were invited to evaluate the revised instrument using the same parameters as social work experts and scholars. Appendix 6 also documents the feedback provided by these participants. None of the questions received a rating below four for clarity or relevance. Overall, panelists agreed that the survey items were important. However, respondents requested feedback to clarify the meaning, intent, and how to respond to specific questions. The most notable recommendations are as follows:

1. Three respondents requested clarification regarding question #2: *How long have you been a school principal?* The researcher edited the question to clarify how the



respondent should answer the question: *How many years have you been a school principal?*

2. Two respondents requested clarification of question #6: *How many school social workers are currently assigned to your building to provide services to students?* The researcher added the phrase, *during a typical week at your current school*, to clarify how to respond to the question.
3. Question #2 received a score of 4.25 for relevance. *What is your age?* The question was removed from the survey since it already collects data about principals' years of experience.
4. One participant recommended adding monitoring school attendance to the list of common tasks completed by school social workers. Once again, the researcher compared the North Carolina Job Description and the NASW School Social Work Standards. Tasks specifically related to school attendance were added to the survey. Additional edits were made to the list of common tasks based on the comparison. As a result, all tasks listed in the two documents were added to the survey.

Following the field test, the survey was revised based on participant feedback and researcher observations. The third version of the survey contained 50 questions. The revised survey was used to conduct a pilot study.

### *Pilot Study*

A small pilot study was attempted with educational leadership students at UNC. Pilot studies provide an additional opportunity to assess the quality of the instrument, to test the data collection procedures, and to observe respondents' reaction to the survey items (Creswell, 2015; Dillman et al., 2014; Kelly et al., 2010). Educational leadership students were asked to complete

the survey using the device of their choice. The purpose was to assess the functionality of the survey on various types of devices (i.e., cellular phones, tablets, and laptops). Additionally, testing survey procedures such as skip logic within the instrument, the capacity of the server to handle outgoing communication, and whether the database is collecting and coding responses correctly, will prevent major problems in the final data collection (Dillman et al., 2014).

The survey was electronically distributed using the department-owned listserv of UNC educational leadership students. The email contained a letter from the researcher requesting participation and informed consent. Participants were asked to click on a link that takes the respondent directly to the survey. As an incentive, participants were invited to enter their email address into a raffle to win a \$15 e-gift card to Amazon. No responses were received. One week later, participants received an email reminder to complete the survey. Again there were no responses. Due to the lack of interest from UNC students, the pilot study was closed.

A second pilot study was conducted using a convenience sample of 39 assistant principals and central office administrators with prior experience as a principal and/or assistant principal from a local school district. The researcher used school web pages to generate a list of participants. Anonymity was an important component of the pilot study. The researcher is a central office administrator in the local school district. Using Qualtrics, an anonymous link was created to collect survey responses. The anonymous link ensured that responses were confidential and that personal data were not collected about participants.

The data collection window for the second pilot study was four weeks. Each participant received an email invitation to participate and two email reminders. Participants were informed that participation in the pilot study was voluntary, anonymous, and took 15-20 minutes to complete. Participants were allowed to skip any question and/or to end the survey at any time

and for any reason. The email contained the anonymous link that took participants directly to the survey. Consent was implied by participation of the survey.

Offering incentives is one way to increase web survey response rates (Dillman et al., 2014). Participants were invited to participate in a drawing for a \$15 Amazon e-gift card. A survey was embedded into the pilot study to collect responses for the drawing. As such, the responses for the drawing were maintained in a separate file. This ensured that there were no linkages between participants' names, email addresses, or computer IP addresses and the pilot survey responses. At the end of the second pilot study, the file containing participant names and email addresses for the drawing was deleted. There was no way for anyone to identify individual respondents.

The following results describe the participants of the second pilot study. Thirty-three respondents completed all or a portion of the survey. Valid cases ranged from 31 to 13, depending on the question. The response rate was 85%. Thirty respondents (91%) indicated that their current position is assistant principal and three respondents (9%) were central office administrators with prior experience as an assistant principal and/or principal. Overall, the participants had an average of seven years of experience as a school administrator. Thirty-one respondents indicated their race as follows: 52% identified as African American, 39% identified as White, and 9% identified as Multiracial. Also, 71% of the respondents were female, while 29% were male. Twenty-nine participants (100%) reported having prior experience working with school social workers.

### *Reliability*

The results of the pilot study were used to test the internal consistency of the instrument (Creswell, 2015). Cronbach's Alpha coefficient is a reliability measure (Creswell, 2015). It

examines the internal consistency of the closed-ended questions scored using a continuous scale (Creswell, 2015). The instrument contained 29 Likert-type scale questions. A score of 0.7 or higher is considered acceptable (Laerd Statistics, 2015c).

The researcher divided the Likert-type scale questions into two sections. Three items measured Principals' Knowledge of School Social Work Roles, and 26 items measured Principals' Perceptions of Common School Social Work Tasks. Using SPSS, Cronbach's Alpha was calculated for each section. Cronbach's Alpha was 0.615 for Principals' Knowledge of School Social Work Roles and 0.876 for Principals' Perceptions of Common School Social Work Tasks. One section of the survey was considered to be a reliable measure. SPSS was also used to find Cronbach's Alpha for the 29 Likert-type scale items at the same time. It was measured at 0.875 based on the 27 survey respondents. This is another indicator of the questions' reliability for measuring principals' perceptions and knowledge of the roles of school social workers.

### *Survey Adjustments*

Additional survey adjustments were conducted at the conclusion of the pilot study. A consultant from UNC's Odum Institute reviewed the questionnaire and provided feedback regarding question construction and survey design. The purpose was to ensure that the instrument presented high-quality questions. Good survey questions increase participants' understanding of the questions and their ability to provide meaningful responses (Creswell, 2015). In turn, high-quality question construction and survey design encourage respondents to complete the instrument (Creswell, 2015). While the entire instrument was critiqued, the most significant recommendations centered on ensuring that each question related to social work tasks was measurable. Also, each item was scrutinized to eliminate leading, double-barreled, and

redundant questions. The item responses were also critiqued to ensure that every possible answer choice was available to respondents and that Likert scales were balanced. The researcher considered all recommendations provided by the consultant and updated the survey accordingly. The final draft of the survey contained 45 questions.

#### *Administration of the Instrument.*

As indicated, a questionnaire was used to collect data for this study. A single administration of a web-based survey was administered to North Carolina principals at all grade spans. Qualtrics web-based survey research software was used to collect the data and manage the project. The survey data were stored on the Qualtrics server at UNC (Snow, 2012).

Providing incentives increases web survey response rates (Dillman et al., 2014). According to social exchange theory, offering a small token of appreciation in conjunction with the invitation to participate in a study is optimal (Dillman et al., 2014). As a token of appreciation, a small pad of customized post-it notes was included with the letter of prior notification. Also, a small pack of Forget Me Not flower seeds was included with the second reminder. In this study, most participants were invited to enter their email address into a drawing for a chance to win one of five \$25 Amazon electronic gift cards. One school district stipulated that participants should not receive incentives or a token of appreciation. School district guidelines were adhered to in this study.

Measures were taken to ensure that there were no linkages between participants' names, email addresses, or computer IP addresses and the survey responses. A survey was embedded into the instrument to collect responses for the drawing. The responses for the drawing were maintained in a separate file. The winners of the gift cards were selected and notified within

eight weeks via email. The file containing participant names and email addresses for the drawing was deleted. There was no way for anyone to identify individual respondents.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

A tailored design method was implemented with this study. It is considered a best practice for conducting survey research methodology (Dillman, Smythe, & Christian, 2014). Also, it is a scientific approach that aims to reduce errors and encourage participant response by customizing survey procedures to meet the unique features of the situation (Dillman et al., 2014). For instance, the survey was tailored to maximize participants' time. As noted, data about schools such as grade span, school type, school code, and locale type was preloaded into Qualtrics. This data were obtained from NCDPI's EDDIE database. Qualtrics allows users to link preloaded data to participants' responses. This allowed the researcher to eliminate multiple questions from the survey.

Dillman et al. recommends providing participants with prior notification and a follow-up email with a link to the survey to increase response rates (2014). This study incorporated these strategies. Also, the study utilized multiple modes to contact respondents to create additional opportunities for communicating study benefits (Dillman et al., 2014).

Using Qualtrics, a unique uniform resource locator (URL) was created for each participant. As mentioned previously, the URL link for the survey was sent to potential respondents embedded in the email invitation. The researcher sent three brief, friendly reminders. There was one exception. One school district stipulated that participants only receive two reminders. Each reminder contained a slightly different message and appealing subject lines to capture respondents' attention (Dillman et al., 2014). By varying the messages and the mode of communication, the researcher hoped to increase response rates (Dillman et al., 2014). The

variation was also intended to reduce the likelihood that the message would be flagged as spam (Dillman et al., 2014). Table 3.0 represents the timeline and modes for contacting participants in this study. The data collection window was six weeks.

**Table 3.0: Timeline for Participant Notification**

<b>Notification</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Format</b>	<b>Mechanism</b>
Prior Notification	One Week Before Data Collection Window Opening	Letter and notepad	US Postal Service
Invitation to Participate	Day 1	Email	Qualtrics Mailer
Reminder #1	Day 14	Email	Qualtrics Mailer
Reminder #2	Day 28	Postcard using Forget Me Not Flower Seeds	US Postal Service
Reminder #3	Day 35	Email	Qualtrics Mailer

## Research Questions and Hypotheses

The research questions and their corresponding hypotheses are listed below.

**RQ1.** How do principals define the importance of the roles of school social workers to the educational success of students?

**H1<sub>0</sub>.** There is no hypothesis for this question. The question has a single variable and asks for descriptive information.

**RQ2.** Do principals' perceptions towards the school social workers' role in the development of a caring school environment differ depending on whether the principal has prior experience working with school social workers?

**HA2.** There is a difference in principals' perceptions towards the school social workers' contributions to the development of a caring school environment as the most important role when the principals' prior experience working with school social workers is considered.

**RQ3.** Do principals' perceptions towards the school social workers' role in the development of a caring school environment differ depending on the principals' years of experience?

**HA3.** There is a difference in principals' perceptions towards the school social workers' contributions to the development of a caring school environment as the most important role when the principals' years of experience are considered.

**RQ4.** Do principals' perceptions towards the school social workers' role in the development of a caring school environment differ depending on the principals' gender?

**HN4.** There is no difference in principals' perceptions towards the school social workers' contributions to the development of a caring school environment as the most important role when the principals' gender is considered.

**RQ5.** Do principals' perceptions towards the school social workers' role in the development of a caring school environment differ depending on the principals' race?

**HA5.** There is a difference in principals' perceptions towards the school social workers' contributions to the development of a caring school environment as the most important role when the principals' race is considered.



**RQ6.** Do principal's perceptions towards the school social workers' role in the development of a caring school environment differ depending on the grade span of the school?

**HA6.** There is a difference in principals' perceptions towards the school social workers' contributions to the development of a caring school environment as the most important role when the grade span of the school is considered.

**RQ7.** Do principals' perceptions towards the school social workers' role in the development of a caring school environment differ depending on the locale type of the school?

**HA7.** There is a difference in principals' perceptions towards the school social workers' contributions to the development of a caring school environment as the most important role when the locale type of the school is considered.

### Variables

This was a mixed methods study. There was one dependent variable: principals' perceptions of the roles of school social workers. The independent variables are outlined below. This study examined quantitative and qualitative data to determine how each of the independent variables affected the dependent variable.

- (RQ2) Principals' prior experience working with school social workers
- (RQ3) Principals' years of experience
- (RQ4) Principals' gender
- (RQ5) Principals' race
- (RQ6) The grade span of the school
- (RQ7) The locale type of the school

### Measurement of Variables

The survey had three major parts. The first part of the survey gathered demographic data about the respondents, the schools that they serve, and the context of their experience working with school social workers. The next section asked respondents to describe the social work services provided at their school and the demographics of the school social workers assigned to the school. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the sample, their experiences with school social workers, and the availability of social work services in schools. The final section of the survey asked respondents to rate the importance of common social work tasks to the educational success of students. Frequencies were calculated from the respondent survey answers. Inferential statistics were also calculated based on the categories for each independent variable (male/female, prior experience with school social workers or not, etc.).

### Analytical Techniques

Data analysis refers to the process of working with data to answer research questions (Ravid, 2011). This study primarily used quantitative methods to summarize, analyze, organize, and interpret the data gathered using a questionnaire. Qualitative methods were used to analyze data gathered from open-ended questions. The EoC was used as a theoretical framework for explaining the role of school social workers as it connects to the school improvement process. For starters, descriptive statistics were used to describe the sample and the schools they served. The data also describes the context of principals' experiences with school social workers such as hiring and performance evaluation. Finally, the data describes how principals learned about the roles of school social workers, how the roles are established at each school, and whether more information is needed.

The numerical data collected in this study was downloaded into an Excel spreadsheet and uploaded to SPSS for further data analysis (Snow, 2012). For research question one, descriptive statistics were used to illustrate how principals define the role of the school social worker as it relates to the educational outcomes of students. Frequencies and percentages were calculated to determine which roles respondents identified as most important to the educational success of students. Further analysis was conducted to determine if principals' perceptions differed when the independent variables were considered for each school social work role. For questions two through seven, inferential statistics were calculated to determine if statistically significant differences exist amongst principals' perceptions. Perception refers to principals' level of agreement with the statement that the most important role of school social workers is their contribution to the development of a caring school environment. The researcher compared principals' perceptions based on characteristics about the principal (prior experience working with school social workers, years of experience, gender, and race) and characteristics about the school (grade span and locale type).

The data in this study does not meet some of the assumptions required for one-way ANOVA. Those assumptions are a continuous dependent variable, no significant outliers in the groups of the independent variable, an approximately normal distribution for each group of the independent variable, and homogeneity of variances (Laerd Statistics, 2015b). In this case, the measurement scale for the dependent variable was ordinal (Laerd Statistics, 2015c). As previously mentioned, the researcher utilized a four-point Likert scale to encourage respondents to offer an opinion rather than a neutral response regarding the roles of school social workers. Ordinal data are sometimes treated as continuous data when the Likert scale contains seven or more points (Laerd Statistics, 2015c). That was not possible for this study.

Nonparametric tests were used as an alternative to the one-way ANOVA and the Independent-samples T-test (Laerd Statistics, 2015a; Vargha & Delaney, 1998). Generally speaking, the Kruskal-Wallis H Test is used when data fails the assumptions required by the one-way ANOVA as described above (Laerd Statistics, 2015a; Vargha & Delaney, 1998). The Mann-Whitney U test is an alternative to the Independent-samples T-test when the assumptions are not met (Laerd Statistics, 2015a). In this study, Kruskal-Wallis was used to determine if a statistically significant difference exists between three or more groups of an independent variable on a continuous or ordinal dependent variable (Laerd Statistics, 2015a; Vargha & Delaney, 1998). For instance, the following independent variables in this study have three or more categories: race, locale type, grade span, and years of experience. The Mann-Whitney U test was used for the independent variables with two categorical groups (Laerd Statistics, 2015a). Those independent variables are gender and previous experience working with school social workers (Laerd Statistics, 2015a).

Qualitative analysis was conducted to support the findings of the quantitative analysis. Manual and computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) were used to code the four open-ended questions in the survey. The CAQDAS, NVivo, was used to manage the project. About 100 respondents answered each of the open-ended questions. Open-ended questions allowed respondents to share their beliefs without limitations imposed by the researcher. Those questions are listed below.

1. In your own words, please describe the primary responsibilities of the school social worker.
2. Describe what value you see in having school social workers available in schools.

3. As best you can remember, describe the most salient experience that you credit with shaping your overall perception of the role of school social workers.
4. Assuming that caring has a positive impact on student achievement, how can the role of the school social worker be utilized to increase caring in schools? Please provide examples.

Structural coding was used to organize and develop meaning from the qualitative data (Saldana, 2013). A conceptual phrase was developed to represent each open-ended question as it relates to the research questions (Saldana, 2013). Those categories are primary roles of school social workers, the value of school social work practice, prior experiences with school social workers, and caring as a role of school social work practice. For example, the data connected to the categories: primary roles of school social workers and the value of school social work practice were used to support the quantitative findings for RQ1. The category, prior experiences with school social workers, was used to further develop the context of this study by expanding our knowledge of prior experiences that helped to shape principals' perceptions of the roles of school social workers. The final category was coded to support RQ2 through RQ7 by asking principals to identify specific ways that the role of the school social worker can be used to increase caring in schools.

The researcher began the coding process using a priori codes developed from the literature and the research questions. Those codes were: tasks completed by school social workers which were coded as "roles," addressing the needs of students which was coded as "caring," the benefits of school social work practice which was coded as "value," and interactions between students and school social workers were coded as "relationships." Reading

through the data, additional codes emerged and the predetermined codes were further refined to capture the essence of each open-ended question (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996).

A detailed codebook was developed to promote consistency with coding (Decuir-Gunby, Marshall, & McCulloch, 2011). For each code, a definition and an example were provided to assist with data analysis (Decuir-Gunby, Marshall, & McCulloch, 2011; Saldana, 2013). To further develop the codes, a small group of school social workers was invited to a meeting to review the codebook and to practice using the codes. Three school social workers attended the two-hour meeting. During this time, a brief overview of the coding process and the purpose of the study was presented. The session also included a review of codenames, definitions, and examples for each code and subcode. Participants were allowed to practice coding data individually and as a group using the codebook. Honest discussion and in-depth questioning were encouraged as the participants worked through a small segment of the data. Their feedback was used to update the codebook. Overall, eighteen codes were developed. Additional subcodes were created to reflect patterns and themes identified within each code. A list of the codes and subcodes developed for each category are available in Appendix 7.

## **Summary**

This chapter outlines the methodology for validating the instrument, the data collection process, and the plan for data analysis. It also described the sample in detail. Also, this section described the statistical calculations used to answer each research question and the qualitative methods used to analyze contextual data. The next chapter will outline the study findings.

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

### Introduction

Classroom teachers and principals do not bear the sole responsibility for creating equal opportunities for all students. The purpose of this study was to focus on a group of student services professionals that may be underutilized in the school setting. Many school districts in North Carolina hire school social workers to provide support services to students (NCDPI, n.d.-b). School social workers are trained mental health professionals that provide an array of services related to the academic, social, emotional, and behavioral achievement of students (NCDPI, n.d.-b). These professionals are liaisons between the home, the school, and the community (NCDPI, n.d.-b). They also utilize social work interventions to identify and remove barriers to learning (Radin & Welsh, 1984).

Given the accountability standards that federal and state mandates assign to public schools, assigning the provision of supportive services to student services professionals such as school social workers may allow teachers to spend more of their time on teaching and learning (Walsh et al., 2014). Researchers predict that providing support services improves the overall school climate and educational outcomes for students (Walsh et al., 2014). As the primary change masters in the school setting (Louis & Gordon, 2006), investigating principals' perceptions of the roles of the school social workers may provide the leverage needed to position these professionals to make significant contributions to student outcomes. This study utilized a questionnaire developed by the researcher, *Principals' Perceptions of the Roles of School Social*

*Workers*, to define principals' perceptions of common social work tasks as they relate to educational outcomes. It also analyzes principals' perceptions based on characteristics of the school and the principal.

### **Organization of the Chapter**

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the data that were collected through the web-based survey. This chapter also provides an analysis of the data as it relates to the seven research questions guiding this study. As a way to organize the information, this chapter is presented in five sections.

In section one, the researcher will briefly review the reliability of the survey and the survey response rate. The next section will provide demographic data regarding the principals that chose to participate in this study and the schools that they serve. Section three will describe the context of principals' experiences with school social workers and their knowledge of the roles of these professionals. Section four will address each research question. The data for question one were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics; while questions two through seven were evaluated using inferential statistics. The last section describes the qualitative analysis. Structural coding was performed to analyze four open-ended questions in the survey. Common themes and patterns discovered in the analysis of the four open-ended questions are presented as supporting information from the research questions.

### **Survey Reliability**

As noted in chapter three, this study includes procedures to assess the reliability of the questions on the questionnaire. The data collected from the second pilot study were used to evaluate the questionnaire for internal consistency. Cronbach's Alpha was calculated for the 29 Likert-type scale items on the questionnaire. It was measured at 0.875 based on the 27 survey



respondents to the second pilot study. A score of 0.7 is considered acceptable, and a score of 0.9 is considered a high coefficient (Laerd Statistics, 2015c).

At the conclusion of the actual study, Cronbach's Alpha was calculated again on all items. The final version of the survey contained 22 Likert-type scale items. The survey results were downloaded to an Excel file and uploaded to SPSS. Cronbach's Alpha was measured at .849 based on the 281 participants. Like the pilot study, the actual survey administration demonstrated an acceptable level of internal consistency.

### **Survey Response Rate**

A single administration of a web-based survey was administered to principals from 39 school districts throughout North Carolina. Invitations were sent to 1,087 principals assigned to public schools designated as Regular, Alternative Education, or Exceptional Children by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. Survey responses were received from principals representing all grade spans, locale types, and school types.

At the close of the data collection window, 292 principals responded to the web-based survey. Of those, nine respondents did not provide consent to complete the survey, and two respondents attempted to complete the survey who are not currently principals. Two hundred and eighty-one web-based surveys were used for data analysis. The response rate for this study was 26%. According to Baruch and Holtom (2008), the response rate for web-based surveys ranges from 10.6 to 69.5%.

Throughout the findings, the reader may note that the reported sample size varies. The number of respondents for each question typically ranged from 268 to 281. The variability is due to missing variables and the survey flow of the questionnaire. Data were analyzed based on the responses provided for each question in the survey.

A few questions appear to report significantly lower response rates in comparison to the other questions. However, the response rates are attributable to the survey flow. The instrument contains contingency questions. For example, the instrument asked principals to report whether a school social worker was available to provide services to students during a typical week. Respondents that answered “yes” to this question were presented with additional questions about the context of social work services (N = 238). These respondents were asked to indicate how many school social workers are currently assigned to their school (N = 228) and the number of days that school social work services are currently allocated to their school each week (N = 230). Also, these respondents were asked if they are responsible for formally evaluating the school social worker assigned to their school (N = 238) and if they are responsible for hiring the school social worker assigned to their school (N = 238).

The most interesting response rate occurred when respondents who are responsible for hiring were further asked to indicate the highest educational level of their school social worker. Only 28% reported hiring their school social worker (N = 79). Half (51%) of those reported the highest educational level of their school social worker (N = 41). Eight respondents indicated that they did not know the answer to this question. The lack of responsiveness may be attributed to some of the following reasons. For example, respondents may have found the question burdensome if it required them to look up the information or to contact their school social worker. It is also possible that some respondents chose to skip the question rather than selecting the response, “don’t know.” Indifference is another possibility. Principals may not perceive a difference in the school social work services provided based on the education level of the school social worker.

One of the social work experts that reviewed the instrument suggested that the education level of the social worker might impact principals' perceptions of the role of the school social worker. This assumption is likely based on the premise that school social workers with a master's degree can provide a wider range of social work services (i.e., clinical mental health services). In fact, Costin (1968) and Allen-Meares (1977) examined the professions' readiness to differentiate the tasks of school social workers based on the social worker's level of education. Both Costin (1968) and Allen-Meares (1977) found that school social workers were reluctant to delegate tasks they considered important to someone with less professional training.

## **Demographic Data**

### Schools

In this study, principals from 281 schools of varying size, grade span, and locale type completed the survey. The majority of the schools were located in the Sandhills, Piedmont-Triad, Southwest, and Western part of the state. In regards to school type, the majority of the principals were assigned to Regular schools (94.7%). A small percentage of schools were categorized as Alternative (4.6%) and Exceptional Children (0.7%). School size ranged from nine to 2,100 students. The average school size was 561.02 (SD = 344.23).

**Table 4.0: School Participation by NCSBE Education Districts**

<b>Region</b>	<b>Education District</b>	<b>Number of Schools</b>	<b>%</b>
Northeast	District 1	14	5.0
Southeast	District 2	17	6.0
North Central	District 3	20	7.1
Sandhills	District 4	97	34.5

Piedmont-Triad	District 5	53	18.9
Southwest	District 6	35	12.5
Northwest	District 7	14	5.0
Western	District 8	31	11.0
Total		281	100.0

### **North Carolina Principals**

This section describes demographic information about the principals that participated in this study. For the purpose of this study, principals were classified based on the independent variables in this study. Those variables are prior experience with school social workers, grade span, years' of experience, gender, race/ethnicity, and local type.

