

Parents' Perceptions of the Role and Function of School Counselors:

A Literature Review

By

Carol Zabel

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A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Barbara Flom", is written over a horizontal line.

Barbara Flom, Ph.D., L.P.C.  
Research Advisor

The Graduate School  
University of Wisconsin-Stout

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**The Graduate School  
University of Wisconsin-Stout  
Menomonie, WI**

**Author:** Zabel, Carol L.

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ABSTRACT

Since the beginning of the profession of school counseling, counselors have been responding to societal need. Along the way there have been questions about school counselor accountability. School counselors are accountable to several constituencies: school administrators, school staff, themselves, their professional community, students, and parents. The purpose of this literature is to focus on parents' perceptions of the role and function of school counselors. Overall, the data uncovered for this review was mixed in terms of school counselors effectiveness in fulfilling their role and function. When considering parental perceptions of the school counselor's role and function, this review concludes with recommendations for practitioners and researchers. An example of one recommendation is for school counselors to educate parents on the counselor's role and functions so parents have accurate information.

The Graduate School  
University of Wisconsin Stout

Menomonie, WI

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## Chapter I: Introduction

The foundation for the profession of school counseling was laid in the early 1900's. From Frank Parsons organizing the Vocational Bureau in Boston to Eli Weaver's work in the New York public schools to Jesse B. Davis forming the first National Vocation Guidance Association in Grand Rapids, Michigan, the need for guiding young people in their vocational choices was being cemented (Myrick, 2003).

World War I brought about a need for measuring intellect and personality traits to screen and appropriately place young men being drafted into the armed services (Myrick, 2003). When this task became too time consuming, the military looked to high schools to provide this information. The testing responsibilities fell to school counselors, adding stability to the structure of school counseling programs.

The Great Depression brought about an urgent need to efficiently match workers' skills and aptitude to a job. Again school counselors were called upon to develop and administer such testing. Aptitude testing was another element securing school counseling programs in schools (Myrick, 2003).

The Soviet Union's launch of the satellite Sputnik in 1957 shocked the government and the people of the United States. In the Cold War era, it was not acceptable to fall behind the Soviet Union in the space race. The United States responded with its own national race. This race was to find the best and brightest young scientific and mathematical minds in the United States. Congress gave school counselors a boost by legislating the responsibility of finding and guiding those bright students to careers in technology via the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) of 1958 (Campbell & Dahir, 1997; Gysbers & Henderson, 2001; Myrick, 2003; Stokes, 1997). Myrick (2003)

suggests this legislation may be "...the single most important event in the history of the school counseling profession" (p.8).

In addition to validating the field of school counseling, the NDEA provided funding to educate counselors. Colleges and universities across the country began developing and implementing training programs for school counselors. These were exciting and turbulent times for the quickly expanding field of school counseling. The focus of the service provision continued to reside in high schools across America until 1965. The Federal government extended the NDEA and enacted the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, providing funds to train elementary school counselors (Myrick, 2003).

The rapid expansion of the field led to some growing pains. The American Personnel and Guidance Association (APGA) organized a commission to study the role and function of school counselors. The chair of this committee, C. Gilbert Wrenn, documented the committee's findings in a report entitled *The Counselor in a Changing World* (Campbell & Dahir, 1997; Myrick, 2003). This was the first effort to standardize the job function and services provided by school counselors. In 1997, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) published national student standards. "National standards for school counseling programs are what the ASCA believes to be the essential elements of a quality and effective school counseling program" (Campbell & Dahir, 1997, p. 3). In order to support students, school counselors offer many services. Burnham and Jackson (2000) identified several researchers who have found, "The role and function of the school counselor has been redefined and broadened through the years. The services provided have characteristically changed and developed in response to various societal events and influences" (p. 42).

Keeping the student as the focus for providing guidance services was fundamental in the formation of the Wisconsin Developmental Guidance Model (WDGM) (Bilzing & Thompson, 1997). The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction promoted this model as a part of their Framework for Comprehensive School Health Programs. In the *Resource and Planning Guide* for WDGM, it was suggested school districts develop their own tools for implementing a comprehensive development guidance program.

As early as the 1920s, Gysbers (2003) found evidence in the literature of concerns with school counselor accountability. Trevisan's (2001) research revealed, "...a lack of time and training as well as a mistrust of the evaluation process have prevented the school counseling field from embracing the potential of sound program evaluation." In another study, Scarborough (2005) recognized the importance of collecting process data for accountability purposes. Scarborough suggested the lack of a good instrument hampers this type of data collection. For that reason, the School Counselor Activity Rating Scale (SCARS) was developed to measure how a school counselor actually spends his or her time versus what guidance related activities the counselor would like to be doing. Another study (Burnham & Jackson, 2000) looked at the discrepancies between what school counselors actually do versus what they are supposed to be doing based on existing guidance delivery models. "School administrators, teachers, parents and other interested groups often view the school counselor's role differently" (Burnham & Jackson, 2000, p. 41).

Hagborg (1992) presented the results when middle school counselors used the Counseling Report Card as a means of communicating with parents regarding their child's use of counseling services. Parents received a copy of the Counseling Report Card indicating what counseling service(s) their child had accessed. In addition, a

questionnaire was sent with the Report Card. The questionnaire asked parents to rate the usefulness of the Counseling Report Card as a way for the middle school counselors to communicate with parents regarding the counseling services being provided to students. Of the 23 parents who returned their questionnaires, 90.9% felt the Counseling Report Card was useful or very useful. Ninety-five percent of the parents who responded supported the middle school counselors using the Report Card. Although this study evaluates the use of a specific communication tool used by middle school counselors rather than an entire school-counseling program, the results supported parental desire for communication with school counselors (Hagborg, 1992).

