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### **Impact of Accountability on Role Confusion: Implications for School Counselor Practice**

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#### **Abstract**

This article addresses the issue of school counselor role confusion and the importance of demonstrating accountability so that counselors can clarify and validate their roles as relevant stakeholders and systemic change agents in the school setting. Further, this article discusses the advantages of following the ASCA National Model and the benefits of being data-driven in order to reduce and clarify role confusion. Implications for the school counselor regarding the importance of using data are examined. In addition, suggestions for future research are stated, in order for counselors to further substantiate that they are valuable participants and play an instrumental role in the success of all students.

#### **The School Counselor's Role**

Today school counselors are not only mental health professionals; they are collaborators, leaders, and advocates who work diligently to create rigorous and comprehensive counseling programs to promote student success (Stone & Dahir, 2006). Counselors work tirelessly to promote and provide equity and opportunity for all students regardless of race, ethnicity, or socio-economic status. School counselors serve a vital role in maximizing student success (Lapan, Gysbers, & Kayson, 2007). Counselors assist in creating safe learning environments that stimulate, challenge, and support all students. Counselors play an integral role in the social/emotional and academic learning of students (Eakin, 2013). The American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2010, 2012) defines the role of the professional school counselor as to address all students' academic, personal/social, and career development needs by designing, implementing, evaluating,

and enhancing a comprehensive school-counseling program that promotes student success.

According to ASCA (2012), school counselors need to spend the majority of their time in direct service to and contact with students. School counselors' duties are focused on the overall delivery of the total program through guidance curriculum, individual student planning, and responsive services. School counselors have a significant role to play in ensuring student success, as they have a school wide perspective on serving the needs of every student. Therefore, school counselors serve as advocates and as agents for removing any barriers that prevent academic success. Specifically, the role of the school counselor includes developing a school counseling core curriculum (instruction and group lesson, including lessons designed to help students achieve mandated competencies in the academic, personal/social and career areas), engaging in individual student planning (coordinate with ongoing systemic activities developed to help students attain goals, including appraisal and advisement), and providing responsive services (designed to meet students' immediate needs and concerns such as counseling and crisis response; ASCA, 2012). Counselors are also required to provide indirect services to students including making necessary referrals, as well as consulting and collaborating with other key stakeholders to help ensure overall student success. Eighty percent of school counselors' time is supposed to be devoted to direct and indirect student services, with program planning and school support activities (program management, professional development, data analysis, and management) relegated to 20% of a counselor's workday (ASCA, 2012).

Paolini (2012) found that 20.7% of counselors' time was spent conducting individual, small group, or peer crisis counseling sessions; 15.2 was spent on individual student planning, appraisal, and advisement; and 14.1% was spent on conducting classroom presentations and workshops. Counselors' spent an average of 12.7% of their time on consulting, collaborating, and teaming with other school stakeholders and 10% of their time was spent on monitoring student progress, evaluating student success, and on data analysis. Counselors' spent about 9.8% of their time helping students with career and college planning and an additional 9.0% of their time helping students with course selection and scheduling. An estimated 5.0% of counselors' time was spent on making school or agency wide referrals. Thus, the majority of counselors' time was spent on conducting individual, small group, or peer counseling, crisis, on individual student planning and advisement, and on conducting classroom presentations and workshops. Finally, 3.4% of counselors' time was spent on other tasks, which included test administration, disciplinary issues, or lunch duty. Yet, counselors commented to the researcher that these administrative tasks not only impeded upon their ability to engage in direct and indirect student services, but also deterred them from being more data driven in regards to utilizing data analysis (accountability).

Further, according to the College Board (2011), the day to day job of school counselors may include post-secondary admissions counseling, scheduling courses, personal needs counseling, academic testing, occupational counseling, and job placement, as well as other non-counseling related activities. Therefore, since counselors are possibly mandated to complete non-counseling related tasks, role confusion amongst and within the profession is alive and well.

## **Role Confusion**

Similar to the role of the school counselor, the school counseling profession has continually transformed and evolved since its evolution in the early 1900s. The historical narrative of the school counseling profession indicates that the school counselor's role has expanded (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). During the early 1900s, the school counseling profession primarily emphasized vocational guidance. Towards the 1950s and 1960s, there was a paradigm shift from career development to student personal and social issues. Towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the advent of the standards based educational movement, Campbell and Dahir (1997) created the ASCA National Standards for school counseling, which strengthened the school counseling profession's identity and programs.