The majority of the principals in this study had prior experience (93.2 %) working with school social workers (N = 280). The questionnaire also asked principals to identify the grade span served at their assigned school (N = 281). Over half (52.3%) were elementary schools. Those remaining were middle schools (21.7%), high schools (18.9%), and other (7.1%). Schools categorized as 'other' served students across multiple grade spans (i.e., K-8, 6-12, etc.). The questionnaire also asked participants to indicate their years of experience as a principal (N = 272). The responses ranged from one to 30. The average years of experience were 6.55 (SD = 5.11). Table 5 illustrates the distribution of the data by years of experience.

The survey also asked participants to indicate their highest level of education. The majority of the respondents (N = 272) held a master's degree (61.9%) and 16.7 % possessed a doctoral degree. The highest level of education for 18% of the participants was the education specialist certification or a post-Master's certification. The highest level of education for 18% of the participants was the education specialist certification or a post master's certification. Also,

**Table 5.0: Principal Participation by Years of Experience**

<b>Years of Experience</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
1	45	16.5
2	26	9.6
3	24	8.8
4	19	7.0
5	28	10.3
6	20	7.4
7	14	5.1
8	14	5.1
9	9	3.3
10	14	5.1
11	13	4.8
12	13	4.8
13	4	1.5
14	3	1.1
15	9	3.3
16	6	2.2
17	3	1.1
18	3	1.1
19	2	0.7
21	1	0.4
28	1	0.4
30	1	0.4
Total	272	100.0

nearly two-thirds of the participants (N = 269) were females (65.4%), and about a third were males (34.6%). The racial/ethnic background of participants (N = 268) was not very diverse. Nearly 70% of the participants in this study were White (69.4%), and 28% were African American. Less than 1% was American Indian (0.7%), and the remaining participants were multiracial (1.9%). Table 6 describes the distribution of the data by race/ethnicity. It is also interesting to note that 3.6% of the respondents were previously employed as school counselors and 0.4% as school social workers.

The locale type of their assigned school also classified principals at the time of the

study (NCDPI, 2010). For reporting purposes, the federal government created a classification system to describe the physical location or locale type of American schools and districts (NCES,

**Table 6.0: Principal Participation by Race/Ethnicity**

<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
White	186	69.4
African American	75	28.0
American Indian	2	0.7
Multiracial	5	1.9

n.d.). A locale code based on an address's proximity to an urban area is assigned to every school and district (NCES, n.d.). Territories are classified into four major types: city, suburban,

town and rural (NCES, n.d.). Each type has three subcategories (NCES, n.d.). Towns and suburbs are classified by their size: large, midsize, and small (NCES, n.d.). Towns and rural areas are distinguished by their proximity to urban areas: fringe, distant, and remote (NCES, n.d.). The locale codes, their definition, and the number of principals represented are detailed in Table 7.0. In this study, only one principal was assigned to each school. The majority of the principals were assigned to schools located in midsize cities (39.5%), rural areas on the fringe of an urban area (24.2%), and distant rural areas (14.6%).

**Table 7.0: Principal Participation by Locale Code**

<b>Locale Code</b>	<b>Territory</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Number of Schools</b>	<b>%</b>
11	City, Large	Territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with population of 250,000 or more.	13	4.6
12	City, Midsize	Territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with a population less than 250,000 and greater than or equal to 100,000.	111	39.5
13	City, Small	Territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with a population less than 100,000.	8	2.8
21	Suburb, Large	Territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area with a population of 250,000 or more.	10	3.6
22	Suburb, Midsize	Territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area with a population less than 250,000 and greater than or equal to 100,000.	23	8.2
23	Suburb, Small	Territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area with a population less than 100,000.	0	0

31	Town, Fringe	Territory inside an urban cluster that is less than or equal to 10 miles from an urbanized area.	4	1.4
32	Town, Distant	Territory inside an urban cluster that is more than 10 miles and less than or equal to 35 miles from an urbanized area.	0	0
33	Town, Remote	Territory inside an urban cluster that is more than 35 miles from an urbanized area.	0	0
41	Rural, Fringe	Census-defined rural territory that is less than or equal to 5 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an urban cluster.	68	24.2
42	Rural, Distant	Census-defined rural territory that is more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an urban cluster.	41	14.6
43	Rural, Remote	Census-defined rural territory that is more than 25 miles from an urbanized area and is also more than 10 miles from an urban cluster. (NCES, n.d.)	3	1.1
Total			281	100.0

### North Carolina School Social Workers

In North Carolina, the number of school social workers assigned to public schools ranged from zero to three. The average number of school social workers assigned to a school was one (SD = 0.162). During a typical week, 84.7% of respondents (N=280) reported that school social work services were available to students. On average, schools received 2.56 days of social work services per week (SD = 1.64). The sample as a whole seemed to indicate that school social workers typically served more than one school.

## **The Context of Principals' Experiences with School Social Workers**

This study gathered data about the context of principals' experiences with school social workers in North Carolina. Descriptive data will be presented to describe how principals obtained knowledge about the roles, how the role of the school social worker is established in the school setting, and principals' experience hiring and evaluating school social workers.

Ninety-three percent of the principals ( $N = 280$ ) in this study have prior experience working with school social workers. Therefore, it is not surprising that most of the respondents ( $N = 280$ ) expressed some degree of understanding of the roles of school social workers. More than half (58.4%) believed that they understand the roles fairly well, while 33.1% felt they understand the roles very well. Some respondents were not as confident and indicated that they do not understand the role very well (8.2%). Even still, the findings support the researcher's assumption that more information about the roles of school social workers is needed. Fifty-four percent ( $N = 279$ ) of the respondents agreed somewhat, whereas 14.6% agreed strongly that more information is needed. Nearly one-third (31%) expressed some level of disagreement with this idea.

It appears that principals learned about the roles of school social workers from a variety of sources. The questionnaire asked principals to indicate where they learned about the possible roles of the school social worker. Ironically, the majority of the respondents ( $N = 281$ ) learned about the role from school social workers (82.9%), district office personnel (74.7%), and the school social worker job description (55.2%). A small percentage of respondents (17.4%) learned about the role through their school administration graduate program. Fewer than 10% of respondents listed other sources such as the performance appraisal instrument, observations, DPI, common sense, and prior experience and training as a school counselor or school social worker.



While the overwhelming majority of the participants have prior experience working with school social workers and knowledge of the roles, more diversity is seen when analyzing principals' specific experiences with school social workers. For instance, only 28.1% of respondents (N = 238) reported being responsible for hiring the school social worker assigned to their school. On the other hand, 44.5% (N = 238) reported being responsible for formally evaluating the school social worker's performance. The questionnaire also asked principals who are responsible for hiring the school social worker to identify the school social workers' highest level of education. These respondents (N = 79) indicated that their school social worker possessed a bachelor's degree in social work (50.7%) and/or a master's degree in social work (57.7%). This study assumes that principals who are not responsible for hiring the school social worker may not know their highest educational level. Considering the small number of principals responsible for hiring, it is likely that school social workers are hired by district office staff and assigned to schools. As such, the school social worker's level of education may not be a variable that impacts principals' perception of the role.

According to the literature review, principals are instrumental in determining which student services are available in their schools and who provides those services (Bye et al., 2009; Graham et al., 2011). If school social workers are to be used more effectively, then the critical importance of the person who most often determines the nature of the services social workers provide is underscored. To this end, the questionnaire asked principals to indicate how the role of the school social worker was primarily established at their school. Of those who chose to answer this question (N = 277), 38.4% indicated that establishing the role of the school social worker is a joint effort between the principal and the school social worker. About 37% said that the district office established the roles. Approximately 7% attributed either the principal (7.1%)

or the school social worker (6.8%) with this level of autonomy. Considering the variety of tasks completed by school social workers, their itinerate status, and the lack of role clarity a partnership between principals and social workers is necessary to ensure that student needs are met (Graham et al., 2011; Staudt, 1991). A deeper understanding of the roles and their impact on the educational outcomes of students may position principals and school social workers to maximize the contributions of this position. The findings for each research question are outlined in the next section.

### **Results for Research Questions**

A questionnaire, *Principals' Perceptions of the Roles of School Social Workers*, was used to gather data to answer the seven research questions. In this section, the quantitative findings are outlined for each research question.

#### **Research Question 1**

**RQ1.** How do principals define the importance of the roles of school social workers to the educational success of students?

**H1.** There is no hypothesis for this question. The question has a single variable and asks for descriptive information.

#### **Results for Research Question 1**

Generally speaking, some level of importance was assigned to all of the roles mentioned in this study. As mentioned previously, the tasks were taken from the North Carolina job description for school social workers (Appendix 1) and the NASW Standards for School Social Work Services (Appendix 2). Descriptive statistics were used to describe principals' perceptions.

Using a Likert scale, principals rated a list of 19 common school social work tasks on their importance to the educational success of students. The most important roles are as follows: (1) providing crisis intervention and response (88.4%), (2) addressing barriers to regular school attendance (88%), (3) collaborating with the school-based Student Support Services Team (86.9%), (4) consulting with teachers and administrators about factors in the home, school, and/or community that impact school performance (81.9%), (5) maintaining accurate records (79.7%), (6) conducting home visits (77.8), (7) coordinating school and/or community services (75.1%), and (8) providing dropout prevention and intervention services (71.6%). Table 8.0 illustrates the frequencies and percentages for each role. The total number of respondents for each task varies due to missing variables.

**Table 8.0: Frequency Distribution of the Importance of School Social Work Roles to Educational Outcomes**

<b>School Social Work Roles</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Conduct assessments of the needs of students.	Not At All Important	2	0.7
	Slightly Important	19	6.8
	Moderately Important	74	26.6
	Very Important	183	65.8
	<b>Total</b>	278	100.0
Conduct assessments of the needs of systems/organizations (i.e., classrooms, schools, neighborhoods, state, district).	Not At All Important	8	2.9
	Slightly Important	51	18.3
	Moderately Important	119	42.8
	Very Important	100	36.0
	<b>Total</b>	278	100.0
Use assessment results to develop appropriate interventions for students.	Not At All Important	2	0.7
	Slightly Important	16	5.8
	Moderately Important	72	26.0

	Very Important	187	67.5
	<b>Total</b>	277	100.0
Conduct ongoing evaluations to determine the level of effectiveness of interventions.	Not At All Important	4	1.4
	Slightly Important	21	7.6
	Moderately Important	85	30.8
	Very Important	166	60.1
	<b>Total</b>	276	100.0
Report school social work outcomes to teachers and/or administrators.	Not At All Important	0	0.0
	Slightly Important	16	5.8
	Moderately Important	86	31.0
	Very Important	175	63.2
	<b>Total</b>	277	100.0
Collaborate with the school-based Student Support Services Team to address barriers and/or problems with the educational process.	Not At All Important	0	0.0
	Slightly Important	2	0.7
	Moderately Important	34	12.4
	Very Important	238	86.9
	<b>Total</b>	274	100.0
Address student needs by providing crisis intervention and response.	Not At All Important	0	0.0
	Slightly Important	1	0.4
	Moderately Important	31	11.2
	Very Important	244	88.4
	<b>Total</b>	276	100.0
Address student needs by conducting home visits.	Not At All Important	0	0.0
	Slightly Important	4	1.5
	Moderately Important	57	20.7
	Very Important	214	77.8
	<b>Total</b>	275	100.0
Address student needs by providing conflict resolution.	Not At All Important	2	0.7
	Slightly Important	15	5.4

	Moderately Important	100	36.2
	Very Important	159	57.6
	<b>Total</b>	276	100.0
Address student needs by providing individual counseling.	Not At All Important	5	1.8
	Slightly Important	22	8.0
	Moderately Important	95	34.4
	Very Important	154	55.8
	<b>Total</b>	276	100.0
Address student needs by providing group counseling.	Not At All Important	12	4.3
	Slightly Important	53	19.1
	Moderately Important	117	42.1
	Very Important	96	34.5
	<b>Total</b>	278	100.0
Address student needs by providing dropout prevention and intervention services.	Not At All Important	2	0.7
	Slightly Important	12	4.3
	Moderately Important	65	23.4
	Very Important	199	71.6
	<b>Total</b>	278	100.0
Address student needs by promoting graduation awareness.	Not At All Important	4	1.5
	Slightly Important	18	6.5
	Moderately Important	94	34.2
	Very Important	159	57.8
	<b>Total</b>	275	100.0
Advocate for services for students using appropriate statutes, case law, policies, and/or procedures.	Not At All Important	0	0.0
	Slightly Important	6	2.2
	Moderately Important	78	28.2
	Very Important	193	69.7
	<b>Total</b>	277	100.0

Utilize appropriate interventions to address barriers to regular school attendance.	Not At All Important	0	0.0
	Slightly Important	1	0.4
	Moderately Important	32	11.6
	Very Important	242	88.0
	<b>Total</b>	275	100.0
Plan programs to promote a caring school climate that fosters academic success.	Not At All Important	0	0.0
	Slightly Important	17	6.1
	Moderately Important	79	28.5
	Very Important	181	65.3
	<b>Total</b>	277	100.0
Consult with teachers and/or administrators to facilitate an understanding of factors in the home, school, and/or community that affect students' educational experiences.	Not At All Important	0	0.0
	Slightly Important	2	0.7
	Moderately Important	48	17.3
	Very Important	227	81.9
	<b>Total</b>	277	100.0
Maintain accurate case records to document services and outcomes.	Not At All Important	0	0.0
	Slightly Important	5	1.8
	Moderately Important	51	18.5
	Very Important	220	79.7
	<b>Total</b>	276	100.0

Further analysis was conducted to determine if statistically significant differences existed between principals' perceptions when the independent variables were considered for each of the roles listed in Table 8.0. The next section reports the statistically significant findings.

#### *Prior Experience with School Social Workers*

Mann-Whitney U tests were run for all school social work roles (N = 19) to determine if there were differences in perception scores based on principals' prior experience working with

school social workers. Distributions of the perception scores for prior experience were similar for all of the roles, as assessed by visual inspection of a histogram created for each role. Two of the school social work roles had statistically significant differences in perception scores. Those roles are (1) address student needs by conducting home visits and (2) utilize appropriate interventions to address barriers to regular school attendance. Table 9.0 illustrates those findings. Principals with prior experience working with school social workers had statistically significantly higher perception scores for the two roles mentioned above than those without prior experience based on mean ranks.

**Table 9.0: Mann-Whitney U Tests by Principals' Prior Experience with School Social Workers**

School Social Work Roles	N		Median		Mean Rank		U	z	p
	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes			
Address student needs by conducting home visits.	17	258	4.0	4.0	110.91	139.78	1,732.500	-2.011	.044
Utilize appropriate interventions to address barriers to regular school attendance.	19	256	4.0	4.0	123.30	137.26	1,923.500	-2.700	.007

\*Asymptotic significances are displayed.



### *Years of Experience*

Kruskal-Wallis H tests were conducted for all school social work roles ( $N = 19$ ) to determine if there were differences in the perception scores between groups that differed in their years of experience. One role had statistically significant findings. That role was: maintain accurate case records to document services and outcomes. Distribution of the perception scores was not similar for all groups, as assessed by visual inspection of a boxplot. The perception scores were statistically significantly different between the different levels of the years of experience group,  $X^2(5) = 12.286, p = .031$ . Table 10.0 outlines the mean ranks for each level of the group. Subsequently, pairwise comparisons were performed using Dunn's (1964) procedure with Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons. Adjusted  $p$ -values are presented. This post hoc analysis did not reveal any statistically significant differences in the perception scores for any group combination.

**Table 10.0: Mean Ranks for Maintaining Accurate Case Records to Document Services and Outcomes by Years of Experience**

Group	N	Mean Rank	Median
1 – 5 Years of Experience	141	130.07	4.0
6 – 10 Years of Experience	71	145.10	4.0
11 – 15 Years of Experience	41	144.46	4.0
16 – 20 Years of Experience	14	100.43	4.0
21 – 25 Years of Experience	1	160.50	3.5
26 – 30 Years of Experience	2	94.75	4.0

## *Gender*

Mann-Whitney U tests were run for all school social work roles ( $N = 19$ ) to determine if there were differences in perception scores based on gender. Distributions of the perception scores for males and females were similar for all of the roles, as assessed by visual inspection of a histogram created for each role. Five of the school social work roles had statistically significant differences in perception scores. Table 11.0 illustrates those findings. Females had statistically significantly higher perception scores than males based on mean ranks.

**Table 11.0: Mann-Whitney U Tests by Gender**

<b>School Social Work Roles</b>	<b>N</b>		<i>Median</i>		<i>Mean Rank</i>		<i>U</i>	<i>z</i>	<i>p</i>
	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>			
Report school social work outcomes to teachers and/or administrators.	93	175	4.0	4.0	122.55	140.85	9,249.00	2.170	.030
Collaborate with the school-based Student Support Services Team to address barriers and/or problems with the educational process.	90	174	4.0	4.0	123.30	137.26	8,658.00	2.426	.015
Address student needs by conducting home visits.	90	175	4.0	4.0	123.66	137.81	8,716.00	1.94	.047
Utilize appropriate interventions to address barriers to regular school attendance.	91	174	4.0	4.0	123.84	137.99	8,750.50	2.527	.012
Maintain accurate case records to document services and outcomes.	92	175	4.0	4.0	123.17	139.69	9,046.00	2.495	.013

\*Asymptotic significances are displayed.

### *Race/Ethnicity*

Kruskal-Wallis H tests were conducted for all school social work roles ( $N = 19$ ) to determine if there were differences in the perception scores between groups that differed in their race/ethnicity. Seven of the school social work roles had statistically significantly different perception scores based on race/ethnicity. Those roles and the respective mean ranks, number of cases, and medians are listed in Table 12.0. Post hoc analysis was conducted to identify statistically significant differences in the distributions between groups. Although the perception scores were statistically significant, four roles did not reveal any statistically significant pairwise comparisons for any group combination. Those roles are: conduct ongoing evaluations to determine the level of effectiveness of interventions ( $X^2(3) = 9.063, p = .028$ ), report school social work outcomes to teachers and/or administrators ( $X^2(3) = 10.238, p = .017$ ), address student needs by providing individual counseling ( $X^2(3) = 9.581, p = .022$ ), and address student needs by providing group counseling ( $X^2(3) = 8.289, p = .040$ ). Three school social work roles had significant pairwise comparisons. Those roles are: conduct assessments of the needs of systems/organizations (i.e., classrooms, schools, neighborhoods, state, district), address student needs by providing dropout prevention and intervention services, and plan programs to promote a caring school climate that fosters academic success.

For the role, conduct assessments of the needs of systems/organizations (i.e., classrooms, schools, neighborhoods, state, and district), the distribution of the perception scores were not similar for all groups, as assessed by visual inspection of a boxplot. Perception scores were statistically significantly different between groups,  $X^2(3) = 12.481, p = .006$ . Pairwise comparisons were performed using Dunn's (1964) procedure with a Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons. Adjusted  $p$ -values are presented. This post hoc analysis revealed

statistically significant differences in perception scores between Whites (mean rank 124.36) and African Americans (mean rank 155.86) ( $p = .009$ ) groups, but not between any other group combinations.

For the role, address student needs by providing dropout prevention and intervention services, the distribution of the perception scores was not similar for all groups, as assessed by visual inspection of a boxplot. Perception scores were statistically significantly different between groups,  $X^2(3) = 11.181, p = .011$ . Pairwise comparisons were performed using Dunn's (1964) procedure with a Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons. Adjusted  $p$ -values are presented. This post hoc analysis revealed statistically significant differences in perception scores between Whites (mean rank 126.55) and African Americans (mean rank 150.71) ( $p = .022$ ) groups, but not between any other group combinations.

Also, for the role plan programs to promote a caring school climate that fosters academic success, the distribution of the perception scores was not similar for all groups, as assessed by visual inspection of a boxplot. Perception scores were statistically significantly different between groups,  $X^2(3) = 8.949, p = .030$ . Pairwise comparisons were performed using Dunn's (1964) procedure with a Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons. Adjusted  $p$ -values are presented. This post hoc analysis revealed statistically significant differences in perception scores between Whites (mean rank 126.44) and African Americans (mean rank 152.59) ( $p = .020$ ) groups, but not between any other group combinations.

**Table 12.0: Mean Ranks and Medians for Various Roles by Race/Ethnicity**

<b>School Social Work Role</b>	<b>Group</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean Rank</b>	<b>Median</b>
Conduct assessments of the needs of systems/organizations (i.e., classrooms, schools, neighborhoods, state, district)	White	186	124.36	3.0
	African American	75	155.86	3.0
	American Indian	2	167.50	3.5
	Multiracial	5	178.10	4.0
Conduct ongoing evaluations to determine the level of effectiveness of interventions	White	185	126.95	4.0
	African American	75	146.40	4.0
	American Indian	2	187.50	4.0
	Multiracial	5	187.50	4.0
Report school social work outcomes to teachers and/or administrators	White	186	126.76	4.0
	African American	75	149.08	4.0
	American Indian	2	184.00	4.0
	Multiracial	5	184.00	4.0
Address student needs by providing individual counseling	White	185	125.93	3.0
	African American	74	148.41	4.0
	American Indian	2	133.25	3.5
	Multiracial	5	193.00	4.0
Address student needs by providing group counseling	White	186	128.99	3.0
	African American	75	145.00	3.0
	American Indian	2	80.25	2.5
	Multiracial	5	203.60	4.0
Address student needs by providing dropout prevention and intervention services	White	186	126.55	4.0
	African American	75	150.71	4.0
	American Indian	2	172.00	4.0
	Multiracial	5	172.00	4.0
Plan programs to promote a caring school climate that fosters academic success	White	186	126.44	4.0
	African American	74	152.59	4.0
	American Indian	2	118.50	3.5
	Multiracial	5	146.50	4.0

### *Grade Span*

Kruskal-Wallis H tests were run for all school social work roles ( $N = 19$ ) to determine if there were differences in the perception scores between groups that differed by grade span. Those groups are elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, and other. The “other” category was used to describe schools that served multiple grade spans (i.e., K-8, K-12, etc.). Three of the school social work roles had statistically significant differences in perception scores. Those roles are: (1) address student needs by providing individual counseling, (2) address student needs by providing dropout prevention and intervention services, and (3) utilize appropriate interventions to address barriers to regular school attendance. The distribution of the perception scores for the role, address student needs by providing individual counseling, was similar for all groups, as assessed by visual inspection of a boxplot. Median perception scores for this role were statistically different between groups,  $X^2(3) = 8.329$ ,  $p = .040$ . Subsequently, pairwise comparisons were performed using Dunn’s (1964) procedure with a Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons. Adjusted  $p$ -values are presented. This post hoc analysis did not reveal any statistically significant differences in the perception scores

**Table 13.0: Median Perception Scores by Grade Span**

Group	N	Median
Elementary School	144	3.5
Middle School	60	4.0
High School	52	4.0
Other	20	3.0

for any group combinations. Table 13.0 outlines the median perception scores.

For the role, address student needs by providing dropout prevention and intervention services, the distribution of the perception scores was not similar for all groups, as assessed by visual inspection of a boxplot. Perception scores were statistically

significantly different between groups,  $X^2(3) = 7.986, p = .046$ . Pairwise comparisons were performed using Dunn's (1964) procedure with a Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons. Adjusted  $p$ -values are presented. This post hoc analysis revealed statistically significant differences in perception scores between the elementary school (mean rank 131.69) and high school (mean rank 159.08) ( $p = .042$ ) groups, but not between any other group combinations.

The school social work role, utilize appropriate interventions to address barriers to regular school attendance, also reported statistically significant differences. The distribution of the perception scores was not similar for all groups, as assessed by visual inspection of a boxplot. Perception scores were statistically significantly different between groups,  $X^2(3) = 15.653, p = .001$ . Pairwise comparisons were performed using Dunn's (1964) procedure with Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons. Adjusted  $p$ -values are presented. This post hoc analysis revealed statistically significant differences in perception scores between Other (mean rank 106.55) and elementary school (mean rank 143.08) ( $p = .004$ ) and Other and middle school (mean rank 144.93) ( $p = .006$ ), but not between any other group combinations.

