Comprehensive School Counseling in Rhode Island: Access to Services and Student Outcomes

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COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL COUNSELING IN RHODE ISLAND: ACCESS TO SERVICES AND STUDENT OUTCOMES

This study explored relationships among school counseling practices, secondary school demographics, and student outcomes in the state of Rhode Island during a 2-year period. The results showed strong and consistent correlations between increased amounts of school counseling services and positive student outcomes. Schools with higher percentages of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch status and with higher percentages of minority students provided fewer comprehensive counseling services for their students.

School counseling interventions have the capacity to improve a wide range of student outcomes (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2012; Campbell & Dahir, 1997; Gysbers & Henderson, 2000; Whiston, Tai, & Rahardja, 2011), but several obstacles make measuring this impact difficult. Any educational outcome has multiple determinants and is the result of complex interconnected variables; thus, identifying the role of school counseling efforts—indeed, the efforts of any specific educational component—is problematic (Brown & Trusty, 2005; Dimmitt, 2003). Another challenge is deciding which outcomes to measure, since school counseling interventions are designed to affect everything from mental health functioning to attendance to college-going rates. Gaining access to relevant and accurate data is an ongoing difficulty in many schools (Dimmitt, Carey, & Hatch, 2007). Yet another challenge is that practices vary widely by school and by state (Martin,

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Carey, & DeCoster, 2009), so that any summative statement about outcomes is necessarily reductionistic or a significantly incomplete picture of what is happening in any given school.

Over the last decades, the literature has called for good outcome research about school counseling (Borders & Drury, 1992; House & Hayes, 2002), with particular emphasis on the need for information about how school counseling impacts student outcomes (Dimmitt, Carey, McGannon, & Henningson, 2005). Previous studies of school counseling program outcomes at the statewide level have indicated that more fully implemented programs are correlated with better student academic outcomes (Lapan, Gysbers, & Petroski, 2001;Sink & Stroh, 2003), student perceptions of greater access to career and college information (Lapan, Gysbers, & Sun, 1997), improved school climate (Lapan, Gysbers, & Petroski, 2001), better relationships with teachers, and greater satisfaction with school (Lapan, Gysbers, & Sun, 1997). Economic and policy research has demonstrated that providing mental health services (Baskin et al., 2009; Reback, 2010), supporting social and emotional learning (Durlack et al., 2011), and school counseling in general (Carrell & Hoekstra, in press) have a positive impact on student academic, behavioral, and social outcomes. Although these studies help school counselors identify where to focus effort and resources, more research specific to school counselor models and practices is also needed.

To determine the impact of school counseling programs, a useful approach is to first identify what kinds of services students are receiving (Johnson, Rochkind, Ott, & DuPont, 2010) and whether all students in a school and district are receiving equitable distribution of counseling resources (Cox & Lee, 2007; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). Economically disadvantaged students and African-American and Hispanic students are more likely to be in schools where their academic advising and future career needs are not being met, often due to larger school counselor caseloads or a prioritization of crisis intervention over other services (Education Trust, 2000; Johnson et al., 2010; Pagani, Boulerice, Vitaro, & Tremblay, 1999).

IDENTIFYING THE ROLE OF SCHOOL COUNSELING EFFORTS—INDEED, THE EFFORTS OF ANY SPECIFIC EDUCATIONAL COMPONENT—IS PROBLEMATIC.

Next, identifying the relationship between school counseling programming and student outcomes provides crucial information about what practices are most efficacious and where efforts are most likely to succeed in supporting student success. Evaluating and comparing the effectiveness of interventions delivered through a comprehensive program designed to serve all students and ad hoc responsive services gives school counselors additional information about impact and where to direct their efforts. This statewide study of school counseling practices and student outcomes in Rhode Island is an effort to replicate and extend the findings from prior studies of this sort.

