Spring 5-8-2015

The Perceptions of Mississippi Secondary School Counselors and School Administrators Regarding the Role of School Counselors in Dropout Prevention

Sherrell Chollottie Gilmore
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The University of Southern Mississippi

THE PERCEPTIONS OF MISSISSIPPI SECONDARY SCHOOL COUNSELORS AND SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS REGARDING THE ROLE OF SCHOOL COUNSELORS IN DROPOUT PREVENTION

by

Sherrell Chollottie Gilmore

Abstract of a Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School of The University of Southern Mississippi in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

May 2015
The purpose of the study was to investigate the perceptions of high school administrators and professional high school counselors regarding the primary role of professional school counselors in dropout prevention and the most appropriate way to assess professional school counselors’ effectiveness in dropout prevention. The modified Counselor Role Survey instrument was used to survey high school administrators and professional high school counselors. The study used a descriptive causal-comparative quantitative design.

Hypotheses were tested using independent $t$-tests. The results of the study indicated there was no statistically significant difference between the perceptions of Mississippi high school administrators and professional high school counselors on the primary role of professional school counselors in dropout prevention. There was also no statistically significant difference between Mississippi high school administrators and professional high school counselors on the most appropriate way to assess professional school counselors’ effectiveness in dropout prevention.

Group statistics were calculated on each individual item to see if there would be any differences. The group statistics suggested that high school administrators perceived that professional school counselors should serve more as school leaders or coordinators
for school initiatives in dropout prevention. The findings also indicated that high school administrators perceived that professional school counselors should be identifying and proposing more evidenced-based, national dropout prevention interventions that could be adopted by the school/school system.
THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

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Approved:

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Committee Chair

Dr. Tyra Bailey

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Dr. Ursula Whitehead

Dr. Karen S. Coats
Dean of the Graduate School

May 2015
DEDICATION

First, I would like to thank God for giving me the wisdom and knowledge to complete this process. I dedicate this study to my parents, Earnest and Ora Mae Gilmore, who are both deceased. Although both of my parents had an influence on my life, I credit my mother with having the greatest. My mother taught me to value who I am as a person. Growing up, my mother taught me to always believe in myself even when others did not believe in me. As a child growing up with a strong-willed mother and a hard-working father, I learned that you have to work hard, and you have to be determined in order to be successful. To my parents, I thank you.

I also dedicate this study to my sister, Doris Gilmore, who is deceased. I thank you for always being there for me when I needed you. You were always my biggest cheerleader regardless of what goal I had. To my dear sister, I thank you.

I would like to thank my son, Bobby Q. Bishop, for supporting me during this process and for understanding why I had to put so much time into completing this process. I always told you that you have to work hard for what you want. It is so important for you to set goals in life and to make plans to achieve the goals. To my son, I thank you.

I would like to thank my brothers, Fred Gilmore, Louis Gilmore, and Ernest Gilmore, and my sisters, Shirley Harris, Ruthie Gilmore, and Eula Gilmore Davis, for supporting me during this process. Ruthie and Eula, you can now call me without asking any questions. I would like to thank my brother, Fred, and my niece, LaSpanya Hunter, for their countless prayers. I would like to thank my nieces and nephews for their
continued support throughout this process. I would like to thank my companion, Michael Daniels, for being by my side throughout this process. To my family, I thank you.

I would like to thank my friends for supporting me. I would like to thank Marquette Dubose for her daily encouragement and for her daily prayers. I would like to thank Mrs. Shirley McCann for her countless prayers and for her words of encouragement. I would like to thank Mrs. Lessie Arrington, Virginia Everett, Jackie Henry, Marilyn Lirette, Shymyred Mayfield, Renee Rankin, and Shronda Turner for their countless prayers. To my friends, I thank you.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my committee chair, Dr. Leslie Locke, for her encouragement, motivation, and support. I am so grateful for her. I would like to thank Dr. Locke for only accepting the best from me. I thank God every day for sending me an exceptional committee chair. I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Tyra Bailey, Dr. James T. Johnson, Dr. Thelma Roberson, and Dr. Ursula Whitehead, for their guidance and time. My sincere gratitude goes to Dr. Johnson for his time and service. I would like to thank Dr. Whitehead for sharing her knowledge about school counseling. I would like to thank Dr. Christine Carr for allowing me to use and to modify her survey.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

According to Burnham (2010), “The goal of education is to help children reach their full potential and to give them the knowledge, the skills, and the abilities needed to succeed as adults” (para. 1). Students who complete school and receive a high school diploma are considered successful at the K-12 level (Burnham, 2010). Those students who do not successfully complete high school are called dropouts (Rumberger, 2011). According to President Obama (2010), the dropout rate is “a crisis that the nation cannot afford to accept or ignore” (para. 1). Dropping out of school is detrimental for the individual, for the school system, for the community, and for society (Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2007). Bridgeland, DiIulio, and Morison (2006) reported that educators, policymakers, and leaders should address the problem of students dropping out of high school as a top priority.

Bridgeland et al. (2006) reported dropouts are more likely to be single parents, to be without a job, to be poor, to be receiving welfare, to be incarcerated, and to be in poor health than high school graduates. If the 1.3 million high school dropouts from the class of 2010 would have graduated from high school, the wages in the United States would have been increased by $337 billion (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010). Furthermore, the Alliance for Excellent Education (2010) reported more than half of the 1.3 million students who do not complete school were students from traditionally marginalized groups, such as students of color and economically disadvantaged students. Accordingly, there remain significant achievement gaps between students from
traditionally marginalized groups and White students (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010).

A student’s decision to drop out of school is often the result of the student being disengaged from school (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009). Balfanz, Herzog, and Mac Iver (2007) defined school disengagement as:

A higher order factor composed of correlated subfactors measuring different aspects of the process of detaching from school, disconnecting from its norms and expectations, reducing effort and involvement at school, and withdrawing from a commitment to school and to school completion. (p. 224)

Henry, Knight, and Thornberry (2012) suggest that “in terms of prevention, measuring early school disengagement may be more beneficial, compared to assessing dropout alone” (p. 157).

Although the school system cannot control the individual, the family, or the community, the school system can provide a positive and safe learning environment that encourages students to stay in school (Christle et al., 2007). Lee and Burkam (2003) conducted a study to determine the role that schools play in encouraging students to stay in school or to drop out of school. These researchers explored the connection between school organization and school structure and students’ decisions to stay in school or drop out. Accordingly, they found that the structure of the high school curriculum is related to keeping students in high school until graduation, and when students have a positive relationship with teachers, they are less likely to drop out of high school (Lee & Burkam, 2003).
Students who may be future dropouts send distress signals (failing grades, low school attendance, and unsatisfactory behavior marks) for years before they physically leave school (Neild, Balfanz, & Herzog, 2007; Suh & Suh, 2007). Neild et al. (2007) conducted a study in Philadelphia with cohorts of students to examine signals students send in middle and in high school that indicate at least a 75% probability of dropping out of school. According to Neild et al., a sixth grader showing at least one of the four early distress signals had in fact at least a 75% probability of dropping out of high school. Furthermore, Neild et al. (2007) indicated that 80% of the students in Philadelphia who were dropouts sent signals that indicated they may become a dropout during middle school or during ninth grade. It seems clear that schools need to institute early warning systems that raise flags when students are falling off track so support can be directed to these students as early as possible (Legters & Balfanz, 2010).

Dropouts reported that they would have stayed in school if they were provided with more practical learning opportunities, if they were able to make the connection between work and school, if they were provided with more help with the curriculum, and if they were given more opportunities to engage in relevant learning experiences (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Literature suggests that dropout prevention strategies should start in middle school (Kennelly & Monrad, 2007). Notably, professional school counselors play an important role in identifying, monitoring, intervening, and following-up with students who may be future dropouts (White & Kelly, 2010). Therefore, professional school counselors need to design dropout prevention strategies based on the individual needs of students in their school (Suh & Suh, 2007).
Statement of the Problem

The roles of professional school counselors have changed over the years. School administrators’ perceived roles and functions of professional school counselors are not always in full agreement with those defined by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) model (Pérusse, Goodnough, Donegan, & Jones, 2004). According to ASCA (2012), the appropriate roles and functions of professional school counselors include:

a) individual student academic program planning, b) interpreting cognitive, aptitude, and achievement tests, c) providing counseling to students who are tardy or absent, d) providing counseling to students as to appropriate school dress, e) collaborating with teachers to present school counseling core curriculum lessons, f) analyzing grade-point averages in relationship to achievement, g) interpreting student records, h) providing teachers with suggestions for effective classroom management, i) ensuring student records are maintained as per state and federal regulations, j) helping the school administrator identify and resolve student issues, needs, and problems, k) providing individual and small-group counseling services to students, l) advocating for students at individual education plan meetings, student study teams, and school attendance review boards, and m) analyzing disaggregated data. (p. 45)

However, professional school counselors and school administrators often do not agree on the roles of professional school counselors with regard to actual counseling duties (Monteiro-Leitner, Asner-Self, Milde, Leitner, & Skeleton, 2006).
School administrators determine the roles and functions of staff members in schools (Taylor, 2002). Chata and Loesch (2007) reported that “principals’ directives, rather than professional job descriptions, determine the roles and function that PSCs actually fulfill in schools” (p. 36). Therefore, school administrators, through a lack of understanding of the purposes of professional school counselors, may unintentionally direct the roles of professional school counselors into quasi-administrative directions that fail to capitalize on the talents and training of professional school counselors in promoting student growth and development (Armstrong, MacDonald, & Stillo, 2010).

Notably, school administrators frequently request professional school counselors to perform inappropriate tasks that are “clerical or administrative in nature, such as developing master schedules, keeping student records, disseminating tests, coordinating special services, and administering student discipline, or supervising the lunchroom and playground” (Leuwerke, Walker, & Shi, 2009, p. 263). Eighty percent of professional school counselors’ time should be spent on providing direct and indirect services to students (ASCA, 2012). Therefore, the services provided to students by professional school counselors are called direct student services; the services provided on behalf of students by professional school counselors are called indirect student services (ASCA, 2012). However, non-counseling duties absorb much of a professional school counselor’s time and take away time from the direct and indirect student services that benefit all students (Fitch, Newby, Ballestero, & Marshall, 2001).

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of Mississippi high school administrators and professional high school counselors regarding the primary role
of professional school counselors in dropout prevention. The researcher sought to examine high school administrators’ and professional school counselors’ perceptions of the most appropriate way to assess professional school counselors’ effectiveness in dropout prevention. The following research questions were addressed throughout this study:

1. What do Mississippi professional high school counselors perceive as their primary role in dropout prevention?
2. What do Mississippi high school administrators perceive as professional school counselors’ primary role in dropout prevention?
3. What do Mississippi professional high school counselors perceive as the most appropriate way to assess their effectiveness in dropout prevention?
4. What do Mississippi high school administrators perceive as the most appropriate way to assess professional school counselors’ effectiveness in dropout prevention?
5. Is there a difference between the perceptions of Mississippi professional high school counselors and high school administrators on the primary role of professional school counselors in dropout prevention?
6. Is there a difference between the perceptions of Mississippi professional high school counselors and high school administrators on the most appropriate way to assess professional school counselors’ effectiveness in dropout prevention?

The hypotheses related to the research questions are as follows:

$H_1$: There is a significant difference between the perceptions of Mississippi professional high school counselors and high school administrators on the
primary role of professional school counselors in dropout prevention.

H2: There is a significant difference between Mississippi professional high school counselors and high school administrators on the most appropriate way to assess professional school counselors’ effectiveness in dropout prevention.

Delimitations
This study was limited to public high schools located in Mississippi serving grades 7 through 12. Participants for this study were limited to professional high school counselors and high school administrators. The sample was drawn from school districts located within the southeast region of Mississippi.

Assumptions
It was assumed that professional high school counselors and high school administrators responded to the surveys completely and honestly. It was assumed that professional high school counselors and high school administrators had some knowledge of the typical professional school counselor’s role according to ASCA.

Definition of Terms
The following terms were used throughout this study.

Accountability. For the current study, accountability refers to the effectiveness of school counseling programs in measurable terms and how students are different in terms of achievement as a result of the programs (ASCA, 2012). Also, accountability refers to educators being accountable for student learning as in the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Ellison, 2012).
Advocacy. “Advocacy is the process of actively supporting causes, ideas, or policies that support students’ academic, career, and personal/social needs” (ASCA, 2003, p. 129).

American School Counselor Association (ASCA). “ASCA, which is the school counseling division of the American Counseling Association, provides professional development, publications and other resources, research and advocacy to professional school counselors around the globe” (ASCA, 2012, p. ii).

ASCA National Model. The ASCA National Model is a framework that can be used by professional school counselors to create counseling programs in order to increase student achievement (ASCA, 2003).

At-risk students. At-risk students are students who display academic problems and disciplinary problems leading to low academic achievement that could result in the students dropping out of high school (Janosz, Blanc, Boulerice, & Tremblay, 2000). Included under the definition of at-risk students are students with disabilities, students from low economic backgrounds, students whose first language is not English, students from traditionally marginalized groups (i.e. students of color), students from single parent homes, and students whose parents have low educational attainment (Land & Legters, 2002).

Disaggregated data. Disaggregated data is “data separated into component parts by specific variables such as ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status” (ASCA, 2012, p. 141).

Domains. Domains are “broad areas of knowledge base (academic, career, and personal/social) that promote and enhance the learning process” (ASCA, 2012, p. 141).
Dropping out. Dropping out is a process that involves quitting school before achieving a diploma (Burrus & Roberts, 2012).

Dropout. Dropout refers to “a student who fails to complete a school” (Burrus & Roberts, 2012, p. 1).

Dropout prevention. Initiatives that are used to help students remain in school and to help students graduate from school (What Works Clearinghouse [WWC], 2008).

Economically disadvantaged students. Students who meet the eligibility guidelines for free or reduced-priced lunches or students who receive another form of public assistance (e.g., Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and Medicaid) are identified as economically disadvantaged (Wilkins, Rolfhus, Hartman, Brasiel, Brite, & Howland, 2012).

Educational equity. Educational equity refers to educating all students so that they will perform at higher levels by requiring educators “to rethink and restructure what expectations they hold for all students, how their schools are organized to support teaching and learning, what curricula will be implemented, what practices include and exclude students, and how instruction will be delivered and assessed, among other aspects of schooling” (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004, pp. 602-603).

Educator. The term refers to all education professionals (e.g. administrators, teachers, counselors) and paraprofessionals (e.g. assistant teachers) working in schools (United States Department of Education, n.d.)

Evaluation. Evaluation refers to “a process used by an individual or a group to determine progress or quality; evaluation is a key element in any improvement process” (ASCA. 2003, p. 130).
**Non-counseling activity/duty.** The term refers to any activity or duty that is not considered appropriate for school counselors to perform (ASCA, 2012).

**Opportunity to learn (OTL).** “OTL refers to the conditions or circumstances within the schools and classrooms that promote learning for all students” (Cooper & Liou, 2007, p. 44). OTL “includes the multiplicity of factors that create the conditions for teaching and learning, such as curricula, learning materials, facilities, teachers, and instructional experiences” (Cooper & Liou, 2007, p. 44).

**Oppression.** “Oppression refers to a social dynamic in which certain ways of being in this world- including certain ways of identifying or being identified- are normalized or privileged while other ways are oppressed or marginalized” (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007, p.19).