#### *Locale Type*

Kruskal-Wallis H tests were run for all school social work roles ( $N = 19$ ) to determine if there were differences in the perception scores between groups that differed by locale type. Those groups are city, suburb, town, and rural. One of the school social work roles had statistically significant differences in perception scores. That role is: conduct assessments of the needs of systems/organizations (i.e., classrooms, schools, neighborhoods, state, and district).

The distribution of the perception scores was not similar for all groups, as assessed by visual inspection of a boxplot. Perception scores were statistically significantly different



between groups,  $X^2(3) = 8.666$ ,  $p = .034$ . Pairwise comparisons were performed using Dunn's (1964) procedure with Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons. Adjusted  $p$ -values are presented. This post hoc analysis revealed statistically significant differences in perception scores between rural (mean rank 125.11) and city (mean rank 151.92) ( $p = .034$ ), but not between any other group combinations.

### Research Question 2

**RQ2.** Do principals' perceptions towards the school social workers' role in the development of a caring school environment differ depending on whether the principal has prior experience working with school social workers?

**HA2.** There is a difference in principals' perceptions towards the school social workers' contributions to the development of a caring school environment as the most important role when the principals' prior experience working with school social workers is considered.

### Results for Research Question 2

Out of 281 survey respondents, 278 responded to the question asking their level of agreement with the statement that the most important role of school social workers is their contribution to the development of a caring school environment and the question that asks about prior experience working with school social workers. Ninety-three percent of those respondents had prior experience working with school social workers. Table 14.0 describes the frequency of participants' responses by their prior experience working with a school social worker and perception. Perception was measured using a four-point Likert scale to indicate agreement or disagreement with the statement.

**Table 14.0: Frequency Distribution of the Importance of the School Social Worker's Role in the Development of a Caring School Environment by Prior Experience and Perception**

		Perception				Total
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Strongly Agree	
Prior Experience with SSWs	Yes	10	16	136	97	259
	No	0	2	10	7	19
Total		10	18	146	104	278

A Mann-Whitney U test was run to determine if there were differences in the perception scores when the principals' prior experience working with school social workers was considered. Distributions of the perception scores for prior experience and no prior experience were similar as assessed by visual inspection. The perception scores were not statistically different between prior experience ( $Mdn = 3.0$ ) and without prior experience ( $Mdn = 3.0$ ),  $U = 2,449.5$ ,  $z = -.036$ ,  $p = .971$ . The hypothesis was not supported.

### Research Question 3

**RQ3.** Do principals' perceptions towards the school social workers' role in the development of a caring school environment differ depending on the principals' years of experience?

**HA3.** There is a difference in principals' perceptions towards the school social workers' contributions to the development of a caring school environment as the most important role when the principals' years of experience are considered.

### Results for Question 3

Out of 281 survey respondents, 270 responded to the question asking their level of agreement with the statement that the most important role of school social workers is their

contribution to the development of a caring school environment, as well as the question that asks the respondent to report their years of experience. For data analysis purposes, the independent variable years of experience was transformed from continuous data to six categorical groups. The data were transformed to decrease the number of outliers and groups with less than five cases. Respondents' years of experience ranged from one to 30. The data were categorized into six groups based on increments of five years. Fifty-two percent of the respondents had one to five years of experience (N = 141), 26.3% had six to 10 years of experience (N = 71), 15.2% had 11 to 15 years of experience (N = 41), and 5.2% had 16 to 20 years of experience (N = 14). Less than 1% had 21 to 25 years of experience (N = 1) and 26 to 30 years of experience (N = 2). Table 15.0 describes the frequency of participants' responses by years of experience and perception. Perception was measured using a four-point Likert scale to indicate agreement or disagreement with the statement.

**Table 15.0: Frequency Distribution of the Importance of the School Social Worker's Role in the Development of a Caring School Environment by Years of Experience and Perception**

		Perception				Total
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Strongly Agree	
Years of Experience	1-5	0	10	80	51	141
	6-10	6	4	35	26	71
	11 - 15	3	2	21	15	41
	16 - 20	1	0	8	5	14
	21 - 25	0	0	0	1	1
	26 - 30	0	0	0	2	2
Total		10	16	144	100	270

A Kruskal-Wallis H test was conducted to determine if there were differences in the perception scores between groups that differed by years of experience. Distributions of perception scores were similar for all groups, as assessed by visual inspection of a boxplot. Median perception scores were the same for respondents with one to 20 years of experience (3.0). The median perception score for participants with 21 to 30 years of experience was 4.0. The differences were not statistically significant,  $\chi^2(3) = 4.921$ ,  $p = .426$ . The hypothesis was not supported.

#### Research Question 4

**RQ4.** Do principals' perceptions towards the school social workers' role in the development of a caring school environment differ depending on the principals' gender?

**HN4.** There is no difference in principals' perceptions towards the school social workers' contributions to the development of a caring school environment as the most important role when the principals' gender is considered.

#### Results for Research Question 4

Out of 281 survey respondents, 268 responded to the question asking their level of agreement with the statement that the most important role of school social workers is their contribution to the development of a caring school environment and answered the question that asked respondents to report their gender. Nearly 35% of the respondents were males ( $N = 93$ ), and 65.3% were females ( $N = 175$ ). Table 16.0 describes the frequency of participants' responses by gender and perception. Perception was measured using a four-point Likert scale to indicate agreement or disagreement with the statement.

**Table 16.0: Frequency Distribution of the Importance of the School Social Worker's Role in the Development of a Caring School Environment by Gender and Perception**

		Perceptions				Total
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Strongly Agree	
<b>Gender</b>	Male	5	4	49	35	93
	Female	5	14	90	66	175
<b>Total</b>		10	18	139	101	268

A Mann-Whitney U test was run to determine if there were differences in the perception scores between males and females. Distributions of the perception scores for males and females were similar as assessed by visual inspection. The perception score was not statistically different between males ( $Mdn = 3.0$ ) and females ( $Mdn = 3.0$ ),  $U = 8,108.5$ ,  $z = -.053$ ,  $p = .957$ . The hypothesis was supported.

#### Research Question 5

**RQ5.** Do principals' perceptions towards the school social workers' role in the development of a caring school environment differ depending on the principals' race?

**HA5.** There is a difference in principals' perceptions towards the school social workers' contributions to the development of a caring school environment as the most important role when the principals' race is considered.

#### Results for Question 5

Out of 281 survey respondents, 267 responded to the question asking their level of agreement with the statement that the most important role of school social workers is their contribution to the development of a caring school environment, as well as the question that asks respondents to report their race. Sixty-nine percent of the respondents were White ( $N = 185$ ),

28.1% were African American (N = 75), 0.75% was American Indian (N = 2), and 1.9% was Multiracial (N = 5). Table 17.0 describes the frequency of participants' responses by race and perception. Perception was measured using a four-point Likert scale to indicate agreement or disagreement with the statement.

**Table 17.0: Frequency Distribution of the Importance of the School Social Worker's Role in the Development of a Caring School Environment by Race and Perception**

		Perceptions				Total
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Strongly Agree	
<b>Race/Ethnic Background</b>	White	5	13	102	65	185
	African American	5	4	34	32	75
	American Indian	0	1	1	0	2
	Multiracial	0	0	2	3	5
<b>Total</b>		10	18	139	100	267

A Kruskal-Wallis H test was conducted to determine if there were differences in the perception scores between groups that differed by race/ethnic background. Distributions of perception scores were not similar for all groups, as assessed by visual inspection of a boxplot. Perception scores were similar for Whites (mean rank 131.97) and African Americans (mean rank 138.63), but higher for Multiracial respondents (mean rank 169.7). The mean rank for American Indian respondents was 58.75. The differences were not statistically significant,  $\chi^2(3) = 4.176$ ,  $p = .243$ . The hypothesis was not supported.

### Research Question 6

**RQ6.** Do principal's perceptions towards the school social workers' role in the development of a caring school environment differ depending on the grade span of the school?

**HA6.** There is a difference in principals' perceptions towards the school social workers' contributions to the development of a caring school environment as the most important role when the grade span of the school is considered.

### Results for Research Question 6

Out of 281 survey respondents, 278 responded to the question asking their level of agreement with the statement that the most important role of school social workers is their contribution to the development of a caring school environment and the question that asked respondents to report the grade span offered at their school. Fifty-two percent of the respondents were assigned to elementary schools ( $N = 145$ ), 21.6% were assigned to middle schools ( $N = 60$ ), 19.1% were assigned to high schools ( $N = 53$ ), and 7.2% were assigned to schools described as other ( $N = 20$ ). The "other" category was used to describe schools that served multiple grade spans (i.e., K-8, K-12, etc.). Table 18.0 describes the frequency of participants' responses by grade span and perception. Perception was measured using a four-point Likert scale to indicate agreement or disagreement with the statement.

A Kruskal-Wallis H test was conducted to determine if there were differences in the perception scores between groups that differed by grade span. Distributions of perception scores were similar for all groups, as assessed by visual inspection of a boxplot. Median perception scores were the same regardless of grade span (3.0). The differences were not statistically significant,  $\chi^2(3) = 4.078$ ,  $p = .253$ . The hypothesis was not supported.

**Table 18.0: Frequency Distribution of the Importance of the School Social Worker's Role in the Development of a Caring School Environment by Grade Span and Perception**

		Perception				Total
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Strongly Agree	
<b>Grade Span</b>	Elementary	5	8	77	55	145
	Middle	3	5	35	17	60
	High School	2	3	23	25	53
	Other	0	2	11	7	20
<b>Total</b>		10	18	146	104	278

#### Research Question 7

**RQ7.** Do principals' perceptions towards the school social workers' role in the development of a caring school environment differ depending on the locale type of the school?

**HA7.** There is a difference in principals' perceptions towards the school social workers' contributions to the development of a caring school environment as the most important role when the locale type of the school is considered.

#### Results for Research Question 7

Out of 281 survey respondents, 278 responded to the question asking their level of agreement with the statement that the most important role of school social workers is their contribution to the development of a caring school environment. The researcher preloaded the locale code for all principals invited to participate into Qualtrics. As such, this information was automatically collected for all respondents, rather than asking respondents to answer an additional question. Forty-seven percent of the respondents were assigned to schools located in cities (N = 131), 11.9% were assigned to schools located in the suburbs (N = 33), 1.4% were



assigned to schools located in towns (N = 4), and 39.6% were assigned to schools located in rural areas (N = 110). For data analysis purposes, this data was transformed into four categorical groups. The raw data contained 12 groups, which increased the likelihood of outliers and groups with less than five cases. For more information, refer to Table 7.0. Table 19.0 describes the frequency of participants' responses by locale type and perception. Perception was measured using a four-point Likert scale to indicate agreement or disagreement with the statement.

**Table 19.0: Frequency Distribution of the Importance of the School Social Worker's Role in the Development of a Caring School Environment by Locale Type and Perception**

		Perceptions				Total
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Strongly Agree	
Locale Type	City	10	4	58	59	131
	Suburb	0	3	17	13	33
	Town	0	0	3	1	4
	Rural	0	11	68	31	110
Total		10	18	146	104	278

A Kruskal-Wallis H test was run to determine if there were differences in the perception scores between groups that differed by locale type. Distributions of perception scores were not similar for all groups, as assessed by visual inspection of a boxplot. Perception scores were the same regardless of locale type (3.0). The mean rank of the perception scores were not statistically significantly different between groups,  $\chi^2(3) = 4.490$ ,  $p = .213$ . The hypothesis was not supported.

### Qualitative Findings

Qualitative analysis was performed to obtain a deeper view of principals' perceptions. As noted previously, the questionnaire included four open-ended questions designed to gather

information to support and expand the quantitative findings of this study. About 95 respondents answered each question. Structural coding was performed to analyze and interpret this data. The findings are described in the next section.

#### Prior Experiences with School Social Workers

Ninety-three percent of the principals (N = 280) in this study reported having prior experience working with school social workers. The questionnaire asked principals to describe the most salient experience with school social workers that in turn, shaped their overall perception of the role of these professionals. Many respondents answered this question by listing common tasks completed by school social workers. The challenge for the researcher was to expand this information to generate new meaning. New patterns were discovered through continuous reading and reflection.

The most frequently referenced experiences were related to the quality of the services provided by the school social worker. There were two references to ineffective school social work practice. However, there were 31 references to high-quality services. These respondents offered specific examples of school social workers going above and beyond the call of duty to help a student or family. These experiences ranged from demonstrating perseverance to obtain basic needs such as food, glasses, clothing, and housing for families in need, to spending personal money to help a student, to helping a student to graduate despite insurmountable odds. Most notable were descriptions of school social workers using innovation to create the services needed within the school setting. A few examples are the Backpack Buddies program that provides students with meals on the weekend, the Buddy Bench to help students find friends, and a major change in the school schedule to ensure that all students could participate in extracurricular activities by offering these programs during the school day. Another principal

described the school social worker as “spearhead[ing] a campaign to get clothing and food for the family while also securing funds to provide transportation for the children [to get] to a relative living in another state.”

Responses that described the school social worker completing common school social work roles were coded as observations of authentic care (N = 26). These references pointed towards the school social worker providing direct services to students such as coordinating services to address homelessness, advocating on behalf of students, utilizing interventions to address poor attendance, and crisis intervention. On the other hand, there were 27 references to principals and school social workers working collaboratively to complete school social work tasks. For example, nine of the 27 references described the principal accompanying the school social worker on home visits.

I recall a few home visits that our social worker and I went on when I worked in an elementary school. Without our social worker, I would not have understood the depth and breadth of the turmoil some of our children were dealing with every day. Her willingness to learn about individual students made me and our teachers more aware of how we could best serve specific students during the school day.

Additional themes represented in this category were the availability of the school social worker, responding to crises, and being a new school administrator. There were six references to the amount of time the school social worker is available to the school. The consensus was that it takes time to respond to the numerous needs presented by students and more time is needed. Having a part-time or itinerate school social worker directly impacts which roles the school social worker can perform.

We are the first school in our district to hire a full time social worker using Title I funds at the school level. Our social worker was the only social worker for the district prior to his current position at our school. In working with him to address issues regarding chronic attendance problems and behavioral issues, I saw the value of having him full-time to support the high level of needs that are associated with a high poverty school such as the one I serve.

More to the point, there were eight references to school social workers offering support to grieving students in response to tragic events such as student deaths and suicide. These experiences appeared to impact principals' perceptions in a positive way. "Unfortunately we have had several student deaths over the last several years. The Social Worker was instrumental in helping our students in crisis." As noted in the literature, teachers and administrators need the help of support personnel such as school social workers to meet the diverse needs of students (Richard & Villarreal Sosa, 2014; Watson, 1985). There were also six references to being a new principal or assistant principal. These responses seemed to indicate that as school administrators, there was greater awareness of the role of the school social worker and more intense collaboration.

As a new administrator, I got to work for the first time in a school that had a full time social worker. I learned all kinds of things from working directly with her that I did not have before as a teacher whose school had a part time social worker.

#### Primary Roles of School Social Workers

RQ1 asked principals to define the importance of the roles of school social workers to the educational success of students. Principals were asked to rate the importance of 19 common school social work tasks using a Likert scale. Descriptive statistics were used to determine which

roles were considered the most important. Also, the questionnaire asked principals to define the primary roles of the school social worker in their own words. The responses were coded to determine if principals defined the role the same when a predetermined list of school social work tasks was not provided.

Based on the literature, school social work roles can be described as home school liaison activities, social casework, and macro practice (Allen-Meares, 1994; Richard & Villarreal Sosa, 2014; Peckover et al., 2013). These broad categories were identified as codes for this question. The 19 common school social work tasks included in the survey were classified as a subcode for one of the three codes previously mentioned. For instance, consulting with teachers and administrators to facilitate an understanding of factors in the home, school, and the community that affect educational experiences is a subcode within home school liaison activities. The responses were coded to determine which roles were referenced most frequently and to identify additional roles that principals' attribute to these professionals.

Some participants found it challenging to narrow down the primary responsibilities of school social workers. "[S]chool social workers have so many duty responsibilities that it is difficult to state primarily what their duties are - it varies day to day and is based upon the needs of the students." Even still, the availability of the school social worker may impact which roles are performed. "Since our school social worker is only 20% she works mainly with the school counselor to address student needs in terms of attendance and social issues."

Overall, respondents seemed to define the role in terms of social casework and home, school liaison activities. There were 107 references to tasks identified as social casework, compared to 85 references to tasks identified as home, school liaison activities. The roles referenced most frequently in the qualitative data are: addressing barriers to regular school

attendance (N = 35), address school needs by coordinating school and community services (N = 29), collaborate with the school-based Student Support Services Team to address barriers and /or problems with the educational process (N = 12), consulting with teachers and administrators about factors in the home, school, and/or community that impact school performance (N = 11), and address student needs by conducting home visits (N = 11). There were only nine references to macro practice. The following macro roles were mentioned: conduct assessments of the needs of systems/organizations (i.e., classrooms, schools, neighborhoods, state, district, plan programs to promote a caring school climate that fosters academic success, and use assessment results to develop appropriate interventions for students.

It is also important to note that the qualitative data included references to school social workers helping parents to address needs and barriers to learning (N = 11) and “ensuring the safety and well-being for our students (N = 4).” An example is as follows: “Working with families to provide these basic needs as well as parental support as needed.” This role was not included in the study because it is not explicitly stated in the North Carolina job description or the NASW National Standards for School Social Workers. On the other hand, the North Carolina job description for school social workers declares that school social workers “contribute to the development of a healthy, safe, and caring environment” (NCDPI, 2008). Some participants described how the school social worker performs this role. “Physical Safety of Students: To investigate the causes that may make a student feel unsafe at school; to include home setting, peer interaction and teacher-student conflicts.”

#### The Value of School Social Work Practice

Again, RQ1 identifies which roles North Carolina principals believe are most important to the educational success of students. To expound upon those beliefs, respondents were asked

to explicate the value of school social work practice. Common themes in the responses were assistance to administrators and teachers, assistance to students, availability, high-poverty schools, and safe and caring environment.

Respondents appear to appreciate the role of the school social worker. “I love having the school social worker to speak to regarding various situations. They are a tremendous help!” There were 40 references to the variety of ways that the role of the school social worker assists administrators and teachers. For example, having a staff person whose job is dedicated to attending to the social/emotional needs and home life of students allows teachers and administrators to focus their attention on instruction. If Dempster and Berry’s (2003) assertion that a considerable amount of the principals’ time is dedicated to dealing with social problems is true, the importance of the role of the school social worker is gravely understated.

The school social worker can devote her time to meeting the specific needs of children and families in order to help the students be more successful in school and in life. In a perfect world, the teachers and principals would be the ones doing this but with all the curricular and non-curricular pressures and time constraints placed on those folks, we need someone whose main job is to assess and take care of family matters. Also, as the school social worker becomes more aware of the home life and the individual needs of students and families he or she is able to “provid[e] staff with essential information to better understand factors (cultural, societal, economic, familial, health, etc.) affecting a student’s performance and behavior.”

School social workers are trained mental health professionals that provide an array of services related to the academic, social, emotional, and behavioral achievement of students (NCDPI, n.d.-b). They also utilize social work interventions to identify and remove barriers to

learning (Radin & Welsh, 1984). The qualitative data suggested that principals value this expertise. There were 17 references to the knowledge and specialized skills of school social workers. “Administration is not trained the same as a social worker often students, parents, and staff need those who are trained in areas outside of academics.” Respondents indicated that school social workers assist staff by “answering questions about guardianship and legal issues,” “offering interventions,” and “handling sensitive issues that students and parents are often embarrassed to address with teachers and administrators” to name a few. “They are critically important. Social work will be done at a school regardless, so it is logical to ensure that a person trained in that field is providing the necessary services.”

The Social Worker is another tool that positively affects the lives of students. Having someone specifically trained to handle domestic issues, address various forms of abuse, follow attendance and potential drop-outs is necessary to keep students from falling through the cracks.

Along with expertise, respondents indicated that school social workers have connections with community agencies and access to information that may not be accessible to other school staff. There were eight references to the value of the professional network of school social workers. “She has a network of support that she can depend upon and utilize as differing needs arise. Basic needs can be quickly identified and support can be given to students.”

The data implies that respondents value the assistance that school social workers provide to students. There were 51 references outlining how this assistance is provided. Thirty-nine of the aforementioned references describe the school social worker providing direct services to students. These references were coded as authentic care.



They are here to specifically assist with the needs of the whole child and provide resources and information to assist families in times of crisis or need. They address more than the academic success of students and they offer a wealth of help to families so that schools and families can work together to make our students healthy, happy and academically successful. They facilitate the enforcement of the NC Compulsory attendance law, serve on student service teams, facilitate food programs, intervene when students and families are in crisis, and contribute to the overall well being of the school. Principals also described school social workers assisting students by serving as a neutral person that students can talk to without fear of getting into trouble or judgment. The data suggested that respondents view the preventive nature of school social work practice to be valuable to students. There were six references to this effect. “Their ability to work with students and their families to address problems before they reach a crisis point and to aid the entire school if there is a crisis.” Last but not least, there were three references to school social work practice ensuring the safety and wellbeing of students. “This role when done effectively, drives a trusting school culture and environment.” These statements were coded as safe and caring environment.

Availability is another theme as it relates to the value of school social work practice. There were 20 references to the amount of time that the school social worker is available. The prevailing idea was that effective school social practice is an invaluable resource for schools. The services are particularly important for high-poverty schools. Respondents reiterated that a full time school social worker is needed to address the numerous needs presented at schools. Also, the itinerate status of school social workers impacted which roles are performed. “If given enough time and with an efficient/effective social worker, their work is invaluable in keeping

students in school working toward graduation. However, most are over worked and therefore rarely focus on anything but attendance laws.”

### Caring as a Role of School Social Work Practice

This study conceptualizes the roles of school social workers through the lens of an EoC. As such RQ2 through RQ7 examined principals’ perceptions towards the school social workers’ role in the development of a caring school environment and how their perceptions differ when factors about the school and factors about the principal are considered. To this end, an open-ended question was included in the survey related to caring as a role of school social work practice. This question asked principals to provide examples of how the role of the school social worker can be used to increase caring in schools. Assuming that caring increases academic achievement, the data were coded to locate strategies for principals (N = 51) and for school social workers (N = 64) to increase caring.

Availability, visibility, educating staff about students, professional development, and serving on school-based planning committees are strategies for principals. School social workers cannot implement these strategies successfully without the support of the principal. There were 17 references to the amount of time that the school social worker is available. Although principals reiterated the need and value of having a full-time position, strategies were also offered. When time is not a factor, the school social worker can be responsible for a variety of tasks. Principals suggested that the role be used to ensure that an adult is available to assist students and to meet with at-risk and vulnerable students on a daily basis. Other strategies mentioned are creating opportunities for school social workers to collaborate with other personnel on student achievement and membership on the School Improvement Team (SIT).

My social worker is only at my school two days per week so any ideas I have about this topic would really be moot due to lack of time. I would love for my social worker to have a parent support group of sorts that helps them learn how to be better parents. I would also love for her to be able to follow up with each child and/or family that she has helped and see how things are going...ask how we can be of further assistance, etc. The truth of the matter is that in two days a week, she only has enough time to “put out fires” as opposed to implementing a “fire prevention” plan.

Visibility also emerged as a theme. There were seven references to increasing the visibility of the school social worker at the school. “Increasing their visibility and accessibility should be a key responsibility for administrators to increase caring in schools and increase student achievement.” The purpose of this strategy is to help students, staff, and the community to see that someone at their school cares about students. It also makes the school social worker more approachable.

Her supportive role requires that she be visible in the building and be known by the staff and the students, and often, the families. It is always easier to help families/students with delicate situations if they know her and know she cares for them.

Additional common themes were educating staff about students, providing professional development, and serving on planning committees. As a strategy, these themes point towards assigning leadership roles to school social workers. For example, there were 13 references to school social workers educating staff about the needs and home life of individual students. According to participants, this allows teachers to understand better where students are coming from, helps teachers to have empathy and caring for their students, and ensures students have a voice in their education.