Several studies have addressed perceptions of school administrators regarding the roles and function of school counselors as well as how effective the counselors are at fulfilling their roles and accomplishing their job functions (Amatea & Clark, 2005; Monteiro-Leitner, Asner-Self, Milde, Leitner & Shelton, 2006; Remley & Albright, 1988; Zalaquett, 2005). Amatea and Clark (2005) presented administrators' perceptions in four categories: "the innovative school leader, the collaborative case consultant, the responsive direct service provider, and the administrative team player" (p. 21-23). Monteiro-Leitner, Asner-Self, Leitner and Shelton (2006) found a great deal of confusion between how school counselors spend their time and how counselors, counselors-in-training, and principals thought school counselors should be spending their time. Of the 11 principals interviewed for Remley and Albright's (1988) research, all 11 made generally positive comments regarding middle school counselors meeting their expectations. Zalaquett (2005) found elementary school principals believed school counselors had a positive influence on: the students' behaviors and mental health, the students and families who sought their assistance, and maintained a positive climate in



the school. Clearly, it is important for the school counselor to understand what his or her administrator expects of the school counseling program. Knowing this helps the school counselor to satisfy the administrator's expectations while fulfilling his or her job responsibilities.

A few studies have been conducted to determine teachers' perceptions of their school counselor (Clark & Amatea, 2004; DeBauche, 1999, Gibson, 1990, Hughey, Gysbers, & Starr, 1993; Quarto, 1999; Remley & Albright, 1988; Wilgus & Shelley, 1988). Gibson (1990) found that high school teachers feel school counselors play a positive role in the school's academic program. Hughey, Gysbers and Starr (1993) found teachers believed school counselors were doing a lot of individual and small groups with students regarding personal issues, educational concerns, and career goals. Quarto (1999) found that teachers believed school counselors who had prior teaching experience were more effective in carrying out general and specific functions of their position. Remley and Albright (1988) reported only 2 of 11 teachers interviewed for their study had generally positive remarks regarding middle school counselors fulfilling the teachers' expectations. Wilgus and Shelley (1988) compared how teachers perceived elementary school counselors were used their time versus how counselors logged the actual use of their time. Out of 15 identified school counselor functions, teachers perceived school counselors to be spending the most time on individual counseling. That perception was accurate according to the counselor log counselor fulfilled an important role in schools.

Three studies and one thesis focused on students' perceptions of guidance counselor's effectiveness in assisting with transitions (Akos, 2002; DeBauche, 1999, Hughey, Gysbers, & Starr, 1993; Remley & Albright, 1988). Akos (2002) addressed student perceptions regarding the transition from elementary to middle school. The

school counselor's role in facilitating successful transition was examined. DeBauche's thesis (1999) found elementary school teachers and student felt the counselor fulfilled an important role in schools. Hughey, Gysbers, and Starr (1993) in their analysis of the Missouri Comprehensive Guidance Program surveyed 280 high school students. Of the survey population, 72.9% of the students had been involved in individual counseling sessions with a school counselor. Remley and Albright (1988) reported 3 of 11 students interviewed for their study had generally positive remarks regarding their expectations of middle school counselors.

School counselors have completed professional audits to provide self-assessment to the evaluation of individual services and comprehensive guidance delivery (Campbell, 1990; Sink & Yilik-Downde, 2001; Wiggins, 1993). Hughes and James (2001) reported in the literature Hughes's use of process data in a presentation to a site-based decision-making council to protect her school-counseling program from being eliminated as a result of school district budget cuts.

While the general findings of the research conducted on administrators, teachers, students, and school counselors themselves provided mostly favorable results regarding the role and function of the school counselor, that is not the reason this research is included in this study. Rather, this research is included to compare the volume of the body of evidence. The pool of resources regarding staff perceptions was deeper than the research regarding parents' perceptions of the role and function of the school counselor.

#### *Statement of the Problem*

Parents are important stakeholders regarding the effectiveness of school counseling services provided to their children. Many school administrators give considerable weight to parental input. A tremendous amount of attention is given to

securing parent buy-in prior to the implementation of a comprehensive school counseling model. School counselors may be collecting data from parents to determine parental perception of the counselor' role and function, and use this information for program improvement. However this information may not be widely available in the professional literature. As the school counseling profession embarks on the implementation of a new service delivery model, accountability will be a primary function of the school counseling program. In order for school counselors to be accountable to parents, the counselors will need to find a way to communicate their role and functions to all their constituencies.

### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study is to review the literature to find evidence of parents' perceptions of the role and function of school counselors. A critical analysis of the research will be provided. The analysis will be used to attempt to answer the following research questions.

### *Research Questions*

Following are the questions:

- 1) What evidence is there in the research to determine parents' awareness of the components of a comprehensive school counseling program?
- 2) Do parents recognize the counselor's role and function within a comprehensive guidance program?

### *Assumptions of the Study*

One assumption of this review is that there is recent research available to be able to determine if parents know the components of a comprehensive guidance program and the role and function of the school counseling within that program. It is further assumed

this research review will include evidence from peer-reviewed journals and other professional literature that is not held to the same standard as the peer reviewed works. I assume there is some research that I did not uncover. Therefore the scope of this review will be inclusive but not comprehensive in nature.

### *Definition of Terms*

There are certain terms that may be unfamiliar to the reader. Many of those terms are defined within the content of this review. The following is the definition of one term that will be important for the reader to understand when reviewing the analysis of the literature:

From Gysbers and Henderson (2001), *Comprehensive School Counseling Program* is defined as a program that addresses competencies a student will master as a result of his or her participation in the comprehensive school-counseling program. Further, there is an organizational framework consisting of a definition, rationale, and assumptions of the program. There are four components of the comprehensive school counseling program: guidance curriculum, individual planning, responsive services, and system support.