State Demographics and Educational Data Systems

Rhode Island is geographically the smallest state in the United States, with a population of slightly over 1 million and 21% of the population under the age of 18 (U.S. Census, 2009). At the time this data was collected (2007-2008), there were 53 public high schools, 50 middle schools, 197 elementary schools and 8 multi-level schools in 36 school districts in the state. With a student population of just under 150,000, almost 84% of the students attended public schools. Statewide, the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) reported that in 2007, 33% of the students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, more than 5% received English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction or bilingual education services, and 18% were classified as special education students (i.e., self-contained, general education with supports, or homebound/ hospitalized). The majority of the students identified as White (70%), with the next largest group identifying as Hispanic (17%), followed by African-American (8%), Asian (3%), and Native American (<1%) (RIDE, 2007, 2008).

From 1998 to 2009, Rhode Island had an extensive educational data collection system called Information Works that measured multiple student, school, and educational outcomes (RIDE, 2009). Part of this system was the School Accountability for Learning and Teaching (SALT) surveys, which included questions about school practices and outcomes for administrators, counselors, and teachers and different questions for parents and students about their experiences and beliefs. Rhode Island now uses SurveyWorks (http://surveyworks.ride.ri.gov/) to collect educational data; the state implemented the student survey in 2009-2010 and the parent, teacher, and administrator surveys in 2011.

Rhode Island has had a state model for comprehensive K-12 school counseling programs since 2004 (RIDE, 2005) and implementation was supported through the hiring of a statewide coordinator of the Rhode Island School Counseling Project. In 2006, the Rhode Island School Counselor Association (RISCA) partnered with the Center for School Counseling Outcome Research and Evaluation (CSCORE) to create a unique school counseling survey for the SALT survey bank. This survey, which was used across the state of Rhode Island from 2007 to 2009, asked both general and specific questions about school counseling practices, such as, "Does your school have a School Counseling Program Advisory Committee?" and

TABLE 1 STATEWIDE RESPONSE RATES FOR SALT SURVEYS

Group Completing SALT Survey	2007	2008
Teachers	59%	55%
Students	85%	83%
Parents	35%	35%

TABLE 2 SCHOOL DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES — SURVEY RESPONDENTS

School Demographic Variable		Survey Respondents 2007	Survey Respondents 2008
Number of Schools	High Schools	32	31
	Middle Schools	19	15
	Total	51	46
School Enrollment Range		309 - 2,029	304 - 2,017
School Enrollment Mean		1,041	1,050
Per-pupil (regular education only) Expenditure Range by School		$6,381 - $11,963	$6,498 - $14,160
Per-pupil (regular education only) Expenditure Mean by School		$8,781	$9,395
Students Eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch Range by School		2% - 87%	3% - 78%
Mean Percentage of Students Eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch		27%	29%
Student Race/ Ethnicity*	White	78%	74%
	Hispanic	12%	15%
	Black	6%	8%
	Asian	3%	3%
	Native American	<1%	<1%

* Percentages were rounded up and may not add up to 100%

"Has your school counseling curriculum been reviewed and approved by your curriculum committee?"

Purpose of this Study

The purpose of the present study was to examine the nature of the delivery of comprehensive school counseling services across Rhode Island schools and to identify relationships between counseling activities and student outcomes. This analysis used results from the SALT school counseling survey and from other SALT survey data that was collected from educators, parents, and students. School-level data outcomes and demographic information from RIDE were also used. Comprehensive counseling domains assessed included counselor activities that facilitated student academic success, provided college and career counseling services, addressed the personal/social and emotional needs of students, involved parents, and used data. Student outcome measures included attendance, suspension rates, student perceptions of belonging in school, student perceptions of being teased and bullied, and reports of hassles and problems with teachers. Parent measures were school responsiveness to their child's needs and communication with the school.

This study explored the following three research questions:

1. What comprehensive school counseling services were being delivered to students in Rhode Island?
2. Were comprehensive school counseling services implemented consistently across schools?
3. Did student outcome measures co-vary with the types of services being provided or with the level of delivery of school counseling services?

METHOD

Participants

The Information Works data set contained information collected from school personnel, parents and students. Most of the data used for this study was the SALT school counseling survey data from the spring of 2007 and the spring of 2008. See Table 1 for response rates for each group in the two years of this study. The surveys could be completed by a variety of school personnel, so the school counseling survey, for example, was completed by school counselors, school psychologists, school social workers, department chairs, directors/ supervisors of guidance, and "other." In 2007, 69% of the respondents on this survey were school counselors, and in 2008, 61% were school counselors. The fact that some of the school counseling program information was reported by non-counselors can be interpreted as a problem or as a strength in this study. Non-direct providers may not have had an accurate sense of program activities, but they were not self-reporting on their own behaviors and so may have been less likely to inflate their answers. Regardless, this was the existing data collecting system in the state at the time, and the authors were limited to these data.