The social worker works to educate personnel and stakeholders as to the living conditions of the students we serve. By better understanding their homelife, educators can provide appropriate interventions and reactions to behaviors that are a response to the worldview of the child.

There were nine references to the school social worker leading professional development. The participants recommended topics such as culture, climate, the role of the school social worker, and student/family issues.

Presentations on child abuse, social media, community agencies, interventions, creating that “paper trail”, PEP's, homelessness, custody, substance abuse . . . all focus the school on what used to be the “affective domain” which has been replaced by [the] need to achieve as we Race to the Top.

The purpose of this strategy is to change staff’s perception of the school social worker, to establish a supportive and caring environment, to train staff to recognize barriers to education, and to make teachers aware of best practices for working with students.

As previously noted, serving on planning committees was another common theme for this open-ended question. There were six references to the assignment of the school social worker to school-based planning committees. Participants provided examples such as the PBIS team (Positive Behavior and Intervention Support), SIT, the school leadership team, and the Compassionate Schools Team. “Placing the social worker in roles such as a member of the school based leadership team can be extremely helpful.” The purpose of this strategy is to improve culture and to help set expectations for staff. “Put the Social Worker on the school improvement team so that all major decisions are informed by the social worker lens.”

Providing authentic care, consulting with school staff, modeling, and relationships are additional themes for this question. These codes were interpreted as strategies that school social workers could implement to increase caring. There were 30 references to school social workers providing direct services to students and families. These references were coded as authentic care. Authentic care refers to the caring that exists in reciprocal relationships such as teachers and students (Courtney & Noblit, 1994; Noddings, 1984). “I believe that caring is shown as the social worker addresses the basic needs of students and their families. The social worker is the face of the school when they are working to address these basic needs.”

There were 17 references to school social workers building and maintaining relationships with students, parents, and teachers. According to participants, school social workers can build relationships by having lunch with students, taking an interest in their activities like Pokemon, meeting with students regularly, and talking with students about things such as graduation and their goals. Participants explained that school social workers could ensure that teachers are building positive relationships with students. “The social worker can also build relationships with parents that are hesitant to come to school for SST or IEP meetings.” The purpose of building relationships as a strategy is to increase academic success and to increase parent engagement. Also, the caring relationship serves as a vehicle for school social work practice to occur. “If she has not established those relationships in advance, her outreach might not be received well.”

The Social Worker can help students understand that there is a team of people working towards the ultimate goal of ensuring that they have a successful school-year. Even when the home-life is a struggle, it lets students know that school is their safe place, and they will be cared for, within the school building.

Finally, the school social worker can increase caring by consulting with staff and modeling caring behavior. There were eight references to consulting with staff. Participants described school social workers offering strategies for working with students, advocating for students, and participating in the Student Services Team process. “Offering ideas and intervention suggestions to help with issues from attendance to grades to social emotional. Any productive suggestions that are assisted in implementation can further the caring piece of any schools climate.” There were five references to school social workers modeling caring and compassion for other students. “He models caring for our staff and students for sure. He is a positive male role model who speaks kindly and coaches students in crisis or just in their day to day interactions with peers.” According to one participant modeling sets the tone for teachers and other people in the building.

### **Summative Statement**

In this study, the *Principals’ Perceptions of the Roles of School Social Workers Questionnaire* was used to explore North Carolina principals’ perceptions towards the role of school social workers. A web-based survey was utilized. Invitations were sent to 1,087 participants. Two hundred and ninety-two participants responded to the invitation. However, 281 surveys were analyzed, yielding a response rate of 26%. As a part of this study, the reliability of the questions on the survey was tested and the alpha coefficient for this administration of the *Principals’ Perceptions of the Roles of School Social Workers Questionnaire* was measured at .849.

Quantitative and qualitative analysis was performed to evaluate participants’ perceptions. Descriptive data regarding participants were evaluated as it relates to demographic data about the participants in this study, the context of principals’ experiences with school social workers and

their knowledge of the roles of these professionals. Also, descriptive statistics were conducted for RQ1 to define the importance of the roles of schools social workers as it relates to the educational success of students. In general, the majority of the participants have prior experience working with school social workers and expressed some understanding of the roles of school social workers. However, more information is needed. Also, principals attributed some level of importance to all 19 school social work tasks included in this study.

Inferential statistics were also conducted. For RQ1, Mann Whitney U tests and Kruskal Wallis H tests were conducted on the 19 common school social work roles to determine if statistically significant differences exist in principals' perceptions. The following independent variables were considered: race, gender, years of experience, prior experience with school social workers, grade span, and locale type. Every independent variable had at least one role with statistically significant differences except years of experience. For RQ2 through RQ7, the statistical tests were repeated to determine if statistically significant differences existed in principals' agreement with the statement that the most important role of school social workers is their contribution to the development of a caring school environment. Out of six research questions with hypotheses, only one hypothesis was supported. RQ4 hypothesized that principals' perceptions did not differ based on gender. RQ2 through RQ7 did not yield statistically significant findings.

Structural coding was performed to analyze four open-ended questions in the survey. Common themes and patterns discovered through the analysis supported the quantitative findings of the research questions. The results also offered new information about principals' perceptions.

In Chapter 5, the practical implications of these results will be discussed in more detail. Furthermore, limitations of this research and recommendations for future studies will be presented.



## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF RESULTS**

### **Introduction**

This chapter provides a summary of the results regarding North Carolina principals' perceptions of the roles of school social workers. It also discusses the implications of these results for principals, school social workers, and higher education (i.e., educational leadership programs and schools of social work). In addition, the chapter will discuss the limitations of this research and offer recommendations for future studies.

### **Summary of Study**

The primary question for this study concerns North Carolina public school principals' perceptions of the roles of school social workers and the extent to which exposure to school social workers impacts principals' perceptions toward the role. Also, the study seeks to understand if variables about the school and variables about the principal inform those perceptions as well.

The social work literature consists of a host of descriptive studies about the roles of school social workers (Costin, 1969; Allen-Meares, 1977; Allen-Meares, 1994; Kelly et al., 2010; Peckover, Vasquez, Van Housen, Saunders, & Allen, 2013; Richard & Villarreal Sosa, 2014; Staudt, 1991). These studies attempt to explain the role of school social workers, to generate a list of tasks completed by school social workers, and to recommend a service delivery model for the profession as perceived by school social workers (Allen-Meares, 1977; Allen-Meares, 1994; Kelly et al., 2010; Peckover et al., 2013; Richard & Villarreal Sosa, 2014; Staudt, 1991). Although principals influence which student services are offered in schools (Louis & Gordon, 2006), the

literature gives little attention to principals' contributions towards the development of school social work practice. Professionals from a variety of disciplines are required to operate a school and to meet the diverse needs presented by students. Principals must understand the roles and contributions of the various specialists assigned to schools. Reflecting on principals' perceptions and knowledge of the roles may expand the collaboration between the two groups and the strategic use of the role to support students.

### Research Design

Survey research methodology guided the data collection for this mixed methods study. A web-based survey, *Principals' Perceptions of the Roles of School Social Workers Questionnaire*, was administered. The cross-sectional survey contained 45 closed and open-ended questions. One thousand and eighty-seven principals assigned to public schools in North Carolina at all grade spans were invited to participate in this study. Of those, 281 surveys were analyzed, yielding a response rate of 26%.

The data were examined using descriptive statistics, inferential statistics, and qualitative analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to describe how principals define the importance of the role of school social workers as it relates to the educational success of students. Furthermore, Mann-Whitney U tests and Kruskal-Wallis H tests were conducted on the 19 common school social work roles to determine if statistically significant differences existed in principals' perceptions. The independent variables were: prior experience with school social workers, years of experience, gender, race, locale type, and grade span. The statistical tests were repeated to determine if differences in principals' attitude existed when examining their agreement with the statement that the most important role of school social workers is their contribution to the development of a caring school environment. Qualitative data analysis was used to take a closer

look at principals' perceptions. Structural coding was used to describe what principals consider to be the primary roles of school social workers, the value of school social work practice, principals' most salient experiences with school social workers, and how to utilize school social work practice to increase caring in schools. The EoC was used as a theoretical framework to frame this discussion.

### Limitations of Study

This study was limited to principals assigned to North Carolina public schools. As such the findings may not be generalizable to the entire population due to self-selection bias (Olsen, 2008). This occurs when respondents have total autonomy in deciding whether to participate in a study (Olsen, 2008). The researcher obtained approval from superintendents or their designee to invite principals to participate in this study. In turn, each principal was asked to provide active consent before completing the survey. Also, since the study only focused on North Carolina principals, the study may not be generalizable to other working contexts.

This study sought to compare and analyze the perceptions of principals with and without prior experience working with school social workers. Some districts indicated that approval was not granted because their district did not employ school social workers. The researcher also received emails from respondents who were willing to participate but needed clarification since their school did not provide social work services or they did not have prior experience working with school social workers. However, it is interesting to note that nearly 93% of respondents have prior experience and about 85% reported that school social work services are provided in a typical week. It is likely that some participants opted to participate based on their interest in the research topic, attributes about the study, or some other characteristic (Olsen, 2008). The researcher attempted to create a diverse sample by inviting every potential respondent available.

Future research designs should explore ways to randomly select participants to produce more generalizable findings and a more diverse sample. Even still, this may continue to be a challenge since there is no way for the researcher to know which principals have prior experience working with school social workers or not.

Another limitation is that the study was only interested in principals' perceptions of professionals with the title of school social worker. In the state of North Carolina, school social workers possess a minimum of a bachelor's degree in social work and are licensed by the NCDPI. In an interview with retired NCDPI Consultant, Chris Minard, she explained that school districts use a variety of job titles to refer to school social workers (March 30, 2015). This variation makes it difficult to track the status of school social workers in the state (C. Minard, personal communication, March 30, 2015). Furthermore, the requirement may have eliminated potential respondents for this survey.

## **Discussion of Results and Implications**

As a way to frame the discussion of the implications of the findings, this section will describe the context of principals' perceptions. Qualitative data were analyzed to explore the most prominent experiences that principals credit with influencing their perceptions of the role of school social workers. This section will also describe the value that principals attribute to school social work practice.

This study sought to test Tower's (2000) assertion that knowledge, prior experiences, and perceptions are positively correlated. In Tower's (2000) study, 8% of the participants had adequate exposure to school social workers, and 28% were knowledgeable of school social work tasks. According to Tower (2000), study participants with experience working with school social workers ranked the value of school social work services significantly higher than those

without. Even still, the study concluded that educators in Nevada have an attitude of “mild dislike/no action” towards schools social workers (Tower, 2000). To the contrary, 93% of the participants in this study reported having prior experience working with school social workers. Also, participants seemed to view the role of school social workers favorably as evidenced by participants’ perceptions of the importance of the role to student success. In this study, all social work roles were assigned some level of importance. Although the situations are reversed, the findings of this study seem to support Tower’s (2000) assumption.

Moreover, respondents were asked to describe prior experiences with school social workers that established their overall perception of the role of school social workers. Principals credited observations of authentic care between the school social worker and students and personal interactions with these professionals as changing their perception of the role. In particular, the quality of the school social work services provided in their school seemed to influence principals’ perceptions. Being a new administrator also changed principals’ perceptions. This is likely due to the fact that many leaders initially defined the roles of school social workers based on earlier experiences (internship or previous positions) and the most visible tasks (home visits, etc.) completed by these professionals (Louis & Gordon, 2006; Shoffner & Williamson, 2000; Tower, 2000; Williams & Wehrman, 2010). However, the administrative role created more opportunities for respondents to collaborate with school social workers and to observe these professionals within the larger context of the school rather than their classroom. Considering the large number of respondents that reported learning about the role from school social workers, it is logical that as principals’ exposure and collaboration with these professionals increased, their overall perceptions were impacted as well.

Generally speaking, the findings infer that principals find value in the role of school social workers. Respondents indicated that school social workers contribute to schools in a variety of ways. For example, they assist principals and teachers by offering their expertise and professional network to address the needs of students. Furthermore, principals indicated that having a school social worker available to address the social and emotional needs of students, allows principals and teachers to focus more time on the curriculum and instruction. The data also inferred that principals appreciate the assistance that school social workers provide to students. Respondents reported that school social work practice contributes to a safe and caring school environment, provides a caring adult that students can turn to for assistance, and addresses problems before they become crises. Although more research is needed, the literature indicates that school social work practice has a positive impact on the emotional, mental, behavioral, and academic outcomes of students (Allen-Meares et al., 2013; Franklin et al., 2009).

The availability of the school social worker was a consistent theme in this study. On average, North Carolina schools receive two and a half days of social work services per week. Overall, respondents have favorable perceptions of school social work practice; however, there appeared to be some frustration with the current allocation of service. The variety of tasks performed by school social workers combined with itinerate status impacts which roles are performed. The consensus was that more time is needed due to the nature of the work.

The qualitative data indicated that principals' perceptions of the role and the value of school social work practice are influenced by their prior experiences with these professionals. The research questions in this study attempted to determine if factors about the school and principals also impact their perceptions. Next, the results and implications for each research question will be discussed.

## Research Question 1

Research question one asked principals to use a four-point Likert scale to rate the importance of 19 common school social work tasks regarding their importance to the educational success of students. This question generated descriptive data. A hypothesis was not postulated. In this section, qualitative and quantitative findings are discussed to provide a comprehensive view of the role as defined by principals.

Respondents rated the following roles as most important: (1) providing crisis intervention and response (88.4%), (2) addressing barriers to regular school attendance (88%), (3) collaborating with the school-based Student Support Services Team (86.9%), (4) consulting with teachers and administrators about factors in the home, school, and/or community that impact school performance (81.9%), (5) maintaining accurate records (79.7%), (6) conducting home visits (77.8), (7) coordinating school and/or community services (75.1%), and (8) providing dropout prevention and intervention services (71.6%). The findings indicated that North Carolina principals define the role in terms of social casework and liaison activities. The North Carolina job description for school social workers also places more emphasis on social casework and liaison activities (NCDPI, 2008).

From the lens of an EoC, it is not surprising that principals defined the roles in this way. Relationships and attending to the needs of others are the primary moral concepts of the EoC (Beck & Cassidy, 2009; Noddings, 1984; Noddings, 2005a). Social casework focuses on the needs of individual students rather than target groups of students with similar problems (Costin, 1969; Allen-Meares, 1977; Peckover et al., 2013). Liaison activities focus on the connection between the home, the school, and the community as it relates to school performance.

According to Noddings (2005a), students have expressed and inferred needs. Expressed needs are those needs communicated by the student through words or behavior (Noddings, 2005a). Inferred needs are those needs expressed by educators on behalf of students (Noddings, 2005a). For example, schools expect students to demonstrate mastery of the curriculum as measured by standardized tests (Noddings, 2005a). On the other hand, students often express overwhelming needs such as hunger, pain, illness, and anxiety that interfere with learning (Noddings, 2005a). Attending to the expressed needs of students is an effective school improvement strategy because academic and social problems are connected (Beck & Cassidy, 2009; Noddings 2005a; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001). Failure to do so works against success in school (Noddings, 2005a). School social workers are tasked with providing services related to the academic, social, emotional, and behavioral needs of students. In other words, they address the expressed needs of students. Following this line of argument, school social workers are a powerful resource within schools.

This study supports the findings of previous studies. For example, serving as the liaison between the home, the school, and the community is considered to be one of the most important roles of school social workers (Costin, 1969; Allen-Meares, 1977; Allen-Meares, 1994; Peckover et al., 2013). It is also consistent with Staudt's (1991) finding that teachers, principals, and school social workers rank counseling, liaison activities, and consultation as most important to student outcomes. Bye et al. (2009) found that principals and school social workers identified increased school attendance and decreased behavior problems as the expected primary outcomes for school social work practice. The tasks identified by principals in this study will certainly support these outcomes.



The qualitative data also supports the quantitative findings in this study. Respondents defined the role in terms of social casework and home, school liaison activities. There was more emphasis on social casework. However, the quantitative findings ranked the individual school social work roles differently. The roles referenced most frequently in the qualitative data were: addressing barriers to regular school attendance (N = 35), address school needs by coordinating school and community services (N = 29), collaborate with the school-based Student Support Services Team to address barriers and /or problems with the educational process (N = 12), consulting with teachers and administrators about factors in the home, school, and/or community that impact school performance (N = 11), and address student needs by conducting home visits (N = 11). In contrast, the quantitative findings ranked providing crisis intervention and response and addressing barriers to regular school attendance, collaborate with the school-based Student Support Services Team to address barriers and/or problems with the educational process as the most important roles.

The qualitative data indicated that some principals consider offering support to parents to be an important role of school social workers. Participants described school social workers "Consult[ing] with parents about needs in the home," as well as "removing barriers for parent participation in school activities (access to transportation, childcare, etc.)." These references may be indicative of a role that principals would like to see more often. A study by Bye et al. (2009) found a statistically significant difference at the .05 level in principals' beliefs about increased parent involvement as an expected outcome of school social work. Eighty-three percent of school social workers believed that their services increased parental involvement compared to 50% of principals (Bye et al., 2009). Additional research may be warranted in this area.

According to the NC job description, school social workers “contribute to the development of a healthy, safe, and caring environment” (NCDPI, 2008). There were a few references to this in the qualitative data. Bye et al. (2009) studied principals’ and school social workers’ perspectives on school social work outcomes. In this study, administrators emphasized school social work’s positive impact on school climate in their written responses (Bye et al., 2009). This too may be an area of school social work practice that needs further exploration and discussion.

There were some statistically significant findings. In this study, principals’ perceptions of school social workers’ utilizing appropriate interventions to address barriers to regular school attendance and addressing student needs by conducting home visits were influenced positively. Principals with prior experience had higher perception scores than those without prior experience. These professionals began as visiting teachers during the 1906-1907 school year (Allen-Meares, 2010b; Phillippo & Blosser, 2013; Torres: 1996). Enforcing compulsory attendance laws and conducting home, school liaison activities such as home visits were the primary focus of the position at that time (Peckover et al., 2013). Although the role of school social workers has evolved, it is no wonder that these two roles continue to be a priority for the profession.

At first look, there appeared to be a statistically significant finding for the independent variable, years of experience. However, post hoc analysis demonstrated that the mean ranks were not that different. Considering the push for accountability in public schools, it is not surprising that years of experience did not impact principals’ perceptions of the school social workers’ role maintaining accurate case records to document services and outcomes. From the NCLB of 2002 to the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, school administrators are accustomed

to documenting outcomes and data-driven decision-making. School social workers should be expected to document their work too.

Statistically significant findings were present for five roles when gender was considered. Females have higher perception scores for the following roles: (1) report school social work outcomes to teachers and/or administrators, (2) collaborate with the school-based Student Support Services Team to address barriers and/or problems with the educational process, (3) address student needs by conducting home visits, (4) utilize appropriate interventions to address barriers to regular school attendance, and (5) maintain accurate case records to document services and outcomes. It is hard to speculate why these particular roles are more important to females than males. A qualitative study to explore and compare principals' rationales in their own words may be warranted.

Seven of the school social work roles had statistically significantly different perception scores based on race/ethnicity. Although the perception scores were statistically significant, four roles did not reveal any statistically significant pairwise comparisons for any group combination. Those roles are: conduct ongoing evaluations to determine the level of effectiveness of interventions, report school social work outcomes to teachers and/or administrators, address student needs by providing individual counseling, and address student needs by providing group counseling. Three school social work roles had significant pairwise comparisons. Those roles are: conduct assessments of the needs of systems/organizations (i.e., classrooms, schools, neighborhoods, state, district), address student needs by providing dropout prevention and intervention services, and plan programs to promote a caring school climate that fosters academic success. African Americans ranked all three roles higher than Whites.

It is interesting to note that principals' perceptions towards the roles mentioned above differ when race is considered. By comparison, the literature found that school social workers spent the least amount of time performing leadership roles such as program planning, serving on school committees, and improving school culture (Kelly et al., 2010; Peckover et al., 2013). It is possible that these three roles were ranked similarly due to the alignment of the roles. For example, school social workers could use the findings from conducting assessments of the needs of systems/organizations to plan programs to promote a caring school climate and education success. Dropout prevention and intervention services are a possible example of the program developed from needs assessments. As the role continues to evolve, it is possible that school social workers may find themselves performing these roles more frequently due to the influence of principals.

It is difficult to speculate why these particular roles were more important to African Americans than other groups; however, research indicates that African American women in educational leadership roles enact an EoC based on their personal experiences with discrimination and oppression (Bass 2009; Bass, 2012). These leaders tend to feel obligated to use their leadership role to promote social justice (Bass 2009; Bass, 2012). There is a long history of African American men and women such as W. E. B. Dubois, Booker T. Washington, Mary McLeod Bethune, and others fighting to uplift the African American race through education (Wilder, 1999). Perhaps this legacy and its emphasis on the collective impact of education is related to African Americans' statistically significantly differing perception of the following roles: address student needs by providing dropout prevention and intervention services and plan programs to promote a caring school climate that fosters academic success. A qualitative study to explore and compare principals' rationales could provide additional insight.

From another perspective, these roles (conduct assessments of the needs of systems/organizations (i.e., classrooms, schools, neighborhoods, state, district), address student needs by providing dropout prevention and intervention services, and plan programs to promote a caring school climate that fosters academic success) are similar to what Beck (1992) describes as activities of caring. The first activity is receiving the perspective of others (Beck, 1992). Conducting need assessments is one way to determine the needs and views of students and parents. The remaining activities are responding to the needs of others and remaining in the relationship as long as care is needed (Beck, 1992). Programs and services developed as a result of a needs assessment create a vehicle to respond to the needs of students for as long as care is needed. While this observation does not explain why African American principals ranked these particular roles higher than their White counterparts, it underscores the potential to utilize these roles to increase caring in schools.

Grade span impacts principals' perceptions of school social workers' role in addressing student needs by providing dropout prevention and intervention services, providing individual counseling, and utilizing appropriate intervention to address barriers to regular school attendance. For example, high school principals had statistically significantly higher perception scores than elementary school principals in regards to dropout prevention and intervention services. It is logical that dropout prevention/intervention and truancy are higher priorities for high school principals. These findings are likely influenced by the NC Compulsory Attendance law, which requires children aged seven to 16 to attend school regularly. In addition, high school students are required to attend school regularly to earn credits towards graduation. School social workers have typically played a key role in enforcing this legislation and working with students at-risk of school dropout.

Grade span also impacts principals' perceptions as it relates to school social workers' role with school attendance. Statistically significant differences were reported when school attendance was considered. Principals in elementary and middle schools had higher perception scores than principals assigned to schools designated as "other." The reader might recall, that "other" refers to schools with students across grade spans (i.e., Pre-K – 8, 6 – 8, etc.). Further analysis is needed to speculate why this difference occurred.

Finally, there was a statistically significant difference in principals' perceptions about school social workers conducting assessments of the needs of systems/organizations when locale type was considered. Principals assigned to schools located in cities had higher perception scores than principals in rural areas. This particular role is considered macro practice. This study has demonstrated that principals attach more importance to social casework and home school liaison activities. Generally speaking, urban areas have more access to community resources and public transportation when compared to rural areas. The findings may be related to the availability of support services in the school and the surrounding community. It could also be related to the itinerate status of school social workers which impacts how the job is performed. The more time a school social worker is available at one school, the more time he or she is available to perform social work at the macro or mezzo level rather focusing solely on the needs of individual students.

#### Research Questions 2 Through 7

According to the literature, principals can support learning for all students by implementing structures that counter the effects of social problems such as poverty, homelessness, and child maltreatment (Noddings, 1984; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001). Aesthetic caring is such a structure. This indirect form of caring directs principals to utilize constructs

such as school culture to create caring school environments that are supportive of students and teachers (Courtney & Noblit, 1994). School social workers are in a unique position to partner with principals to establish caring as a priority in schools (Adelman & Taylor, 2006; Kober & Usher, 2012; Louis & Gordon, 2006). Assuming that caring has a positive impact on student achievement, principals were asked to describe how the role of the school social worker could be used to increase caring in schools.