## Chapter II: Literature Review

In this chapter the reader will find three separate sections. First, there is a historical overview of the development of the school counseling field from a national and state perspective. Second, the reader will find a synopsis of the standards and framework that have been developed to guide the provision of school counseling services. The concluding section will contain an analysis of the professional literature regarding parents' perceptions of the role and function of school counselors.

### *A Historical Perspective of the Development of Guidance Counseling*

The economic and social effects of the Industrial Revolution caused many people to leave their agrarian way of life to move to the city and work in a factory. More people living closer together gave rise to certain social changes viewed as destructive by members of the Progressive Movement. In this climate of change came a need for guidance (Gysbers & Henderson, 2001). In 1909, Frank Parsons organized the Vocational Bureau of Boston to help people to learn about careers and make career choices based on aptitude, knowledge and preference (Myrick, 2003). In 1913, Jesse Davis helped form the National Vocational Guidance Association in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The organization is still in existence with the mission of career development throughout the life span. Eli Weaver, Meyer Bloomfield, Anna Reed, and David Hill all contributed to the formation of the emerging guidance-counseling field from their work in settlement houses, schools and national organizations (Gysbers & Henderson, 2001; Myrick, 2003).

At that time, guidance consisted of providing people occupation information, vocational assessments, and job placement help. Classroom teachers often assumed these functions. During the Great Depression and World War I, vocational assessment and job placement became critical to our nation. Therefore, state guidance directors were given

the responsibility of developing and coordinating implementation of testing programs. World Wars I and II brought about a demand for intelligence, aptitude and personality testing. These tests became routine in the military and eventually wound up in high school guidance programs (Myrick, 2003).

The 1957 launch of the Russian satellite Sputnik would serve to change the guidance and counseling field forever. This event was perceived as a threat to United States security. In response, the United States Congress enacted the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) of 1958. This legislation provided funding to train school counselors. Counselors were now trained to identify and encourage students with aptitude in math and science to enter college (Campbell & Dahir, 1997; Gysbers & Henderson, 2001; Myrick, 2003). Additionally, NDEA provided funding for full-time guidance counselors in schools, replacing the teacher counselors of an era gone by (Gysbers & Henderson, 2001). Other legislation that created permanent change to the school counseling field included: the Vocational Education Act of 1946; the 1965 extension of NDEA provided funding to train elementary school counselors; the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 provided funding for Title I and III programming and additional funds for elementary school guidance (Gysbers & Henderson, 2001; Myrick, 2003; Schmidt, Lanier, & Cope, 1999).

#### *Standards and Framework for Providing Guidance Services*

Federal legislation and funding brought about an increase in the number of school counselors. Those early college and university training programs were very limited. School districts were unsure how to best utilize their new full-time school counselors. Many school counselors found they spent their days changing student schedules, administering tests, assisting the principal, substituting for teachers, or any of a number

of tasks. As a result, many people thought of guidance and counseling services as ancillary support (Gysbers & Henderson, 2001; Myrick, 2003). In the early 1960s, the American Personnel and Guidance Association (APGA) asked C. Gilbert Wrenn to lead a commission to study the role and function of school counselors. Wrenn's report outlining the commission's recommendations seemed very much like a first attempt at providing standards for school counseling practitioners and their employers. The commission recommended school counselors provide individual and group counseling and consultation to parents and teachers. Further, the commission suggested school counselors should be well versed on the developmental needs of children. Of course, the commission recommended school counselors continue to provide testing and vocational guidance. The report added school counselors should take an active role in curriculum development. Clearly, the commission saw the function of the school counselor as a position for supporting students to be their best with an emphasis on "personal growth, self-determination and self-responsibility" (Campbell & Dahir, 1997).

Campbell and Dahir (1997) published the American School Counselor Association's (ASCA) *National Standards for School Counseling Programs*. This publication clearly stated that the purpose of school counseling is to encourage student learning. It was suggested that school counseling programs concentrate on the facilitation of student learning in three areas: Academic Development, Career Development, and Personal Social Development. Within each broad area are three standards to be met to ensure students acquire the skills necessary to achieve school success. The 2003 edition of the *ASCA National Model for School Counseling Programs* states that all successful comprehensive school counseling programs have the following program systems operating: The Foundation consists of a mission statement, beliefs and philosophy, the

ASCA content standards for students academic, career, and personal/social development. The Delivery System is comprised of the school counseling curriculum, individual student planning, responsive services, and system support services. The Management System includes agreements, the development and implementation of an advisory council, use of data, an action plan, a break down of the counselors' time use, and the counselors calendar. The Accountability System is the component of this model addressing results reports, the school counselor performance standards, and the comprehensive school counseling program audit.

In 1997 when the *National Standards for School Counseling Programs* was made available to school counselors, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) revised and reprinted *The Wisconsin Developmental Guidance Model* (WDGM). Nine competencies were the core of the WDGM. A new comprehensive school counseling model is currently being developed to align the Wisconsin model with the new ASCA standards.

Rowley, Stroh, and Sink (2005) stated that ASCA "clearly supports a comprehensive guidance and counseling orientation through its policy statement in the publication of the *National Standards for School Counseling Programs*" (p. 297). Evaluation data from comprehensive guidance programs show students are more successful in school and at achieving other important school goals when guidance services are organized in this framework (Gysbers & Henderson, 2001). Sink and Stroh (2003) found that early elementary school students who have been involved in comprehensive school counseling programs for several years scored higher on achievement tests than children enrolled in schools without comprehensive guidance programming. Bergin and Miller (1990) presented evidence that supported the use of



comprehensive development guidance programs as a framework for the implementation of guidance services. These results are specific to a part-time counseling program in a small, rural elementary school in Oklahoma.