**Professional school counselor.** “Professional school counselors are certified/licensed educators with the minimum of a master’s degree in school counseling and are uniquely qualified to address the developmental needs of all students through a comprehensive school counseling program addressing the academic, career, and personal/social development of all students” (ASCA, 2013, p. 2).

**School disengagement.** The term refers to the lack of connection to schools’ norms and expectations (Balfanz et al., 2007).

**School administrator.** A certified/licensed educator who directs a school or who has the authority to direct a school (United States Department of Education, n.d.). For this study, school administrator refers to a high school principal or an assistant principal (U. S. Department of Education, n.d.).
**Social justice.** In educational leadership, social justice refers to leaders increasing academic achievement; making students and staff aware of inequities and achievement gaps; and “structuring schools to ensure that students learn in heterogeneous, inclusive classrooms” (McKenzie et al., 2008, p.116).

**Socioeconomic status.** “Socioeconomic status is commonly conceptualized as the social standing or class of an individual or group” (American Psychological Association, 2013, p. 2). Socioeconomic status “is often measured as a combination of education, income, and occupation” (American Psychological Association, 2013, p. 2).

**Students of color.** Students who self-identify as Asian, Black or African American, Latina/Latino, Native American, Bi-racial, or Multi-racial (Seward & Guiffrida, 2012).

**Zero tolerance policies.** “Policies that mandate predetermined consequences for rule infractions, regardless of the circumstances” (Brownstein, 2010, p. 23).

**Justification**

School administrators’ perceptions of professional school counselors’ roles are often used to help determine the tasks that the professional school counselors are given in schools (Kirchner & Setchfield, 2005). In delegating administrative/clerical tasks such as “developing master schedules, keeping student records, disseminating tests, coordinating special services, administering student discipline, or supervising the lunchroom and playground” to professional school counselors, school administrators often ask professional school counselors to carry out duties not associated to ASCA’s standards (Leuwerke et al., 2009, p. 264). In fact, ASCA (2012) has recommended professional school counselors take on leadership roles in order to help develop strategies to improve
student achievement. Therefore, professional school counselors work in partnership with other educators in order to become leaders in schools (Bemak, 2000). Thus, White and Kelly (2010) reported that “the role that school counselors can play in helping to prevent school dropout is substantial and could ultimately enhance not only student outcomes, but also the trajectory of the profession of school counseling” (p. 233).

The academic scholarship is limited as it relates to the roles of professional school counselors in dropout prevention. However, according to ASCA (2012), professional school counselors are vital as they relate to helping students stay in school. Therefore, it is important that school administrators understand professional school counselors’ roles in dropout prevention. Moreover, school administrators must change the way they view professional school counselors’ roles as clerical or administrative if professional school counselors are to become essential in helping all students succeed (Beale, 2004).

Professional school counselors have struggled with role ambiguity for years (Burnham & Jackson, 2000; Gysbers, 2001; Luewerke, Bruinekool, & Lane, 2008; Ross & Herrington, 2006).

More research is required to understand and improve the collaboration between the school administrator and the professional school counselor in order to improve school climate and student achievement (Ross & Herrington, 2006). Results from this study may be used to educate school leaders regarding the potential for professional school counselors’ roles in dropout prevention. This study will contribute to the academic scholarship surrounding school counseling and students at risk of dropping out of high school.
Summary

One of the central purposes of public education is to provide opportunities for all students to learn and to excel (Harris, 2006). However, the large numbers of dropouts among students of color and students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are related to the academic achievement gaps found in schools throughout the United States (Bemak & Chung, 2008). According to Bemak and Chung (2005), “Data show a marked achievement gap, social inequities, and social, economic, and politically based problems that are associated with race, ethnicity, and poverty” (p. 201).

Professional school counselors must show that they are helping to close the achievement gaps by having effective school counseling programs (ASCA, 2012). Notably, professional school counselors could play a crucial role in identifying at-risk students by monitoring grades and attendance, providing behavioral intervention, and following-up with the students (White & Kelly, 2010). In the world of 21st–century schools, professional school counselors must be able to interpret data in order to enlighten and improve their focus (Dahir & Stone, 2009). Therefore, working in a setting with the support of school administrators, professional school counselors can improve the academic achievement of all students by having effective school counseling programs (Beale, 2004).

Professional school counselors and school administrators are key agents in schools with pivotal roles that influence student learning (Militello & Janson, 2007). Thus, professional school counselors and school administrators are increasingly expected to demonstrate their impact on and responsibility for student achievement (Militello & Janson, 2007). Zalaquett and Chatters (2012) stated that “in order to make appropriate
and informed decisions, principals need to be cognizant of the roles and functions of school counselors in order to make appropriate and informed decisions” (p. 90).

However, school administrators must change the way they view professional school counselors’ roles as clerical or administrative if professional school counselors are to become essential in helping all students succeed (Beale, 2004).
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the theoretical foundations and the academic scholarship related to those who are dropping out, factors that contribute to students dropping out, reasons for dropout prevention efforts, and effective strategies to reduce the dropout rate. This chapter also outlines the history of school counseling, the role of the professional school counselor, the role confusion surrounding the role of the counselor, and the roles professional school counselors play in dropout prevention and in helping to close achievement gaps. Additionally, this chapter provides an overview of the conceptual frameworks. Notably, the conceptual frameworks were utilized in this research study to examine professional school counselors’ primary role in dropout prevention and to determine the most effective way to assess professional school counselors’ effectiveness in dropout prevention.

Theoretical Frameworks

MacIver and MacIver (2009) reported that “despite decades of school improvement initiatives, many young people still do not cross the finish line for secondary education with the credential that signifies success—a high school diploma” (p. 1). One of the major issues facing schools in the United States is the achievement gap among different groups of students (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). Notably, the theoretical frameworks that were used for this study include social justice, equity, opportunity to learn, and opportunity gaps.
Social Justice

All students can achieve at high academic levels (Garza, 2008). Garza (2008) reported “children do not fail, but rather the school system fails them” (p. 164). The academic achievement gap that exists in the United States has resulted in the large numbers of high school dropouts among students of color and students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds (Bemak & Chung, 2008). Levin, Belfield, Muennig, and Rouse (2007) stated that “education is expensive, but poor and inadequate education for substantial numbers of our youth may have public and social consequences that are even more costly” (p. 2). Therefore, in education, social justice is the idea that all students are entitled to be treated equally and with respect and all students deserved a quality education (North, 2006).

According to Skrla, Scheurich, Johnson, and Koschoreck (2001), social justice means school success would be equitable across such differences as socioeconomic status and race. Therefore, in the United States, all students are expected to have access to high quality education that will lessen the likelihood of later lifetime inequalities (Levin et al., 2007). However, Levin et al. (2007) reported that “large differences in educational quality and attainment persist across income, race, and region” (p. 2). Because of the large differences in educational quality and attainment, there is a critical need to address the root causes of persistent achievement gaps for students of color and students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds in schools (Skrla et al., 2001). Holcomb-McCoy (2007) stated the following:

Social justice refers to the idea of a just society, which gives individuals and groups their due. Social justice as a general concept is based on the idea of human
rights. Thus, a broad definition of social justice would be the way in which human rights are manifested in the everyday lives of people at every level of society. Whereas equal opportunity and human rights are applicable to everyone, social justice targets the marginalized groups of people in society—it focuses on the disadvantaged. Social justice recognizes that there are situations in which application of the same rules to unequal groups can generate unequal results. Social justice provides a framework to assess the impact of policies and practices. (pp. 17-18)

The idea of social justice is very important in school systems (Pazey & Cole, 2012). Furthermore, if social justice is to be at the forefront of educational policy, then educators need to take part in serious discussions that focus on the academic and social needs of all students (Pazey & Cole, 2012). Academic scholarship calls attention to the need of schools to determine the correlation between the academic problems students encounter and issues related to socioeconomic status and race (Noguera, 2008). Ratts, DeKruyf, and Chen-Hayes (2007) reported that “social justice advocacy is warranted to right injustices, increase access, and improve educational outcomes for all students” (p. 90). Thus, professional school counselors are in unique positions to be social justice leaders in schools (Dixon, Tucker, & Clark, 2010).

According to Holcomb-McCoy (2007), types of oppression, such as classism, racism, and ableism (prejudice against students with disabilities), potentially lead to students performing below what is expected in schools. Blankstein and Houston (2011) suggest that educators must understand that decades of intentional and consequential discrimination based on race, gender, ethnicity, social class, and ability is the foundation
for the disparities we face in society and our schools today. Notably, social justice is doing what is right for the students (Blankstein & Houston, 2011).

In school counseling, a social justice approach reduces the impact of oppression and improves equity and accessibility within the school system (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). According to Holcomb-McCoy (2007), a social justice approach to school counseling is as follows:

Major focus of counseling is on highlighting the strengths of students (empowerment-based counseling); emphasis is on sociocultural and environmental factors (e.g., poverty and discrimination) that influence students’ behavior and performance; major goal of the school counseling program is to challenge oppression and oppressive practices in schools; emphasis on equality and equity; school counseling activities are implemented during the school day and after school hours (e.g., advocating for policies and resources) in the community; avoidance of labeling; students are described by their strengths and positive characteristics; dependence on data to guide counseling services and to evaluate existing interventions; focus on changing existing policies and strategies so that all students are successful; and focus on enrolling students in more rigorous courses. (p. 19)

According to Dowden (2010), social justice requires professional school counselors to take action when inequities exist, which in some instances, may require professional school counselors to speak out against the majority. Thus, professional school counselors become leaders as they collaborate with parents, the community, and other educators to ensure equity for all students (Dowden, 2010).
Equity

There are basically two school systems in the United States (Futrell, 2004). There is a school system in the suburban areas that educates predominantly White and Asian students, and there is a school system in the urban areas that educates predominantly economically disadvantaged students and students of color (Futrell, 2004). According to McKenzie and Scheurich (2004), schools are not providing students of color and economically disadvantaged students with a quality education. Blanchett, Mumford, and Beachum (2005) reported that “when it comes to matters of quality and equity, all educational stakeholders have a responsibility to help ensure the success of all students” (p.79).

Educational equity can be characterized by providing equal opportunities for students to participate in the educational settings (Nieto, 1996). In addition, The Education Trust (2003) stated that “educational equity in a democratic society requires that all children have equal access to high-quality teaching and curricula- and all the support they need to succeed” (para. 3). According to Unterhalter (2009), equity in education when used in academic scholarship refers to treating everyone fair within the educational environment. Therefore, equity consciousness occurs when educators recognize that all students can “achieve academic success, regardless of race, social class, gender, sexual orientation, learning difference, culture, language, religion, and so forth” (Pazey & Cole, 2012, p. 256).

According to Caldwell, Shapiro, and Gross (2007), equity in education is based on giving every student what he or she needs to be successful in school and equality is based on giving every student the same thing in order to be successful in school. Therefore
equity requires educators to treat students differently based on the student’s specific needs (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). These different needs may be based on the students’ cultures, including race, ethnicity, gender, economic class, and exposure to education (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). In contrast, equality requires educators to enforce formal school policies in a consistent manner (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). Notably, the overemphasis on ability grouping and tracking of students of color and economically disadvantaged students has led to many students being denied an equivalent education (Futrell, 2004). Accordingly, Dover (2009) noted that “educational inequity is a fundamental challenge facing contemporary educators” (p. 506).

Students of color and economically disadvantaged students are constantly being treated unfairly within school systems (Griffin & Steen, 2011). Therefore, it is important to have schoolwide initiatives in place to address issues related to equity and diversity (Howard, 2005). Notably, professional school counselors are in appropriate positions to help eliminate inequities within school systems (Bemak & Chung, 2005). In addition, the ASCA National Model outlines the importance of professional school counselors’ emphasis on educational success and equity for all students (Dimmitt & Carey, 2007).

*Opportunity to Learn (OTL)*

The Opportunity to Learn (OTL) framework was developed from the work of policymakers, educators, and researchers who were concerned about the ability of students to have access to subject area content and high quality delivery (Chism & Pang, 2014). According to Chism and Pang (2014), OTL is used by educators in examining the opportunities that students have to achieve and in making sure that equity is a core value in schools. Thus, Cooper and Liou (2007) stated that “OTL includes the multiplicity of
factors that create the conditions for teaching and learning, such as curricula, learning materials, facilities, teachers, and instructional experiences” (p. 44).

As noted by Chism and Pang (2014), OTL standards include seven core areas which are as follows:

- **Teacher quality** is key to student learning because the teacher is the most important component in the classroom. The teacher must be competent in disciplines being taught; decides on and implements effective instructional strategies; uses motivational methods; has effective classroom management skills; attends professional development training; and holds high expectations for students and him/herself.

- **School quality** refers to the cohesive nature of the school and whether there are carefully communicated goals and effective leadership in the building. Elements of schools such as class size, school climate, and diverse staffing are in place. The faculty and staff are professionals and have high academic standards for student learning as a collective organization.

- **District quality** refers to the ability of the organization to provide a comprehensive system where effective achievement is at its core and includes elements such as the recruitment and retention of high quality educators, fair compensation for educators, mandated regular review and adoption of textbooks, required instructional time, common curriculum standards across the district, and additional programs such as Special Education and English as a second language to meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students.
• Content delivery refers to the ability of teachers to engage students in learning. This area is highly integrated with the opportunity of students to learn. Instructional strategies, interventions, and lesson planning that teachers choose will determine if students have access to and are able to learn the content being presented.

• Curriculum should meet federal and state standards; the curriculum must be rigorous and cover depth of content, free from bias, and aligned with district/school curriculum standards.

• Facilities provide for a variety of elements in schools such as the implementation of enough physical space for student learning, the heating and cooling systems in buildings are effective, proper lighting is present, a safe environment is furnished, and recreational and library facilities are provided.

• Resources refer to materials and services provided to students such as access to computer laboratories, internet access, up-to-date textbooks, science lab equipment, physical education apparatuses, and consumable materials like art and office supplies. (p. 20)

Furthermore, school systems can be measured on these seven core areas to make certain that students are provided with opportunities to learn the content in which schools are held accountable (Chism & Pang, 2014). Therefore, OTL refers to the conditions or circumstances within the school’s environment that promote learning for all students (Cooper & Liou, 2007).
Opportunity Gaps

Opportunity gaps increase when opportunities to learn decrease for students (Tienken & Zhao, 2013). Darling-Hammond (2013) reported that “much less attention, however, is paid to the opportunity gap, the cumulative differences in access to key educational resources that support learning at home and at school: expert teachers, personalized attention, high-quality curriculum opportunities, good educational materials, and plentiful information resources” (p. 77). Welner and Carter (2013) reported the following:

Vast opportunity gaps limit children’s future prospects every day in schools in almost every community across America. Talent is being wasted, particularly among those living in poverty and in disadvantaged communities of color. Children in these communities are not reaching their full potential and are not “closing the gap” in achievement—precisely because they are not receiving equitable and meaningful opportunities to reach that potential. (p. 3)

Therefore, efforts to close the achievement gap must begin with efforts to close the opportunity gap (Barnett & Lamy, 2013).

According to Chambers (2009), Focusing on the educational inputs (what students receive on their educational journey) rather than educational outputs (students’ performance on standardized tests) is more important when discussing achievement gaps. Therefore, Chambers (2009) used the term ‘receivement gap’ to direct the focus on structures, not students, and on inputs instead of outputs. As noted by Flores (2007), looking at what students experience in school when describing disparities among student in school is important. Notably, students from traditionally marginalized groups are less
likely to have access to qualified and experienced teachers as well as to receive equitable per student funding but are more likely to face low expectation (Flores, 2007). Clearly, these entities contribute to the ‘receivement gap’ (Flores, 2007).