Respondents offered strategies for utilizing the role to increase caring. For instance, administrators should ensure that the school social worker is available to needy students and visible to all stakeholders. The principal could also place the school social worker on school-based committees such as PBIS and SIT. Last but not least, principals can encourage and provide opportunities for school social workers to collaborate with school staff as it relates to student achievement and to facilitate professional development on student-related issues. School social workers can also use their role to increase caring. Respondents advised that school social workers increased caring by providing direct services to students and their families. Other strategies include consulting with staff, modeling caring behavior, and developing relationships with students and staff.

Research questions two through seven analyzed principals' perceptions towards school social workers' role in the development of a caring school environment. These questions sought to determine if principals' perceptions differed when factors about the school (i.e., locale type, grade span) and factors about the principal (i.e., gender, race, years of experience, and prior experience with school social workers) were considered. The next section discusses the results and implications for each question.

### Research Question 2

Question two hypothesized that a difference exists in principals' perceptions towards the importance of school social workers' role in the development of a caring school environment when the principals' prior experience working with school social workers is considered. The hypothesis was not supported, and there were no statistically significant findings.

Towers' (2000) claim that knowledge and exposure have a positive impact on perceptions may explain this finding. In this study, 93% of the respondents had prior experience with school social workers. The majority of the respondents were knowledgeable of the role from a variety of sources. Principals reported learning about the role from school social workers, district office personnel, the school social worker job description, and school administration graduate programs. Other sources included the performance appraisal instrument, observations, DPI, common sense, and prior experience and training as a school counselor or school social worker. Assuming that Tower was correct, the fact that a small percentage of respondents did not have prior experience may be mitigated by their knowledge of the role from other sources.

### Research Question 3

Question three hypothesized that there is a difference in the principals' perceptions towards the importance of the school social workers' role in the development of a caring school environment when the principals' years of experience are considered. The hypothesis was not supported, and there were no statistically significant findings. It is surprising that years of experience do not indicate a difference in perceptions. Perhaps the findings are attributed to education and the legislation's focus on accountability and standardized testing as school improvement models. Although school climate is of critical importance, it may be a lower priority than other initiatives (Hopson & Lawson, 2011). It is also speculated that educational



leadership and social work programs give little attention to school climate (Hopson & Lawson, 2011). In particular, the authors asserted that the curriculum might not give enough emphasis to the development school climate or how to generate data to monitor and improve school climates (Hopson & Lawson, 2011). Last but not least, improving school climates can be a major undertaking that requires changing attitudes and behaviors of students, staff, and other stakeholders (Hopson & Lawson, 2011). Regardless of years of experience, many principals feel the urgency to increase test scores and graduation rates, and to decrease the achievement gap between subgroups.

#### Research Question 4

Question four hypothesized that there is no difference in principals' perceptions towards the importance of the school social workers' role in the development of a caring school environment when the principals' gender is considered. The hypothesis was supported. Although the findings were not statistically significant, it is not surprising that a difference did not exist. Gilligan introduced care ethics in the 1980s in response to a study by Lawrence Kohlberg (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001; Tronto, 1987). Kohlberg asserted that moral reasoning develops and manifests differently in males and females (Noddings, 2013; Tronto, 1987). Gilligan refuted those findings and established care ethics as a feminist theory (Noddings, 2013; Tronto, 1987). Tronto deconstructed this notion and argued that Gilligan did not present enough evidence to declare a gender difference as it relates to caring (1987).

#### Research Question 5

Question five hypothesized that there is a difference in the principals' perceptions towards the importance of the school social workers' role in the development of a caring school

environment when the principals' race is considered. The hypothesis was not supported. There were no statistically significant findings.

The researcher speculated that African American leaders might prioritize caring differently than other groups. Trend data indicate that African American students are lagging behind their White counterparts as it relates to academic achievement and graduation rates for a variety of reasons. African American students are also suspended from school at higher rates than their peers. As such, the researcher speculated that African American principals might empathize with students based on their prior experiences and their marginalized status in society (Bass, 2012; Wilder, 1999). For instance, it is suggested that African American women in educational leadership roles enact an ethic of caring through the lens of their oppression (Bass 2009; Bass, 2012). Furthermore, personal experiences of discrimination or oppression increase one's sensitivity to the oppression faced by others (Bass 2009; Bass, 2012). In turn, these same women might also feel an obligation to uplift the race and approach their work from the perspective of collective impact (Bass, 2009; Bass, 2012; Wilder, 1999). According to Noddings (1984), an EoC also emphasizes the moral obligation of individuals to address the needs of others. Some studies indicate that African American women leaders in education feel this obligation so strongly that at times they put themselves at risk for the sake of social justice (Bass 2009; Bass, 2012). Regardless of race, Beck (1992) explains that at times caring leaders place the needs of students and teachers over policies and mandates. Based on the literature mentioned above, the findings for this particular research question were surprising.

#### Research Question 6

Question six hypothesized that there is a difference in the principals' perceptions towards the importance of the school social workers' role in the development of a caring school

environment when the grade span of the school is considered. The hypothesis was not supported. The researcher speculated that the varying needs of students across grade spans could impact principals' perceptions. For example, the structure of elementary schools and secondary schools are very different. Compared to secondary schools, elementary schools are typically smaller, and students spend the majority of the school day with one teacher (Lester & Cross, 2011). At the secondary level, students have more independence, and they move between classes and teachers over the course of the school day (Lester & Cross, 2011). The school size, the increasing level of student independence associated with secondary schools, the importance of peer relationships, and normal teenage angst underscore the necessity for a positive school climate at the secondary level. However, there were no statistically significant findings in this study to indicate a difference in principals' perceptions. While student needs may differ by grade span, perhaps the relative importance of a caring school environment does not change.

#### Research Question 7

Question seven hypothesized that there is a difference in the principals' perceptions towards the importance of the school social workers' role in the development of a caring school environment when the locale type of the school is considered. The hypothesis was not supported. Again, the researcher speculated that the unique characteristics and challenges of each locale type would impact principals' perceptions. For instance, rural areas may have issues related to transportation and the availability of community resources. However, there were no statistically significant findings. The findings may underscore the importance of a caring school environment in every building regardless of the locale type.

#### **Overall Meaning**

Based on the study results discussed, the overall meaning of this study is as follows:

1. Prior experiences with school social workers impact principals' perceptions of the role.
2. North Carolina principals define the role of school social workers in terms of social casework and home school liaison activities.
3. In most cases, principals do not hire North Carolina school social workers.
4. Principals' perceptions differed based on the grade span served at the school. Principals assigned to high schools had higher perception scores for the role, address student needs by providing dropout prevention and intervention services than elementary school principals. Elementary and middle school principals had higher perception scores for the role; utilize appropriate interventions to address barriers to regular school attendance, than schools designated as "other."
5. Principals' perceptions differed based on prior experience with school social workers. Principals with prior experience had higher perception scores for the following roles: address student needs by conducting home visits and utilize appropriate interventions to address barriers to regular school attendance.
6. Principals' perceptions differed based on gender. Women had higher perception scores for the following roles: report school social work outcomes to teachers and/or administrators, collaborate with the school-based Student Support Services Team to address barriers and/or problems with the educational process, address student needs by conducting home visits, utilize appropriate interventions to address barriers to regular school attendance, and maintain accurate case records to document services and outcomes.
7. Principals' perceptions differed based on race. African Americans had higher perception scores for the following roles than Whites: conduct assessments of the needs of

systems/organizations (i.e., classrooms, schools, neighborhoods, state, district), address student needs by providing dropout prevention and intervention services, and plan programs to promote a caring school climate that fosters academic success.

8. Principals' perceptions differed based on the locale type of the school. Principals assigned to schools located in cities had higher perception scores for the role, conduct assessments of the needs of systems/organizations (i.e., classrooms, schools, neighborhoods, state, district), than principals located in rural areas.

The reader might recall that previous national and statewide studies inferred that school social workers tend to focus on the needs of individual students through social casework and liaison activities (Allen-Meares, 1977, 1994; Costin, 1969; Kelly et al., 2010; Peckover et al., 2013). In addition, Allen-Meares (1977, 1994) found that school size impacts the level of importance that school social workers assigned to tasks. In a study of school social work practice in Tennessee, Dupper et al. (2014) found that geographic location impacts which roles are performed by school social workers. It is important to note that the referenced studies focused on the perspectives of school social workers whereas this study focused on the perspectives of school principals. Even still, the findings of this study indicate that school social work practice in North Carolina is reflective of national trends. School social work practice is defined in terms of social casework and liaison activities, and factors about the school impact the level of importance assigned to school social work roles.

### **Implications for Stakeholders**

The role of the school principal has evolved from head teacher to manager of school operations, to instructional leader (Brown, 2011). In addition, principals must manage a system of student support services to meet the diverse needs of students (Higy et al., 2012). To do so,

the principal must understand how these services contribute to the overall mission of the school (Higy et al., 2012). The majority of the participants (84.7%) in this study reported that school social work services were available on a weekly basis. This study utilized mixed methodology to examine the differences in principals' perceptions towards the roles of school social workers when factors about the school and the principal were considered. The study also attempted to define the role from the perspective of school principals. The next section outlines the implications for principals, school social workers, and institutions of higher learning.

#### Availability of School Social Workers

One implication is related to the availability of school social workers. Availability was a common theme in the qualitative data. Respondents indicated that they would like to receive more social work services. On average, schools received 2.56 days of social work services per week ( $SD = 1.64$ ). Respondents also indicated that the availability of the school social worker impacted which roles were performed or not. It is also notable that only 28.1% of the respondents in this study were responsible for hiring the school social worker assigned to their school. This finding indicates that school social workers are most likely hired by someone at the district office and assigned to schools.

Descriptive statistics demonstrated that 79.7% of respondents rated the role, maintain accurate case records to document services and outcomes, as very important to the educational success of students. Another 18.5% described the role as moderately important. Principals and school social workers could collaborate to collect, interpret, and share this data with relevant stakeholders. In an era of tight fiscal budgets and accountability, principals will likely need to demonstrate both the need and the effectiveness of school social work services to convince

district leaders to increase the current allocation. The data could also be used to justify the use of Title I funds to increase the allocation.

School social workers would likely agree with principals' perceptions in this area. The reader might recall from the literature review that Teasley et al. (2012) examined barriers and facilitators to school social work practice. School social workers identified time and caseload as the most frequent barriers to practice (Teasley et al., 2012). The authors interpreted time to mean time to work with clients, staff availability, and/or the size of the caseload (Teasley et al., 2012). In this study, principals emphasized the amount of time that school social workers are assigned to their schools and the impact of their availability on the services provided.

The needs of students are not contingent upon the availability of the school social worker. For this reason, principals and school social workers may benefit from collaborating to develop an individual service plan to outline the role of the school social worker (Staudt, 1991). As noted in this study, principals' perceptions vary based on factors about the school and the principal. The implementation of individual service plans could foster role clarity and reasonable expectations. Individual service plans should be updated annually and supported with data collected from the services and outcomes of school social work practice. In turn, the plan serves as a tool for ongoing communication between principals and school social workers regarding the strategic use of the role to support the most pressing needs of students.

#### Principal Knowledge of the Roles of School Social Workers

Another implication of this study is related to principals' knowledge and awareness of the roles of school social workers. Principals learn about the roles of school social workers from a variety of sources. The majority of the respondents (N = 281) learned about the role from school social workers (82.9%), district office personnel (74.7%), and the school social worker job

description (55.2%). A small percentage of respondents (17.4%) learned about the role through their school administration graduate program.

When discussing curriculum content, English (2010) encourages educators to disrupt the socioeconomic status quo. More specifically, he advises the reader to deconstruct the curriculum content by examining what is explicitly stated in the curriculum as well as what is missing (English, 2010). The information provided by educational leadership programs may be limited as it relates to student services professionals. A study conducted by Hess and Kelly (2005) examined the course syllabi of 31 elite and mainstream schools to determine what leadership programs are teaching. The authors found that 30% of the class sessions focused on school law, school finance, and facility management (Hess & Kelly, 2005). Managing for results (16%), managing personnel (15%), and norms and values (12%) were the other most frequently addressed topics (Hess & Kelly, 2005). In both elite and mainstream programs, principals received little training in critical areas such as: working with data, technology, hiring and dismissing personnel, and research (Hess & Kelly, 2005). In addition, many texts used in educational leadership programs do not address the roles of student services professionals in school improvement (Louis & Gordon, 2006; Shoffner & Williamson, 2000; Williams & Wehrman, 2010). Also, Geltner and Shelton (1991) stated that educational leadership programs do not train school leaders to assign, utilize, supervise, or evaluate student support services professionals.

The literature and the findings support the researcher's assumption that more information about the roles of school social workers is needed. Fifty-four percent of the respondents (N = 279) agreed somewhat, whereas 14.6% agreed strongly that more information is needed. Nearly one-third (31%) expressed some level of disagreement with this idea. Leadership programs



should assist principals in developing a deeper awareness of the roles of school social workers and other student support services professionals. As noted in the literature review, research documents that effective school social work practice contributes positively to the academic success of students (Allen-Meares et al., 2013; Alvarez et al., 2013). In as much as leadership preparation programs provide clarity about supervising teachers and implementing instructional practices, the same is required for student services professionals (Geltner & Shelton, 1991). An increased awareness may empower principals to leverage the use of these positions to promote student achievement. In addition, it may foster creative thinking about the utilization of school social workers to their fullest potential (Holtzman, Dukes, & Page, 2012).

### Interdisciplinary Collaboration

The EoC encourages school administrators to structure schools to foster collaboration between professionals and ongoing communication between all stakeholders (Beck, 1992). Likewise, an additional implication of this study is the need for interdisciplinary collaboration. As mentioned previously, principals would like more information about the roles of school social workers. Furthermore, more than half (58.4%) of the respondents indicated that they understand the roles fairly well, while 33.1% felt they understand the roles very well. Others indicated that they do not understand the role very well (8.2%). Also, as noted earlier, only a small percentage of the respondents learned about school social workers through their graduate studies. Incorporating interdisciplinary collaboration into graduate programs is one way to increase principals' knowledge and appreciation for student services professionals such as school social workers.

Schools of Social Work and Education could use these findings to implement collaborative practices that prepare principals and school social workers for successful

interdisciplinary practice and increased appreciation for the wide array of roles that are needed in the school setting. The purpose of the approach is to accomplish a common goal that cannot be successfully obtained by a single discipline (Gropper & Shepard-Tew, 2000). It is a team-oriented process that makes the most of the diversity of knowledge and resources provided by each profession (Agostino, 2013; Deloach et al., 2012; Quealy-Berge & Caldwell, 2004). Continuous communication across professions, reciprocal respect for each discipline, role clarification, and a shared agenda are critical components of this approach (Agostino, 2013; Argresta, 2004; Deloatch et al., 2012; Gropper & Shepard-Tew, 2000; Gibelman, 1993; Humes & Hohenshil, 1987; Radin & Welsh, 1984; Shear, 1965). The benefits for students and parents are expanded services and increased efficiency (Adelman & Taylor, 2006; Gropper & Shepard-Tew, 2000).

Some universities have pursued innovative practices to increase interdisciplinary collaboration and the partnership between school administrators and school social workers. As noted in the literature review, the University of North Carolina at Pembroke (UNCP) surveyed graduate students in the masters of school administration (MSA) program to explore their perceptions of the roles of school social workers (Higy et al., 2012). The study found that the MSA interns did not have accurate perceptions of the roles or how school social workers allocate their time to complete various tasks (Higy et al., 2012). Based on these findings, the authors recommended that school administrators and school social workers begin their collaborative relationship at the pre-service level (Higy et al., 2012). The following activities were recommended to foster collaboration: incorporating case studies and role plays into class discussions that allow students to work through the scenarios as a team, and exposure between both groups while in the field placement (Higy et al., 2012).

Boston College developed a model to jointly train graduate students for collaborative rather than parallel practice in the school setting (Tourse, Mooney, Kline, & Davoren, 2005). Parallel practice refers to the tendency of teachers and school social workers to discuss issues concerning students while working individually to address the concern (Tourse et al., 2005). The two graduate schools (i.e., social work and education) placed pairs of students in field placements at a local school. In addition, the interns participated in combined activities such as supervision and a practicum seminar (Tourse et al., 2005). The supervisors also met without the interns to discuss the blended paradigms and the joint field placement and supervision (Tourse et al., 2005). Boston College reported positive outcomes for the social work and education interns, the school staff, and the students (Tourse et al., 2005).

The School of Education at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) also implemented collaborative practices to improve the relationships and perceptions between principals and student services professionals (Shoffner & Williamson, 2000). The Department of Counseling and Educational Development and the Department of Educational Leadership and Cultural Foundations designed a seminar for counseling and MSA interns (Shoffner & Williamson, 2000). Faculty from both departments taught the seminar (Shoffner & Williamson, 2000). The course involved joint and separate meetings (Shoffner & Williamson, 2000). Topics of discussion included: roles, expectations, standards, and areas of potential conflict (Shoffner & Williamson, 2000). The seminar also included opportunities for joint problem solving of case studies (Shoffner & Williamson, 2000).

Like Boston College and UNCG, Rhode Island College implemented a course to increase interdisciplinary collaboration amongst graduate students (Holtzman, Dukes, & Page, 2012). The course, Interdisciplinary School Leadership Development, was developed for graduate

students training to become principals, school psychologists, and school counselors (Holtzman, Dukes, & Page, 2012). The course utilized techniques such as theoretical discussion, experiential learning, case-based learning, and “crucial conversations” (Holtzman, Dukes, & Page, 2012). The course consisted of three sessions (Holtzman, Dukes, & Page, 2012). According to the authors, students responded positively to the course (Holtzman, Dukes, & Page, 2012). Students appreciated learning about the roles of other professions, understanding how other professions view problems, and building relationships with students outside of their respective disciplines (Holtzman, Dukes, & Page, 2012). Last but not least, the authors found that an increased understanding of the roles and contributions of other disciplines increased student’s capacity to think creatively about the use of various professionals in the school setting (Holtzman, Dukes, & Page, 2012).

Although more research is needed, the strategies listed above provide a starting point for interdisciplinary practice at the graduate level. Schools of Education and Social Work could model the collaboration they would like to see in schools. Incorporating these practices may produce a better-prepared principal and school social worker for the 21<sup>st</sup> century and more comprehensive services for students (Shoffner & Williamson, 2000).

### **For Further Study**

In this researcher’s opinion, principals’ perception of the roles of school social workers is a viable concept for further exploration. Increased understanding may unlock ways to leverage the role in supporting student success. Based on the findings and implications of this study, there are several directions in which future studies may venture. The next section outlines ideas for further study.

A logical next step for this study would be to replicate the study with North Carolina school social workers. The findings could be compared and contrasted to determine similarities and differences in principals' and school social workers' perceptions. This study asserts that principals and school social workers should have similar beliefs about the role. Further study to include the perspectives of school social workers would further define the role of school social workers in North Carolina.

It appears that school social workers are hired and assigned to schools by district office personnel. Generally speaking, principals would like to see an increase in school social work services. On average, the schools in this study receive 2.5 days of service per week. Another possible study would be to determine how district office personnel allocate services and their perceptions about the role. More specifically, which factors influence the amount of time allocated to schools and their perceptions of the amount of time school social workers spend completing common social work tasks. For example, some districts employ district office personnel with social work experience to offer support, consultation, and technical assistance to principals and school social workers. The findings may assist principals in their advocacy for more service and district office personnel in their quest to allocate services equitably.

Again, only 28% of the participants in this study are responsible for hiring, and 44.5% are responsible for evaluating the school social worker assigned to their school. The literature indicates that principals are influential in deciding which services are provided in their school. The authority to hire and evaluate the school social worker may impact the principals' beliefs about how the role is defined. It is worthwhile to determine if principals' perceptions of the role change when hiring and evaluation are considered.

Another potential direction for future study might be to explore school social workers' role with parental involvement. The qualitative data demonstrated that principals consider parental support to be a role of the school social worker. However, the literature review indicates a disparity in the beliefs of school social workers and principals as it relates to this topic (Bye et al., 2009). Further study could examine how each group defines parental involvement and which social work activities lead to increased parental involvement.

Finally, this study references the contributions of school social workers towards the development of a caring school environment. One principal described everything the school social worker does as "caring." Inferential statistics did not reveal a statistically significant difference in principals' perceptions regarding the school social workers' contribution to the development of a caring school environment when factors about the school and the principals were considered. The North Carolina job description and the literature review also speculate that school social workers contribute to a safe and caring school environment (NCDPI, 2008; Bye et al., 2009). From the lens of an EoC, the human aspects of education are a priority. Assuming that Beck's (1992) claim that creating a positive school climate is a viable school improvement strategy is true, it would be worthwhile to further examine school social workers' contributions to a caring school environment. For example, a New Zealand study reported that enhancing the health and welfare services for students led to an improved school climate for teachers and students (Anderson, Thomas, Moore, & Kool, 2008). Also, an Australian study found that school climate factors are both predictive and protective factors for the mental and emotional well-being of students (Lester & Cross, 2015). In addition, Hopson and Lawson (2011) asserted that improving school climates is challenging work and that university programs do not adequately train principals or school social workers on how to implement or monitor its impact.

Further study could exemplify ways that principals can leverage the role of the school social worker to increase caring in schools to support student success and principals' knowledge of school climate.

### **Closing Statement**

This study examined principals' perceptions of the roles of school social workers. The researcher believed that factors about the school and the principal influence those perceptions. In this study, this was true for certain roles of the school social worker. In addition, the study findings defined the role from the perspective of school principals as it relates to the importance of common school social work tasks to the educational success of students. Principals defined the role in terms of social casework and liaison activities. Participants also provided useful information about the context of school social work practice from the perspective of principals. For instance, participants provided strategies that principals and school social workers can implement to increase caring in schools. The researcher hopes that institutions of higher learning will use these findings to better prepare principals to leverage the role of school social workers for student success and, furthermore, that principals and school social workers will use the findings to strengthen their partnership to support students.

## **APPENDIX 1: NORTH CAROLINA SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKER JOB DESCRIPTION**

### **SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKER STUDENT SERVICES JOB DESCRIPTION**

**POSITION:** School Social Worker

**REPORTS TO:** Supervisor of School Social Work or Appropriate Administrator

**PURPOSE:** The School Social Worker promotes and enhances the overall academic mission by providing services that strengthen home, school, and community partnerships and address barriers to learning and achievement. The School Social Worker significantly contributes to the development of a healthy, safe, and caring environment. Such an environment is achieved by advancing the understanding of the emotional and social development of children and the influences of family, community, and cultural differences on student success along with the implementation of effective intervention strategies.

The major functions of the school social worker job description incorporate the North Carolina State Board of Education guiding mission that every public school student will graduate from high school globally competitive for work and postsecondary education and prepared for life in the twenty-first century.

#### **DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

The School Social Worker's principle task is to empower students, families, and school personnel to access available opportunities and resources that develop each student's potential. Integrated into all major functions are home, school, community assimilation; diversity and cultural competence; dropout prevention; graduation awareness; and adherence to federal and state statutes, professional development and practices, School Social Work Standards and the National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics.

1. **MAJOR FUNCTION: Assessment of Student, Family, and School Needs**  
Effectively and appropriately assesses and addresses the needs, characteristics, and interactions of students, families, LEA personnel, and community.

- 1.1 Conducts assessments and evaluations in accordance with family and student rights.

- 1.2 Uses student, family, and school assessment results to identify needs that affect student learning.



- 1.3 Uses assessment and evaluation results to develop appropriate interventions for students, families, schools, and communities.
- 1.4 Develops long-term and short-term intervention plans consistent with curriculum; students' needs, strengths, diversity and life experiences; and social and emotional factors.
- 1.5 Uses a variety of appropriate formal and informal tools and techniques including observations and interviews to evaluate the progress and performance of students and families.
- 1.6 Addresses the needs of the school, student, families, and community by collaborating with the Student Support Services Team to design a holistic approach to any barriers or problems with the educational process.
2. **MAJOR FUNCTION: Direct Services/Service Delivery**  
 Uses knowledge and understanding of the reciprocal influences of home, school, and community to intervene for student success via such practices as assessment, crisis intervention and response, home visits, conflict resolution, individual and group counseling, consultation, program development, dropout prevention, graduation awareness, and coordination of school and community services.
  - 2.1 Promotes family support of students' learning experience within the context of multicultural understanding and competencies.
  - 2.2 Provides services to students in ways that build upon individual strengths and offers students maximum opportunities to participate in the planning and direction of their own learning experience.
  - 2.3 Develops and provides training and educational programs that address the goals and mission of the educational institution.
3. **MAJOR FUNCTION: Advocacy**  
 Advocates for appropriate services for students and their families.
  - 3.1 Advocates and facilitates change that effectively responds to the needs of students, families, and school systems using appropriate statutes, case law, policies, and procedures.
  - 3.2 Promotes services to students and their families within the context of multicultural understanding and competence that enhances families' support of students learning experiences.
  - 3.3 Assists students and their families in gaining access to formal and informal community resources.