More prominent in the literature is the Missouri Model of comprehensive developmental guidance programming (Gysbers & Henderson, 2001; Gysbers, Lapan, & Blair, 1999; Rowley, Stroh, & Sink, 2005). "This model has four major components: guidance curriculum, individual planning, responsive services, and system support. Although each element of the model is important, perhaps the guidance curriculum component is the most innovative. It helps transform and focus school counseling from a collection of practice to an educational program, integrating comprehensive guidance and counseling program into the academic mission of a school district" (Rowley, Stroh, & Sink, 2005, p. 292). The curriculum allows for individualizing lessons to fit the needs of each school population.

One study noted a problem that arises when guidance services are based on a model. Burnham and Jackson (2000) found discrepancies between the duties school counselors were performing and the functions described in the models. The authors recognized a need for program models to be flexible enough to incorporate evolving trends.

A final endorsement for comprehensive school counseling programs is that planning and evaluation are built into the model. "At a time when policymakers are requiring increased evidence that supports the effectiveness of different funding initiatives, the results-based framework of a comprehensive program enables school counseling to seize this accountability mandate to improve counseling services available to all children and advocate for the profession" (Lapan, 2001, p. 289). Additionally,

Lapan cited Mitchell and Gysbers in suggesting, "...comprehensive guidance and counseling programs form a self-correcting system around four interrelated processes (i.e. planning, designing, implementing, and evaluating" (p.289).

In 2003, the American School Counselor Association introduced *The ASCA National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs*. The foundation of this model consists of the following components: Foundation, Delivery System, Management System and Accountability System. The model links "... the National Standards with the process of implementing a comprehensive, developmental, results-based program that is consistent with the current educational reform agenda and responsive to state, district and building-level needs" (p. 1). Like the Missouri Model, the ASCA National Model begins with a Foundation. The Foundation includes a statement about the beliefs and philosophy used in the formation of this model. The Foundation also includes a mission statement, and identifies standards for students' academic, career and personal/social development. The Delivery System explains four methods for school counselors to provide their services. These methods of service delivery are: school guidance curriculum; individual student planning; responsive services; and, system support. The Management System of the model suggests the use of management agreements by counselors and administrators to prioritize program implementation based on data. The model recommends an advisory council representing the school's stakeholders should be created to assist the school-counseling program. This group should use data when making decisions and creating an action plan used to direct the counseling program. The Accountability System suggests the use of results reports including the data that has been collected to let stakeholders know if the comprehensive school counseling program is achieving the goals established in the action plan. This system provides school counselor

performance standards and program audit criteria. According to Dr. Norman Gysbers, “When guidance and counseling is organized and implemented as a program, it places school counselors conceptually and structurally in the center of education, making it possible for them to contribute directly and substantially to their local school districts’ educational goals. As a result, guidance and counseling becomes an integral and transformative program in the district, not a marginal and supplemental activity” (p. 4).

#### *Utilizing Data Collection as a Means of Assessing School Counselor Accountability*

This section will take a closer look at the available research regarding methods for evaluating school counselors’ effectiveness at fulfilling their professional role and performing the functions of their position. In these times of economic short falls, it is imperative for school counselors to collect data that will be useful in evaluating the effectiveness of their services provision. The data must be reported to stakeholders (i.e. school boards, district administrators, school staff, students, parents, community partners and tax payers) to insure program sustainability.

In 1990, Robert Myrick introduced into the research the notion that school counselors could collect data retrospectively to assess their work. In this article, Myrick (1990) suggested there is three accountability questions school counselors need to ask for accountability purposes. Those questions are:

1. What are the students’ needs?
2. What is being done to meet these needs?
3. What difference, if any, is counselor intervention making?

Myrick recommended that data for answering the first question be obtained through needs assessment work. An answer to the second question could be obtained through a review of school counselor records. The third question is a bit tougher to

answer. Myrick provided an example of an evaluation tool used to assess Teacher-Adviser Programs. By adapting this tool, school counselors could gain retrospective insight into their intervention. This article presented no empirical data. Rather, the author was suggesting to school counselors the need for accountability. To that end, Myrick (1990) gave ideas of how a school might obtain data to be used to assess their provision of school counseling services. The article attempted to spur school counselors into action.

As Fairchild (1993) put it, “ In spite of the seeming consensus in the literature regarding the importance of being involved in accountability activity, the prevailing attitude seems to be that counselors are not involved in systematically collecting accountability information” (p. 363). Fairchild (1993) reported his results from a national survey involving 500 randomly selected members of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA). Two hundred and eight of the completed questionnaires were usable for this study. The results indicated a majority of the respondents did collect accountability data. The data came from a number of sources: teachers, administrator, and parents. The data were used to show counselor effectiveness and assess the quality of school counseling services provided. In this study Fairchild (1993) compared these results with a 1986 study conducted by Fairchild and Zins. By comparing these results, the author (Fairchild, 1993) was able to identify the following trends: more school counselors were collecting accountability data, time analyses was cited as the primary methodology for data collection, and many admitted the data collection was as a result of a state mandate. Although there was an increase in the number of counselors collecting data, Fairchild (1993) noted that 33% of practitioners did not collect any accountability data.

In 2003, Myrick revisited the topic of counselor accountability. In this article, Myrick (2003) listed several reasons for school counselors' resistance to accountability. Myrick (2003) suggested school counselors receive little support or reinforcement for being accountable. Making accountability studies a part of the school counselors' job description may allocate time and resources for the school counselor to collect accountability data and report the results to school counseling program stakeholders. A well-designed accountability system was also suggested as way of collecting data that will be useful and meaningful to administrators and school counselors. Myrick (2003) completed this article by saying, "Accountability studies present opportunities for counselors to tell their story. They can increase visibility and support. Accountability studies let counselors count and be counted" (p. 180).