Who is Dropping Out of High School?

Dropping out of high school should be viewed as a status that affects a group of individuals, as an event that occurs at a particular place and time, and as a process that develops over a long period of time (Rumberger, 2011). Therefore, the process of dropping out starts with the student being disengaged from the school before the student actually stops attending class (Messacar & Oreopoulos, 2013). Dropout rates are higher for males and students of color (Rumberger, 2011). Thus, the school systems in the United States face persistent disparities in achievement among racial and ethnic groups (Rumberger, 2011).

Additionally, the large numbers of dropouts among students of color and students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are related to the academic achievement gaps found in schools throughout the United States (Bemak & Chung, 2008). According to Henry, Knight, and Thornberry (2012), the proficiency rates in core courses, such as reading and math, and the graduation rates for students of color are less than those for White students. Additionally, economically disadvantaged students are six times more likely to dropout out of high school compared with students from higher income backgrounds (Bemak & Chung, 2008).

According to Hupfeld (2010), there are certain types of students’ characteristics that correlate to students who drop out as well as students who are at risk of dropping out of high school. Hupfeld (2010) reported that the characteristics “include being from a
low-income family, being a minority, being male, being from a single parent family, having limited English ability, having learning or emotional disabilities, moving frequently, and being overage for grade level” (p. 1). Furthermore, students who lacked interest in school, who were chronically truant from school, who were academically behind, who were associated with other students who disliked school, who became parents, and who were employed were more likely to drop out of high school (Azzam, 2007). Additionally, the chances for students to drop out of high school increase when students have academic problems such as making low or failing grades, lacking required credits for graduation, and being retained in the same grade (Hupfeld, 2010).

Kennelly and Monrad (2007) stated the following:

The key indicators that researchers have identified as indicative of who is most likely to drop out are poor grades in core subjects, low attendance, failure to be promoted to the next grade, and disengagement in the classroom, including behavioral problems. (p. 1)

Notably, most future dropouts can be identified in the ninth grade (Kennelly & Monrad (2007). Thus, the dropout problem in the United States disproportionately affects economically disadvantaged students, students of color, urban students, and single-parent students attending public schools (Bridgeland et al., 2006).

Factors that Contribute to Students Dropping Out of School

*Individual Factors*

“There is no single reason why students drop out of high school” (Bridgeland et al., 2006, p. iii). Dropping out of school is a cumulative process (Christle et al., 2007). However, we know the warning signs that a student might drop out of school include:
poor grades, attendance problems, disruptive behavior, disinterest in school, early parenthood, grade retention, school mobility, and not being able to adjust to the ninth grade year (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Accordingly, it is important to understand the reasons why students leave school before receiving a diploma (Rumberger, 2004).

Academic achievement is the most significant indicator of whether students complete high school with a diploma or drop out of high school (Rumberger, 2011). Furthermore, academic failure is one of the key factors that drive students to drop out of high school (Princiotta & Reyna, 2009). Additionally, school failure and early school leaving are complex processes that often co-occur with each other (Bradshaw, O’Brennan, & McNeely, 2008). Therefore, school failure is one of the main reasons why students fail to attend school (Suh & Suh, 2007).

According to Kennelly and Monrad (2007), one of the most important indicators of school failure is absenteeism. In addition, students who are chronically absent are at greater risk of dropping out of high school than other students (Sheldon & Epstein, 2004). Farneth and Sundius (2008) said the following:

Oftentimes, school absence is an indicator of challenges occurring with the family, school, or community. Regardless of the reason for school absence, however, students who miss school are losing out on critical academic and social learning opportunities. And as they fall behind, students disengage from school and become much less likely to graduate. (p. 1)

Additionally, dropouts report lack of interest in school as the main reason for dropping out of high school (Princiotta & Reyna, 2009).
The National Research Council and The Institute of Medicine (2004) reported the following:

Research on motivation and engagement is essential to seeing some of the most fundamental and vexing challenges of school reform. Improving meaningful learning depends on the ability of educators to engage the imaginations of students to involve them in new realms of knowledge, building on what they already know and believe, what they care about now, and what they hope for in the future. At the very least, increasing students’ academic achievement requires improvement in attendance, attention, and completion of school work. (p. 14)

Hardre et al., (2006) reported, “Motivation is among the most powerful determinants of students’ success or failure in school” (p. 190). According to Casillas et al., (2012), motivation appears to be a key mechanism in predicting later academic achievement at all educational levels. Thus, teachers need to make lessons relevant and engaging in order to reduce dropout intentions (Khalkhali, Sharifi, & Nikyar, 2013).

The risk of dropping out of high school increases when students engage in any deviant behaviors, such as misbehaving in school, participating in delinquent behavior outside of school, using drugs and alcohol, engaging in sexual activity, and getting pregnant (Rumberger, 2011). According to Rumberger (2011), the most common sign of deviant behavior is school misbehavior. Furthermore, suspension and expulsion increase students’ risk of dropping out of high school (Brownstein, 2010). Lee, Cornell, Gregory, and Fan (2011) found that “if a student had a prior history of suspension, it increased the likelihood of the student dropping out by 78%” (p. 169).
Students’ beliefs, values, and attitudes are related to their performance in school (Rumberger, 2011). Cobb, Meltzer, and Williams (2004) stated the following:

Overcoming years of failure in school is indeed daunting. By high school, many low-achieving students have developed negative attitudes and behaviors. Failure breeds low self-esteem, hopelessness, alienation from school and other institutional supports, and depression. Frustration with failed attempts to perform learning tasks all too often leads to anti-social and self-destructive behavior, including absence, truancy, discipline problems, drug use, crime, and violence. Many dropouts report that the combination of these factors was insurmountable, and that no adult in school seemed to care. When caring educators attempt to intervene, their efforts are often too little and too late to turn the situation around. (p. 6)

A number of students’ background characteristics are related to whether students drop out of school or graduate from school (Rumberger, 2011). Notably, the large numbers of dropouts among students of color and students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are related to the academic achievement gaps found in schools throughout the United States (Bemak & Chung, 2008). Economically disadvantaged students have more school absences due to illness that can contribute to students dropping out of school (Rothstein, 2008). According to Rumberger (2011), dropout rates are higher for males than for females and for African American, Hispanics, and Native Americans than for Asian and Caucasians. Dropping out of school is a cumulative process (Christle et al., 2007). Thus, understanding the reasons why students leave school before receiving a diploma is important (Rumberger, 2004).
The ninth grade, for most students, is the most critical year in determining if a student will graduate from high school (Kennelly & Monrad, 2007). McCallumore and Sparapani (2010) reported that “researchers target ninth grade as the make or break year for completing high school” (p. 447). Additionally, ninth grade students are usually the first to encounter any modifications in the graduation requirements mandated by the state (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010). Notably, students are expected to adjust to changes in rules and expectations in high school with little or no adult support (Cooper & Liou, 2007).

The transition to ninth grade is difficult for most students because of the socially and academically differences between high school and middle school (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010). As noted by Bernstein, Milsap, Schimmenti, and Page (2008), “ninth grade academies are designed to bridge middle and high school” (p. 2). Furthermore, ninth grade academies are designed to help close the achievement gap and help ninth graders stay on track for graduation in four years (Osler & Waden, 2012). Notably, ninth grade academies are defined as yearlong, uniquely designed school programs that provide ninth graders with the resources and support they need to be successful (Osler & Waden, 2012). According to Osler and Waden (2012), ninth grade academies have a positive impact in the following areas: attendance rates, dropout rates, retention, high stakes testing, and graduation rates of students.

**Family Factors**

Three aspects of family factors that contribute to dropping out of high school include: (a) family structure, (b) family practices, and (c) family resources (Rumberger, 2011). Family structure generally refers to the number and type of individuals in a
student’s household (Rumberger, 2011). Economically disadvantaged students get less attention from adults in single-parent homes (Rothstein, 2008). Likewise, students from single-mother families and students from divorced or separated families are less likely to graduate from high school than students from two-biological-parent families (Song, Benin, & Glick, 2012). According to Song et al. (2012), both the loss of a parent due to divorce or separation and the addition of a parent due to remarriage will increase the likelihood that the student will drop out of high school.

Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to drop out of high school because of lack of resources to support some educational activities (Suh & Suh, 2007). Notably, Burney and Beilke (2008) reported that “students from lower income families may have limited access to programs outside of school that provide lessons and enrichment opportunities that add to student competence in a learning environment, confidence in ability to learn new things, social interaction skills, and background information that may transfer to an academic setting” (p. 181).

School Factors

It is important to look at school factors as well as individual student characteristics when trying to understand the problem of high school dropout (Knesting, 2008). Christle et al. (2007) stated that “high schools need to change their organizational structure to become more student-centered environments that nurture all students” (p. 334). Therefore, it is important for educators to examine school factors and how those factors affect students (Knesting, 2008). Accordingly, dropouts reported not getting along with their teachers as a reason for dropping out of high school (Messacar & Oreopoulous, 2013). Some students are effectively pushed out of school by boring and
irrelevant classes, uncaring teachers and administrators, and unreasonable requirements and policies (Rumberger, 2011).

Furthermore, the school setting is a determining factor in the success of students who are at risk of dropping out (Messacar & Oreopoulos, 2013). Notably, dropouts reported not being able to connect school learning to their own lives as the leading reason for dropping out of high school (Bridgeland, 2010). According to Blum (2010), students who do not feel connected to school are lacking the following:

Research has demonstrated that students who feel connected to school have both positive academic and behavioral outcomes. Increased student connectedness promotes classroom engagement and school attendance which increases students’ academic achievement and competency to overcome challenges. Connected students are focused, achieve higher grades, and invest in relationships at school. (p. 1)

Therefore, teachers need to make classroom learning engaging and relevant for students (Somers, Owens, & Piliawsky, 2009).

**Push-Out Factors and Pull-Out Factors**

Stearns and Glennie (2006) stated that “high school students face forces such as disciplinary policies, employment opportunities, and family responsibilities that may push or pull them out of school” (p. 29). Thus, students’ ethnicity and/or gender are a major determinant of the effects of push-out factors and pull-out factors on students (Bradley & Renzulli, 2011; Stearns & Glennie, 2006). There are several factors that may contribute to students being pushed or pulled out of school as students form their identities in high school (Stearns & Glennie, 2006).
**Push-Out Factors**

Push-out factors conceive students dropping out of high school to be caused by factors (school structure and school policies) to be found within the school itself that prevent students from continuing their education (Bradley & Renzulli, 2011; Stearns & Glennie, 2006). Additionally, internal school factors, such as behavioral policies, might contribute to students being pushed out of high school (Stearns & Glennie, 2006). Therefore, zero-tolerance behavior policies are the reason why so many students are being pushed out of school (Brownstein, 2010).

**Pull-Out Factors**

Pull-out factors conceive students dropping out of high school as caused by factors located outside the school, such as out-of-school employment and family responsibilities (Bradley & Renzulli, 2011; Stearns & Glennie, 2006). For example, economically disadvantaged students may drop out of high school not because of a disjuncture between the students’ aspirations and expectations, but because the students choose to do so for more promising prospects such as employment (McNeal, 1997). Hence, students of color and female students are affected more by pull-out factors because these factors focus on family responsibilities, such as the formation of the family and the care of siblings and elders (Stearns & Glennie, 2006). According to pull-out factors, students participate in an economic cost-benefit analysis when deciding to stay in school or not (Van Dorn, Bowen, & Blau, 2006). Therefore, Stearns and Glennie (2006) reported that “schooling is only one important part of the adolescent’s life, along with family, the labor market, peers, and churches and other organizations” (p. 31).
Reasons for Dropout Prevention Actions

Bridgeland et al. (2006) emphasized that “the prevalence of high dropout rates not only imperils individual futures but also profoundly impacts our communities and nation due to the loss of productive workers, the earnings and revenues they would have generated, and the higher costs associated with increased incarceration, healthcare, and social services” (p. 2). A dropout is more likely unhealthy, is less likely to work on a high paying job, and is more likely to be incarcerated than a student who graduates from high school (Messacar & Oreopoulos, 2013). Thus, a student’s decision to drop out of high school is associated with considerable cost to both society and the student (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009).

In today’s workforce, it is detrimental for students to drop out of high school (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Messacar and Oreopoulos (2013) reported that “among recent dropouts, 16% are unemployed and 32% live below the poverty line” (p. 55). Therefore, the high cost associated with dropping out of high school makes clear the need for dropout prevention programs to help students stay in school (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009).

Effective Strategies to Reduce the Dropout Rate

Educators need to understand the reasons why students do not graduate from high school in order to create effective strategies to reduce the dropout rate (Rumberger, 2011). Professional school counselors need to be knowledgeable about issues that cause students to drop out of school so that professional school counselors can design strategies to assist students with graduating from high school (Suh, Suh, & Houston, 2007).
Blankstein (2010) reported the following:

The most effective schools provide a ladder of opportunities for struggling students, ranging from identification of students needing extra support before the school year begins to mandatory enrollment in remedial and/or skill classes. The effect of this range of interventions is to make clear to students that they may not fail. It tells students that the only choice is to learn and succeed. (p. 128)

Therefore, early warning systems can be invaluable tools for providing a ladder of opportunities for struggling students and for preventing students from dropping out of high school (Henry et al., 2012).

According to Kennelly and Monrad (2007), early warning systems should (a) track attendance, behavior, and grades; (b) determine who need additional support in order to graduate; (c) monitor students in the ninth grade who are absent 10 or more days within the first month of school; (d) track freshman grades for the first quarter; (e) monitor fall semester freshmen grades; (f) monitor end-of-year grades; and (g) monitor students who cannot be promoted to tenth grade due to course failure. Therefore, educators need to be proactive and build an early warning system to help students at risk of dropping out of high school (Kennelly & Monrad, 2007). Kennelly and Monrad (2007) stated that “upon establishing an early warning system, the work of matching student needs with the appropriate supports and interventions commences” (p. 11).

Bridgeland et al. (2006) suggested the following strategies to help students stay in school:

- Making lessons more engaging and relevant by improving teaching and curricula.
• Providing support for students who struggle academically and improving instruction.

• Building a school climate that promotes academics.

• Providing adult mentors to students.

• Increasing parental involvement.

• Provide different schools for different students.

• Using parent engagement strategies and individualized graduation plans.

• Creating early warning systems.

According to Bridgeland (2010), dropouts cited that they would have remained in school if they were given more opportunities to engage in relevant learning experiences, such as internships and job shadowing.