TABLE 3 STATEWIDE DATA FOR STUDENTS AND SCHOOLS

Statewide Data Variables		2007	2008
Number of Schools	High Schools	57	58
	Middle Schools	60	58
	Total MS and HS	117	116
Student Attendance (K-12)		93%	93%
Out-of-school suspensions - Middle Schools (incidents per 100 students enrolled)		41	47
Out-of-school suspensions - High Schools (incidents per 100 students enrolled)		53	56
Students Eligible for Free or Reduced-price Lunch (K-12)		33%	33%
Student Mobility Index (% of K-12 students entering or leaving RI schools in the year)		19%	20%
K-12 Student Race/Ethnicity	White	70%	69%
	Hispanic	17%	18%
	Black	8%	9%
	Asian	3%	3%
	Native American	<1%	<1%

This study's sample was composed of the 51 middle and high schools that completed the SALT survey for school counseling programs in 2007 and the 46 middle and high schools that did so in 2008. All of these were public schools. The authors used only data from middle and high schools for this study due to the small number of elementary schools that completed the SALT school counseling survey. In 2007, 32 high schools and 19 middle schools responded. The enrollment in these schools ranged from 309 to 2,029 students, with a mean of 1,041. The per-pupil expenditure (excluding expenditures for special education services) ranged from $6,381 to $11,963, with a mean of $8,781. On average, 27% of students in the schools responding were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, with a range from 2% to 87% eligible in any given school. The racial/ethnic background of students across the 51 represented schools was 78% White, 12% Hispanic, 6% Black, 3% Asian, and 1% Native American, with varying levels of racial/ethnic diversity by school. No data was reported for student gender. Student demographic data is presented in Table 2.

In 2008, 31 high schools and 15 middle schools completed the survey used in this study. The enrollment in these schools ranged from 304 to 2,017, with an average enrollment of 1,050 students. The per-pupil expenditure ranged from $6,498 to $14,160, with a mean of $9,395. Almost 29% of students overall were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch status, with a range of 3% to 78%. The racial/ethnic background of students across the 46 represented schools was 74% White, 15% Hispanic, 8% Black, 3% Asian, and 1% Native American (percentages are rounded and so do not add up to 100%). As in 2007, no data was reported for student gender. See Table 2 for school demographic variables by year and the comparison data for schools across the state. The data on per-pupil expenditure at the school level and on school enrollment was not available in the state data, which was by K-12 district.

TO DETERMINE THE IMPACT OF SCHOOL COUNSELING PROGRAMS, A USEFUL APPROACH IS TO FIRST IDENTIFY WHAT KINDS OF SERVICES STUDENTS ARE RECEIVING AND WHETHER ALL STUDENTS IN A SCHOOL AND DISTRICT ARE RECEIVING EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION OF COUNSELING RESOURCES

Research Variables

Student outcome variables at the school level were attendance (average daily attendance) and discipline (out-of-school suspensions). Table 3 presents the statewide averages for these variables. Two questions from the SALT student survey were used to measure school climate: the extent to which students indicated that "not getting along with teachers" and "being teased or bothered by other students" was a "mild," "moderate," or "very big hassle." From the parent survey, the item, "The school counselor contacts me if my child does something well or improves," was used to measure parent involvement. and, "The school counselor responds to my concerns and requests within a reasonable time," measured counselor responsiveness to student needs.

School-level student demographic variables analyzed were the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch and the percentage of students at each school who identified as ethnic/racial minority students. Table 2 provides this data for schools in the study and Table 3 for K-12 students statewide. School demographic variables included school type (middle or high school), enrollment size, student mobility, and per-pupil expenditure.