Even though the ASCA National Model (2003) was developed to decrease role confusion and increase clarity, school counselors today have a variety of duties, many of which do not fall under the traditional realm of school counseling services (ASCA, 2005). Thus, they are often overwhelmed by the array of tasks that need to be completed, along with rising expectations regarding student outcomes as a result of their services. In addition, many school counselors experience role stress and confusion due to the conflicting and incongruent messages that they receive from administrators and other stakeholders who fail to understand the actual role of the school counselor (Culbreth, Scarborough, Banks-Johnson, & Solomon, 2005). As a result, school counselors are often assigned non-counseling related tasks. Therefore, in spite of the clear role statements by ASCA and a clear preference towards activities indicated in the ASCA National Model (Scarborough & Culbreth, 2008), "professional school counselors experience high levels of stress because of multiple job demands, role ambiguity, large caseloads, and lack of clinical supervision" (Lambie, 2007). Whereas ASCA (2003, 2005) and CACREP (2012) have outlined best practices for school counseling, professional school counselors at times find themselves in organizational systems where there is a lack of a defined role or the role is inconsistent with their training and values. This impedes upon their personal wellness as well as leads to occupational stress and impairment (Young & Lambie, 2007).

Role conflict and role ambiguity are the two specific occupational stressors that school counselors experience with regard to the multiple roles they assume within school (Bryant & Constantine, 2006). Many administrators do not have an accurate view of the role, appropriate functions, and relevant skills that school counselors need to possess in order to be proactive at their jobs (Amatea & Clark, 2005). Additionally, school administrators determine the role of the school counselor; however, the majority of administrators do not have any formal training in counseling. Therefore, counselors' duties are often incongruent with the ASCA National Model (Ross & Herrington, 2006). Due to administrators' lack of knowledge regarding school counselors' duties, they tend to assign counselors non-counseling related activities such as lunch duty, discipline, or test administration (Baker, 2001). School counselors need to be more proactive in program planning to educate administrators about their roles as leaders, advocates, and systemic change agents. Counselors also need to assert themselves and set clearer boundaries with administrators so that their efforts can be focused on directly promoting students' academic, social/personal, and career success.

Many school counselors adapt their counseling programs to meet the needs of the specific students in their schools (Erford, 2011). Thus, the needs of the school and students are the determinants regarding the amount of time school counselors spend consulting, coordinating, providing direct or indirect services, and advocating for issues (Erford, 2011). Counselors must know how to acquire adaptability skills and learn how to negotiate needs in a unique school context (Borders, 2002). Hence, there is no universal approach to counseling, and although counselors' agendas are encouraged to be dependent upon the needs of students, they are also determined by administrators who may assign non-counseling related tasks.

Many counselors are executing duties such as the disciplinarian, record keeper of absences, and other clerical tasks (Fitch et al., 2001). According to ASCA (2003), these school counselor duties are unrelated to the standards set forth for counselors, leading to further role confusion. Additionally, counselors lose autonomy when they assume duties unrelated to their mandatory counseling responsibilities (Ross & Herrington, 2006). Having a decreased sense of autonomy may cause counselors to feel disempowered and develop feelings of resentment towards administrators rather than developing a collaborative working relationship with them. This in turn may negatively impact their role performance.

Role confusion is not only detrimental to the counseling profession, but is also harmful for students, since they too suffer from poorly defined school programs (Ross & Herrington, 2006). Due to multiple demands, unrealistic expectations, and failure to interpret and utilize data properly, counselors aren't always able to meet the needs of all students.

Furthermore, parents play a vital role in their child's education and are important links between school and home. Having a mutual understanding of one another's roles will allow for the counselor to interact, consult, and help parents to be more invested in their child's overall development (ASCA, 2005). Increased parental awareness regarding the school counselor's position and services is critical in order to enhance collaboration and cooperation amongst key stakeholders. Yet, there also seems to be confusion on the part of the parents regarding the school counselor's role.

Helms and Ibrahim (1983) identified the need to clarify parent perceptions in an effort to help clarify the school counselor's identity. Helms and Ibrahim (1985) conducted a study to determine the viewpoint of several of ASCA's noted counselor functions. Personal and educational counseling and public relations were viewed as more important to the counselor in comparison to the parent; however, there was mutual agreement regarding the need for career counseling. Many parents view the school counselor as a main source of assistance having knowledge in multiple areas (Herr, 2002).

Schmidt (2003) reviewed survey responses from an external study developed to determine the perceptions of students, teachers, and parents in two different southeastern school systems. This study showed that parents of students in high schools perceived counselor helpfulness to be lower than that of counselors in the elementary and middle school levels. Additionally, these parents perceived the clerical tasks, paperwork, and test coordination as the least important activities for school counselors (Schmidt, 2003). In accordance with Baker (2000), parents perceived college advising as being much more important than other counselor functions.