Gysbers (2003) also weighed in on the topic of accountability. While providing detailed information on the evolution of accountability in the field of school counseling, Gysbers also addressed three themes that have emerged as necessary for accountability to be achieved. First, school counselors must believe that professional accountability is a necessity. Second, school counseling outcome measures should be developed based on the individual school's improvement plan. Finally, school counselors must put accountability into action. Talking about accountability is not enough to satisfy the professional standards being implemented across the country. School counselors must collect accountability data, analyze the data, and use the results to fine tune those elements of the school counseling program that need adjustment.

Hagborg (1992) presented a tool for collecting data from parents. His study was conducted in a middle school with a population of 400 students. Forty-nine of fifty-four students seen for individual or group counseling during the fourth quarter of the 1988-89

school year were a part of research group. The school counselor prepared Counseling Report Cards on each student who received services. Of the 54 students who received service, 49 students agreed to be a part of the study. To insure confidentiality, the school counselor showed each student in study his or her Counseling Report Cards. If the student was uncomfortable with the information shared in the Report Card, the student was taken out of the study. The Counseling Report Cards were sent home to parents along with a four-item questionnaire, and a letter asking the parents to help evaluate the usefulness of the Report Card. Twenty-three questionnaires were completed and returned. The Counseling Report Card was rated useful or very useful by 90.9% of the respondents. This finding suggests that parents found the Counseling Report Card to a useful way for school counselors to communicate their child's counseling experience.

Remley and Albright (1988) recommended a number of ways to communicate with middle school parents so middle school counselors can gain appreciation from this population for the important work that they do. The purpose of Remley and Albright's (1988) study was to determine students, teachers, principals and parents expectations of the middle school counselors. Eleven researchers were trained to conduct structured interviews. Each interviewer was expected to conduct four interviews, one person from each of populations whose perceptions were being studied. The research took place in Washington, D.C., and suburban Maryland and Virginia. Only five of the eleven parents interviewed were generally positive in their perceptions of middle school counselors. When describing middle school counselors, interviewers recorded parents saying, "not dedicated, not strict enough in teaching children self-responsibility, and only interested in helping the good students who are high achievers." (Remley & Albright, 1988, p, 294). Parents' comments regarding the school counselor helping students with personal

problems were conflicting. Of the 62 parent statements regarding the school counselor helping students with personal problems some saw this as a appropriate use of the counselor's time while others thought it was inappropriate. Parents mentioned other school personnel and family members as more appropriate people to help a child with his or her personal problems. At the same time, 7 of 11 parents interviewed thought it was appropriate for middle school counselors to assist students with personal problems..

In 1990, Chapman and DeMasi published an article relating parents' perceptions of school counselors' effectiveness in college advising. The article reported the results of a study conducted in the state of New York. Parents were randomly selected using the list of first time financial aid applicants of students ages 18-22. One thousand students were also randomly selected utilizing that same list. Parents in this study regarded counselor overall effectiveness as low. The results indicated parents believed their child saw the school counselor approximately 11 times in their last two years of high school. Students reported an average of 12.5 visits to their school counselor's office in the two years prior to their graduation from high school. Parents overestimated the amount of time counselors spend with students on personal and interpersonal problems. They also overestimated the amount of time the counselor spent on academic advising, but underestimated the amount of time spent administering and interpreting tests. Parents and students agreed on the amount of time school counselors spend advising students regarding college and financial aid. Yet parents underestimated the amount of time their child spent with the counselor, as well as the number of times the counselor initiated that contact. Often the parent did not know the purpose of the contact. This evidence suggests that parents' perceptions are not based on what the school counselor is actually doing. Remley and Albright's (1988) results were similar to Chapman and DeMasi's (1990), in

reference to parents' perceptions not accurately reflecting how a school actually spends his or her time.

Bergin and Miller (1990) evaluated the use of comprehensive school counseling programming in a rural school setting. Students, faculty and parents participated in the study. A team of university researchers met with a guidance team from a small rural school district in Oklahoma. The guidance team consisted of the school counselor, the building principal, parents, and community members. In the initial meetings, the guidance team learned Oklahoma's model and philosophy of developmental guidance. In subsequent meetings, the guidance team worked with the researchers to develop a procedure for administering the needs assessment survey to students, parents and school personnel. Sixty-one percent of the parents returned their surveys. The results indicated that parents wanted the guidance program to focus on students' academic needs. Parents also wanted the school counselor to help students understand feelings and how feelings impact behavior. Further, parents wanted the counselor to help students improve their self-concept. Parents also reported a desire to have the counselor teach their children to take responsibility for their actions. The results of this needs assessment, including the teachers and students results, were used to create a plan for implementing the state model of comprehensive developmental guidance.

In 1993 Hughey, Gysbers, and Starr evaluated the impact of the state model of comprehensive developmental guidance in Missouri. The persons in charge of the guidance departments in 18 high schools was asked to select 5 students, 10 to 15 parents, and 10 to 15 teachers to complete a survey regarding the guidance program. Approximately 280 students from 14 high schools, 125 parents, and 150 teachers completed and returned a survey. A closer look at the parent results revealed more than



80% of the parent respondents had talked with the school counselor during the academic year. Parents sought out the school counselor for: post secondary school options for their child, to find out how their child was doing in school, scheduling, college admission and financial aid information, personal concerns, and teacher/student relationship issues. Post secondary planning and finding out how their child was doing in school were the most frequent reasons parents noted for talking with the school counselor. The most frequent response from students and parents when asked to list suggestions for the guidance program was that counselors were doing a good job. Teachers, students and parents all agreed there was a need to hire additional counselors.