School counseling program variables included questions about the extent of

comprehensive guidance implementation across five domains: (a) focusing on the academic success of students, (b) providing college and career counseling services to students, (c) addressing personal and social needs of students, (d) using data, and (e) involving parents. Table 4 shows each domain and the related school counseling practices, and how many Rhode Island school counselors indicated that they were doing each practice. To prevent analysis errors, the authors tabulated summary scores for each domain by adding up the total number of "yes" responses for each practice within each domain. Correlational analyses used these domain summary scores only.

Data Gathering and Analysis Procedures

All data collection was done by the Center for School Improvement and Educational Policy (CSIEP) at the University of Rhode Island as part of their annual contract with the Rhode Island Department of Education to collect school data across the state. In an effort to be consistent with the other statewide studies in this special issue, the authors sent a request for specific types of data, and to the extent that it was available, CSIEP provided the relevant information. The study maintained confidentiality through careful coding of data, and CSIEP followed standard participant right protection processes in accordance with their policy directives. To protect confidentiality of those completing surveys, all data was aggregated at the school or state level. In this study, due to the nature and size of the data set, the unit of analysis was the school and the authors calculated Pearson correlation coefficients to determine the strength of the relationships between variables.

RESULTS

Research Question 1 was, "What comprehensive school counseling services were being delivered to students in Rhode Island?" In 2007 and 2008, Rhode Island school counselors were

TABLE 4 SCHOOL COUNSELING PROGRAM PRACTICES

	Percent Responding Yes 2007	2008
1. Our school counseling program contributes to the academic success of students in the following ways:		
Individual Learning Plans (ILPs)	44	60
Career planning	59	61
Classroom interventions and/or curriculum	74	67
Consultation with teachers, parents, and/or administrators regarding academic issues	90	87
Other	18	11
2. Our school counseling program prepares students for careers in the following ways:		
Individual Learning Plans (ILPs)	32	54
Career days/career fairs	46	44
Work-based learning opportunities (e.g., job shadowing, internships)	31	27
Computer-assisted career guidance programs (e.g., Choices, Discover)	42	50
Opportunities to apply real-life contexts	19	23
Large/small group sessions on career choices	46	47
Assessment (e.g., ASVAB, Harrington-O'Shea)	35	35
Other	12	7
3. Our school counseling program addresses students' personal/social needs in the following ways:		
Life skill development (e.g., time management, study skills)	60	56
Individual counseling	95	89
School-wide prevention/support (e.g., Bully-Busters, Second Step)	49	43
Referrals to school psychologist/social worker	87	86
Career planning	54	52
Social skills training	51	47
Group counseling	67	61
Referrals to external agencies	76	73
Peer mediation	40	36
Other	7	5
4. How does your school counseling program use student data?		
To examine student progress on a group basis	58	63
To examine student progress on an individual basis	82	91
To determine the need for interventions	79	88
To examine the effectiveness of interventions	56	55

CONTINUED NEXT PAGE

TABLE 4, CONT.

	Percent Responding Yes 2007	2008
To examine my own effectiveness in using interventions	46	59
To identify evidence-based interventions that enhance achievement, career development, and personal/social development	41	49
To identify the relationship between school counseling activities and student performance	40	43
To identify issues of equity and access	24	27
To document the impact our service have on students for principals, school committees, etc.	31	32
5. Our school counseling program involves parents in the following ways:		
Conferences during the school day	90	89
After school/evening conferences, as needed	67	64
After school/evening conferences on a regular basis	15	13
Meet with new students and their family	70	66
Extended hours (beyond the school day)	33	32
Phone calls	94	94
E-mails	62	70
Letters to home	84	83
Home visits	16	20
Open house	79	79
Newsletter	44	45
Website	46	43
Parent education event	41	35
Other	6	3

providing students and their families with a wide variety of comprehensive school counseling services across all five key domains in the study. When asked directly about whether their school was implementing a comprehensive developmental school counseling program, 66% of the respondents indicated yes in 2007, and in 2008, 68% indicated yes. This descriptive data is in Table 4, which lists each domain, the related practices, and the percentage of respondents who indicated that their school was implementing the practice.