Many parents are not aware of the services offered by counselors. Therefore, they view the school counselor as having little significance in their child's education and don't see the need to become aware of services rendered (Borders, 2002). Parents may perceive the counselor as not doing his or her job and express dissatisfaction towards the counselor if the counselor reports that their child is struggling academically or behaviorally (Erford, 2003). Counselors can help to modify these negative perceptions by engaging in proactive activities that are congruent with the needs and goals of parents.

Further, counselors must demonstrate how their programs contribute to student achievement and positive school behaviors (Borders, 2002). However, many counselors don't feel adequately prepared to design or conduct program evaluations, as their counselor education programs may not have provided them with the guidelines or experience to conduct program assessments (Borders, 2002). It is imperative that program evaluation on a larger scale needs to be the responsibility of the university graduate level programs and perhaps on the state legislative level (Borders, 2002). Borders' research determined that counselors who are knowledgeable about developing and conducting program evaluations are better equipped to assess the effectiveness of their counseling programs, leading to greater student achievement. Topdemir (2010) and Edwards (2009) both found though that the most frequently reported reason school counselors are collecting data is for program planning and improvement. This is a positive finding given that the reason of supervisor or principal requirement was reported less frequently (Topdemir, 2010).

School counselors frequently need to advocate for their students and for their professional role in the school community (Borders, 2002; Topdemir, 2010). Professional advocacy is necessary in order to further clarify role confusion. Through advocacy, counselors will be able to collaborate with other key stakeholders and demonstrate that their services do in fact make a significant difference in the lives of students.

### **The ASCA National Model: Framework to Overcoming Role Confusion**

In order to work to overcome role confusion, the American School Counselor Association National Model (ASCA, 2012), as well as other counseling frameworks, was developed so that there is more consistency and greater awareness about a school counselor's purpose and primary role. Therefore, the primary purpose of developing the ASCA National Model (2003, 2005, 2012) was to answer the question, "How are students different as a result of what school counselors do?" The mission of the ASCA National Model (2003, 2005, 2012) was to create and ensure consistency within the school counseling field and to resolve the role ambiguity and confusion that has clouded the counseling profession for years.

The intent of the ASCA National Model is to provide uniformity, structure, comprehensiveness, and organization amongst counseling curriculums nationwide (ASCA, 2012). The publication defines the school counselor's role in implementation of a program based on the principles of leadership, advocacy, collaboration, and systemic change. The model was updated in 2005 and 2012 from its original version in 2003. It provides tools to build each component of the program including the foundation, delivery, management, and accountability system (ASCA, 2012). In the third edition of the ASCA National Model (2012), a portion of the accountability component includes

school data profile analysis. This analysis can assist school counselors in creating their goals and can help them identify a need for systemic change (ASCA, 2012).

The ASCA National Model was also developed in response to the need for the National Standards for School Counseling Programs to have a framework for the implementation of a comprehensive, data-driven school counseling program (Erford, 2011). The national standards were developed to guide school counseling programs that support and maximize each student's ability to learn. The standards require that all students acquire the attitudes, knowledge, and skills that contribute to effective learning in school and across the lifespan. The national standards set competencies for students to achieve in the academic, career, and personal/social domains (ASCA, 2012). The ASCA National Model outlines the connection between school counselors' practices and successful student outcomes.

The creation of the ASCA National Model was monumental in working towards clarifying the role of school counselors. It provides a data-driven and universal framework for counselors to follow in order to implement a structured developmental counseling program. According to ASCA, the "purpose of the school counseling program is to impart specific skills and learning opportunities in a proactive, preventative manner, ensuring that all students can achieve success through academic, career, and personal/social experiences" (ASCA, 2003, p. 14).

The ASCA National Model is composed of four quadrants (ASCA, 2012). The Foundation System (quadrant 1) discusses the counseling program's focus, students, and professional competencies. The Foundation System establishes the groundwork for a successful counseling program that works to meet the needs of all students. The Delivery System (quadrant 2) addresses the school counseling curriculum, individual student planning, and responsive services that are designed to meet students' needs. The Delivery System focuses on the 'how' of the comprehensive school-counseling program and explains the activities in which counselors need to engage in order to meet the needs of all students. The Management System (quadrant 3) highlights the importance of using data to document services, self-assessments, and calendars in order to monitor time spent completing counseling-related activities. The Management System is the organizational structure and emphasizes the importance of developing action plans, using data, and monitoring student progress (ASCA, 2012). The Accountability System (quadrant 4) was integrated into the model in order to encourage counselors to use data in order to show how students flourish and benefit as a result of the school-counseling program. The Accountability System focuses on analyzing data. Being data-driven is essential for school counselors, as they are obligated to show their effectiveness and demonstrate that their services are rendering positive outcomes for students.