Kottman and Wilborn (1992) presented an idea for a way to capitalize on existing resources. The purpose of the study was to compare results of parent study groups led by school counselor with the results of similar groups led by trained parent facilitators. The group studied consisted of 359 parents from a Texas school district. One hundred and seventy- one of these parents were in the treatment groups. Ninety of the participants were in the parent-led groups and eighty-one parents were in the counselor-led groups. There were 188 parents placed in two control groups who registered but did not attend any group meetings or attended just one session. The Parent Attitude Survey was used to obtain pre and post-test scores for group participants. The results were compared with scores obtained from parents in the control groups. Overall, parents who attended the study groups had a more positive attitude toward their children and their parenting role than the parents who did not attend the study groups. There was no significant difference between the results of the parent-led and counselor-led study groups.

In 1999, Scruggs presents the results of her evaluation of a K-12 counseling program in Houston, Texas. A random sample of elementary and secondary school

students and parents participated in this evaluation. All school staff members were invited to participate in study. The majority of the parent input was solicited during focus group meetings. Parents agreed there was a need for more counseling staff and more counseling services. Parents also felt that counseling staff was being asked to perform noncounseling duties. Sixty percent of the parents who participated in the evaluation felt that their school counselor had the ability to respond appropriately in a crisis. Only 40% of the parents felt that their school counselor did a good job of letting students know what guidance services were available. One of the biggest areas of concern that was realized as a result of this evaluation was “the lack of consistency in defining or supporting the role of the school counselor, so as to maximize direct counseling services to students versus accomplishment of other tasks” (Scruggs, 1999, p. 247).

Curcio, Mathai, and Robert (2003) sought parent input when evaluating a secondary school counseling program. A superintendent approached one of the authors of this study, requesting the evaluation due to a great deal of parental criticism of the high school counseling program (Curcio, Mathai, & Robert, 2003). He wanted to use the data to recommend specific changes to the counseling program critics and to improve the service. He felt he needed to seek outside evaluators for their expertise and to insure credibility of the results when he presented the information to the critics. The purpose of this article was to present the process the authors used to determine what data to collect and how the data was collected. The data were collected in six different ways: counselor interviews, counselor log sheets, principal interviews, teacher focus groups, student focus groups, and parent focus groups. The specific results of the evaluation were shared with the school district that requested the study, but were not included in the journal article. Rather, the authors chose to publish the details of their process of conducting this

evaluation. Their hope was to aid their colleagues in future data collection in on-going school counselor accountability efforts.

Kaplan (1996) was a member of a writing team asked to respond to parental criticism of school counselors' professional practices. As a result of these concerns, the Virginia Board of Education directed the State Department of Public Instruction to draft school guidance and counseling regulations. As a member of the team, Kaplan (1996) was able to read letters sent to the State Board of Education by disgruntled parents. She admitted some of the concerns she read were outrageous while others were legitimate. Kaplan (1996) cited examples of those legitimate concern as: teaching children to make decisions without reference to family, potentially harmful counseling practices, not allowing parents to make informed decisions about their child(ren)'s participation in counseling activities, and confidentiality in the school setting. Kaplan (1996) shared with her colleagues her belief that counselors need to be able to separate the outrageous from the legitimate parental concerns while respectfully and professionally addresses these concerns. Kaplan (1996) also included recommendations to school counselors for improving their relationships with parents. Informing parents of the school counseling program and activities, listening carefully to parents, and showing parents an understanding of their point of view, were ideas for ways each school counselor could improve his or her relationships with parents. Systemic recommendations for improving relationships with parents included: developing and implementing policies for counselor-parent communication, establishing parent-advisory committees; and addressing the unique confidentiality issues counselors face in a school setting.

One study regarding parents' perceptions focused on a specific population. Kottman and Robert (1995) looked at how parents thought school counselors could help

with children diagnosed with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). To uncover this information, the researchers sent surveys to 506 parents who belonged to a statewide organization for parents of children with ADHD. One hundred and ten parents completed and returned the survey. Forty-three percent of the parents voiced concern about their child's academic ability. Only 1.8% of the parents in this study listed the school counselor as useful. Parents expressed a need for a collaborative partnership with school personnel. In addition, the parents asked for help accessing services and more effective methods of communicating with teachers and other school personnel. Although these results from parents presented schools and school personnel in a negative way, there were many suggestions for ways to improve this relationship.

Donna Barefoot, working with George Thomas on his 1994 Mississippi State University thesis, presented the results of their research into the parents' use of the school counselor as a resource person after attending an educational seminar. For their study, Barefoot and Thomas (1994) developed a questionnaire to administer to parents of children with attention deficit disorder/attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADD/ADHD). Questions were designed to measure parents' knowledge of ADD/ADHD prior to parent group seminar participation. The same questionnaire was used as a post-test after completion of the seminar. The study included an experimental group of fifteen randomly selected Jones County School District parents who attended the seminar. The control group consisted of fifteen randomly selected parents who did not attend the seminar but completed the questionnaire. There was a question regarding whom parents used as a resource to gain a better understanding and help with their child's ADD/ADHD. The intent of this question was to determine if parents were using the school counselor as a resource person. In the pre-test, only 7 of 30 respondents said they used the school

counselor as a resource person. In the post-test, all fifteen of parents in the experimental group identified the school counselor as a valuable resource person. Although this study was limited to a very small group of parents in Laurel, Mississippi, the results support the need of school counselors to educate parents about regarding the role and function of their position. This information may encourage parents to utilize the school counselor as a resource person.