As Neild, Balfanz, and Herzog (2007) suggest, schools can intervene in the middle grades by identifying strategies for addressing signals, such as attendance problems, behavior problems, and low grades, by “using a three-tiered school-based model for prevention and intervention” (p. 30). According to Neild et al., the top tier includes effective preventative methods for the whole school (aimed at keeping an estimated 70% to 80% of the students on track to graduate from high school), the second tier consists of targeted interventions (aimed at 10% to 20% of students who require additional focused support), and the third tier consists of intensive interventions (aimed at 5% to 10% of students who need small-group or one-on-one support). In addition, the ninth grade curriculum need to be designed to close the achievement gaps in reading comprehension and mathematics in order for students to be successful during ninth grade (Neild et al., 2007).
As noted previously by McCallumore and Sparapani (2010), “Researchers target ninth grade as the make or break year for completing high school” (p. 447). The ninth grade is considered a transitional year that is marked by low academic performance, low school attendance, and increase discipline problems (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010). Therefore, paying attention to the key predictors (low academic performance, low school attendance, and increase discipline problems) during the ninth grade is vital for receiving the resources necessary for dropout prevention (Kennelly & Monrad, 2007). Ninth grade academies are designed to help ninth graders make a better transition to high school (Osler & Waden, 2012). Likewise, ninth grade academies are smaller learning communities that are designed to help ensure that first year freshmen (ninth graders) have every opportunity to be academically successful in all areas and earn their diploma four years later (Osler & Waden, 2012).

The Counseling Role

Professional school counselors have often been instrumental in helping students make various types of transitions throughout a student’s educational journey (Dimmitt & Carey, 2007). Professional school counselors are often charged with the development of all students in “three domains: academic, career, and personal/social” (Ross & Herrington, 2006, p. 4).

The first domain is academic development:

Standard 1: Students will acquire the attitudes, knowledge, and skills that contribute to effective learning in school and across the life span.

Standard 2: Students will complete school with academic preparation essential to choose from a wide range of substantial postsecondary options, including college.
Standard 3: Students will understand the relationship of academics to the world of work and to life at home and in the community. (ASCA, 2003, p. 34)

The second domain is career development:

Standard 4: Students will acquire the skills to investigate the world of work in relation to knowledge of self and to make informed career decisions.

Standard 5: Students will employ strategies to achieve future career success and satisfaction.

Standard 6: Students will understand the relationship between personal qualities, education, and training and the world of work. (ASCA, 2003, p. 34)

The third domain is personal/social development:

Standard 7: Students will acquire the attitudes, knowledge, and interpersonal skills to help them understand and respect self and others.

Standard 8: Students will make decisions, set goals, and take necessary action to achieve goals.

Standard 9: Students will understand safety and survival skills. (ASCA, 2003, p. 34)

The 13 professional school counselor standards reflect the unique training of professional school counselors and the responsibilities of professional school counselors within the school system (ASCA, 2003).

- Standard 1: The professional school counselor plans, organizes, and delivers the school counseling program.
• Standard 2: The professional school counselor implements the school guidance curriculum through the use of effective instructional skills and careful planning of structured group sessions for all students.

• Standard 3: The professional school counselor implements the individual planning component by guiding individuals and groups of students and their parents or guardians through the development of educational and career plans.

• Standard 4: The professional school counselor provides responsive services through the effective use of individual and small-group counseling, consultation, and referral skills.

• Standard 5: The professional school counselor provides system support through effective school counseling program management and support for other educational programs.

• Standard 6: The professional school counselor discusses the counseling department management system and the program action plans with the school administrator.

• Standard 7: The professional school counselor is responsible for establishing and convening an advisory council for the school counseling program.

• Standard 8: The professional school counselor collects and analyzes data to guide program direction and emphasis.

• Standard 9: The professional school counselor monitors the students on a regular basis as they progress in school.

• Standard 10: The professional school counselor uses time and calendar to implement an efficient program.
• Standard 11: The professional school counselor develops a results evaluation for the program.

• Standard 12: The professional school counselor conducts a yearly program audit.

• Standard 13: The professional school counselor is a student advocate, leader, collaborator, and a systems change agent. (ASCA, 2003, pp. 63-65)

Role Confusion

According to Bardhoshi and Ducan (2009), the role of professional school counselors is unclear in the school system. Monteriro-Leitner et al. (2006) suggested that “in an effort to address this, the American Professional School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2003) developed a comprehensive set of school counseling guidelines, enhancing the efficacy of the school counselor's role within the nation's schools” (p. 248). Considerable debate remains among educators with regard to the professional school counselor’s role despite attempts made by ASCA to clarify the professional school counselor’s role (Griffin & Farris, 2010). Therefore, role ambiguity remains in schools with regard to professional school counselors’ role, function, and purpose (Dahir, 2004).

School administrators are responsible for utilizing all school employees an effective and appropriate ways (Lieberman, 2004). As a result, school administrators have substantial impact on determining the roles of professional school counselors (Amatea & Clark, 2005; Dollarhide, Smith, & Lemberger, 2007). In reality, professional school counselors’ duties are often not aligned with state and national standards because school administrators usually determine professional school counselors’ roles (Fitch et al., 2001). Thus, school administrators’ perceptions are usually not aligned with ASCA national standards (Kirchner & Setchfield, 2005).
In today’s schools, a majority of professional school counselors’ time is spent on administrative and clerical tasks (Foster, Young, & Hermann, 2005). According to Bemak (2000), many professional school counselors have been reassigned non-counseling duties by school administrators, such as monitoring the cafeteria, administering tests, and substituting for teachers in classrooms. Additionally, a lot of a professional school counselor’s time is absorbed by scheduling, participating in disciplinary function, and conducting clerical duties (Fitch et al., 2001). In delegating administrative/clerical tasks, such as maintaining records for students, distributing testing material, and monitoring the cafeteria, to professional school counselors, school administrators usually ask that professional school counselors perform activities not congruent to the standards developed by ASCA (Leuwerke et al., 2009).

Lieberman (2004) reported that “confusion and lack of clarity regarding the role and function of counselors has been highly visible and problematic in the educational field for years” (p. 553). Therefore, a concern that remains in the school counseling profession is the need to define appropriate roles for professional school counselors (Kirchner & Setchfield, 2005). Notably, many professional school counselors believe they could help students be successful if their professional abilities and skills were being used in effective ways (Ross & Herrington, 2006). Despite the fact that the ASCA National Model (2005) has defined standards for providing effective school counseling services to every student, role confusion remains in the school counseling profession (Shillingford & Lambie, 2010).

According to ASCA (2012), the non-counseling activities are as follows:

- coordinating paperwork and data entry of all new students
• coordinating cognitive, aptitude, and achievement testing programs
• signing excuses for students who are tardy or absent
• performing disciplinary actions or assigning discipline consequences
• sending students home who are not appropriately dressed
• teaching classes when teachers are absent
• computing grade-point averages
• maintaining student records
• supervising classrooms or common areas
• keeping clerical records
• assisting with duties in the administrator’s office
• providing therapy or long-term counseling in schools to address psychological disorders
• coordinating school wide individual education plans, student study teams, and school attendance review boards
• serving as a data entry clerk. (p. 45)

Compared to the non-counseling activities, ASCA (2012) reported the appropriate counseling activities as follows:

• individual student academic program planning
• interpreting cognitive, aptitude, and achievement tests
• providing counseling to students who are tardy or absent
• providing counseling to students who have disciplinary problems
• providing counseling to students as to appropriate school dress
• collaborating with teachers to present school counseling core curriculum lessons
• analyzing grade-point averages in relationship to achievement
• interpreting student records
• providing teachers with suggestions for effective classroom management
• ensuring student records are maintained as per state and federal regulations
• providing individual and small-group counseling services to students
• advocating for students at individual education plan meetings, student study teams, and school attendance review boards
• analyzing disaggregated data. (p. 45)

Thus, a concern that remains in the school counseling profession is the need to define appropriate roles for professional school counselors (Kirchner & Setchfield, 2005).

Several studies investigated the perceptions of school administrators and professional school counselors with regard to the roles of professional school counselors (Monteiro-Leitner et al., 2006; Kirchner & Setchfield, 2005; Fitch et al., 2001; Pérusse, Goodnough, Donegan, & Jones, 2004). Monteiro-Leitner et al. (2006) surveyed professional school counselors-in-training, professional school counselors, and school administrators with regard to the perceptions of professional school counselors’ current and expected roles. Professional school counselors-in-training, professional school counselors, and school administrators have different perceptions of the roles of professional school counselors with regard to time spent on counseling duties (Monteiro-Leitner et al., 2006).
According to Monteiro-Leitner et al. (2006), the results of this study suggested some of the reasons for the confusion:

(a) All key players do not know what a school counselor’s role is, and when they do, they do not always agree on that role; (b) the power differentials inherent in the relationships among key players make it difficult for the school counselor’s role to become institutionalized; and (c) economic, regional, local, and student needs play a significant part in altering the daily functioning of an individual professional school counselor’s duties. (p. 250)

Kirchner and Setchfield (2005) surveyed practicing professional school counselors and school administrators to determine how professional school counselors and school administrators “who had taken Education 603 Leadership and School Transformation” (a class at the University of Puget Sound) perceive the role of professional school counselors (p. 11). Professional school counselors and school administrators were introduced to each other’s roles in the class (Kirchner & Setchfield, 2005). The outcome of this study demonstrated professional school counselors and school administrators had a tendency to agree with congruent role statements, but school administrators had a tendency to support incongruent role statements more than professional school counselors (Kirchner & Setchfield, 2005).

Fitch et al. (2001) surveyed graduate students in educational administration programs at two universities in Kansas to determine how the students perceived the role of professional school counselors. The results of this study showed that the graduate students ranked the following activities as significant or highly significant: keeping student’s records, helping with special education, administering student discipline,
administering tests, and registering students (Fitch et al., 2001). According to Fitch et al. (2001), over 50% of graduate students ranked administering tests, helping with special education, keeping student’s records, and registering students as significant or highly significant professional school counselor activities and 27.9% of the graduate students ranked administering discipline as significant.

Pérusse et al. (2004) surveyed professional school counselors and school administrators with regard to counseling duties and non-counseling duties. Over 80% of school administrators selected the non-counseling duties (scheduling and registering students who are new, keeping records, and overseeing aptitude, cognitive, and achievement tests) as counseling duties (Pérusse et al., 2004). According to Pérusse et al. (2004), the results of this study suggested that the top three non-counseling duties (scheduling and registering students who are new; keeping records; and overseeing aptitude, cognitive, and achievement tests) that were performed by professional school counselors were supported by over 80% of school administrators as counseling duties.

Role of Professional School Counselors in Dropout Prevention

Student Advocates

House and Hayes (2002) suggested that “counselors are ideally prepared and, as educational leaders, are ideally situated to serve as advocates for all students in meeting high standards” (p. 258). According to The Education Trust (2003), professional school counselors are in ideal positions to serve as social justice advocates for students by (a) evaluating and understanding the needs of the student, identifying culture, values, backgrounds, and languages differences; (b) acting as liaisons between students and staff, setting high aspirations for all students, and developing support to help students succeed;
(c) evaluating barriers that hinder inclusion, academic achievement, and learning; (d) coordinating school and community resources for students, families, and staff to improve academic achievement; and (e) providing leadership for school officials to view data through equity lens. Therefore, professional school counselors need to maintain moral professional relationships while encouraging school leaders to implement goals that benefit every student (Bemak & Chung, 2005).

School Leaders

Howard (2005) stated that “leadership is the process of communication (verbal and non-verbal) that involves coaching, motivating/inspiring, directing/guiding, and supporting/counseling others” (p. 385). Furthermore, professional school counselors should act as leaders (Janson, Stone, & Clark, 2009). Accordingly, professional school counselors act as leaders in dropout prevention by utilizing specific data to ensure the achievement and success of all students (Janson et al., 2009). Thus, in order to determine the range of the dropout problem, professional school counselors need to analyze student data to identify potential dropouts (Dynarski et al., 2008).

Notably, professional school counselors play an important role in helping students grow in the following areas: personal, career, academic, and social (Curry & DeVoss, 2009). Wingfield, Reese, and West-Olatunji (2010) reported that “the ASCA National Model (2005) sets precedence for school counselors to serve as school community leaders through student advocacy, collaboration, and promoting systemic change that will maximize the academic, career, and personal/social outcomes for all students” (p. 120).
Therefore, in order to be school leaders, professional school counselors are anticipated to advocate for every student in the following areas: academic, personal, career, and social (Paisley & Hayes, 2003).

**Collaborators**

ASCA (2012) stated that “professional school counselors work with stakeholders, both inside and outside of the school, as a part of the comprehensive school counseling program” (p. 6). In order to achieve the goals of access, equity, and academic achievement for all students, professional school counselors collaborate with school administrators, teachers, students and staff (ASCA, 2012). According to Sink (2008), professional school counselors collaborate with school administrators and teachers (a) to design a community of learning within the school environment; (b) to provide interventions to those students identified as at-risk students in a small-group environment; and (c) to provide academic remediation to those students identified as having academic difficulties.

Outside of school, professional school counselors work in partnership with the following stakeholders in order to gain access to necessary resources for students: community agencies, community members, and parents (ASCA, 2012). Therefore, professional school counselors provide parents with the assistance they need to become involved in their child’s education (Davis & Lambie, 2005). According to Steen and Noguera (2010), professional school counselors work with families and community members to identify and to meet students’ needs and to eliminate barriers to students’ learning. Through family, school, and community collaboration, professional school
counselors can be provided with support for student achievement and development that cannot be achieved by an individual or school alone (ASCA, 2012).

**System Change Agents**

Professional school counselors are expected to meet the needs of all students by recognizing systemic barriers that prevent student’s learning (ASCA, 2012). Furthermore, House and Hayes (2002) suggested that “issues of equity, access, and the lack of supporting conditions for success come to counselors’ attention every day in the form of data, files, and reports of whole school and individual student progress or failure” (p. 253). Thus, systemic change promotes equity and access to educational opportunities (ASCA, 2012).

Professional school counselors have access to school-wide achievement, attendance, and behavioral data that highlights the need to recognize and to remove barriers that prevent all students from achieving college and career readiness (ASCA, 2012). The achievement, attendance, and behavioral data are used by professional school counselors to facilitate systemic change (ASCA, 2012). ACSA (2012) stated that “systemic change occurs when inequitable policies, procedures, and attitudes are changed, promoting equity and access to educational opportunities for all students” (p. 9). Professional school counselors use qualitative and quantitative data from school and community resources to advocate for every student (House & Hayes, 2002).

**Early Identification of At-Risk Students**

Professional school counselors have been forced to examine their roles in encouraging students to perform at high levels and to complete school (White & Kelly, 2010). Consequently, White and Kelly (2010) reported that “the role that school
counselors can play in helping to prevent school dropout is substantial and could ultimately enhance not only student outcomes, but also the trajectory of the profession of school counseling” (p. 233). In the world of 21st–century schools, professional school counselors must be able to interpret data in order to enlighten and improve their focus (Dahir & Stone, 2009). Therefore, professional school counselors need to be knowledgeable about issues that cause students to drop out of school so that professional school counselors can design strategies to assist students with graduating from high school (Suh, Suh, & Houston, 2007).

Students at risk of dropping out of school send distress signals (failing grades in mathematics, failing grades in English, low school attendance, and unsatisfactory behavior marks) for years before they physically leave school (Neild et al., 2007). Neild et al. conducted a study in Philadelphia with cohorts of students to examine signals students send in middle and in high school that would indicate at least a 75% probability of dropping out of school. Sixth grade and ninth grade students participated in the study (Neild et al., 2007). According to Neild et al. (2007) a sixth grader showing at least one of the four early distress signals had in fact at least a 75% probability of dropping out of high school.

Furthermore, Neild et al. (2007) indicated that 80% of the students in Philadelphia who were dropouts sent signals that indicated he or she may become a dropout during middle school or during ninth grade. Based on this data, it seems clear that schools need to create warning systems to recognize potential dropouts early and to provide interventions to address the individual needs of the students (Neild et al., 2007). Literature suggests that dropout prevention strategies should start in middle school
Therefore, professional school counselors need to design dropout prevention strategies based on the individual needs of students in their school (Suh & Suh, 2007).  