Research Question 2 asked whether comprehensive school counseling services were implemented consistently across schools. To explore the question of whether students were receiving approximately equivalent school counseling services across the state, the authors computed correlations between school-level demographic variables and the school counseling services offered in each school. In line with findings from available research (e.g., Bryan et al., 2009; Johnson et al., 2010; Lapan et al., 2006) the authors expected that comprehensive school counseling services would vary between schools depending on the enrollment profile, with schools with higher percentages of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch or with more racial and ethnic minorities providing fewer services. Pearson correlations were computed to explore possible covariance between these variables.

Figures 1 and 2 provide examples of the similar covariance patterns found across counseling service domains for both 2007 and 2008. To avoid running too many correlations and thus increasing the likelihood of making a Type I error and still being able to answer this research question, the authors focused on the equitable delivery of counseling services to meet the personal and social needs of students. However, findings were consistent for other domains and readers may contact the authors for those statistics. Schools were divided into two groups; they were assigned to the Low Group if they scored below the state mean on the summative variable concerning providing counseling services to help students with their personal and social needs. Schools were assigned to the High Group if they scored above the state mean for this variable. The descending line indicates that schools with greater percentages of minority youth and schools with more students receiving free or reduced-price lunch provided fewer counseling services in the personal and social domain. In answer to Research Question 2, in both 2007 and 2008, students were not receiving equitable school counseling services to help them with their personal and social needs.

Research Question 3 was "Did student outcome measures co-vary with the types of services being provided or with the level of delivery of school counseling services?" The third research question explored possible relationships between school counseling services and student outcomes. The authors tabulated summative variables for each school counseling practice domain, then computed Pearson correlations in relation to key educational outcomes for students such as student self-report data, parent data, and information collected by schools on attendance and discipline incidents. Tables 5 and 6 present the relationships between school counseling domains and student outcomes. Statistically significant correlations are

FIGURE 1 SCHOOL COUNSELORS HELPING STUDENTS WITH THEIR PERSONAL/SOCIAL NEEDS (2007)

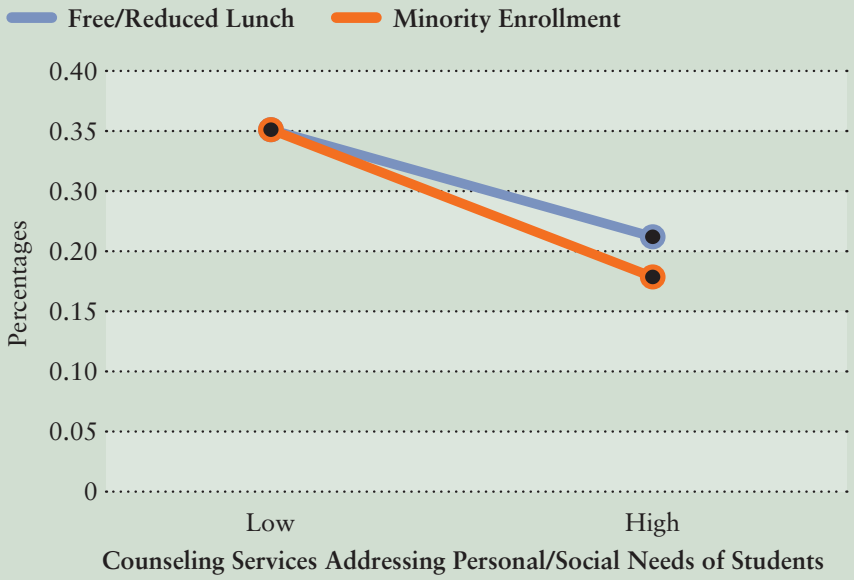
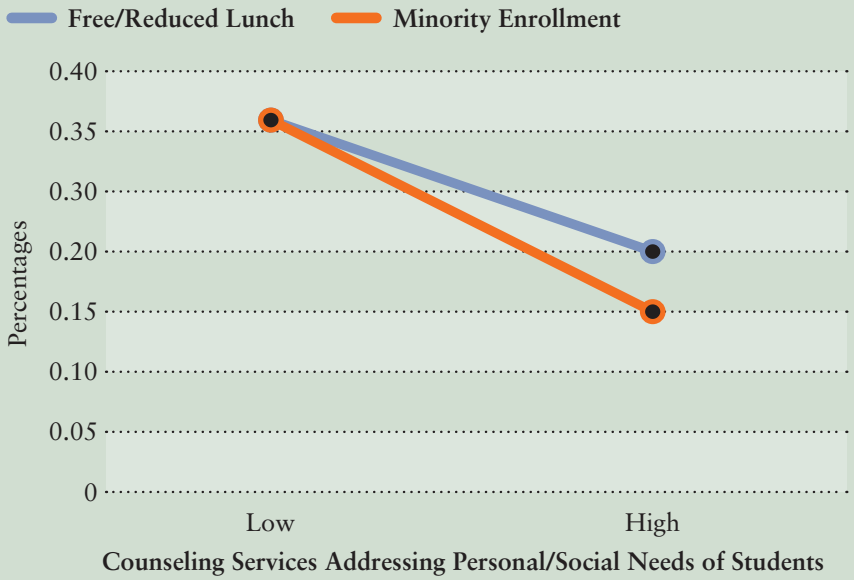