Stokes (1997) surveyed 730 parents in the Wisconsin Rapids School District to determine their perception of the role and purpose of elementary school counselors for his University of Wisconsin-Stout thesis. A survey was developed specifically for this research. Respondents were asked to rank the importance of 32 different guidance services. The ranking was on a continuum from essential, important, somewhat important, should not provide to no opinion. Based on survey results, Stokes (1997) concluded parents believed school counselors served a legitimate purpose in the schools. More specifically, a majority of the parents who completed the survey felt the duties of the elementary school guidance counselor were important. Respondents recognized the importance of the guidance counselor's role in working with teachers to help students who are having academic trouble, counseling students with personal and/or social problems, and working with the parents of these students (Stokes, 1997).

Quast (2003), in her University of Wisconsin-Stout thesis, researched parent perceptions of the role and function of school counselors. She focused on high school guidance counselors. Quast (2003) designed a survey by combining two existing surveys and modified the tools for her research project. When completed, the survey consisted of 44 yes/no questions that dealt with the role and function of a high school counselor. The survey was administered during fall parent/teacher conferences. One hundred and two

parents completed and returned their surveys. Based on the results of her research, Quast (2003) concluded, “the majority of parents perceived a high school counselor as performing the appropriate and essential roles and functions within the school” (p.59). Based on the finding of the two theses authors (Quast, 2003; Stokes, 1997), it would appear parents in these school districts studies felt elementary and high school counselors provided services essential to their child(ren)’s school success.

In June of 2005, ASCA conducted a telephone survey to determine how often parents initiate contact with their child’s school counselor. The survey concluded, “too many parents lack contact with school counselor” (ASCA, 2005). Richard Wong, the Executive Director of ASCA, added the survey results indicated that parents perceive school counselors make a valuable contribution to students’ academic, personal, career, and college preparation success.

The call for professional accountability for school counselors has been long standing. In attempts to evaluate comprehensive school counseling programs, researchers have collected data from a number of sources: administrators, teachers, students and parents. The focus of this literature review was to determine parents’ perceptions of the role and function of the school counselor. Based on the data presented, it is difficult to determine parents’ perceptions of the role and function of the school counselor. Very few studies directly addressed this topic. Parents’ perceptions were woven into the finding in some of the research. What has become clear is that parents first need to understand what the role and function of the school counselor is before they can formulate accurate perceptions about school counselor effectiveness in fulfilling their role and function. It is to the school counselor’s advantage to educate parents on their role and function within

the context of a comprehensive school counseling program. Without this education, school counselors are at a disadvantage when asking for parents' perceptions.

### Chapter III: Summary, Critical Analysis, and Recommendations

In this chapter I will summarize and analyze the findings of the literature presented in this study. The chapter will conclude with recommendations for further research.

#### *Summary*

This review covers literature published on parents' perceptions of the role and function of school counselors during the last two decades. I uncovered fifteen articles. I concede there may be articles I missed for inclusion in this review.

In the initial stages of data collection, I found it difficult to find research that clearly addressed parents' perception of the role and function of the school counselor. Seven of the studies presented for consideration in this review specifically included parents when evaluating comprehensive school counseling services (American School Counselor Association, 2005; Bergin & Miller, 1990; Hughey, Gysbers & Starr, 1993; Quast, 2003; Remley & Albright, 1988; Scruggs, 1999; Stokes, 1997).

When summarizing this information it seemed logical to return to my original research questions. The first question was: What evidence is there in the research to determine parents' awareness of the components of a comprehensive school counseling program? To answer this, we can look to Bergin and Miller (1990) who found parents wanted school counselors to focus on students' academic needs. Hughey, Gysbers, and Starr (1993) found parents in Missouri were seeking school counselors' advisement and information regarding post secondary options for their child, child's school performance, scheduling, college admission and financing issues, personal concerns, and teacher/student relationship issues. Scruggs (1999) found parents in Houston, Texas felt



that there was a need for more school counselors and that the counselors were being asked to perform noncounseling duties.

Overall, the evidence provided here is not sufficient to determine if parents are aware of the components of a comprehensive school counseling program. It appears that parents have information and understand pieces of the puzzle. But, no study showed that parents have a complete understanding of all of the components of a comprehensive school counseling program. Thus, these programs remain puzzling to parents.

The second question was: Do parents recognize the counselor's role and function within a comprehensive school counseling program? To get an answer to this questions we can look to Chapman and DeMasi (1990) who found parents regarded school counselors overall effectiveness as low when it comes to college advising. Remley and Albright (1988) had a similar experience when interviewing parents of middle school students. Parents recorded comments indicated they felt school counselors were not dedicated, not diligent in teaching students responsibility, and only interested in helping high academic achievers. Stokes (1997) surveyed Wisconsin Rapids School District elementary school parents and found they recognized the importance of the school counselor's role in consulting with teachers assist students who struggling academically, experiencing personal/social difficulties, and working with the parents of troubled students. Quast (2003) survey high school parents in the Wisconsin Rapids School District. She found parents of high school students provided services that were essential to their child's school success.

The following studies either evaluated the school counselor's role in providing services to a specific population or implementing a program. Barefoot and Thomas (1994) found that parents of students diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder and/or

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADD/ADHD) were more likely to use the school counselor as a resource person after attending an information seminar regarding their child's disorder. Kottman and Roberts (1995) surveyed parents of a child with a diagnosis of ADD or ADHD. They found on 1.8% of parents found the school counselor to useful. Hagborg (1992) presented his results when he evaluated the usefulness of the Counseling Report Card as a communication tool for school counselors to use with parents. The Report Card listed services provided by the school counseling department. School counselors identified which services he or she provided to the student. Parents found this to be a valuable communication tool. An unanticipated outcome of using the Report Card may have been the education parents received regarding all of the duties listed on the card as potential services school counselors may provide to middle school students. Kottman and Wilborn (1992) studied the results between counselor-led and trained parent-led parent study groups. There was no significant difference between the parent survey results in the two groups. And finally, the American School Counseling Association (ASCA) reported their 2005 parent survey results by acknowledging parents want more contact with the school counselors.