Closing the Gap

Schools are held responsible for the academic achievement of all students (ASCA, 2003). Professional school counselors are aware that some students do not come to school prepared to learn (ASCA, 2003). By analyzing disaggregated data, professional school counselors can discover areas where at-risk students are having academic difficulty and can discover issues of equity and access (ASCA, 2003). To disaggregate data, professional school counselors analyze the data to see how students are performing compared to their peers (ASCA, 2003). After identifying the barriers, professional school counselors create programs to eliminate the barriers and to close the achievement gap (ASCA, 2003). Furthermore, Rothstein (2008) suggested that “closing or substantially narrowing achievement gaps requires combining school improvement with reforms that narrow vast socioeconomic inequalities in the United States” (p. 9).

Conceptual Framework

ASCA National Model

The ASCA National Model was first published in 2003 with the purpose of changing school counseling to a program for all students (ASCA, 2012). The ASCA National Model was formed to clarify the appropriate roles of professional school counselors (Pyne, 2011). According to Singh, Urbano, Haston, and McMahon (2010), “The ASCA National Model, which offers a comprehensive framework to guide school counseling program, is based on the qualities of leadership, advocacy, and collaboration,
which are intended to lead to systemic change” (p. 135). Furthermore, the ASCA National Model outlines the importance of professional school counselors’ emphasis on educational success and equity for all students (Dimmitt & Carey, 2007).

According to Hatch and Chen-Hayes (2008), “The success of the ASCA National Model depended upon the willingness of school counselors to learn new skills, to change outdated practices, and to design and implement program evaluation and action research studies showing program model component effectiveness” (p. 34). The ASCA National Model can be used as a guide by professional school counselors to help them best serve students in their schools (Dimmitt & Carey, 2007). Notably, ASCA (2012) reported the following:

The ASCA National Model ensures equitable access to a rigorous education for all students, identifies the knowledge and skills all students will acquire as a result of the K-12 comprehensive school counseling program, is delivered to all students in a systematic fashion, is based on data-driven decision making, and is provided by a state-credentialed school counselor. (p. xii)

The ASCA National Model is the key source for defining the roles of professional school counselors (Bardhoshi & Ducan, 2009). Notably for this study, the researcher used the ASCA National Model to examine the primary role of professional school counselors in dropout prevention. The following four ASCA National Model’s themes were used throughout this study to frame professional school counselors’ role in dropout prevention: “leadership, advocacy, collaboration, and systemic change” (ASCA, 2012, p. 1).
• **Leadership.** Leadership serves as the foundation of essential skills, such as advocacy, collaboration, and systemic change, because these essential skills require a certain amount of leadership (Mason & McMahon, 2009). Thus, leadership is defined as the capacity or ability to guide others (ASCA, 2012). As stated in ASCA (2012), “School counseling leadership supports academic achievement and student development, advances effective delivery of the comprehensive school counseling program, promotes professional identity, and overcomes challenges of role inconsistency” (Shillingford & Lambie, 2010, p. 1). Therefore, professional school counselors are leaders who ensure the success of all students by engaging in system-wide changes (ASCA, 2003). Professional school counselors perform as leaders, advocates, and collaborators to close the achievement gap that exist among economically disadvantaged students and students of colors (ASCA, 2003).

• **Advocacy.** Advocacy is defined as the process of actively supporting causes, ideas, or policies that support the educational need of students (ASCA, 2003). Professional school counselors promote school reform by advocating for the academic success of all students (ASCA, 2012). ASCA (2012) reported that “to promote student achievement, school counselors advocate for students’ academic, career and personal/social development needs and work to ensure these needs are addressed throughout the K-12 school experience” (p. 4).

• **Collaboration.** Baker, Robichaud, Dietrich, Wells, and Schreck (2009) stated that “collaboration implies a process of mutually seeking ways to understand and resolve challenges” (p. 202). Notably, professional school counselors collaborate
within the school with administrators, students, teachers, and staff for the common purpose of equity, access, and academic success for all students (ASCA, 2012). Furthermore, outside of school, professional school counselors collaborate with the following stakeholders in order to gain access to necessary resources: community agencies, community members, and parents (ASCA, 2012).

- **Systemic Change.** Systemic change is defined as change affecting the entire system (ASCA, 2012). In order to create systemic change, professional school counselors use school-wide achievement, attendance, and behavioral data to support leadership, advocacy, and collaboration (ASCA, 2012). Professional school counselors are expected to meet the needs of all students by recognizing systemic barriers that prevent student’s learning (ASCA, 2012). Systemic barriers (ranging from state or federal law, to district policies, to school and classroom procedures) are often identified after a review of data reveals gaps between student groups in achievement, opportunities, and attainment (ASCA, 2012). ACSA (2012) stated that “systemic change occurs when inequitable policies, procedures, and attitudes are changed, promoting equity and access to educational opportunities for all students” (p. 9).

In addition, the four elements of the ASCA National Model are “foundation, management, delivery, and accountability” (ASCA, 2012, p. xiii). The delivery system was used throughout this study to describe counselors’ roles in dropout prevention. The accountability element was used to assess professional school counselors’ effectiveness in dropout prevention.
• **Delivery System.** Delivery is defined as “the means around which the school counseling program is organized and delivered, including direct student services (school counseling core curriculum, individual student planning and responsive services) and indirect student services (referrals, consultation, and collaboration)” (ASCA, 2012, p. 141). ASCA (2012) recommends that 80% or more of the professional school counselor’s time be spent in direct and indirect student services.

• **Accountability.** Accountability is defined as “being responsible for one’s actions and contributions, especially in terms of objectives, procedures, and results” (Myrick, 2003, p. 174). In order to determine the effectiveness of school counseling programs, professional school counselors analyze data to conclude how student are different as a result of the school counseling program (ASCA, 2012). Accordingly, professional school counselors regularly evaluate their program to determine the program effectiveness (ASCA, 2012).

*What Works Clearinghouse*

“No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB; 2002) leaves a legacy of accountable high-stakes expectations in which every professional in every school building is expected to contribute to the overall strategy for improving school achievement” (Dahir & Stone, 2009, p.12). Accountability is tied closely to student success (Myrick, 2003). Therefore, accountability requires the use of data to document the effectiveness of the school counseling program toward the academic success of every student (Dahir & Stone, 2003).

Accountability involves all educators sharing responsibility to remove any barrier that prevent students from learning (Dahir & Stone, 2003). Thus, the ultimate goal of
accountability is to close the achievement gap (Dahir & Stone, 2003). White (2007) reported that “accountability is the key to determining the success of school counseling programs” (p. 5). Three outcome domains (“staying in school, progressing in school, and completing school”) recommended by What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) were used to determine the most effective way to assess professional school counselors’ effectiveness in dropout prevention (WWC, 2008, p. 1).

- Staying in school. WWC (2008) reported that “the staying in school domain includes measures of whether the student remained enrolled in school or dropped out of school without earning a high school diploma or GED certificate, as well as the number of days enrolled” (p.3).

- Progressing in school. WWC (2008) reported that “the progressing in school domain includes measures of credits earned, grade promotion, whether the student is making normal progress toward graduation, and highest grade completed” (p.3).

- Completing school. WWC (2008) reported that “the completing school domain includes measures of whether the student earned a high school diploma or if the student received a GED certificate” (p. 3).

Summary

School dropout and failure depend on students receiving the necessary support to succeed from parents, caregivers, and educators (Bradshaw et al., 2008). Therefore, Shoffner and Williamson (2000) stated that “it is vital for school counselors and school principal to understand and appreciate their different roles, responsibilities, and paradigms so they can engage in collaborative work that addresses student development
and learning goals” (p. 139). Furthermore, Lieberman (2004) concluded that school administrators should take the initiative to learn and to understand professional school counselors’ appropriate roles and functions.

Effective interventions need to be used by school leaders to address the early warning indicators in order to prevent students from dropping out of school (MacIver & MacIver, 2009). Professional school counselors can use interventions to address the individual and school risk factors found within the school environment (White & Kelly, 2010). Thus, it is important that professional school counselors collaborate with other educators in order to become leaders within schools (Bemak, 2000). Zalaquett and Chatters (2012) stated that “in order to make appropriate and informed decisions, principals need to be cognizant of the roles and functions of school counselors in order to make appropriate and informed decisions” (p. 90).
CHAPTER III
METHODODOLOGY

Introduction

Chapter III outlines the research design that was used in this study. It also outlines the research questions and hypotheses. Information related to the participants, the instrument, the procedures, and the data analysis are also reported in this chapter.

Research Design

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of high school administrators and professional high school counselors regarding the primary role of professional school counselors in dropout prevention. The researcher sought to determine high school administrators’ and professional high school counselors’ perceptions of the most appropriate way to assess professional school counselors’ effectiveness in dropout prevention. A descriptive causal-comparative quantitative design was used in this study. Data were obtained from a survey completed by high school administrators and professional high school counselors.

The independent variable in the study was the participants’ job title (professional school counselor or school administrator). The perceptions of the primary role in dropout prevention and the perceptions of the most appropriate way to assess professional school counselors’ effectiveness in dropout prevention were the dependent variables. The participants’ gender, race, and years of experience were used to describe the sample.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Discovering the perceptions of both high school administrators and professional high school counselors regarding the role of the professional school counselors in dropout
prevention yielded some valuable information. Ross and Herrington (2006) reported that it is important to discover the perceptions of school administrators and professional school counselors regarding the role of professional school counselors in order to improve the collaboration between school administrators and counselors. The following research questions were addressed throughout this study:

1. What do Mississippi professional high school counselors perceive as their primary role in dropout prevention?
2. What do Mississippi high school administrators perceive as professional school counselors’ primary role in dropout prevention?
3. What do Mississippi professional high school counselors perceive as the most appropriate way to assess their effectiveness in dropout prevention?
4. What do Mississippi high school administrators perceive as the most appropriate way to assess professional school counselors’ effectiveness in dropout prevention?
5. Is there a difference between the perceptions of Mississippi professional high school counselors and high school administrators on the primary role of professional school counselors in dropout prevention?
6. Is there a difference between the perceptions of Mississippi professional high school counselors and high school administrators on the most appropriate way to assess professional school counselors’ effectiveness in dropout prevention?

The hypotheses related to the research questions are as follows:

$H_1$: There is a significant difference between the perceptions of Mississippi professional high school counselors and high school administrators on the
primary role of professional school counselors in dropout prevention.

H2: There is a significant difference between Mississippi professional high school counselors and high school administrators on the most appropriate way to assess professional school counselors’ effectiveness in dropout prevention.

Participants in the Study

After obtaining permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at The University of Southern Mississippi (Appendix A) and from superintendents in the 20 participating districts, the researcher conducted this study in schools located in the southeast region of Mississippi. High school administrators and professional high school counselors were invited to take part in the survey. All participants held a valid school administrator or professional school counselor license issued by the Mississippi Department of Education. Only school administrators and professional school counselors working in public high schools in Mississippi during the 2014-2015 school year were asked to participate in the study.

Instrumentation

The survey instrument used in this study was a modified version of the Counselor Roles Survey (Appendix B) developed by Christine Carr (2010). The researcher obtained permission from Carr (Appendix C) to revise and to use the instrument for this study. The modified survey consisted of items related to the perceptions of school administrators and professional school counselors with regard to the primary role of professional school counselors in dropout prevention and the most appropriate way to assess professional school counselors’ effectiveness in dropout prevention.
The modified Counselor Roles Survey was validated by a panel that included three experts (one school administrator and two professional school counselors) in the field. This panel assisted the researcher with determining content validity and clarity of the questions. After obtaining IRB approval, a pilot study was conducted to evaluate the reliability and face validity of the instrument. The pilot study included seven school administrators and five professional school counselors. The data from the pilot study were used to determine reliability. Results from the pilot study were entered into SPSS for analysis.

A Cronbach’s alpha (α) test was conducted on the two constructs (role and assessment) to test for internal consistency reliability of the modified survey. The minimum acceptable value was .7 for each of the two constructs (role and assessment). Notably, the alphas were above the minimally acceptable .7 for each constructs (role and assessment). Therefore, the instrument was considered a reliable measure for this study. The Cronbach’s alpha test results are reported in Table 1.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary Role</td>
<td>.834</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessing Effectiveness</td>
<td>.777</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The modified Counselor Roles Survey was divided into three sections. Section I included demographic information. This section was developed by the researcher and included four items related to the participant’s current job title (school administrator or
professional school counselor), gender, years of experience, and race/ethnicity. The second section consisted of items related to participant’s perceptions of appropriate roles of professional school counselors with regard to dropout prevention. These items were developed by the creator of the original instrument, Christine Carr (2010). The responses from items Section II were used to answer Research Questions 1, 2, and 5.

The third section of the instrument consisted of items related to assessment. These items focused on the participants’ perceptions of the most appropriate way to assess professional school counselors’ effectiveness in dropout prevention. These items were also part of the original instrument developed by Christine Carr. The responses from items in this section were used to answer Research Questions 3, 4, and 6. The participants used a five-point Likert scale to respond to items in Section II and Section III. The Likert-scale ranged from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

Procedures

The researcher conducted this study in 20 school districts located in the southeast region of Mississippi after obtaining permission from the Internal Review Board (IRB) at The University of Southern Mississippi and each school district. The researcher sent permission letters (Appendix D) and consent forms (Appendix E) to superintendents using the contact information provided by Mississippi Department of Education for superintendents. After receiving the necessary authorization, the researcher contacted the schools’ administrators by telephone to establish a protocol for collecting data for that school. The participants included 43 high school administrators and 39 professional school counselors.
A packet of surveys with cover letters (Appendix F) attached were mailed to each school administrator or representative. The cover letter explained the study, purpose of the study, benefits of participating in the study, risks of participating in the study, and confidentiality. The letter also explained that participation in the study was voluntary, clarified that completing the survey implied consent to participate in the study, and explained that the responses to the paper surveys would be kept in a locked file cabinet by the researcher for no more than three years and paper surveys will be properly destroyed after that time. The survey was conducted anonymously. Identifying information was not requested from the participants on the survey.

The researcher provided a return postage paid envelope with each packet for returning of surveys. The participants at each school were asked to return the completed surveys to the school administrator or representative. After collecting all surveys, the school administrator or representative mailed the completed surveys to the researcher.

Data Analysis

The independent variable in the study was the participants’ job title (school administrator or professional school counselor). The perceptions of the primary role in dropout prevention and the perceptions of the most appropriate way to assess professional school counselors’ effectiveness in dropout prevention were the dependent variables. The participants’ gender, race/ethnicity, and years of experience were used to describe the sample.

The responses to the survey were analyzed using version 22 of SPSS. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to obtain answers to the proposed research questions. Descriptive statistics were calculated on all demographic information. A Cronbach’s
alpha test was performed to determine the reliability of the subscales after responses for final study were received. The acceptable range for the Cronbach’s alpha was .7 or greater. Each subscale yielded a reliability of greater than .7. The Cronbach’s alpha test results for the final study are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2

Cronbach’s Alpha for Final Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary Role</td>
<td>.846</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessing Effectiveness</td>
<td>.926</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two independent $t$-tests were performed to determine whether the perceptions of the counselor’s role varied as a function of the participants’ job title (school administrator or professional school counselor). The independent $t$-tests were conducted in order to determine whether there are differences between professional school counselors’ and school administrators’ perceptions of the most appropriate way to assess professional school counselors’ effectiveness in dropout prevention.