FIGURE 2 SCHOOL COUNSELORS HELPING STUDENTS WITH THEIR PERSONAL/SOCIAL NEEDS (2008)



summarized below, with the data year in parentheses.

When counselors provided more services that focused on improving academic success, students had significantly better attendance (2008), fewer suspensions (2008), fewer self-reported hassles with other students (2008), a better sense of belonging to their school (2007), and fewer reports of getting teased or bullied (2007). In schools where counselors provided more college and career counseling services, students had statistically significantly lower suspension rates (2008), a stronger sense of belonging to their school (2008), fewer self-reported hassles with teachers (2008), fewer self-reports of being teased or bullied (2008), better attendance (2007), and fewer self-reported hassles with other students (2007). More college and career counseling services were also correlated with increased parent reports that the school was responsive to their needs (2008).

In schools where the school counseling program spent more time addressing student personal and social needs, students were significantly more likely to report feeling a greater sense of belonging to their school (2007, 2008), less likely to report difficulties with teachers (2007, 2008), and less likely to say they were teased or bullied (2007, 2008). More personal and social interventions with students were also significantly correlated with parent reports that counselors were responsive to their needs (2008).

Greater use of data by counselors was significantly associated with fewer suspensions (2008), decreased self-reports of students being teased or bullied (2008), and increased parent reports that their child's school was responsive to their needs (2008). Program activities focused on involving parents was correlated with better student attendance (2008), a greater sense of student belonging to their school (2007), and fewer self-reported hassles with other students (2007, 2008). With more counseling activities that involved families, parents were significantly more likely to report that their child's school was responsive to their needs (2007, 2008).

Overall, the study found extensive, fairly consistent, and significant correlations between comprehensive counseling services and several important educational outcomes across both years of this study. This data set contained student and parent self-report data and school-level data on attendance and suspension rates. Counselors reported what services they were carrying out in their schools. The authors obtained data collected from counselors, students, parents, and school-level outcome measures independently from each other to prevent influence on resulting correlations. School-level data was then aggregated across these independent

TABLE 5 2007 CORRELATIONS BETWEEN STUDENT OUTCOMES AND SCHOOL COUNSELING PRACTICE DOMAINS

	Counselor Practice Domains				
Student Outcomes	**AS**	**CC**	**PS**	**UD**	**PI**
1. Student Belonging	.33*	.16	.29*	.15	.28*
2. Hassles with Other Students	-.23	-.32*	-.21	-.10	-.40**
3. Hassles with Teachers	-.02	-.22	.04	-.31*	.02
4. Getting Teased/Bullied	-.02	-.26*	.01	-.30*	-.06
5. Attendance	.01	.03	.31*	.08	.24
6. Getting Suspended	-.17	-.17	.03	-.20	-.24
7. Responsiveness to Parents	-.02	.04	.07	.11	.28*

Note: AS = counselors focusing on the academic success of students; CC = counselors providing college and career counseling services to students; PS = counselors addressing personal and social needs of students; UD = counselors using data; PI = counseling working to involve parents.