- 3.4 Utilizes research and technologies to assist students, families, schools, and communities.
4. **MAJOR FUNCTION: Consultation and Collaboration**  
Consults and collaborates with stakeholders on behalf of students and their families.
- 4.1 Consults with stakeholders to facilitate an understanding of factors in the home, local education agency, and community that affect students' educational experiences.
- 4.2 Consults on such issues as attendance, diversity, mental health, behavior management, delinquency, crisis intervention, homelessness, child abuse, neglect, and the importance of confidentiality.
- 4.3 Initiates and supports activities to overcome institutional barriers and gaps in services as leaders and members of interdisciplinary teams with the unique contribution of bringing the home, school, and community perspective to the interdisciplinary process.
- 4.4 Works with internal and external individuals, groups, and organizations to develop programs or systems of care that support and enhance the health, social and emotional well-being, and safety of students.
- 4.5 Promotes collaboration among community health and mental health service providers and facilitates student access to these services.
- 4.6 Uses extensive knowledge of community resources, enabling the school social worker to play a critical role in facilitating the provision of community services in the local education agency.
- 4.7 Helps to build effective school-community teams and orients community providers to school climate, culture, structure, and to the laws and regulations governing practice in educational settings.
5. **MAJOR FUNCTION: Program Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation**  
Effectively plans, implements, and evaluates programs that promote student and family success.
- 5.1 Applies knowledge of environmental factors in planning programs.
- 5.2 Conducts individual and/or system-wide surveys to assess the school and/or community needs.
- 5.3 Plans school and/or system-wide programs to promote a safe, healthy, caring school climate that fosters academic success.

- 5.4 Assists the school and community in planning programs that alleviate situations that may interfere with the learning process of students.
- 5.5 Assists in the evaluation of effective departmental, school-based, system, community, and statewide programs.
- 6. MAJOR FUNCTION: Accountability  
Advocates, facilitates, and contributes to School Social Worker accountability for outcomes aligned with local, state, and federal policies and guidelines.
  - 6.1 Conforms to the National Association of Social Work (NASW) Code of Ethics and Standards for School Social Work practice.
  - 6.2 Maintains accurate case records and documentation.
  - 6.3 Maintains current knowledge of federal and state laws and regulations and abides by said laws and regulations with emphasis on persons with disabilities, child welfare, mental health, confidentiality, and student and parent rights.
  - 6.4 Organizes time, resources, energy, and workload in order to meet responsibilities.
  - 6.5 Evaluates own practice and disseminates the findings to consumers, school districts, the community, and the profession in order to maximize the effectiveness of services and resources provided to students. By reflecting upon and evaluating one's practice, more effective services, and resources will be provided.
  - 6.6 Participates in appropriate professional development activities to improve knowledge and skills.

#### Reference

Bye, L. & Alvarez, M. E. (2006). *School Social Work: Theory to practice*. California: Thompson/Brooks/Cole.

## **APPENDIX 2: NASW STANDARDS FOR SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK SERVICES**

### **Standards**

#### **Standard 1. Ethics and Values**

School social workers shall adhere to the ethics and values of the social work profession and shall use the NASW Code of Ethics as a guide to ethical decision-making, while understanding the unique aspects of school social work practice and the needs of the students, parents, and communities they serve.

#### **Interpretation**

School social workers shall demonstrate core values of service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence. In addition, school social workers shall adhere to the professional ethical responsibilities delineated in the NASW Code of Ethics.

School social workers shall have knowledge of and comply with local, state, and federal mandates related to informed consent, privacy and confidentiality, and access to records within the context of legal and ethical rights of minors and parents. Students, families, and other professionals shall be informed of the limits of confidentiality when services are initiated. Employers and school administrators should be informed of the ethical responsibilities of the social work profession. In the event that conflicts arise among competing expectations, school social workers are directed to the NASW Code of Ethics as a tool in their decision-making.

#### **Standard 2. Qualifications**

School social workers shall meet the provisions for professional practice set by NASW and their respective state department of education and possess knowledge and understanding basic to the social work profession as well as the local education system.

#### **Interpretation**

School social workers shall have a graduate degree in social work from a program accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). An MSW degree is the recommended entry-level qualification for a school social worker position. As a distinct specialty within the social work profession, school social work requires specialized knowledge and understanding of education systems, which should be provided by social work education programs. The school social worker shall actively seek this specialized training when the CSWE accredited program does not provide it. School social workers shall be licensed by state boards of social work and certified through state departments of education when available.

School social workers shall have specialized knowledge and an understanding of historical and current perspectives of public school education at the local, state, and national levels, including educational reform and legislation. School social workers shall also be knowledgeable about evidence-informed approaches to teaching and learning that promote positive academic outcomes for all students.

**Standard 3. Assessment**

School social workers shall conduct assessments of individuals, families and systems/organizations (namely, classroom, school, neighborhood, district, state) with the goal of improving student social, emotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes.

**Interpretation**

School social workers shall possess skills in systematic assessment, data gathering, and interpretation at multiple levels using a variety of methods (for example, interview, direct observation, standardized instruments, surveys, focus groups) to assess the needs, characteristics, and interactions of students, families, and school personnel. School social workers shall conduct reliable and valid assessments of students and organizations to inform the design of interventions to remove barriers to learning. Assessments shall use ecological perspectives and functional approaches to enhance understanding of barriers to learning and the interventions that foster improvement of student well-being and academic progress.

**Standard 4. Intervention**

School social workers shall understand and use evidence-informed practices in their interventions.

**Interpretation**

School social workers shall remain current with school-based intervention research and use evidence-informed practices in service delivery. Interventions shall be designed to enhance positive educational experiences and involve the student, the family, other team members, school personnel, and community resources as appropriate. Interventions shall be based on assessments relevant to the concerns in the referral and include goals, objectives, methods of evaluation, and outcome criteria. Interventions shall be applied within the multitier framework and address the ecologies (for example, home, school, community) most relevant to the problem being addressed.

**Standard 5. Decision Making and Practice Evaluation**

School social workers shall use data to guide service delivery and to evaluate their practice regularly to improve and expand services.

**Interpretation**

School social workers shall collect, analyze, synthesize, and disseminate data related to their practice. School social workers shall conduct ongoing evaluation to determine the level of effectiveness of all interventions. Methods used to evaluate social work practice shall be assessed periodically to ensure that objectives, activities, and measured outcomes are aligned with the local education agency's goals and social work ethical practice.

**Standard 6. Record Keeping**

School social workers shall maintain accurate data and records that are relevant to planning, implementation, and evaluation of school social work services.

**Interpretation**

School social workers shall maintain timely, accurate, and confidential records that document school social work services, demonstrate outcomes, and promote accountability to the local education agency and community. Records shall be maintained according to federal, state, and local laws.

**Standard 7. Workload Management**

School social workers shall organize their workloads to fulfill their responsibilities and clarify their critical roles within the educational mission of the school or district in which they work.

**Interpretation**

School social workers shall manage their work in an efficient and effective manner. Priorities for practice shall be developed collaboratively between the school social worker and the supervisor. Priorities shall be established on the basis of the needs of students, professional skills of the school social worker, program needs, research, and availability of other resources. School social workers shall perform roles and responsibilities across a multitier framework for service delivery and use technology to enhance communication, obtain and organize information, demonstrate accountability, and complete workload assignments.

**Standard 8. Professional Development**

School social workers shall pursue continuous enhancement of knowledge and skills to provide the most current, beneficial, and culturally appropriate services to students and their families.

**Interpretation**

School social workers shall adhere to the NASW Standards for Continuing Professional Education and follow state professional regulation regarding continuing education requirements. School social workers shall access ongoing supervision and consultation to increase their professional proficiency and competence. School social workers shall participate in professional development activities that enhance their knowledge and skills. School social workers shall also contribute to the development of the profession by educating and supervising school social work interns when possible.

**Standard 9. Cultural Competence**

School social workers shall ensure that students and their families are provided services within the context of multicultural understanding and competence.

**Interpretation**

School social workers shall demonstrate self awareness, knowledge, and practice skills consistent with the NASW Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice. School social workers shall continue to develop specialized knowledge and understanding about client groups they serve and culturally appropriate resources. This understanding shall be applied in a manner that results in a positive school climate that respects and values differences. School social workers shall use evidence-informed practices, skills, and techniques that reflect the worker's understanding of the role of culture in the helping process. School social workers shall recognize barriers to academic progress relating to cultural issues within the local education

agency, while supporting an environment that honors and celebrates the cultures of the population within the school.

**Standard 10. Interdisciplinary Leadership and Collaboration**

School social workers shall provide leadership in developing a positive school climate and work collaboratively with school administration, school personnel, family members, and community professionals as appropriate to increase accessibility and effectiveness of services.

**Interpretation**

School social workers shall serve as leaders and consultants in promoting positive school climate. School social workers shall also serve as leaders and consultants to facilitate an understanding of factors in the home, school and community that affect students' educational experiences. School social workers shall provide training and engage parents, school personnel, other professionals and community members in the removal of barriers to learning. School social workers shall also provide leadership and collaboration in the implementation of comprehensive school-based and school-linked programs that promote student well-being and positive academic outcomes.

**Standard 11. Advocacy**

School social workers shall engage in advocacy that seeks to ensure that all students have equal access to education and services to enhance their academic progress.

**Interpretation**

School social workers shall advocate for students and their families. This advocacy includes helping them gain access to and effectively use formal and informal community resources that enable families to self-advocate. School social workers, as systems' change agents, shall identify areas of need that are not being addressed by the local education agency and community and shall work to create services that address these needs. School social workers shall be informed about court decisions, legislation, rules and regulations, and policies and procedures that affect school social work practice, to effectively advocate for students.

**Reference**

National Association of Social Workers (NASW) (2012). *NASW standards for school social work services*. Retrieved from <http://www.socialworkers.org/practice/standards/NASWSchoolSocialWorkStandards.pdf>.

### APPENDIX 3: LETTER OF PRIOR NOTICE AND FOLLOW-UP LETTERS

#### Letter of Prior Notification

Deirdre Natasha Scott, Ed.S., MSW  
UNC Chapel Hill – Doctoral Candidate  
[dnscott@live.unc.edu](mailto:dnscott@live.unc.edu)

June 26, 2016

Dear «Name»,

I am a doctoral candidate in Educational Leadership at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill (UNC). I am requesting your participation in a study entitled, North Carolina Principals' Perceptions of the Roles of School Social Workers. You were selected based on your assignment to a NC public school designated as Regular, Alternative, or Exceptional Children. Your participation in this important study is greatly appreciated.

On July 5, 2016, you will receive an email inviting you to complete a brief online survey. The email will contain a link that takes you directly to the survey. It will take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. You will have access to the survey for 6 weeks. If you choose to complete the survey, you will have the opportunity to enter your email address into a drawing for the chance to win one of five \$25 Amazon electronic gift cards. The gift card will be provided via the email address provided. The winners of the gift cards will be selected and notified within eight weeks. All email addresses will be deleted after all gift cards are distributed.

**Purpose.** The goal of this study is to improve role clarity for school social workers by understanding North Carolina principals' perceptions of the roles of school social workers. The survey collects demographic data to aid the researcher in making comparisons. The survey also asks you to share your experiences working with school social workers and to rate the importance of common school social work tasks to educational success.

**Confidentiality and Risk.** The information you provide will be handled confidentially. Your information will be assigned a code number. Data about your school (grade span, locale type, and school type) are connected to your code number. The list connecting your school name to this code will be kept in a locked file. Your name, school name, or any other potentially identifiable information will not be shared with anyone. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, this list will be destroyed. Results will be reported only in aggregate form. There are no foreseeable personal or professional risks associated with completing this survey.

**Participation and Consent.** Your participation is completely voluntary. You may exit the survey at any time or decline to answer any survey item for any reason. Your active consent is required to participate in this study.



Benefits. There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this research study. The study will help us understand principals' perceptions of the roles of school social workers.

If you have any questions about the research project or the survey itself, please contact Natasha Scott (Principal Investigator) or Dr. Fenwick W. English (Faculty Advisor) as indicated below. You may contact the UNC Institutional Review Board at (919) 966-3113 and mention study number 15-2863 for questions about your rights as a study participant.

Sincerely,  
DNS

Natasha Scott, Ed.S., MSW  
Doctoral Candidate, UNC-Chapel Hill  
[dnsconfig@live.unc.edu](mailto:dnsconfig@live.unc.edu)  
(910) XXX-XXXX

Fenwick W. English, Ph.D.  
Faculty Advisor, UNC-Chapel Hill  
[fenglish@email.unc.edu](mailto:fenglish@email.unc.edu)  
(919) XXX-XXXX

## Email Invitation to Participate

Subject: Share your views about the Roles of School Social Workers

Dear North Carolina School Principal,

Roughly one week ago, you received a letter notifying you that you were selected to participate in a study entitled, North Carolina Principals' Perceptions of the Roles of School Social Workers. Principal input is an important component of the role development of school social workers. The results may be used to assist school administrators and school social workers in prioritizing and aligning the roles of school social workers to address the most pressing needs of schools.

Your LEA has approved principal participation in this study. The survey will take only 15-20 minutes to complete. Your participation is completely voluntary, and the information you provide will be kept confidential. Results will be reported only in aggregate form; your name will never be associated with your data.

If you choose to complete the survey, you will have the opportunity to enter your email address into a drawing for the chance to win one of five \$25 Amazon electronic gift cards. The gift card will be provided via the email address provided. The winners of the gift cards will be selected and notified within eight weeks. All email addresses will be deleted after all gift cards are distributed.

Please click on the link below to begin the survey.

Survey link:

Your participation will significantly enhance our understanding of principals' perceptions of the roles of school social workers. It is important that we hear from you.

If you have any questions about the research project or the survey itself, please contact Natasha Scott (Principal Investigator) or Dr. Fenwick W. English (Faculty Advisor) as indicated below. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University of North Carolina Institutional Review Board at (919) 966-3113 and mention study number 15-2863. Thank you for your participation in this important study.

Sincerely,

Natasha Scott, Ed.S., MSW  
Doctoral Candidate, UNC-Chapel Hill  
[dnsconfig@live.unc.edu](mailto:dnsconfig@live.unc.edu)  
(910) XXX-XXXX

Fenwick W. English, Ph.D.  
Faculty Advisor, UNC-Chapel Hill  
[fenglish@email.unc.edu](mailto:fenglish@email.unc.edu)  
(919) XXX-XXXX

Email Reminder #1

Subject: UNC School of Education Doctoral Candidate Needs Your Help Understanding the Roles of School Social Workers

Dear North Carolina School Principal:

About two weeks ago you were invited to complete a survey on *North Carolina Principals' Perceptions of the Roles of School Social Workers*. As of today, your survey has not been completed. In order for our results to represent all principals in North Carolina, we really need your participation. We hope you will take a few moments now to click the link below and complete the survey.

Survey Link:

The survey will take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. Your participation is completely voluntary, and the information you provide will be kept confidential.

If you choose to complete the survey, you will have the opportunity to enter your email address into a drawing for the chance to win one of five \$25 Amazon electronic gift cards. The gift card will be provided via the email address provided. The winners of the gift cards will be selected and notified within eight weeks. All email addresses will be deleted after all gift cards are distributed.

If you have any questions about the research project or the survey itself, please contact Natasha Scott (Principal Investigator) or Dr. Fenwick W. English (Faculty Advisor) as indicated below. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University of North Carolina Institutional Review Board at (919) 966-3113 and mention study number 15-2863. Thank you for your participation in this important study.

Sincerely,

Natasha Scott, Ed.S., MSW  
Doctoral Candidate, UNC-Chapel Hill  
[dnscott@live.unc.edu](mailto:dnscott@live.unc.edu)  
(910) XXX-XXXX

Fenwick W. English, Ph.D.  
Faculty Advisor, UNC-Chapel Hill  
[fenglish@email.unc.edu](mailto:fenglish@email.unc.edu)  
(919) XXX-XXXX

Email Reminder #2

# There's Still Time!

July 18, 2016

Dear North Carolina School Principal,

It is important that we hear from you. I hope that you will find the time to complete a brief online survey about the roles of school social workers. The survey takes 15-20 minutes to complete. Access the survey using the link included in the email that you received on July 5th or 18<sup>th</sup>.

If you choose to complete the survey, you will have the opportunity to enter your email address into a drawing for the chance to win one of five \$25 Amazon electronic gift cards.

If you have any questions about the research project or the survey itself, please contact Natasha Scott (Principal Investigator) or Dr. Fenwick W. English (Faculty Advisor) as



Email Reminder #3

Subject: Forget Me Not! Share Your Views Regarding the Roles of School Social Workers

Dear North Carolina School Principal:

This is the last notice that you will receive to participate in this very important study about *North Carolina Principals' Perceptions of the Roles of School Social Workers*. As of today, your survey has not been completed. The deadline to complete the survey is \_\_\_\_\_. Please take a few moments now to click the link below and share your views.

Survey Link:

The survey will take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. Your participation is completely voluntary, and the information you provide will be kept confidential.

If you choose to complete the survey, you will have the opportunity to enter your email address into a drawing for the chance to win one of five \$25 Amazon electronic gift cards. The gift card will be provided via the email address provided. The winners of the gift cards will be selected and notified within eight weeks. All email addresses will be deleted after all gift cards are distributed.

If you have any questions about the research project or the survey itself, please contact Natasha Scott (Principal Investigator) or Dr. Fenwick W. English (Faculty Advisor) as indicated below. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University of North Carolina Institutional Review Board at (919) 966-3113 and mention study number 15-2863. Thank you for your participation in this important study.

Sincerely,

Natasha Scott, Ed.S., MSW  
Doctoral Candidate, UNC-Chapel Hill  
[dnsconfig@live.unc.edu](mailto:dnsconfig@live.unc.edu)  
(910) XXX-XXXX

Fenwick W. English, Ph.D.  
Faculty Advisor, UNC-Chapel Hill  
[fenglish@email.unc.edu](mailto:fenglish@email.unc.edu)  
(919) XXX-XXXX

## APPENDIX 4: PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE ROLES OF SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS QUESTIONNAIRE

### Text for Active Consent Embedded in Survey

Dear North Carolina School Principal,

I am a doctoral candidate in Educational Leadership at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill (UNC). I am conducting a mixed methods research study entitled, *North Carolina Principals' Perceptions of the Roles of School Social Workers*. I am requesting your assistance with this endeavor. You were selected based on your current position as the principal of a public school designated as Regular, Alternative, or Exceptional Children by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

**Survey.** As a part of this research, you are invited to complete a brief online survey. It will take **approximately 15-20 minutes** to complete. You will have access to the survey for 6 weeks. The survey includes open and closed-ended questions. Where closed-ended questions are presented, you will select the response that most accurately reflects your perceptions about the topic. The open-ended questions will allow you to type your response. There is no right or wrong answer to any of the questions presented.

If you choose to complete the survey, you will have the opportunity to enter your email address into a drawing for the chance to win one of five \$25 Amazon electronic gift cards. The gift card will be provided via the email address provided. The winners of the gift cards will be selected and notified within eight weeks. All email addresses will be deleted after all gift cards are distributed.

**Purpose.** The goal of this study is to improve role clarity for school social workers by understanding North Carolina principals' perceptions of the roles of school social workers. The survey collects demographic data to aid the researcher in making comparisons. The survey also asks you to share your experiences working with school social workers and to rate the importance of common school social work tasks to educational success.

**Confidentiality and Risk.** The information you provide will be handled confidentially. Your information will be assigned a code number. Data about your school (grade span, locale type, and school type) are connected to your code number. The list connecting your school name to this code will be kept on a password-protected computer. Your name, school name, or any other potentially identifiable information will not be shared with anyone. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, this list will be destroyed. Results will be reported only in aggregate form. There are no foreseeable personal or professional risks associated with completing this survey.

**Participation and Consent.** Your participation is completely voluntary. You may exit the survey at any time or decline to answer any survey item for any reason. Please provide active consent by answering the question at the bottom of this page.

**Benefits.** There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this research study. The study will help us understand principals' perceptions of the roles of school social workers. If you have any questions about the research project or the survey itself, please contact Natasha Scott (Principal Investigator) or Dr. Fenwick W. English (Faculty Advisor) as indicated below. You may contact the UNC Institutional Review Board at (919) 966-3113 and mention study number 15-2863 for questions about your rights as a study participant.

Sincerely,

Natasha Scott, Ed.S., MSW  
Doctoral Candidate, UNC-Chapel Hill  
[dnsconfig@live.unc.edu](mailto:dnsconfig@live.unc.edu)  
(910) XXX-XXXX

Fenwick W. English, Ph.D.  
Faculty Advisor, UNC-Chapel Hill  
[fenglish@email.unc.edu](mailto:fenglish@email.unc.edu)  
(919) XXX-XXXX

Principals' Perceptions of the Roles of the School Social Workers Questionnaire

1. **Active Consent.** Please indicate your agreement or refusal to participate in this study by selecting your answer below.
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_ Yes, I agree to participate in this study.
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_ No, I do not give consent to participate in this study.
2. Are you currently the principal of a public North Carolina school?
  - a. Yes → Skip to Question 4
  - b. No → Skip to Question 3
3. What is your current position in a North Carolina public school? → Skip to Question 43
  - a. School Social Worker
  - b. District Office Personnel
  - c. Other (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
4. How many students are currently enrolled at your school? \_\_\_\_\_
5. What grade span is offered at your school?
  - a. Pre-K Center
  - b. Elementary
  - c. Middle
  - d. High
  - e. Other (i.e., K-8, K-12, etc.)
6. Overall, how many years have you been a school principal? \_\_\_\_\_
7. During your career as a school principal, was a school social worker ever available to provide services to students enrolled at your school?
  - a. Yes



- b. No
8. During a typical week, is a school social worker currently available to provide services to students enrolled at your school?
- a. Yes
  - b. No ➔ Skip to Question 14
9. How many school social workers are currently assigned to your building to provide services to students? \_\_\_\_\_
10. During the current school year, approximately how many days of school social work services are allocated to your school each week? \_\_\_\_\_
11. Are you responsible for formally evaluating the performance of the school social worker currently assigned to your school using the North Carolina Educator Evaluation System (NCEES) or some other performance appraisal instrument?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
12. Are you responsible for hiring the school social worker assigned to your school?
- a. Yes ➔ Go to Question 13
  - b. No ➔ Go to Question 14
13. What is the educational background of your school social worker(s)? (Select all that apply)
- a. Bachelor's degree of Social Work
  - b. Master's degree of Social Work
  - c. Doctorate in Social Work
  - d. Other (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

e. Don't Know

14. Over the course of your career, where have you learned about the possible roles of school social workers? (Check all that apply)

- a. District office personnel
- b. School social worker(s)
- c. School social worker job description
- d. National/state/local principals' association
- e. School administration graduate program
- f. National/state/local school social work association
- g. Scholarly journals and other publications
- h. Internet
- i. National/state/local Conferences
- j. Other (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
- k. Nowhere. I have never learned about the roles of school social workers.

15. During your career as an educator, were you ever officially employed as a student services professional? (Check all that apply)

- a. Yes, I was a school social worker.
- b. Yes, I was a school counselor.
- c. Yes, I was a school psychologist.
- d. Yes, it was another student services position (Please Specify) \_\_\_\_\_.
- e. Yes, it was another student services position (Please Specify) \_\_\_\_\_.
- f. None. A school or school district never employed me as a student services professional.