Summary

The researcher used a descriptive causal-comparative quantitative design for this study. IRB and school districts’ approval was obtained. Surveys that consist of 20 items were mailed to high school administrators and professional school counselors in the southeast region of Mississippi. Return postage paid envelopes for return surveys were included. Data from the surveys were analyzed using two independent $t$-tests, descriptive statistics, and inferential statistics. The results are discussed in Chapter IV.
CHAPTER IV
RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of high school administrators and professional high school counselors regarding the primary role of professional school counselors in dropout prevention. A descriptive causal-comparative quantitative design was used in the current study to examine high school administrators’ and professional school counselors’ perceptions of the most appropriate way to assess professional school counselors’ effectiveness in dropout prevention. The participants were asked to complete a survey that consisted of 20 items. The survey included four demographic items, ten items related to the primary role of professional school counselors in dropout prevention, and six items related to the most appropriate way to assess professional school counselors’ effectiveness in dropout prevention.

The researcher received permission to conduct research from superintendents of 20 school districts within the southeast region of Mississippi. High school administrators and professional high school counselors from 27 schools within the 20 school districts participated in the study. A total of 123 Counselor Roles Surveys were mailed to high school administrators (68) and professional high school counselors (55). A total of 82 surveys (67%) were returned to the researcher from 43 high school administrators and 39 professional high school counselors. The response rate for high school administrators was 63%, and the response rate for professional high school counselors was 71%.
Descriptive Statistics

Demographic Items

The researcher analyzed descriptive statistics to describe the responses for the demographic items on the Counselor Roles Survey received from the high school administrators and professional high school counselors. Frequency tables were generated for the demographic items. A majority of the participants were high school administrators. Of the 82 participants, 43 (52.4%) were high school administrators and 39 (47.6%) were professional high school counselors. Table 3 provides the frequencies and percentages for this demographic item.

Table 3

Frequencies and Percentages of Participants’ Job Title

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job Title</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Administrator</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>52.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Counselor</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>47.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participants were asked to indicate their gender. The majority of the participants were female. Of the participants responding, 56 (68.3%) were female and 26 (31.7%) were male. Table 4 outlines the frequencies and percentages for the participants’ gender.
Table 4

*Frequencies and Percentages of Participants’ Gender*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>31.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>68.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participants were asked to indicate their years of experience in their current positions. A majority of the participants indicated 3 to 9 years of experience. Out of the 82 participants, 14 (17.1%) reported less than 3 years of experience, 32 (39.0%) reported 3 to 9 years of experience, 25 (30.5%) reported 10 to 20 years of experience, and 11(13.4%) reported more than 20 years of experience. These results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5

*Frequencies and Percentages of Participants’ Years of Experience*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 3 years</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-9 years</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>39.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-20 years</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>30.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 20 years</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The participants were asked to categorize their ethnicity. The choices the participants could choose from were African American, American Indian, Asian, Caucasian, Hispanic, Multiracial, or Other. The participants in this study categorized themselves as being either African American or Caucasian. A majority of the participants were identified as Caucasian. Out of the 82 participants, 60 (73.2%) categorized themselves as Caucasian and 22 (26.8%) categorized themselves as African American. No participant selected American Indian, Asian, Hispanic, Multiracial, or Other. Table 6 provides the frequencies and percentages for this demographic item.

Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>26.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>73.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Subscales

Section II of the survey instrument consisted of 10 items regarding the participants’ perceptions of what the professional school counselor’s primary role should be in dropout prevention. Section III consisted of six items regarding the participants’ perceptions of what is the most appropriate way to assess the professional school counselor’s effectiveness in dropout prevention. Participants used Likert-scale responses to respond to items within the subscales. The scale was as follows: 5=Strongly Agree, 4=Agree, 3=Not Sure, 2=Disagree and 1=Strongly Disagree. Descriptive statistics were
calculated for each subscale. The results from these analyses are reported in the following sections.

**Primary Role.** This subscale was used to respond to Research Question 1 (What do Mississippi professional high school counselors perceive as their primary role in dropout prevention?), Research Question 2 (What do Mississippi high school administrators perceive as professional school counselors’ primary role in dropout prevention?), and Research Question 5 (Is there a difference between the perceptions of Mississippi professional high school counselors and high school administrators on the primary role of professional school counselors in dropout prevention?). The mean for professional high school counselors’ perceptions of the primary role was 4.11. The means ranged from 2.85 to 4.74 with most means above 4.0. Professional high school counselors rated Item 9 (“To provide direct counseling services to students at risk for dropping out”) the highest ($M=4.74, SD=.59$) of all the items in the Primary Role subscale. The highest rated items by professional high school counselors were: Item 9, “To provide direct counseling services to students at risk for dropping out” ($M=4.74, SD=.59$) and Item 6, “To serve as a member of the school’s dropout prevention team” ($M=4.69, SD=.47$). The lowest rated items by professional high school counselors were: Item 5, “To serve as the school’s leader or coordinator for school initiatives in dropout prevention” ($M=2.85, SD=1.01$) and Item 11, “To serve as the individual in charge of identifying students at risk for dropping out of school using data known as risk factors” ($M=3.46, SD=1.07$). The items and their descriptive statistics can be found in Table 7.
Table 7

Descriptive Statistics for Professional School Counselors’ Perceptions of School Counselor’s Primary Role in Dropout Prevention (n=39)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Role</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To provide direct counseling services to students at risk for dropping out.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4.74</td>
<td>.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To serve as a member of the school’s dropout prevention team.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.69</td>
<td>.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To provide a comprehensive counseling program to all students as a measure of dropout prevention.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4.51</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To serve as an advocate for needed services for students at risk for dropping out.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.46</td>
<td>.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To collaborate with agencies outside of the school system which provide services to students at risk for dropping out.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.41</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To work proactively to remove barriers to learning for at-risk students.</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4.26</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Role</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To guide school reform efforts that assist at-risk students in graduating.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To identify and propose evidenced-based, national dropout prevention interventions that the school/school system could adopt.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To serve as the individual in charge of identifying students at risk for dropping out of school using data known as risk factors.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To serve as the school’s leader or coordinator for school initiatives in dropout prevention.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. 1.00= Strongly Disagree, 2.00= Disagree, 3.00= Not Sure, 4.00= Agree, 5.00= Strongly Agree

High school administrators’ perceptions of the 10 items in the first subscale regarding the primary role of professional school counselors in dropout prevention were very similar to the professional high school counselors’ perceptions. Item 9 (“To provide direct counseling services to students at risk for dropping out”) was the highest rated item.
(M=4.74, SD=.44) of all the items in the Primary Role subscale. The mean for high school administrators’ perceptions of the primary role was 4.30. The means ranged from 3.70 to 4.74 with most means above 4.0. The mean for Item 9 was the same for high school administrators and professional high school counselors. Professional school counselors rated Item 9 (“To provide direct counseling services to students at risk for dropping out”) the highest (\(M=4.74, SD=.59\)) of all the items in the Primary Role subscale. The highest rated items by high school administrators were: Item 9, “To provide direct counseling services to students at risk for dropping out” (\(M=4.74, SD=.44\)) and Item 6, “To serve as a member of the school’s dropout prevention team” (\(M=4.60, SD=.73\)). The lowest rated items by high school administrators were: Item 11, “To serve as the individual in charge of identifying students at risk for dropping out of school using data known as risk factors” (\(M=3.70, SD=.96\)) and Item 5, “To serve as the school’s leader or coordinator for school initiatives in dropout prevention” (\(M=3.79, SD=.99\)). The items and their descriptive statistics can be found in Table 8.
Table 8

*Descriptive Statistics for School Administrators’ Perceptions of School Counselor’s Primary Role in Dropout Prevention (n=43)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Role</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To provide direct counseling services to students at risk for dropping out.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4.74</td>
<td>.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To serve as a member of the school’s dropout prevention team.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.60</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To serve as an advocate for needed services for students at risk for dropping out.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.53</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To provide a comprehensive counseling program to all students as measure of dropout prevention.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To collaborate with agencies outside of the school system which provide services to students at risk for dropping out.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Role</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To work proactively to remove barriers to learning for at-risk students.</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To identify and propose evidenced-based, national dropout prevention</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interventions that the school/school system could adopt.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To guide school reform efforts that assist at-risk students in graduating.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To serve as the school’s leader or coordinator for school initiatives in</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dropout prevention.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To serve as the individual in charge of identifying students at risk for</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dropping out of school using data known as risk factors.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. 1.00= Strongly Disagree, 2.00= Disagree, 3.00= Not Sure, 4.00= Agree, 5.00= Strongly Agree
Way to Assess Effectiveness. The second subscale consisted of six items regarding the participants’ perceptions of what is the most appropriate way to assess the professional school counselor’s effectiveness in dropout prevention. The participants were asked to select the Likert-scale response that best represented their belief regarding the primary role of professional school counselors in dropout prevention. The scale for this section was as follows: 5=Strongly Agree, 4=Agree, 3=Not Sure, 2=Disagree, and 1=Strongly Disagree. This subscale was used to respond to Research Question 3 (What do Mississippi professional high school counselors perceive as the most appropriate way to assess their effectiveness in dropout prevention?), Research Question 4 (What do Mississippi high school administrators perceive as the most appropriate way to assess professional school counselors’ effectiveness in dropout prevention?), and Research Question 6 (Is there a difference between the perceptions of Mississippi professional high school counselors and high school administrators on the most appropriate way to assess professional school counselors’ effectiveness in dropout prevention?). The means for Ways to Assess Effective subscale were low for all items considering 3=not sure and 2=disagree.

The mean for professional high school counselors’ perceptions of the most appropriate way to assess the effectiveness of professional school counselors in dropout prevention was 2.78. The means ranged from 2.59 to 3.10 with most means below 3.0. Professional high school counselors rated Item 15 (“The number or percentage of students who earned a high school diploma”) the highest (M=3.10, SD=1.31) of all the items in the Way to Assess Effectiveness subscale. The highest rated items by professional high school counselors were: Item 15, “The number or percentage of
students who earned a high school diploma” ($M=3.10$, $SD=1.31$) and Item 16, “The number of students who dropped out in a given year” ($M=2.79$, $SD=1.24$). The lowest rated items by professional high school counselors were: Item 20, “The highest grade completed by students at risk for dropping out” ($M=2.59$, $SD=.99$) and Item 18, “The number or percentage of students who earned a GED” ($M=2.64$, $SD=1.01$). These results are shown in Table 9.

Table 9

*Descriptive Statistics for Professional High School Counselors’ Perceptions of the Most Appropriate Way to Assess the Professional School Counselor’s Effectiveness in Dropout Prevention ($n=39$)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Way to Assess Effectiveness</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The number or percentage of students who earned a high school diploma.</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>1.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The number of students who dropped out in a given year.</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>1.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The numbers of days students identified as at risk for dropping out were enrolled in a given year.</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 9 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Way to Assess Effectiveness</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The number of credits earned in a given year by at-risk students.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The number or percentage of students who earned a GED.</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The highest grade completed by student at risk for dropping out.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>.99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. 1.00= Strongly Disagree, 2.00= Disagree, 3.00= Not Sure, 4.00= Agree, 5.00= Strongly Agree

The mean for high school administrators’ perceptions of the most appropriate way to assess the effectiveness of professional school counselors in dropout prevention was 2.98. The means ranged from 2.84 to 3.28 with most means below 3.0. High school administrators rated Item 15 (“The number or percentage of students who earned a high school diploma”) the highest (Mean=3.28, SD=1.32) of all the items in the Way to Assess Effectiveness subscale. The highest rated items by high school administrators were: Item 15, “The number or percentage of students who earned a high school diploma” (Mean=3.28, SD=1.32) and Item 17, “The number of credits earned in a given by at-risk students” (Mean=3.0, SD=1.29). The lowest rated items by high school administrators were: Item 20, “The highest grade completed by students at risk for dropping out” (Mean=2.84, SD=1.13) and Item 18, “The number of days students identified as at risk for dropping out were
enrolled in a given year” ($M=2.88 \ SD=1.24$). The means and standard deviations are shown in Table 10.

Table 10

*Descriptive Statistics for School Administrators’ Perceptions of the Most Appropriate Way to Assess the Professional School Counselor’s Effectiveness in Dropout Prevention (n=43)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ways to Assess Effectiveness</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The number or percentage of students who earned a high school diploma.</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>1.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The number of credits earned in a given year by at-risk students.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>1.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The number of students who dropped out in a given year.</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>1.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The number of or percentage of students who earned a GED.</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>1.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The numbers of days students identified as at risk for dropping out were enrolled in a given year.</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>1.24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 10 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ways to Assess Effectiveness</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The highest grade completed by students at risk for dropping out.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. 1.00= Strongly Disagree, 2.00= Disagree, 3.00= Not Sure, 4.00= Agree, 5.00= Strongly Agree

Hypotheses Testing

There were six research questions and two hypotheses for this study. Significance for this study was established at .05. Hypothesis 1 stated: There is a significant difference between the perceptions of Mississippi professional high school counselors and high school administrators on the primary role of professional school counselors in dropout prevention. An independent $t$-test was used in this study to determine whether a difference existed among the mean scores in the area of primary role of professional high school counselors. An independent sample $t$-test was calculated comparing the primary role mean score of professional high school counselors to the primary role mean score of high school administrators. No significant difference was found, $t(80) = -1.686, p = .096$. The mean score of the primary role of professional high school counselors ($M=4.11$, $SD=.50$) was not significantly different from the mean score of the primary role of high school administrators ($M=4.30$, $SD=.54$). Thus, the mean rating of professional high school counselors on this domain was not statistically different from the mean ratings of high school administrators. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was rejected.
Hypothesis 2 stated: There is a significant difference between Mississippi professional high school counselors and high school administrators on the most appropriate way to assess professional school counselors’ effectiveness in dropout prevention. An independent sample \( t \)-test was calculated comparing the effectiveness mean score of professional high school counselors to the effectiveness mean score of high school administrators. No significant difference was found, \( t(80) = -.863, p = .391 \). The effectiveness mean of professional high school counselors (M=2.78, SD=.96) was not significantly different from the effectiveness mean of high school administrators (M=2.98, SD=1.07). Thus, the mean rating of professional high school counselors on this domain was not statistically different from the mean ratings of high school administrators. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was rejected. The means and standard deviations for role and effectiveness are outlined in Table 11.

Table 11

*Group Statistics for Professional School Counselors and School Administrators on Role and Effectiveness*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Job Title</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role</td>
<td>Counselor</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effectiveness</td>
<td>Counselor</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. 1.00= Strongly Disagree, 2.00= Disagree, 3.00= Not Sure, 4.00= Agree, 5.00= Strongly Agree

Group statistics were calculated on each individual item to see if there would be any differences. The only individual differences were found in Item 5 (‘To serve as
school leaders or coordinators for school initiatives in dropout prevention”) and Item 8 ("To identify and propose evidenced-based, national dropout prevention interventions that the school/school system could adopt"). The mean for high school administrators (M=3.79, SD=.99) was higher than the mean for professional high school counselors (M=2.85, SD=1.01) on Item 5. Therefore, high school administrators perceived that professional school counselors should serve more as school leaders or coordinators for school initiatives in dropout prevention more than professional high school counselors. The mean for high school administrators (M=4.23, SD=.90) was also higher than the mean for professional high school counselors (M=3.67, SD=.93) on Item 8. Therefore, high school administrators perceived that professional school counselors should be identifying and proposing more evidenced-based, national dropout prevention interventions that could be adopted by the school/school system than did professional high school counselors. The means and standard deviations are found in Table 12.