While this evaluation information gives us insight into parents' perceptions on how effective school counselors are at performing certain services or programs, it does not tell us whether parents recognize the counselors' role and function with a comprehensive school counseling program.

### *Critical Analysis*

The body of evidence regarding parents' perceptions of the role and function of the role and function is limited. I can speculate on the reasons for the limited data available on this subject. Finding the time and from which stakeholder group to collect

data remain two of many issues facing school counselors as they embark on the implementation of the ASCA National Model for school counseling programs.

We have looked at parents' knowledge of the component of a comprehensive school counseling program. Based on parent responses in the Hughey, Gysbers, and Starr's (1993) it is apparent that parents knew what to expect from a comprehensive school counseling program and appropriately sought the advice of the school counselor in these areas. The parents interviewed in Scruggs (1999) study knew enough about what they expected from the school counseling program and what to expect from the school counselor to know they needed more counselors. Although Bergin and Miller (1990) set out to evaluate a comprehensive school counseling program, a great deal of the data reported in the study had to do with what parents wanted the school counselor to do. Parents wanted the school counseling program to focus on students' academic needs. Further, parents wanted the school counselor to help students understand feelings, how feelings impact behavior, and to teach students to take responsibility for their behavior. Parents wanted the school counselor to help students improve their self-concept.

For parents to be able to understand the school counselor's role and function within a comprehensive school counseling program, parents must be educated. In the Barefoot and Thomas (1994) study we find parents consider the school counselor as a resource person after receiving specific information regarding ADD/ADHD. Stokes (1997) designed a survey delineating the school counselors' duties. When asked to rank the importance of the 32 separate school counseling services, elementary school parents were also educated on the complexity of the role and function of the school counselor's position. Quast (2003) used an abbreviated version of the survey to find high school parents perceptions of the role and function of the school counselor. Results from both of

these surveys found parents to value the services provided through the school counseling program by the school counselor.

Chapman and DeMasi (1990) survey parents regarding their satisfaction with the school counselor's service in respect to college advising. Parents had a very low opinion of the school counselors' effectiveness in providing this service. Students were also surveyed in this study. When the data was compared, parents often believed their child was receiving more service from the counselors than what the students reported. Clearly, parents were basing their opinion on some inaccurate assumptions. Remley and Albright (1988) research population consisted 11 participants in each of the survey populations (students, teachers, principals, and parents). Based on the small sample size a researcher would be remiss in generalizing the results of this study to a broader population. In this same study, parents mentioned other school personnel and family members as more appropriate people to help a child with his or her personal problems. At the same time, 7 of 11 parents interviewed thought it was appropriate for middle school counselors to assist students with personal problems. This conflicting information suggests parents are not sure what to expect of middle school counselors.

Whether or not parents are aware of the components of a comprehensive school counseling program or understand the role and function of the school counselor, ASCA (2005) reports that parents want more contact with school counselors. Parents want more information. School counselors may be providing that information, but there is little evidence in the literature to support that theory. In those studies where parents were made aware of what to expect from the school counselor, parents were satisfied the services being provided (Hughey, Gysbers, & Starr, 1993; Quast, 2003; Stokes, 1997). Perhaps now more than ever, school counselors need to take Myrick's (2003) advice and report

their accountability study results so parents can see how closely the school counselors' role and function is linked to student success.

### *Recommendations*

Given the limited body of evidence, it would seem school counselors are not collecting a great deal of accountability data from parents. Yet I continue to believe it is important for the school counselor to view parents as a part of their constituency. Further, school counselors need to educate parents on the components of a comprehensive school counseling program and the counselor's role and function within that program. Once the school counselor has provided that education, parents will be a better position to provide feedback on the program and the counselor.

If parents are not initiating contact with school counselors, the counselors will need to go to them. The fact that the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) has recently revised professional standards and ASCA is recommending the implementation of a new model of guidance services provision, may give school counselors the opportunity to initiate that contact. School counselors must let parents know exactly what the job of the school counselor entails.

A second recommendation comes from the Kottman and Wilburn (1992). For many school counselors, teaching parenting classes is just one of a long list of duties. If counselors could train parents to help teach other parents, like the study groups described in this study, this could help free up school counselor time to complete other tasks. Parents who are trained by the counselor may see how complex and demanding the position of school counselor.

This research uncovered tools used by school counselor for collecting data regarding their guidance practice. Counselors used these tools to evaluate their own

practice. Parts of those tools may be adapted for use in collecting data from parents. Other tools have been developed for thesis data collection regarding parents' perception of the role and function of school counselors in a specific school district. Counselors could obtain data for a wide variety of school counselor functions by using either of these tools or designing their own.

I would agree with Kaplan (1996) in making this final recommendation for school counseling practitioners. School counselors must listen to parents concerns without becoming defensive. Improving relationships with parents can only serve to benefit the image of the school counseling program and help parents to understand the role and function of the school counselor.

Based on this literature review, I would suggest there is a need for more research in the area of parents' perceptions of comprehensive school counseling programs and the role and function of the school counselor within those programs. We look to the school counseling professionals in higher education to lead the way in this effort. At the university level, school counseling professionals have the resources available to them to efficiently collect and analyze data and objectively report the results. The onus for legitimizing a profession through research often falls to professionals at this higher level of education. We look to them to lead the way in expanding our professional accountability through research.

The limited body of research demonstrates that the need may not be to survey parents to gain additional data, rather to report to parent the results of data collection efforts. These reports may serve to make parents aware of the role and function of school counselors. Ultimately, information is what will give parents the knowledge they need to understand the vital role a school counselor plays in their child's success in school.

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