$N = 50$ schools. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$.

domains. Because this study used multiple data sources across several contexts, the resulting correlations were not contaminated by common method bias (e.g., when all data comes from the same source, or is all self-report data). Although the authors are not making an argument for causal relationships, correlational patterns of the extent found here are potentially important and very consistent with the other articles in this special issue and with prior research literature.

DISCUSSION

Rhode Island school counselors and the state Department of Education recognized the need to collect data specifically for school counseling programs in order to assess practices, improve programming, and demonstrate accountability. Their efforts have provided critical information both for the state and for the school counseling profession nationally. These data indicated that many comprehensive school counseling interventions were being implemented across the state, although substantially fewer of these services were provided in schools that had greater percentages of minority and/or free or reduced-price lunch students in attendance.

IDENTIFYING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCHOOL COUNSELING PROGRAMMING AND STUDENT OUTCOMES PROVIDES CRUCIAL INFORMATION ABOUT WHAT PRACTICES ARE MOST EFFICACIOUS AND WHERE EFFORTS ARE MOST LIKELY TO SUCCEED IN SUPPORTING STUDENT SUCCESS

The present study found that comprehensive counseling services consistently and positively co-varied with critical markers of student success. This analysis is descriptive and correlational, with the common constraints of educational data sets, so any causal relationships among these data cannot be plausibly determined. The data set used in this study had limitations designed to protect student, parent, and counselor confidentiality, and these protections imposed constraints that did not allow researchers to carry out more theory-driven multivariate analyses. However, the pattern of relationships found in this study was very consistent with the results reported in prior school counseling outcome research and with the other state studies reported in this special issue.

Past studies have found consistently that high-poverty schools (those with high percentages of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch and lower per-pupil expenditures) have higher rates of teacher attrition (Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2004), more teachers who are unlicensed, teachers with lower test scores, and more teachers with less experience and less education (Kahlenberg, 2001; U.S. Department of Education, 2008). The present study found that higher poverty schools in Rhode Island were less likely to be implementing comprehensive school counseling services. As a result, students in these schools were less likely to receive needed counseling to deal with critical issues such as college and career planning and/or help with personal and social needs.

The relationship between race and poverty in education is complex, with increasing evidence that the economic status of schools and families are stronger predictors of academic achievement than student race (Rothstein, 2004). However, for a variety of reasons, including inequity in housing markets and employment, many more students in high poverty schools are Black and Hispanic (Rothstein, 2004). According to recent data, approximately 64% of Black and 63% of Hispanic public school students in the U.S. were in schools where at least 50% of the students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, compared to 20% of White students (Planty et al., 2009).

In this study, schools with higher percentages of minority students also had significantly lower per-pupil expenditures and a higher percentage

TABLE 6 2008 CORRELATIONS BETWEEN STUDENT OUTCOMES AND SCHOOL COUNSELING PRACTICE DOMAINS

	Counselor Practice Domains				
Student Outcomes	AS	CC	PS	UD	PI
1. Student Belonging	.26	.36*	.36*	.28	.20
2. Hassles with Other Students	-.37*	-.06	-.06	-.27	-.39*
3. Hassles with Teachers	.01	-.31*	-.31*	-.26	.04
4. Getting Teased/Bullied	-.04	-.30*	-.30*	-.41*	-.12
5. Attendance	.37*	.18	.18	.05	.34*
6. Getting Suspended	-.26	-.40*	-.40*	-.36*	-.26
7. Responsiveness to Parents	.28	.38*	.38*	.35*	.37*

Note: AS = counselors focusing on the academic success of students; CC = counselors providing college and career counseling services to students; PS = counselors addressing personal and social needs of students; UD = counselors using data; PI = counseling working to involve parents