Table 12

Group Statistics for Professional School Counselors and School Administrators on Item 5 (To Serve as School Leaders or Coordinators) and Item 8 (To Identify and Propose Evidenced-Based Interventions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Job Title</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Counselor</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Counselor</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary

This study investigated whether there were differences in the perceptions of high school administrators and professional high school counselors regarding the primary roles of professional school counselors in dropout prevention and the most appropriate ways to assess professional school counselors’ effectiveness in dropout prevention. This study included 82 participants from public schools in the southeast region of Mississippi. Descriptive statistics and independent t-tests were used to determine that there were no statistically significant differences among the variables.
CHAPTER V  
DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of high school administrators and professional high school counselors regarding the primary role of professional school counselors in dropout prevention and the most appropriate way to assess professional school counselors’ effectiveness in dropout prevention. High school administrators and professional high school counselors were asked to complete the Counselor Roles Survey, which yielded quantitative data. This chapter outlines the summary of the procedures, the major findings, the discussion of the findings, the limitations of the study, and the recommendations for policy, practice, and future research.

Summary of Procedures

This study was conducted in school districts located in the southeast region of Mississippi. The researcher sent permission letters and consent forms to 43 superintendents. Superintendents from 20 school districts gave the researcher permission to conduct the study in their respective districts. The participants for the study included high school administrators and professional high school counselors currently working in public high schools. The researcher utilized a survey that included demographic items and Likert-scale items. The survey instrument, Counselor Role Survey, incorporated demographic items and survey items designed to measure the perceptions of high school administrators and professional high school counselors on the primary role of professional school counselor in dropout prevention and on the most appropriate way to assess professional school counselors’ effectiveness in dropout prevention.
After receiving the necessary authorization, the researcher contacted the schools’ administrators by telephone to establish a protocol for collecting data for that school. A packet of surveys with cover letters attached were mailed to each school administrator or representative. Surveys were mailed during the second week of September, 2014 and were collected through the end of November, 2014.

High school administrators and professional high school counselors from 27 schools within the 20 school districts participated in the study. A total of 123 surveys were mailed to high school administrators (68) and professional high school counselors (55). A total of 82 surveys from 43 high school administrators and from 39 professional high school counselors were returned. A descriptive causal-comparative quantitative design was used in this study. Data were input into version 22 of SPSS and were analyzed using two independent $t$-tests, descriptive statistics, and inferential statistics. Cronbach’s alpha test was performed to determine the reliability of the subscales after responses for final study were received. The acceptable range for the Cronbach’s alpha was .7 or greater. Each subscale yielded a reliability of greater than .7. The responses to the survey were analyzed using version 22 of SPSS.

**Major Findings**

Perceptions of high school administrators and professional high school counselors did not differ significantly in the areas of primary role of professional school counselors in dropout prevention and the most appropriate way to assess professional school counselors’ effectiveness in dropout prevention. There were items where differences in perceptions were noted: Item 5 (“To serve as school leaders or coordinators for school initiatives in dropout prevention”) and Item 8 (“To identify and propose evidenced-based,
national dropout prevention interventions that the school/school system could adopt”). The overall means were high for Primary Role subscale and were low for Way to Assess Effectiveness subscale. The low mean for the perceptions of high school administrators and professional high school counselors on the most appropriate way to assess professional school counselors’ effectiveness in dropout prevention support the need to identify a better way to assess professional school counselors.

Research Question 1 asked “What do Mississippi professional high school counselors perceive as their primary role in dropout prevention?” Descriptive statistics indicated that professional high school counselors perceive their primary role in dropout prevention as providing direct counseling services to students at risk for dropping out.

Research Question 2 asked “What do Mississippi high school administrators perceive as professional school counselors’ primary role in dropout prevention?” High school administrators’ perceptions of the 10 items in this subscale regarding the primary role of professional school counselors in dropout prevention were very similar to the professional high school counselors’ perceptions. Descriptive statistics showed that high school administrators perceived providing direct counseling services to students at risk for dropping out as the primary role of professional school counselors in dropout prevention.

Research Question 3 asked “What do Mississippi professional high school counselors perceive as the most appropriate way to assess their effectiveness in dropout prevention?” Professional high school counselors perceived that the most appropriate way to assess their effectiveness in dropout prevention should be based on the number or
percentage of students who earned a high school diploma. The highest score on any of the appropriate ways was barely a 3 on a 5 point scale.

Research Question 4 asked “What do Mississippi high school administrators perceive as the most appropriate way to assess professional school counselors’ effectiveness in dropout prevention?” High school administrators’ perceptions of the six items in this subscale regarding the most appropriate way to assess professional high school counselors’ effectiveness in dropout prevention were somewhat similar to the professional high school counselors’ perceptions. Descriptive statistics showed that high school administrators perceived that the most appropriate way to assess professional school counselors’ effectiveness in dropout prevention should be based on the number or percentage of students who earned a high school diploma. The highest score on any of the appropriate ways was barely a 3 on a 5 point scale.

Research Question 5 asked “Is there a difference between the perceptions of Mississippi professional high school counselors and high school administrators on the primary role of professional school counselors in dropout prevention?” High school administrators’ perceptions of the subscale regarding the primary role of professional school counselors in dropout prevention were very similar to the professional high school counselors’ perceptions. High school administrators also perceived that providing direct counseling services to students at risk for dropping out should be the primary role of professional school counselors in dropout prevention.

Research Question 6 asked “Is there a difference between the perceptions of Mississippi professional high school counselors and high school administrators on the most appropriate way to assess professional school counselors’ effectiveness in dropout
High school administrators and professional high school counselors perceived that the most appropriate way to assess professional high school counselors’ effectiveness in dropout prevention should be based on the number or percentage of students who earned a high school diploma.

There were two hypotheses for this study. Hypothesis 1 was stated as follows: There is a significant difference between the perceptions of Mississippi professional high school counselors and high school administrators on the primary role of professional school counselors in dropout prevention. The statistical analysis revealed that no significant difference was found. The primary role mean of professional high school counselors was not significantly different from the primary role mean of high school administrators. Thus, the mean rating of professional high school counselors on this domain was not statistically different form the mean ratings of high school administrators. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was rejected.

Hypothesis 2 was stated as follows: There is a significant difference between Mississippi professional high school counselors and high school administrators on the most appropriate way to assess professional school counselors’ effectiveness in dropout prevention. The statistical analysis revealed that no significant difference was found. The effectiveness mean of professional high school counselors was not significantly different from the effectiveness mean of high school administrators. Thus, the mean rating of professional high school counselors on this domain was not statistically different from the mean ratings of high school administrators. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was rejected.
Group statistics were calculated on each individual item to see if there would be any differences. The only individual differences were found in Item 5 ("To serve as school leaders or coordinators for school initiatives in dropout prevention") and Item 8 ("To identify and propose evidenced-based, national dropout prevention interventions that the school/school system could adopt"). The group statistics suggested that high school administrators perceived that professional school counselors should be serving more as schools leaders or coordinators for school initiatives in dropout prevention. The findings also indicated that high school administrators perceived that professional school counselors should be identifying and proposing more evidenced-based, national dropout prevention interventions that could be adopted by the school/school system.

Discussion

The existing literature is limited as it relates to the roles of professional school counselors in dropout prevention. However, according to ASCA (2012), professional school counselors are vital to helping students stay in school. Therefore, it is important that school administrators understand professional school counselors’ roles in dropout prevention. Furthermore, White and Kelly (2010) reported that “the role that school counselors can play in helping to prevent school dropout is substantial and could ultimately enhance not only student outcomes, but also the trajectory of the profession of school counseling” (p. 233).

Prior research reported in Chapter II found there was a lack of clarity regarding the professional school counselor’s role (Bardhoshi & Ducan, 2009; Dahir, 2004; Fitch et al., 2001; Foster et al., 2005; Kirchner & Setchfield, 2005; Lieberman, 2004). Therefore, professional school counselors and school administrators often do not agree on the roles
of professional school counselors with regard to actual counseling duties (Monteiro-Leitner et al, 2006). According to Griffin and Farris (2010), considerable debate remains among educators with regard to the professional school counselor’s role despite attempts made by ASCA to clarify the professional school counselor’s role. The findings from the current study indicated that high school administrators and professional high school counselors agreed that the professional school counselor’s primary role in dropout prevention should be to provide direct counseling services to students at risk for dropping out. The current study is not consistent with prior research due to the lack of clarity regarding professional school counselors’ roles.

The ASCA National Model was formed to clarify the appropriate roles of professional school counselors (Pyne, 2011). According to ASCA (2012), professional school counselors should spend a majority (80%) of their time providing direct and indirect student services to students. Thus, the services provided to students by professional school counselors are called direct student services; the services provided on behalf of students by professional school counselors are called indirect student services (ASCA, 2012). The findings of this study suggest Mississippi high school administrators and professional high school counselors agree that the professional school counselor’s primary role in dropout prevention should be to provide direct counseling services to students at risk for dropping out. These findings are consistent with ASCA regarding how professional school counselors should spend a majority of their time.

More recently, Mississippi legislators passed Senate Bill No. 2423 which requires professional school counselors to spend a minimum of 80% of their contractual time to the delivery of services to students as outlined by ASCA beginning with the 2014-2015
school year (MS SB2423, 2014). Delivery of services is defined as “the direct service provided to students, parents, school staff and the community which are the interaction between professional school counselors and students” (MS SB2423, 2014, para. 4).

School administrators need to be knowledgeable about the roles of professional school counselors (Zalaquett & Chatters, 2012). The results of the current study indicated that high school administrators are somewhat cognizant of professional high school counselors’ roles.

In the current study, high school administrators and professional school counselors agreed that providing direct services to students at risk of dropping out should be the primary role of professional school counselors. This finding of this study was startling because professional school counselors are usually assigned clerical and administrative tasks (Beale, 2004; Foster et al., 2005; Leuwerke et al., 2009). This could suggest that high school administrators may be realizing that professional school counselors are best utilized in providing direct services to at-risk students.

According to Janson et al. (2009), professional school counselors act as leaders in dropout prevention by utilizing specific data to ensure the achievement and success of all students. Therefore, Paisley and Hayes (2003) stated that “today’s school counselor is envisioned to be school leaders who advocates for the academic, career, social, and personal success of every student” (para. 8). The results from the current study suggested that professional high school counselors completely disagreed with the primary role in dropout prevention as being to serve as the school’s leader or coordinator for school initiatives. High school administrators, on the other hand, perceived that professional high school counselors should be serving more as schools’ leaders or coordinators for
school initiatives in dropout prevention. In prior research reported in Chapter II, professional school counselors were viewed as schools’ leaders (Janson et al., 2009; Paisley & Hayes, 2003; Wingfield, Reese, & West-Olatunji, 2010). Therefore, the finding that high school administrators believed professional school counselors should be serving more as school leaders is consistent with prior research.

Wilkerson (2010) reported that “in accordance with the No Child Left Behind Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2001), current educational reform initiatives in the United States call for increased accountability, demonstrable improvements in learning outcomes for all students, and a focus on reducing achievement gaps” (p. 420). Professional school counselors have been forced to examine their roles in promoting students’ academic success and school completion due to the emphasis in school counseling on accountability and academic performance (White & Kelly, 2010). It is important for professional school counselors to assess what they are doing with regard to the success of all students to see if what they are doing is effective. In the current study, the low mean for the perceptions of high school administrators and professional high school counselors on the most appropriate way to assess professional school counselors’ effectiveness in dropout prevention support the need to identify a better way to assess professional school counselors. Prior research support accountability in school counseling (ASCA, 2012; Dahir & Stone, 2003; Dahir & Stone, 2009; White, 2007).

The current study is important because the academic scholarship is limited with regard to school counselors’ roles in dropout prevention. The current study yielded some valuable information that can be added to the academic scholarship as it relates to the roles of professional school counselors in dropout prevention. The data from the current
study revealed that high school administrators are in agreement with professional high
school counselors regarding the primary role of school counselors in dropout prevention
and the most appropriate way to assess professional school counselors’ effectiveness in
dropout prevention. It is important to understand the perspectives of high school
administrators and professional high school counselors regarding the primary role of
school counselors in dropout prevention and the most appropriate way to assess
professional school counselors’ effectiveness in dropout prevention because educators,
policymakers, and school leaders can use the information to increase student achievement
and to decrease dropout rates.

The results from the current study are important to educational leadership because
the findings can be used to facilitate changes in how professional school counselors are
best utilized in schools by school administrators to increase student achievement. In
addition, results from the current study can be used to educate school leaders regarding
the potential for professional school counselors’ roles in dropout prevention. Moreover,
results from the current study can be used to determine areas of training needed for
school administrators and school counselors with regard to appropriate roles of
professional school counselors as defined by ASCA. Furthermore, results from the
current study can be used as a guide to help school leaders align professional school
counselors’ roles with the appropriate roles defined by ASCA.

Limitations

The findings of the current study were limited by several factors. Participants for
the study were limited to professional high school counselors and high school
administrators with valid licenses issued by the Mississippi Department of Education.
Also, this study was limited to professional high school counselors and high school administrators currently working in public high schools located in the southeast region of Mississippi. The current study was limited to quantitative research methodology. The sample for the study was limited to high school administrators and professional school counselors from 27 schools within 20 school districts in the southeast region of Mississippi.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Policy

According to President Obama (2010), the dropout rate is “a crisis that the nation cannot afford to accept or ignore” (para. 1). Dropping out of school is detrimental for the individual, for the school system, for the community, and for society (Christle et al., 2007). Educators, policymakers, and leaders should address the problem of students dropping out of high school as a top priority (Bridgeland et al., 2006). President Obama (2012) reported that “if we want America to lead in the 21st century, nothing is more important than giving everyone the best education possible – from the day they start preschool to the day they start their career” (para. 6). School dropout and failure depend on students receiving the necessary support to succeed from parents, caregivers, and educators (Bradshaw et al., 2008).

Professional school counselors’ main resource for defining their roles is the ASCA National Model (Bardhoshi & Ducan, 2009). The ASCA National Model was first published in 2003 with the purpose of changing school counseling to a program for all students (ASCA, 2012). School administrators and professional school counselors should be provided with the necessary training to implement the ASCA National Model.
Hatch and Chen-Hayes (2008) suggested that “the success of the ASCA National Model depended upon the willingness of school counselors to learn new skills, to change outdated practices, and to design and implement program evaluation and action research studies showing program model component effectiveness” (p. 34).

The findings in the current study indicated that school administrators and professional school counselors agreed that providing direct counseling services to students at risk for dropping out should be the primary role of professional school counselors in dropout prevention. With the passing of Senate Bill 2423 in Mississippi, “professional school counselors are required to spend a minimum of eighty percent (80%) of their contractual time to the delivery of services to students as outlined by the American School Counselor Association” beginning the 2014-2015 school year (MS SB2423, 2014, p. 1). Therefore, it is very important that school administrators and professional school counselors are cognizant of the appropriate roles of professional school counselors as outlined by ASCA so that the professional school counselors will be able to perform the roles as outlined by Senate Bill 2423.