16. How well do you feel that you understand the role of school social workers?

- a. Not at all
- b. Not very well
- c. Fairly well
- d. Very well

Please indicate how strongly you disagree or agree with each of the following statements:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Strongly Agree
17. I would like more information about the role of school social workers.				
18. The most important role of school social workers is their contribution to the development of a caring school environment.				

19. Thinking of the most recent time that a school social worker was available at your school, how were the roles of the school social worker **primarily** established in your building?

- a. There has never been a social worker available at a school where I was the principal.
- b. I established the roles and responsibilities.
- c. The district office established the roles and responsibilities.
- d. The school social worker established the roles and responsibilities.
- e. The principal and the social worker collaborated to establish the roles and responsibilities.
- f. The NC job description established the roles and responsibilities.
- g. The School Social Work Association of America's National School Social Work Practice Model established the roles and responsibilities.

h. Other (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

The next set of questions represents common tasks completed by school social workers to address the academic and social needs of students. The list was compiled from the North Carolina job description for school social workers and the National Association of Social Workers' Standards for School Social Work Services. Indicate the importance each task is to the educational success of students.

School Social Work Tasks	Not At All Important	Slightly Important	Moderately Important	Very Important
20. Conduct assessments of the needs of students.	1	2	3	4
21. Conduct assessments of the needs of systems/organizations (i.e., classrooms, schools, neighborhoods, state, district).	1	2	3	4
22. Use assessment results to develop appropriate interventions for students.	1	2	3	4
23. Conduct ongoing evaluations to determine the level of effectiveness of interventions.	1	2	3	4
24. Report school social work outcomes to teachers and/or administrators.	1	2	3	4
25. Collaborate with the school-based Student Support Services Team to address barriers and/or problems with the educational process.	1	2	3	4
26. Address student needs by providing <b>crisis intervention and response.</b>	1	2	3	4

27. Address student needs by <b>conducting home visits.</b>	1	2	3	4
28. Address student needs by providing <b>conflict resolution.</b>	1	2	3	4
29. Address student needs by providing <b>individual counseling.</b>	1	2	3	4
30. Address student needs by providing <b>group counseling.</b>	1	2	3	4
31. Address student needs by providing <b>dropout prevention and intervention services.</b>	1	2	3	4
32. Address student needs by promoting <b>graduation awareness.</b>	1	2	3	4
33. Address student needs by <b>coordinating school and/or community services.</b>	1	2	3	4
34. Advocate for services for students using appropriate statutes, case law, policies, and/or procedures.	1	2	3	4
35. Utilize appropriate interventions to address barriers to regular school attendance.	1	2	3	4
36. Plan programs to promote a caring school climate that fosters academic success.	1	2	3	4
37. Consult with teachers and/or administrators to facilitate an understanding of factors in the home, school, and/or community that affect students' educational experiences.	1	2	3	4
38. Maintain accurate case records to document services and outcomes.	1	2	3	4

The following questions are very important to understanding principals' actual experiences with school social workers. Take your time answering these questions.

- 39. In your own words, please describe the primary responsibilities of the school social worker.
- 40. Describe what value you see in having school social workers available in schools.
- 41. As best you can remember, describe the most salient experience that you credit with shaping your overall perception of the role of school social workers.
- 42. Assuming that caring has a positive impact on student achievement, how can the role of the school social worker be utilized to increase caring in schools? Please provide examples.

Just a few more questions and you are done! But first, tell us a little about yourself.

- 43. What is your gender?
  - a. Male
  - b. Female
- 44. What is your racial/ethnic background? Check all that apply
  - a. American Indian/Alaskan Native
  - b. Asian
  - c. Black/African American
  - d. Hispanic/Latino
  - e. White (non-Hispanic/Latino)
- 45. What is your highest educational level?
  - a. Bachelor's Degree

- b. Master's Degree
- c. Post Masters Certification
- d. Education Specialist Certification
- e. Doctoral Degree

---

**End of Survey ➔** Go to Incentive Questionnaire



### Incentive Questionnaire - \$25 Amazon Gift Card

Thank you for participating!

Please enter your name and email address below to be entered into a random drawing to win one of five \$25 Amazon gift cards. Your email address will not be connected with your responses and will be destroyed once the winner is selected. The winners of the Amazon gift cards will be notified by October 29, 2016.

First Name \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

## References

- Graham, M. A. Desmond, K. J., & Zinsser, E. (2011). State mandated principals' training – does it make a difference? An examination of principals' perceptions of the American School Counselors Association (ASCA) national model, state-specific models of school counseling and the roles of the school counselor. *The Journal for Counselor Preparation and Supervision*, 3(2), 95-109. Retrieved from <http://repository.wcsu.edu/jcps/vol3/iss2/3/>
- National Association of Social Workers. (2012). *NASW standards for school social work services*. Retrieved from <http://www.socialworkers.org/practice/standards/naswschoolsocialworkstandards.pdf>
- North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI). (2008). *School social worker: Student services job description*. Retrieved from <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/work4ncschools/employment/jobdescrip/socialworkerjob.pdf>
- Tower, K. (2000, April). Image crisis: A study of attitudes about school social workers. *Social Work in Education*, 22(2), 83-94.

## **APPENDIX 5: CONTENT VALIDITY EXPERT CERTIFICATION**

### **Letter to Panel of Social Work Experts**

Dear Social Work Expert,

You will be presented with one question from the instrument at a time. Please evaluate each question for clarity and relevance to the overall study using a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is the lowest score and 5 is the highest score. In addition, you will have the opportunity to make other recommendations to the instrument.

Feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Telephone – (910) XXX-XXXX or Email – [XXXXXX@live.unc.edu](mailto:XXXXXX@live.unc.edu)

Thank you in advance for your assistance.  
Natasha

Attachments

- (1) Overview of the Study
- (2) Copy of the Instrument

## Letter to Panel of Retired/Former Principals

Dear Educator,

Thank you for assisting me with the content validation of my instrument. This instrument will be used to conduct a mixed methods study of North Carolina Principals' Perceptions of the Roles of School Social Workers. This process should take 10 – 15 minutes.

You will be presented with one question from the instrument at a time. Please evaluate each question for clarity and relevance to the overall study using a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is the lowest score and 5 is the highest score. In addition, you will have the opportunity to make other recommendations to the instrument.

Feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Telephone – (910) XXX\_XXXX or Email – [XXXXXX@live.unc.edu](mailto:XXXXXX@live.unc.edu)

Thank you for your assistance.  
Natasha

Attachments

- (1) Overview of the Study
- (2) Copy of the Instrument

## APPENDIX 6: EXPERT CERTIFICATION RESULTS

Certification Results			
Social Work Scholars and Practitioners (N = 9)			
Question	Clarity Mean	Relevance Mean	Additional Comments & Changes
1. Are you currently the principal of a public North Carolina school? a. Yes b. No → Skip to Question 17	5.0	5.0	UNDERLINED “CURRENTLY”
2. How long have you been a school principal? a. 0 – 4 years b. 5 – 9 years c. 10 – 14 years d. 15 - 19 years e. 20+ years	5.0	5.0	REMOVED RANGES AND CONVERTED TO AN OPEN-ENDED QUESTION
3. What is your gender? a. Male b. Female	5.0	4.86	
4. During your tenure as a school principal, was a school social worker ever available to provide services to students enrolled at your school? a. Yes b. No → Skip to Question 17	4.86	5.0	I know that NC offers SSW certification. However, I do not know if it is possible that someone with a BSW or MSW would be employed in a school service position that is titled something other than SSW? If so, you may want to capture that information. And you may also want to clarify what qualification a SSW should have i.e., BSW or MSW

			<p>Underline 'ever'</p> <p>You ask about tenure as principle - what if they were employed at a private school then a public school, etc. Do you care about this situation?</p> <p>CHANGED THE WORD "TENURE" TO "CAREER;" UNDERLINED THE WORD "EVER"</p> <p>REMOVED SKIP LOGIC SO THAT THE DATA CAN BE COMPARED (i.e., EXPOSURE VS NON-EXPOSURE TO SSW)</p>
<p>5. During your tenure as an educator, were you ever officially employed by a school district in any of the positions listed below? (Check all that apply)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. School Social Worker</li> <li>b. School Counselor</li> <li>c. School Psychologist</li> </ul>	5.0	5.0	<p>Capitalize the first letters of school social worker to be consistent with the other response options</p> <p>Capitalize S and W on item A; should you add School Nurse?</p> <p>You should have a, b, c, and "other" - There are school nurses, speech pathologists and only three support services are identified. There could be others.</p> <p>CHANGED THE WORD 'TENURE' TO "CAREER;" ADDED "OTHER" AS AN ANSWER CHOICE; UNDERLINED THE WORD 'EVER'</p>

<p>6. Is a school social worker currently available to provide services to students enrolled at your school?</p> <p>a. Yes</p> <p>b. No ➔ Skip to Question 10</p>	5.0	5.0	<p>Underline ‘currently’</p> <p>UNDERLINED “CURRENTLY;”</p> <p>REMOVED SKIP LOGIC</p>
<p>7. During a typical week at your current school, approximately how many hours is a school social worker available to provide services at your school?</p> <p>a. 1 – 4 hours</p> <p>b. 5 – 8 hours</p> <p>c. 9 – 12 hours</p> <p>d. 13 – 16 hours</p> <p>e. 17 – 20 hours</p> <p>f. 21 – 24 hours</p> <p>g. 25 – 28 hours</p> <p>h. 29 – 32 hours</p> <p>i. 33 – 36 hours</p> <p>j. 37 – 40 hours</p>	5.0	5.0	<p>Although having a social worker for 37-40 hours might imply this, but would you want to know if a social worker is school-based?</p> <p>Why not just provide a blank space?</p> <p>Then you can find the natural divisions.</p> <p>REMOVED RANGES AND CONVERTED TO AN OPEN-ENDED QUESTION</p>
<p>8. Are you responsible for formally evaluating the performance of the school social worker currently assigned to your school using the North Carolina Educator Evaluation System (NCEES)?</p> <p>a. Yes</p> <p>b. No</p>	5.0	5.0	<p>ADDED “OR SOME OTHER PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL INSTRUMENT” TO CAPTURE ALL PRINCIPALS THAT FORMALLY EVALUATE THE SSW</p>
<p>9. Are you responsible for providing professional development to the school social worker currently assigned to your school?</p> <p>a. Yes</p> <p>b. No</p>	4.71	5.0	<p>I’m a little unclear about this question. Is it asking whether the principal actually delivers the professional development or whether the school social worker is required to complete professional development?</p>

			<p>What do you mean by professional development - In service training offered by the school system or district, or support to attend external conferences, or membership in a relevant organization?</p> <p>EDITED QUESTION TO ASK IF THE PRINCIPAL IS 'RESPONSIBLE FOR 'HIRING' THE ...' BECAUSE THIS QUESTION PROVIDES A CLEARER PICTURE OF PRINCIPALS' EXPERIENCES WITH SSW</p>
<p>10. Over the course of your career, where have you learned about the possible roles of school social workers? (Check all that apply)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Colleagues</li> <li>b. School social worker(s)</li> <li>c. National/state principals' association</li> <li>d. School administration graduate program</li> <li>e. National/state school social work association</li> <li>f. Scholarly journals and other publications</li> <li>g. Other (Please specify)</li> </ul> <hr/>	4.86	5.0	<p>You might want to include "Internet" as a response option. Also, if they answer "Colleagues," do you want them to specify what role those colleagues are in (e.g. other principals, teachers, etc.)? I AGREED; ADDED INTERNET &amp; SSW JOB DESCRIPTION; REMOVED COLLEAGUES AND ADDED DISTRICT OFFICE PERSONNEL AS AN ANSWER CHOICE, ADDITIONAL CHOICES CAN BE CAPTURED THROUGH 'OTHER'</p> <p>You have where they learned about school social work. Could it be at a conference, part of their training, etc.? I AGREED; ADDED NATIONAL/STATE/LOCAL CONFERENCES</p>



			<p>You may want to first ask a question that asks what they know about SSWs; THE SURVEY ALREADY ASKS PRINCIPALS TO EXPLAIN THE ROLE IN THEIR OWN WORDS</p> <p>EDITED ANSWER CHOICES AS FOLLOWS “NATIONAL/STATE/LOCAL”</p>
<p>11. Indicate your agreement with the following statement. “I have relevant knowledge of the roles and responsibilities of school social workers.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Strongly disagree</li> <li>b. Disagree</li> <li>c. Agree</li> <li>d. Strongly agree</li> </ul>	4.57	5.0	<p>It’s unclear to me exactly what you mean by “relevant.” Relevant to what? Maybe you could ask something like “I understand the roles of school social workers?” I AGREED; QUESTION WAS EDITED TO STATE, “I UNDERSTAND THE ROLES OF SSW.”</p> <p>What do you mean by relevant knowledge? Do you want to ask if they know the functions and/or tasks?</p> <p>Should this statement come before #10?</p> <p>REVIEWED THE ORDER OF ALL QUESTIONS AND REARRANGED THE ORDER SO THAT QUESTIONS ARE GROUPED INTO THE FOLLOWING CATEGORIES – ELIGIBILITY, EXPERIENCES WITH SSW, SSW TASKS, AND OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS</p>

			<p>REVISED THE QUESTION TO CLARIFY THE MEANING OF RELEVANCE. THE REVISED QUESTION ASKS IF PRINCIPALS BELIEVE THEY NEED MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE ROLES OF SSW.</p> <p>ADDED A QUESTION THAT LINKS THE SURVEY TO THE EoC. THE QUESTION ASKS IF PRINCIPALS BELIEVE THAT THE MOST IMPORTANT ROLE OF SSW IS THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF A CARING SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT.</p>
<p>12. Thinking of the most recent time that a school social worker was available at your school, how were the roles of the school social worker <b><u>primarily</u></b> established in your building?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. I established the roles and responsibilities</li> <li>b. The school board established the roles and responsibilities</li> <li>c. The school social worker established the roles and responsibilities</li> </ul>	5.0	5.0	<p>Should you consider NASW SSW Standards; add “school” before social worker on item e; I AGREED AND EDITED QUESTION AS STATED</p> <p>Are there State guidelines for school social work? A few decades ago, I helped NASW in DC create the standards for school social work.</p>
<p>d. The School Social Work Association Of America’s National School Social Work</p>			<p>COMPARED THE NC JOB DESCRIPTION TO THE NASW STANDARDS FOR SSW PRACTICE</p>

Practice Model established the roles and responsibilities e. The principal and the social worker collaborated to establish the roles and responsibilities f. Other (Please specify) _____			TO ENSURE THAT ALL OF THE ROLES ARE CAPTURED IN THE INSTRUMENT; AS A RESULT I ADDED MORE TASKS AND EDITED SOME FOR CLARITY.
13. According to the North Carolina job description for school social workers, the list below represents common tasks completed by school social workers to address academic and social needs of students. Rate the importance of each task to the educational success of students. (1 = Not at all important; 2 = slightly important; 3 = moderately important; 4 = Very important).  Where did this list of tasks come from? You need to describe this in your narrative. Is it fairly representative of the tasks performed by school social workers? For example, where is evaluate practice, and advocate for change in adverse school policy? It seems to me that there are some omissions of tasks and it would be important to explain to the committee where the list came from. COMPARED THE NC JOB DESCRIPTION TO THE NASW STANDARDS FOR SSW PRACTICE TO ENSURE THAT ALL OF THE ROLES ARE CAPTURED IN THE INSTRUMENT; AS A RESULT I ADDED MORE TASKS AND EDITED SOME FOR CLARITY; ALTHOUGH IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT MUCH OF THE LANGUAGE IN THE NC JOB DESCRIPTION COMES DIRECTLY FROM THE NASW STANDARDS.			
a. Effectively and appropriately assesses and addresses the needs, characteristics, and interactions of students, families, LEA personnel, and community.	5.0	5.0	
b. Uses knowledge and understanding of the reciprocal influences of home, school, and community to address student needs by providing <b>crisis intervention and response</b> .	5.0	5.0	
c. Uses knowledge and understanding of the reciprocal influences of home, school, and community to address student needs by	4.86	5.0	

community to address student needs by <b>conducting home visits.</b>			
d. Uses knowledge and understanding of the reciprocal influences of home, school, and community to address student needs by providing <b>conflict resolution.</b>	4.86	4.57	
e. Uses knowledge and understanding of the reciprocal influences of home, school, and community to address student needs by providing <b>individual counseling.</b>	5.0	5.0	School social workers definitely provide this service but have had to phrase it differently due to the school counselor role.  And group counseling
f. Uses knowledge and understanding of the reciprocal influences of home, school, and community to address student needs by providing <b>group counseling.</b>	5.0	5.0	Same comment as 13 e  Could combine and add student individual and group counseling; I DISAGREE BECAUSE INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP COUNSELING ARE TWO DIFFERENT THINGS. COMBINING THE ITEMS WOULD CREATE A DOUBLE BARRELLED QUESTION.
g. Uses knowledge and understanding of the reciprocal influences of home, school, and community to address student needs by providing <b>dropout prevention activities.</b>	5.0	5.0	“services” versus activities??? I AGREED AND CHANGED “ACTIVITIES” TO “SERVICES”  Prevention and intervention services  I AGREED AND EDITED ACCORDINGLY
h. Uses knowledge and understanding of the reciprocal influences of home, school, and	4.29	4.14	I do not know what you mean by graduation awareness activities?

community to address student needs by providing <b>graduation awareness activities</b> .			Someone might think it means helping students order caps and gowns  EDITED QUESTION AS FOLLOWS, “PROMOTING GRADUATION AWARENESS ACTIVITIES.”
i. Uses knowledge and understanding of the reciprocal influences of home, school, and community to address student needs by providing <b>coordination of school and community services</b> .	5.0	5.0	
j. Advocates for appropriate services to address the needs of students and their families.	5.0	5.0	
k. Consults and collaborates with stakeholders to address the needs of students and their families.	5.0	5.0	
l. Effectively plans, implements, and evaluates programs that address the needs of students.	5.0	5.0	Consideration for school based and community programs
m. Advocates, facilitates, and contributes to School Social Worker accountability for outcomes aligned with local, state, and federal policies and guidelines.	5.0	5.0	
14. In your own words, please describe the primary responsibilities of the school social worker.	5.0	5.0	
15. Describe what value you see in having school social workers available in schools.	5.0	5.0	
16. As best you can remember, describe the most salient experience that you credit with shaping your overall perception of the role of school social workers.	5.0	5.0	ADDED AN OPEN-ENDED QUESTION THAT ASKS PRINCIPALS TO PROVIDE EXAMPLES OF HOW THE ROLE OF THE SSW CAN BE USED TO INCREASE CARING IN SCHOOLS.

<p>17. How many students are currently enrolled at your school?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. 100 – 250</li> <li>b. 251 – 500</li> <li>c. 501 – 750</li> <li>d. 751 – 1,000</li> <li>e. 1,001 or More</li> </ul>	5.0	5.0	<p>Again, why not provide a blank space? Then you can divide the responses more appropriately.</p> <p>How many students enrolled? The numbers seem very small. Most high schools have more than 700 students. You may want to revisit enrollment parameters.</p> <p>REMOVED RANGES AND CONVERTED TO AN OPEN-ENDED QUESTION</p>
<p>18. What is your racial/ethnic background?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. American Indian/Alaskan Native</li> <li>b. Asian</li> <li>c. Black/African American</li> <li>d. Hispanic/Latino</li> <li>e. White (non-Hispanic/Latino)</li> <li>f. Mixed Race</li> <li>g. Other</li> </ul>	4.86	5.0	<p>If they select, other, do you want them to specify what other is?</p>
<p>19. What is your age?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Less than 30</li> <li>b. 30 – 39</li> <li>c. 40 – 49</li> <li>d. 50 or Over</li> </ul>	5.0	5.0	<p>Ditto</p> <p>REMOVED RANGES AND CONVERTED TO AN OPEN-ENDED QUESTION</p>
<p>20. What is your highest educational level?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Bachelor's Degree</li> <li>b. Master's Degree</li> </ul>	5.0	5.0	

c. Education Specialist Certification d. Doctoral Degree			
Are there additional questions that should be included in this instrument?	No – 60% Yes – 40%	<p>Consider asking about the education level and or specialty certifications of the social workers the principals have mostly worked with. I think BSW vs MSW and/or LCSW may create differences in principals’ responses; I AGREED AND ADDED A QUESTION THAT ASKS PRINCIPALS ABOUT THE EDUCATIONAL LEVEL OF SSW.</p> <p>I didn’t see any questions that ask about the role of SSW in RTI or multi-tiered frameworks of support or anything about SSWs role in Tier 1 social emotional learning activities</p> <p>COMPARED THE NC JOB DESCRIPTION TO THE NASW STANDARDS FOR SSW PRACTICE TO ENSURE THAT ALL OF THE ROLES ARE CAPTURED IN THE INSTRUMENT; AS A RESULT I ADDED ADDITIONAL TASKS</p>	
Use this space to record any additional feedback that you would like to provide.	<p>Would it be helpful to know if the principals have provided any type of in-service for staff/teachers so that they know when a referral to the school social worker is appropriate?</p> <p>None</p>		

	<p>I am looking forward to learning more about this survey for principals and your findings.</p> <p>Your questions were thought-provoking and thorough. Thank you for asking me to participate.</p> <p>Looking forward to seeing the results! Great study!</p>
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<b>Certification Results</b>  <b>Retired Principals and District Office Personnel (N = 12)</b>			
<b>Question</b>	<b>Clarity Mean</b>	<b>Relevance Mean</b>	<b>Additional Comments &amp; Changes</b>
1. Are you <u>currently</u> the principal of a public North Carolina school? a. Yes b. No → Skip to Question 21	4.92	5.0	Does this include charter schools?  NO, USING THE EDDIE WEBSITE CHARTER SCHOOLS WILL BE REMOVED FROM THE SAMPLING FRAME.
2. How long have you been a school principal?	4.42	5.0	Do you want total number of years? Years and months?  I assume it means overall not just at the current school? WILL ADD “OVERALL” TO THE QUESTION STEM TO CLARIFY THE QUESTION  How many years or years and months WILL ADD THE WORD “YEARS” TO THE QUESTION STEM TO CLARIFY HOW THE RESPONDENT SHOULD ANSWER THE QUESTION
3. During your career as an educator, were you <u>ever</u> officially employed by a school district as a student services professional? (Check all that apply) a. School Social Worker b. School Counselor c. School Psychologist	4.83	4.5	Capitalize Social Worker; Should other include student support services area? AGREED  Other? Would that be all other positions?

d. Other (Please Specify) _____			WILL ADD STUDENT SERVICES PROFESSIONAL TO THE ANSWER STEM  Capitalize social worker to be consistent
4. During your career as a school principal, was a school social worker <u>ever</u> available to provide services to students enrolled at your school? a. Yes b. No	5.0	4.92	underline “ever,” line goes one space beyond the r AGREED
5. Is a school social worker <u>currently</u> available to provide services to students enrolled at your school? a. Yes b. No → Skip to Question 11	5.0	5.0	
6. How many school social workers are currently assigned to your building to provide services to students? _____	5.0	5.0	Will you ask any data about size of school in terms of student population?  I assume on a daily basis and not in the time of crisis; WILL ADD THE PHRASE “DURING A TYPICAL WEEK AT YOUR CURRENT SCHOOL,”
7. What is the educational background of your school social worker? (Select all that apply) a. Bachelor’s Degree of Social Work b. Master’s Degree of Social Work c. Doctorate in Social Work d. Other (Please specify) _____ e. Don't Know	4.92	4.83	This may be information they would have to research in order to answer correctly.

8. During a typical week at your current school, approximately how many hours is a school social worker available to provide services at your school? _____	4.92	5.0	<p>I would only worry how the word "available" may be misconstrued. THE PURPOSE OF THE QUESTION IS TO DETERMINE THE LEVEL OF SERVICE PROVIDED; WILL CHANGE THE QUESTION AS FOLLOWS: "DURING THE CURRENT SCHOOL YEAR, APPROXIMATELY HOW MANY HOURS OF SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK SERVICES ARE ALLOCATED TO YOUR SCHOOL?"</p> <p>Another option would be spans of time, like 1-3 hr., etc. Might be better the way you asked it to get a truer average of time available; RANGES WILL BE DETERMINED FROM THE RESPONSES</p>
9. Are you responsible for formally evaluating the performance of the school social worker currently assigned to your school using the North Carolina Educator Evaluation System (NCEES) or some other performance appraisal instrument? a. Yes b. No	4.92	4.67	Maybe add if using other appraisal instrument, add name of it?
10. Are you responsible for hiring the school social worker assigned to your school? a. Yes b. No	4.92	5.0	Might consider asking are you involved in selection of school social worker...