$N = 50$ schools. $^{*}p < .05$,

of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. School counselors in these schools reported providing less counseling services to meet personal and social needs than in more financially affluent schools. This difference in counseling services is likely to result in unequal access to resources and information. Such questions were also raised by the Public Agenda report on school counseling (Johnson et al., 2010), which found that African-American and Hispanic students were less likely to report receiving academic, career, and college counseling than their White peers, despite high levels of interest. Although that study was based on a representative sample of only 614 people, the young adults who reported having had more school counseling support were more likely to go directly to college after high school, and were more likely to receive scholarships or financial aid. Ninety-one percent of Black adults and 83% of Hispanic students (72% of all students overall) in the Public Agenda sample indicated that the chance to talk with a counselor about college and job training program options was or would have been very helpful (Johnson et al., 2010). Other studies have similarly found differential access to college information by student demographics such as gender, race, and socioeconomic status (Bryan, Holcomb-McCoy, Moore-Thomas, & Day-Vines, 2009; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; McDonough, 2005). Bryan et al. (2009) found that school size and counselor ratios were also predictors of whether students received college information. Differential access to comprehensive counseling services perpetuates unequal distribution of critical resources and supports for students' success in school and in the transition to postsecondary educational and workplace settings.

> IN 2007 AND 2008, RHODE ISLAND SCHOOL COUNSELORS WERE PROVIDING STUDENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES WITH A WIDE VARIETY OF COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL COUNSELING SERVICES ACROSS ALL FIVE KEY DOMAINS IN THE STUDY.

If inequitable counseling services was a disappointing finding in this research, indicators of the powerful and consistent relationship between school counseling services and student outcomes was a hopeful one. Comprehensive school counseling activities across five broad domains were significantly and positively related to several student outcomes in two different academic years (2007 and 2008).

Limitations

The major limitation of this study was that it was correlational and descriptive in nature. The constraints built into the data set to protect confidentiality limited the kinds of multivariate analyses that the authors could perform. Many factors impact educational outcomes, and while it is highly likely that school counselors are part of the equation (see Carrell & Hoekstra, 2012, for related discussion), students, parents, teachers, and administrators all play critical roles. In addition, these outcomes are complex and challenging to measure (Brown & Trusty, 2005).

This study's data have strengths that guarded against the generation of spurious correlations. Data collected for use in all correlations were gathered independently and at different times from each other. Ratings of the counseling services provided in each school were made by a variety of educational professionals, not just school counselors. Students provided self-report ratings about their school experience (e.g., whether they experienced bullying and how much they felt they belonged in their school) and not what counseling services they were being provided. School data on attendance and discipline incidents were collected from school records. Further, ratings of counseling services and student/parent perceptions of their school were then summed across all of these ratings to arrive at a value that was the mean score for each school. These composite scores were then correlated to each other.

These data collection methods do not produce artificially high correlations. This very conservative aggregation of data obtained from multiple independent sources makes finding statistically significant relationships very difficult. When such correlations are so consistently found, and when relationships are clearly in line with an extensive body of credible prior research, they should be seriously considered and efforts should be made to replicate the findings.

Implications for Practice

The unequal access to comprehensive counseling services in schools with higher percentages of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch and with more students who are racial/ethnic minorities in attendance suggests the need for greater action at the level of state policy and administration. State level support for increased implementation of comprehensive school counseling services through a state model based on the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2012) may be a good way to make this happen, and much of this structure is already in place in Rhode Island. In some states, these changes have been created through centralized department of education mandates, and in other states, through funded professional development opportunities (Martin, Carey, & DeCoster, 2009). Even without state-level resources or coordination, districts, schools, and individual school counselors can choose to move to more comprehensive programming that ensures equitable access to key resources.

This research finds clear support for implementing comprehensive school counseling program activities such as support for academic achievement, college and career counseling, and the use of data, in addition to the traditional school counseling practices that meet the personal and social needs of students and that involve parents. Implementing a variety of program components in order to meet a broad range of student needs also is warranted, based on this study.

Conclusion

A growing body of clear and consistent research results indicates that access to school counseling resources and services benefits students and impacts a wide range of educational outcomes. Replication of these findings across educational and community contexts continues to be a critical need in the field. Furthermore, the consistent finding of disparate school counseling program implementation, by income and by race, provides a moral imperative to address inequities in access (Singh, Urbano, Haston, & McMahan, 2010). School counselors, educational leaders, and counselor educators need to continue to seek more extensive distribution of professional resources, effective training in advocacy, and strategies to close gaps in services (Bailey, Getch, & Chen-Hayes, 2007; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). All students both need and deserve equitable access to the benefits connected to comprehensive school counseling programs. ■

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