Professional school counselors are expected to serve as leaders. According to Janson et al. (2009), leadership is an essential role of the professional school counselor. However, professional high school counselors disagreed with high school administrators on the role to serve as schools’ leaders in the current study. As a result, professional school counselors need more training to help them understand appropriate leadership roles and how performing those roles can help all students achieve academically. Therefore, policymakers need to redefine professional school counselors’ job descriptions to align with the appropriate roles defined by ASCA. Furthermore, school counseling
programs should teach emerging school counselors how to conduct themselves as school leaders (Graham, Desmond, & Zinsser, 2011).

Even though school administrators and professional school counselors agreed on the most appropriate way to assess professional school counselors’ effectiveness based on the methods provided in the current study, there is still a need for an overall evaluation tool to assess professional school counselors’ effectiveness based on the means of this subscale. All the means for this subscale were relatively low. Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) created a statewide evaluation tool for school counselors, the Mississippi Statewide Counselor Appraisal Rubric (M-CAR), during the 2013-2014 school year (MDE, 2014). According to MDE (2014), the school counselor performance evaluation was created to improve the influence of professional school counselors and school counseling programs on students and stakeholders. The statewide field test for the M-CAR will be held during the 2014-2015 school year with the full statewide implementation held during the 2015-2016 school year (MDE, 2014).

Recommendations for Practice

According to Rahbari, Hajnaghizadeh, Damari, and Adhami (2014), every student who enters in the formal education system of the United States has the opportunity to be promoted to a higher grade, or face academic failure and repeat that level in the next school term and/or finally face school dismissal. Furthermore, success at the K-12 level is measured by the number of students who successfully complete high school (Burnham, 2010). In the world of 21st-century schools, professional school counselors must be able to interpret data in order to enlighten and improve their focus (Dahir & Stone, 2009). However, Graham, Desmond, and Zinsser (2011) stated that “in the field of professional
school counseling, there is and continues to be a pervasive struggle toward professional identity, role definition, and service delivery, as well as gaining support from administrators to facilitate the work of the school counselor as defined by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model (2005) and state specific models of school counseling” (pp. 95-96).

Therefore, school administrators and professional school counselors need to be provided with the necessary training in order to understand the appropriate roles of professional school counselors. School districts can provide professional development with regard to the appropriate roles as defined by ASCA. Therefore, Shoffner and Williamson (2000) stated that “it is vital for school counselors and school principal to understand and appreciate their different roles, responsibilities, and paradigms so they can engage in collaborative work that addresses student development and learning goals” (p. 139).

Furthermore, Lieberman (2004) concluded that school administrators should take the initiative to learn and to understand professional school counselors’ appropriate roles and functions.

The universities can incorporate courses related to the appropriate roles as defined by ASCA into the counselor education programs and into the educational leadership programs. Therefore, future school administrators and future professional school counselors will graduate with firsthand knowledge with regard to the appropriate role of professional school counselors. According to Bringman, Mueller, & Lee (2010), it is important for ASCA’s recommendations regarding school counselor roles be taught in educational administration programs.
Based on the findings of the current study, schools need to fully implement the ASCA National Model. By implementing the model in schools, the role confusion among school administrators and professional school counselors will be limited. Superintendents should ensure that school administrators and professional school counselors are provided with the necessary training to understand all aspects of the ASCA National Model.

In order to fully implement the ASCA National Model, school administrators and professional school counselors need to work together as a team with other educators in order to develop effective programs. Thompson and Moffett (2008) report that educational support teams are needed to understand and to collaborate on data-driven performance outcomes to maximize accountability. Zalaquett and Chatters (2012) reported that “collaboration between school principals and school counselors is essential for the development of guidance programs that are effective and accountable to reaching the academic goals at the district, state, and national levels” (p. 90). Therefore, working in a setting with the support of school administrators, professional school counselors can improve the academic achievement of all students by having effective school counselor programs that aligns with the ASCA National Model (Beale, 2004).

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the results of the current study, the researcher recommends the following studies for future research with regard to the primary role of professional school counselors in dropout prevention and the most appropriate way to assess professional school counselors’ effectiveness in dropout prevention:
1. Future studies should explore the perceptions of middle school administrators and high school administrators with regard to the primary role of professional school counselors in dropout prevention to determine if the role differs at the different levels.

2. Future studies should examine the perceptions of professional school counselors working in middle schools and professional school counselors working in high schools to determine if the role differs at the different levels.

3. Future studies should include a larger sample size, perhaps the entire state, in order to gather additional insights into how school administrators and professional school counselors perceive the primary role of school counselors in dropout prevention.

4. Future studies should include a qualitative study to explore the perceptions of school administrators and professional school counselors on the best way to assess professional school counselors’ effectiveness in dropout prevention.

Summary

The purpose of the study was to investigate the perceptions of high school administrators and professional high school counselors regarding the primary role of professional school counselors in dropout prevention and the most appropriate way to assess professional school counselors’ effectiveness in dropout prevention. The modified Counselor Role Survey instrument was used to survey high school administrators and professional high school counselors. The study used a descriptive causal-comparative quantitative design.
Hypotheses were tested using independent $t$-tests. The results of the study indicated there was no statistically significant difference between the perceptions of Mississippi high school administrators and professional high school counselors on the primary role of professional school counselors in dropout prevention. There was also no statistically significant difference between Mississippi high school administrators and professional high school counselors on the most appropriate way to assess professional school counselors’ effectiveness in dropout prevention.

Group statistics were calculated on each individual item to see if there would be any differences. The group statistics suggested that high school administrators perceived that professional school counselors should be serving more as schools’ leaders or coordinators for school initiatives in dropout prevention. The findings also indicated that high school administrators perceived that professional school counselors should be identifying and proposing more evidenced-based, national dropout prevention interventions that could be adopted by the school/school system. Based on the findings of this study, the researcher was able to make recommendations for policy, practice, and future research with regard to the primary role of professional school counselors in dropout prevention and the most appropriate way to assess professional school counselors’ effectiveness in dropout prevention.
APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL LETTERS

THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
118 College Drive #5147 | Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0003
Phone: 601.266.5997 | Fax: 601.266.4777 | www.usm.edu/research/institutional.review.board

NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 21, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the “Adverse Effect Report Form”.
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months. Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 14072001
PROJECT TITLE: The Perceptions of Mississippi Secondary School Counselors and School Administrators Regarding the Role of School Counselors in Dropout Prevention
PROJECT TYPE: New Project
RESEARCHER(S): Sherrell Gilmore
COLLEGE/DIVISION: College of Education and Psychology
DEPARTMENT: Educational Leadership and School Counseling
FUNDING AGENCY/SPONSOR: N/A
IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Expedited Review Approval
PERIOD OF APPROVAL: 06/07/2014 to 06/06/2015

Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board
NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 21, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the “Adverse Effect Report Form”.
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months.

Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: CH14072901
PROJECT TITLE: The Perceptions of Mississippi Secondary School Counselors and School Administrators Regarding the Role of School Counselors in Dropout Prevention
PROJECT TYPE: Change to a Previously Approved Project
RESEARCHER(S): Sherrell Gilmore
COLLEGE/DIVISION: College of Education and Psychology
DEPARTMENT: Educational Leadership and School Counseling
FUNDING AGENCY/SPONSOR: N/A
IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Expedited Review Approval
PERIOD OF APPROVAL: 10/01/2014 TO 09/30/2015

Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board
APPENDIX B
MODIFIED COUNSELOR ROLES SURVEY

Part I: Demographic

1. What is your job title at your school?
   □ Professional School Counselor
   □ School Administrator

2. Gender
   □ Male      □ Female

3. How many years of experience do you have in your current position?
   □ Less than 3 years
   □ 3-9 years
   □ 10-20 years
   □ More than 20 years

4. With which race/ethnicity do you identify?
   □ African American □ American Indian □ Asian
   □ Caucasian      □ Hispanic   □ Multiracial □ Other
Part II: What do you believe the professional school counselor’s primary role should be in dropout prevention?

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

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

5. To serve as school leaders or coordinators (i.e., the person in charge) for school initiatives in dropout prevention.

   Strongly Disagree      Disagree      Not Sure      Agree      Strongly Agree

6. To serve as a member of the school’s dropout prevention team.

   Strongly Disagree      Disagree      Not Sure      Agree      Strongly Agree

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

   Strongly Disagree      Disagree      Not Sure      Agree      Strongly Agree

8. To identify and propose evidenced-based, national dropout prevention interventions that the school/school system could adopt.

   Strongly Disagree      Disagree      Not Sure      Agree      Strongly Agree

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

   Strongly Disagree      Disagree      Not Sure      Agree      Strongly Agree

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

    Strongly Disagree      Disagree      Not Sure      Agree      Strongly Agree
11. To serve as the individual in charge of identifying students at risk for dropping out of school using data known risk factors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

12. To provide a comprehensive counseling program as described in the American School Counselors Association (ASCA) National Model to all students as a measure of dropout prevention.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

14. To work proactively to remove barriers to learning for at-risk students as a measure of dropout prevention.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Part III: What do you believe is the most appropriate way to assess the professional school counselor’s effectiveness in dropout prevention?**

Please circle the response that best represents your belief about the most appropriate way to assess the professional school counselor’s effectiveness in each of the statements below.

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

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

16. The number of students who dropped out in a given year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
17. The number of credits earned in a given year by students identified as at risk for dropping out.
Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Not Sure  Agree  Strongly Agree

18. The number of days students identified as at risk for dropping out was enrolled in a given year.
Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Not Sure  Agree  Strongly Agree

19. The number or percentage of students who earned a GED.
Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Not Sure  Agree  Strongly Agree

20. The highest grade completed by student at risk for dropping out.
Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Not Sure  Agree  Strongly Agree
APPENDIX C
REQUEST TO USE AND ADAPT SURVEY

Hello Ms. Gilmore,

You have my permission to use and adapt the dropout survey for your dissertation.

Good luck in your program!

Sincerely,
Christine Carr
Sent from my Verizon Wireless BlackBerry

From: Sherrell Gilmore <sherrell.gilmore@eagles.usm.edu>
Date: Wed, 2 Oct 2013 15:57:36 -0500
To: <carrchrist@aol.com>
Subject: Requesting Permission to Use and Adapt Survey

Dr. Carr,

My name is Sherrell Gilmore. I am working on my dissertation with regard to the primary role of school counselors in dropout prevention at The University of Southern Mississippi. I will be conducting my research with high school counselors and high school principals in Mississippi. I am seeking permission to use and modify the dropout prevention survey that you used in your dissertation (What Role Do Middle and High School Counselors Perceive They Should Adopt in Dropout Prevention?).

Thank you in advance for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you. If you have any questions, you can contact me by email or by telephone at (601) 381-3873,

Sincerely,
Sherrell Gilmore
APPENDIX D

SUPERINTENDENT PERMISSION LETTER

Date

Dear Superintendent ___________,

My name is Sherrell Gilmore and I am a professional school counselor for Wayne County School District. I am also a graduate student at the University of Southern Mississippi in the Educational Leadership doctoral program. I have completed the required coursework and I will soon be conducting the research to complete the requirements for my dissertation.

I have chosen the topic: The perceptions of Mississippi secondary school counselors and school administrators regarding the role of school counselors in dropout prevention. This study will focus on the perceptions of school administrators and professional school counselors regarding the primary role of school counselors in dropout prevention. This study will determine the most appropriate ways to assess school counselors’ effectiveness in dropout prevention.

I am requesting permission to distribute surveys to your high school administrators and school counselors. With your consent, the surveys will be mailed to each high school in your district. It will be explained in the cover letter attached to the surveys that participation is voluntary and that all identifying information related to the school and the district will be kept confidential. Identifying information will not be requested from the participants on the surveys. The surveys will be kept in a locked file cabinet and will only be seen by the researcher and the researcher’s dissertation advisors. After receiving the necessary authorization, I will contact the schools’ administrators to establish a protocol for collecting data for that school.

As school dropout rates increase, the roles and responsibilities of professional school counselors in dropout prevention will change. The results of this study will provide information as to what is the primary role of professional school counselors in dropout prevention and the most appropriate ways to assess school counselors’ effectiveness in dropout prevention. Once the study is complete, I will be very happy to share the results with you.

If you choose to grant me permission to conduct this research with administrators and counselors in your district, please copy the enclosed consent form to your district letterhead, sign it, and return it in the self-addressed, stamped envelope.

My email address is sherrell2educate@yahoo.com and my cell phone number is (601)381-3873 if you have any questions or concerns. Dr. Leslie Locke of the University of Southern Mississippi is my committee chair. Her email address is Leslie.Locke@usm.edu and her office phone number is (601)266-4579.
Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Sherrell Gilmore  
Doctoral Candidate, University of Southern Mississippi  
Enclosure  
CC: Dr. Leslie Locke, Committee Chair
APPENDIX E
SUPERINTENDENT’S PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH:
CONSENT FORM

(Please place on school letterhead. I would be glad to email this to you if you will let me know at sherrell2educate@yahoo.com.)

As superintendent of _________________________________ District, I give Sherrell Gilmore permission to conduct educational research in the district during 2014-2015 academic school year.

The research conducted will measure high school principals’ and counselors’ perceptions of the primary role of school counselors in dropout prevention along with the most appropriate ways to assess school counselors’ effectiveness in dropout prevention.

Permission is granted to distribute the survey instruments to high school principals and counselors within the specified school district. I understand that participation in the study is completely voluntary and all responses will be kept confidential. None of the individuals or districts will be identified in any of the reports.

__________________________________________  ________________________
Superintendent’s Signature                      Date
Dear Participant,

My name is Sherrell Gilmore and I am a graduate student at the University of Southern Mississippi in the Educational Leadership doctoral program. I am conducting research on the perceptions of high school administrators and professional high school counselors regarding the primary role of professional school counselors in dropout prevention. As school dropout rates increase, the roles and responsibilities of professional school counselors in dropout prevention will change. The results of this study will provide information as to what is the primary role of professional school counselors in dropout prevention and the most appropriate ways to assess professional school counselors’ effectiveness in dropout prevention.

Information from high school administrators and professional high school counselors is needed for this study. Please complete the enclosed survey. It should take no longer than 15 minutes to complete. The survey is divided into three sections. The first section is the demographic section. The second section consists of items related to appropriate roles of school counselors with regard to dropout prevention. The third section consists of items that focus on the most appropriate way to assess professional school counselors’ effectiveness in dropout prevention. Once you have completed the survey, please return it to the secretary in the attached envelope.

The survey will be conducted anonymously. All responses from the surveys will be kept confidential. The surveys will be stored in a locked file cabinet and will only be seen by the researcher and the researcher’s dissertation advisors. Please do not write your name on the survey. Participation in the study is voluntary. Your completed survey will serve as your consent to participate in the study.

This research study has been reviewed and approved by the Human Subjects Protection Review Committee, which ensures that all research fits the federal guidelines for involving human subjects. Any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant should be directed to the Chair of the Institutional Review Board at the University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive #5147, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001 or by phone at (601)266-5997.

Please contact me at sherrell2educate@yahoo.com or (601)381-3873 if there are any questions that I may assist you with. This research is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Leslie Locke with the University of Southern Mississippi. Dr. Locke’s email address is leslie.locke@usm.edu and her phone number is (601)266-4579.
Thank you in advance for your time, participation, and consideration.

Sincerely,

Sherrell Gilmore
Doctoral Candidate, the University of Southern Mississippi
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