<p>11. Over the course of your career, where have you learned about the possible roles of school social workers? (Check all that apply)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Colleagues</li> <li>b. School social worker(s)</li> <li>c. School social worker job description</li> <li>d. National/state/local principals' association</li> <li>e. School administration graduate program</li> <li>f. National/state/local school social work association</li> <li>g. Scholarly journals and other publications</li> <li>h. Internet</li> <li>i. National/state/local Conferences</li> <li>j. Other (Please specify)</li> </ul> <hr/>	5.0	4.83	<p>Maybe add District level information?  <b>AGREED; WILL REPLACE COLLEAGUES WITH DISTRICT OFFICE PERSONNEL BECAUSE DISTRICT OFFICE PERSONNEL ARE THE MOST LIKELY GROUP TO PROVIDE THIS INFORMATION AND RESPONDENTS CAN LIST OTHER COLLEAGUES USING "OTHER"</b></p>
<p>12. Indicate your agreement with the following statement. "I understand the roles of school social workers."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Strongly disagree</li> <li>b. Disagree</li> <li>c. Agree</li> <li>d. Strongly agree</li> </ul>	5.0	5.0	<p>Not done yet—will there be a question where people provide input on what the roles are?</p>
<p>13. Indicate your agreement with the following statement. "I would like more information about the roles of school social workers."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Strongly disagree</li> <li>b. Disagree</li> <li>c. Agree</li> <li>d. Strongly agree</li> </ul>	5.0	5.0	

<p>14. Indicate your agreement with the following statement. “The most important role of school social workers is their contribution to the development of a caring school environment.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Strongly disagree</li> <li>b. Disagree</li> <li>c. Agree</li> <li>d. Strongly agree</li> </ul>	4.67	4.58	Just a little vague.
<p>15. Thinking of the most recent time that a school social worker was available at your school, how were the roles of the school social worker <b><u>primarily</u></b> established in your building?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. I established the roles and responsibilities</li> <li>b. The school board established the roles and responsibilities</li> <li>c. The school social worker established the roles and responsibilities</li> <li>d. The School Social Work Association Of America’s National School Social Work Practice Model established the roles and responsibilities</li> <li>e. The principal and the social worker collaborated to establish the roles and responsibilities</li> <li>f. Other (Please specify)</li> </ul> <p>_____</p>	5.0	5.0	<p>Should there be a period at the end of each statement? AGREED</p> <p>CHANGED “SCHOOL BOARD” TO “DISTRICT OFFICE.”</p> <p>ADDED THE NC JOB DESCRIPTION AS AN ANSWER CHOICE.</p>
<p>16. The list below represents common tasks completed by school social workers to address academic and social needs of students. The list was compiled based on the North Carolina job description for school social workers and the National Association of Social Workers’ Standards for School Social Work Services. <b>Rate the importance of each task to the</b></p>			

<b>educational success of students. (1 = Not at all important; 2 = slightly important; 3 = moderately important; 4 = Very important).</b>			
a. Conducts assessments of the needs, characteristics, and interactions of students, families, and school personnel.	4.92	5.0	CHANGED “SCHOOL PERSONNEL” TO “SYSTEMS/ORGANIZATIONS (NAMELY, CLASSROOMS, SCHOOLS, NEIGHBORHOODS, STATE, DISTRICT) WITH THE GOAL OF IMPROVING STUDENT SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, BEHAVIORAL, AND ACADEMIC OUTCOMES.”
b. Demonstrates core values of service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence.	5.0	5.0	
c. Uses assessment and evaluation results to develop appropriate interventions for students, families, schools, and communities.	5.0	5.0	
d. Develops long-term and short-term intervention plans consistent with curriculum; students’ needs, strengths, diversity and life experiences; and social and emotional factors.	5.0	5.0	
e. Conducts ongoing evaluations to determine the level of effectiveness of all interventions.	4.83	5.0	Are interventions those established by social worker or do they encompass academic interventions established by teachers? SSWers ARE THE SUBJECT OF THIS STUDY; QUESTION REFERS TO THE ACTIONS OF THE SSW  Defining “evaluations” may be helpful here.

f. Collaborates with the Student Support Services Team to address any barriers or problems with the educational process.	4.92	5.0	School level SST? WILL ADD “SCHOOL BASED”
g. Develops and provides training and educational programs that address the goals and mission of the educational institution.	5.0	5.0	
h. Uses knowledge and understanding of the reciprocal influences of home, school, and community to address student needs by providing <b>crisis intervention and response</b> .	5.0	5.0	
i. Uses knowledge and understanding of the reciprocal influences of home, school, and community to address student needs by <b>conducting home visits</b> .	5.0	5.0	
j. Uses knowledge and understanding of the reciprocal influences of home, school, and community to address student needs by providing <b>conflict resolution</b> .	5.0	5.0	
k. Uses knowledge and understanding of the reciprocal influences of home, school, and community to address student needs by providing <b>individual counseling</b> .	5.0	5.0	Group counseling
l. Uses knowledge and understanding of the reciprocal influences of home, school, and community to address student needs by providing <b>group counseling</b> .	5.0	5.0	
m. Uses knowledge and understanding of the reciprocal influences of home, school, and community to address student needs by providing <b>dropout prevention and intervention services</b> .	5.0	5.0	

n. Uses knowledge and understanding of the reciprocal influences of home, school, and community to address student needs by promoting <b>graduation awareness</b> .	5.0	5.0	
o. Uses knowledge and understanding of the reciprocal influences of home, school, and community to address student needs by <b>coordinating school and community services</b> .	5.0	4.92	
p. Advocates and facilitates change that effectively responds to the needs of students, families, and school systems using appropriate statutes, case law, policies, and procedures.	5.0	5.0	SSW TASKS “P” AND “Q” ARE VERY SIMILAR. COMBINED THEM TO MAKE ONE TASK: “ADVOCATES FOR APPROPRIATE SERVICES FOR STUDENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES USING APPROPRIATE STATUTES, CASE LAW, POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES.”
q. Advocates for students and their families.	5.0	5.0	
r. Identifies areas of need not addressed by the school/LEA and community and works to create services to address these needs.	5.0	5.0	
s. Plans school and/or system-wide programs to promote a safe, healthy, caring school climate that fosters academic success.	5.0	4.55	Font changed—type of font as well as size; should it be foster (Programs is plural)
t. Serves as leaders and consultants in promoting a positive school climate.	5.0	5.0	should it be serves in a leader and consultant role? or change to serve?  Wording on this one does not sound right
u. Consults with stakeholders to facilitate an understanding of factors in the home, local education agency, and community that affect students’ educational experiences.	5.0	5.0	Font changed in statement stem



v. Provides leadership and collaboration in the implementation of comprehensive school-based and school-linked programs that promote well-being and positive academic outcomes.	4.83	4.83	
w. Conforms to the National Association of Social Work (NASW) Code of Ethics and Standards for School Social Work practice.	5.0	4.92	I am not sure the principals would know these standards
x. Maintains accurate and confidential case records to document services, outcomes, and to promote accountability.	5.0	5.0	
y. Serves as leaders and consultants in promoting a positive school climate.	5.0	5.0	should it be serves in a leader and consultant role? or change to serve?  Wording on this one does not sound right
17. Consults with stakeholders to facilitate an understanding of factors in the home, local education agency, and community that affect students' educational experiences.	5.0	5.0	Font changed in statement stem
18. Provides leadership and collaboration in the implementation of comprehensive school-based and school-linked programs that promote well-being and positive academic outcomes.	4.83	4.83	
19. Conforms to the National Association of Social Work (NASW) Code of Ethics and Standards for School Social Work practice.	5.0	4.92	I am not sure the principals would know these standards
20. Maintains accurate and confidential case records to document services, outcomes, and to promote accountability.	5.0	5.0	
21. How many students are currently enrolled at your school? _____	4.92	4.83	☺

22. What is your gender? a. Male b. Female	5.0	4.75	
23. What is your age? _____	4.75	4.25	Should it be years experience as a principal? Should it be a range? Use ranges here instead of Open-ended  WILL REMOVE THIS QUESTION BECAUSE THE SURVEY ALREADY ASKS RESPONDENTS THEIR YEARS OF EXPERIENCE
24. What is your racial/ethnic background? a. American Indian/Alaskan Native b. Asian c. Black/African American d. Hispanic/Latino e. White (non-Hispanic/Latino) f. Mixed Race g. Other (Please specify)	5.0	4.67	
25. What is your highest educational level? a. Bachelor's Degree b. Master's Degree c. Education Specialist Certification d. Doctoral Degree	5.0	4.67	Not sure if you should add additional coursework beyond masters—I had a masters and then added coursework for MSA certification; WILL ADD POST MASTERS CERTIFICATION
26. Are there additional questions that should be included in this instrument	No – 92% Yes – 8%		May have been included-- anything about economic levels of student population-- I know that's harder to get; was there anything about addressing school attendance as a role of social worker?

		<p>ADDED THE FOLLOWING SSW TASKS, “CONSULTS ON SUCH ISSUES AS ATTENDANCE, DIVERSITY, MENTAL HEALTH, BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT, DELINQUENCY, CRISIS INTERVENTION, HOMELESSNESS, CHILD ABUSE, NEGLECT, AND THE IMPORTANCE OF CONFIDENTIALITY.”</p> <p>“MONITORS SCHOOL ATTENDANCE. UTILIZES INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL RESOURCES, SOCIAL WORK INTERVENTIONS, AND APPROPRIATE STATUTES TO ADDRESS BARRIERS TO REGULAR SCHOOL ATTENDANCE.”</p>
27. Use this space to record any additional feedback that you would like to provide	<p>I think the questions are great ones and are very relevant and clear.</p> <p>Great job!</p>	

## APPENDIX 7: QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS CODEBOOK

RQ1. How do Principals define the importance of the roles of school social workers as it relates to the educational success of students?

### **Category: Primary Responsibilities of School Social Workers**

Code: Availability - The participant describes how the school social workers' availability/allocation impacts which roles the social worker is able to complete.

Example: "I do not know the primary responsibilities of the school social worker. I have not had the opportunity to work with one. The only time a school social worker came to my building was to meet with a family and provide community resource information."

Code: New Roles - The participant describes school social work roles that were not included in the 19 common social work tasks described in this study.

Example: "academic coaching"

Example: "job coaching"

Code: Safe and Caring Environment - The participant describes the social workers role in maintaining or creating a safe environment and/or ensuring students feel safe.

Example: "ensuring the safety and well-being for our students"

Code: Variety of Roles - The participant describes the variety of roles maintained by the school social worker. Due to the variety of tasks it is difficult to name the primary tasks.

Example - "school social workers have so many duty responsibilities that it is difficult to state primarily what their duties are - it varies day to day and is based upon the needs of the students."

Code: Home, school, community Liaison Activities - The participant describes roles of the school social worker that focus on the connection between the home, the school, and the community as it relates to school performance. The primary purpose is to address the needs of the student and the family, to remove barriers to student success, and to sensitize school staff to the lives of children outside of school and how it impacts student performance.

Example: "Making sure the basic needs of our students are met. / Working with families to provide these basic needs as well as parental support as needed. /Support the principal with attendance issues."

Example: "Our social worker helps with students who may have needs that extend beyond the academic. He helps us provide intervention in cases where regular classroom based interventions and school resources fall short."

Subcode: Consulting with teachers and/or administrators to facilitate an understanding of factors in the home, school, and/or community that affect students' educational experiences.

Example: "To serve as a direct line of communication between the school and home (students & parents). Consulting with these stakeholders to provide students with essential resources that will enable them to receive a fair educational experience."

Example: "The School Social Worker should work with students, parents and staff to ensure the needs of all students are being met. They should work as a liaison with the community to help meet the needs of students."

Subcode: Coordinating school and/or community services.

Example: "Working with agencies to establish support for families."

Example: "Coordinate community resources to meet family needs."

Subcode: Collaborating with the school-based Student Support Services Team to address barriers and/or problems with the educational process.

Example: "The School Social Worker serves as a member of the School level Student Services Team."

Subcode: Reporting school social work outcomes to teachers and/or administrators.

Code: Social Casework: The participant describes roles of the school social worker that focuses on addressing the needs of individual students rather than target groups of students with similar problems. Social casework is a process for problem-solving.

Example: "Our Social worker pushes into every classroom every day, and she also provides a group counseling meeting every morning for 50 minutes."

Example: "Our school social worker has many responsibilities. It is hard to determine which ones are primary. She provides crisis intervention counseling in emergency situations, attends SST meetings to determine if assessments are needed for students, completes family history for SST meetings, helps families obtain needed services, and assists with student attendance issues."

Subcode: Conducting assessments of the needs of students.

Example: "To assess and help address the needs of students that may adversely affect their education."

Subcode: Providing crisis intervention and response.

Example - "Being the "point person" for admin and school counselors when we have a crisis or a student is hurting."

Subcode: Conducting home visits.

Example - "conduct home visits and/or bridge the gap between parents and school."

Subcode: Conflict resolution.

Example - "intervene during times of conflict."

Subcode: Providing individual counseling.

Example - "Counseling (group, individual and/or family)"

Subcode: Providing group counseling.

Example - "Counseling (group, individual and/or family)"

Subcode: Providing dropout prevention and intervention services.

Example - "helping students transition after high school to affordable housing and post secondary opportunities, and working with students to help them stay in school; she is a primary resource to help prevent drop outs, or, if they do leave traditional public school, to look for ways that they can finish a high school education."

Subcode: Utilizing appropriate interventions to address barriers to regular school attendance.

Example: "Monitor attendance, meet with students in danger of truancy."

Subcode: Maintaining accurate case records to document services and outcomes.

Example - "From making sure attendance records were up to date"

Subcode: Addressing child abuse and neglect.

Example - "reporting abuse and neglect"

Code: Macro Practice: The participant describes roles of the school social worker that focuses on providing intervention on a large scale. Macro practice focuses on schoolwide interventions, classrooms, and/or large groups of students.

Example: "Work closely with the school counselor to plan programs and address the needs of the school."

Subcode: Conduct assessments of the needs of systems and organizations (i.e., classrooms, schools, neighborhoods, state, district).

Example - "To help find barriers that are preventing students from being successful in school and to help determine and implement solutions."

Example - "Our school social worker works in collaboration with the school counselor and administration to identify programmatic and individual areas that are barriers to student success in school."

Subcode: Conduct ongoing evaluations to determine the level of effectiveness of interventions.

Example - "They support the efforts of the SST to monitor, recommend and track interventions. They track attendance / tardy data to help with compulsory attendance laws and support graduation efforts."

Subcode: Planning programs to promote a caring school climate that fosters academic success.

Example - "sponsors community events to provide outreach"

Example - "plans parent educational nights, coordinates parent affinity groups."

Subcode: Promoting graduation awareness.

Example - Provide support to students to help them overcome any issue that could keep them from graduation"

Subcode: Use assessment results to develop appropriate interventions for students.

Example - "To support the school in the overall experience of the child. Help identify strategies and interventions to improve school performance."

Example - "The social worker then collaborates with others to develop appropriate interventions to support improved academic and behavioral outcomes."

RQ1. How do Principals define the importance of the roles of school social workers as it relates to the educational success of students?

**Category: Value of School Social Work Practice**

Code: Availability: The participant describes the impact of the social work allocation on meeting the needs of students or the roles the school social worker performs.

Example - "Our School Social Worker is highly valued! I only have her at the school 1/2 day each day. I could use a full time social worker."

Example - "I feel it would be of great value to have a school social worker. We are one of the highest poverty schools in our district and there are many issues they could help address with students."

Code: High Poverty Schools - The participant describes the importance of having a school social worker in high poverty schools.

Example - "I feel it would be of great value to have a school social worker. We are one of the highest poverty schools in our district and there are many issues they could help address with students."

Code: Safe and Caring Environment - The participant describes how the role of the school social worker helps students to feel safe and cared for.

Example - "This role when done effectively, drives a trusting school culture and environment."

Code: Quality of the School Social Worker - The participant describes traits and habits of the school social worker that make them an excellent school social worker.

Example - "Our School Social Worker is critical to the success of our students. This is partly due to the demographics of our school but mostly due to the quality of the individual person. Through hard work, organization skills, communication skills and tenacity she has made herself invaluable to our student services team, administration and most importantly our students and families."

Code: Assistance to Students: The participant describes the school social worker providing direct and indirect services to students and their families.

Subcode: Authentic Care: The participant describes the school social worker providing direct services to students and their families.

Example - "The ability to work with students, parents and staff to ensure students' needs are met is imperative to a successful school."



Subcode: Prevention: The participant describes the social worker performing roles that prevent future problems for students.

Example - "Their ability to work with students and their families to address problems before they reach a crisis point and to aid the entire school if there is a crisis."

Code: Assistance to Administrators and Teachers: The participant describes services/roles of the school social worker that benefit the teacher and/or administrator.

Example - See below.

Subcode: Educating Staff

Example - "Social workers also help educate staff members in best practices for relating with and supporting those students and families."

Subcode: Expertise

Example - "The school social worker has the expertise to work with families to provide for their needs."

Subcode: Allows teachers and administration to focus on instruction

Example - "The school social worker can devote her time to meeting the specific needs of children and families in order to help the students be more successful in school and in life. In a perfect world, the teachers and principals would be the ones doing this but with all the curricular and non-curricular pressures and time constraints placed on those folks, we need someone whose main job is to assess and take care of family matters."

Subcode: Professional Network

Example - "She has a network of support that she can depend upon and utilize as differing needs arise."

Subcode: "Neutral Person"/"Safe Haven"

Example - "Social workers provide students with a "safe haven" when needed. These individuals are the people where students can "unload" without fear of discipline or judgement."

Subcode: Part of the School Administrative Team

Example - "Extremely important in that they function as a part of the administrative team."

RQ1. How do Principals define the importance of the roles of school social workers as it relates to the educational success of students?

**Category: Prior Experiences with School Social Workers**

Code: Availability - The participant describes how the availability of the social worker and/or the allocation of services impact the role of the school social worker.

Example - "We are the first school in our district to hire a full time social worker using Title I funds at the school level. Our social worker was the only social worker for the district prior to his current position at our school. In working with him to address issues regarding chronic attendance problems and behavioral issues, I saw the value of having him full-time to support the high level of needs that are associated with a high poverty school such as the one I serve."

Code: Training-Professional Development - The participant describes receiving training or professional development about the role of the school social worker.

Example - "professional development at the district level"

Code - Change of Perspective - The participant indicates that their view of the role has changed as result of a prior experience with school social workers. The change in perspective can be positive or negative.

Example - "The chance to work with the last social worker that we had previously. This person served as a great support to our counselor and worked on the details outside of the school building that were necessary to create next steps to help the child. It has been almost three school years without one. / / The circumstance I remember the most is when the Social Worker took a very hostile parent to lunch off site and got on the parents level to build trust with the school."

Example - "After working with ineffective school social workers, I was able to work with one who was proactive in identifying students who were at-risk and then creating a plan with the administration, teachers, and school counselors to address those needs both in and out of school."

Subcode - First Year Principal

Example - "My main experience was just working with the social worker my first year as an assistant principal. From my personal experience I never really knew what a social worker did when I was a teacher. My first year as an assistant principal at a Title 1 school I was able to see how integral the social worker was in chasing down paperwork, contacting outside agencies and assisting during the student services meetings."

Subcode - Observations of Authentic Care

Example - "A student who in my opinion had no chance of staying in school and graduating did so because the social worker took her under her wing and got her the assistance and support she needed."

Subcode - Personal Experiences with SSW

Example - "He went on a particularly rough and sensitive home visit with me. He was calm and warm and helped build a bridge with the family. It ended up a very positive experience, but could have been a very negative one."

Subcode - Ineffective SSW Practice

Example - "For 5 years, I had two social workers who did very little. I did not know exactly what they were supposed to do so I thought they were doing their job. When I evaluated them, I had to ask them to explain to me what they did related to the standards. Two years ago, I got a new, first year social worker and she is awesome. She has done more work in the two years she has been at my school than the other two ever did. She monitors students' behavior, grades, attendance, etc. and investigates causes of decline in each area. She makes home visits and gets parents out to the school for meetings and involvement in their child's education. I share her with two other schools that are in relatively close proximity so she is able to address situations at the three schools on any day of the week if needed. I never knew what social workers were supposed to do or could do until she came to work for us. She is awesome!"

Subcode - Effective SSW Practice

Example - "Working with an exceptional school social worker at a previous school assignment taught me that social workers wear many hats and must be fully integrated into the school community."

Subcode - Crisis

Example - "Student suicide and the follow-up/coordination of services to all stakeholders."

RQ2 – 7. Survey question asking principals to indicate their level of agreement with the statement that the most important role of school social workers is their contribution to the development of a caring school environment.

**Category: Caring as a Role of School Social Workers**

Code: Strategies for Principals - The participant describes specific strategies or ways that principals can use the role of the school social worker to promote a safe and caring environment.

Example - See below.

Subcode: Visibility

Example - "Increasing their visibility and accessibility should be a key responsibility for administrators to increase caring in schools and increase student achievement."

Subcode: Availability - The participant describes how the allocation of social work services impacts the role of the school social worker. The participant also describes the social workers availability to students and families.

Example - "Our part-time school social worker is an integral part of the team that works with our most vulnerable students. She is also part of our planning when we design ways to improve our culture. If she were full time, then she would be part of our school improvement team and could work with our students every day."

Subcode: Serving on Planning Committees - the participant describes the school social worker's membership/participation on leadership teams in the school. These teams are responsible for planning programs for students (i.e., PBIS, SIT, Care Team, SST, etc).

Example - "Placing the social worker in roles such as a member of the school based leadership team can be extremely helpful."

Subcode: Educating Staff about Individual Students - The participant describes the school social worker communicating with school staff to sensitize them to the home life of students. This also includes reminding staff that students are 'people.'

Example - "The social worker works to educate personnel and stakeholders as to the living conditions of the students we serve. By better understanding their homelife, educators can provide appropriate interventions and reactions to behaviors that are a response to the worldview of the child."

Subcode: Professional Development - The participants describes the school social worker providing professional develop to staff about a variety of topics. The purpose of the training is to improve their ability to form meaningful relationships with students and the role of the social worker.

Example - "Leading professional development on culture, climate and other topics changes perception of the social worker."

Code: Strategies for School Social Workers - The participant describes specific strategies or ways that school social workers can use their roles to promote a safe and caring environment.

Example - See below.

Subcode: Consulting with School Staff - The participant describes the school social worker collaborating with school staff to promote student success. This may include, but is not limited to providing suggestions for working with students, interventions, strategies, and/or best practices.

Example - "Supporting the counselor. Offering ideas and intervention suggestions to help with issues from attendance to grades to social emotional. Any productive suggestions that are assisted in implementation can further the caring piece of any schools climate."

Subcode: Modeling - The participants describes desirable actions of the school social worker that support caring. Most importantly, the social worker is an example that other staff can emulate.

Example - "He models caring for our staff and students for sure. He is a positive male role model who speaks kindly and coaches students in crisis or just in their day to day interactions with peers."

Subcode: Relationships - The participant describes the relationship between school social workers and students and parents. As a result of these relationships the student has a positive school experience.

Example - "I believe that a social worker could be a human connection that a student could have to assist with needs that they have at home or at school in the area of attendance, hygiene, home relations."

Subcode: Providing Authentic Care to Students - The participant describes the school social working providing direct services to students and families.

Example - "The role of the School Social Worker can be utilized to increase caring in schools by providing services, such as working with families, to ensure student needs are being met. They can work with the community to secure resources to help meet these needs. The most prominent example would be the Food Backpack Program that our School Social Worker coordinates with our School Counselor and the United Way to provide food to needy students on the weekends."

Subcode: Traits of the SSW - The participant describes specific traits that school social workers must have to do the job.

Example - "She was proactive, constructive, kind, compassionate...."

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