The ASCA National Model (2012) outlines the roles and responsibilities of counselors in a clear and concise manner, which is one reason why the model has helped to reduce role confusion and increase counselor competency. The ASCA National Model acts as a guide that counselors nationwide can follow in order to successfully fulfill their professional requirements, as well as to meet the expectations and goals of students and other school stakeholders. There are four themes composed of leadership, advocacy, collaboration, and systemic changes that are integrated throughout the ASCA National Model to highlight the significance of school counselors and the contributions that they make in helping to promote equity and achievement for all students (ASCA, 2012). The

model places an emphasis on accountability, obtaining feedback, gaining data, and enhancing counselor self-efficacy (Paolini, 2012; Topdemir, 2010) in order to increase student achievement and outcomes. It strives to close the achievement gap, to reform educational agendas, to set uniform and formal learning objectives that are aligned with the student curriculum, to set measurable learning outcomes, and to ensure that counselors must be accountable for all student outcomes (ASCA, 2012).

The ASCA National Model aims to help counselors be more clinically prepared, since it provides a guideline and framework that incorporates their responsibilities, thereby raising counselors' awareness regarding the duties that they are mandated to accomplish. The ASCA National Model outlines the counselor competencies (knowledge, attitudes, and skills) that counselors need to possess in order to ensure that they are prepared to meet the needs of all students (ASCA, 2012). School counselors are viewed as school advocates, leaders, and collaborators who bring about systemic change and whose program is an integral part of the school community.

Moreover, school counselor performance standards used for evaluation contain basic standards of practice expected of school counselors implementing a comprehensive school counseling program. School counselors are evaluated on their performance in regards to the implementation and evaluation of their guidance program, as well as their professionalism. The ASCA National Model provides guidelines for counselors to execute their duties in a more structured and effective manner, evaluate their services, and enable counselors to establish themselves as pertinent professionals who enhance students' academic, personal, social, and career outcomes (ASCA, 2012).

### **Accountability: Overcoming Role Confusion**

In addition to following the ASCA National Model, using accountability measures can also help counselors to decrease role confusion. Counselors who document and validate the effectiveness of their services have empirical evidence to show that their interventions are making a positive impact on the lives of students. By analyzing and disaggregating data and obtaining appropriate stakeholder feedback, counselors help to clarify their role by developing and implementing effective strategies and activities that counselors alone utilize to support students

### **Importance of Counselors Demonstrating Accountability**

Today's school counselors face increased demands to demonstrate program effectiveness (Adelman, 2002). Therefore, demonstrating accountability is becoming a standard practice among school counselors (Dahir & Stone, 2003). The increase in the need for accountability in the schools is due to several mandates, including No Child Left Behind (NCLB), Title I, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, among others (Erford, 2011).

Currently, with the advent of Common Core Standards and the emphasis on being accountable and data-driven, school counselors are even more focused on helping students to become both college and career ready. Common Core Standards have become a national movement setting high expectations in English and Math for all students. The purpose of creating these standards is to ensure that all students have the skills and knowledge to be successful in the 21<sup>st</sup> century global economy. The standards are

designed to determine which students are prepared or unprepared for college and career pathways (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). Although counselors are aware of the importance of engaging in accountability, it is a time consuming process which accounts for counselors being unable to utilize accountability measures on a consistent basis. This further adds to role confusion, as counselors may not be able to demonstrate that their services are making a positive difference in the lives of students. Recent studies have substantiated that school counselors believe that accountability practices take “too much time” (Edwards, 2009; Topdemir, 2010). When school counselors were asked what assistance they needed to effectively collect and analyze data, the most frequently reported answer was “more time” (Topdemir, 2010). When asked what the barriers were that prevented them from using accountability practices, school counselors reported that it was “too time consuming” (Edwards 2009, Topdemir, 2010).

Even though accountability demands are increasing, many school counselors at times fail to evaluate their programs due to time constraints, lack of training in research and evaluation methods, and fear that evaluation results may undermine their school counseling program (Astramovich & Coker, 2005).

Therefore, although demonstrating accountability may be time consuming and challenging, it is imperative for counselors to be data-driven in order to be seen as critical stakeholders. Counselors must be able to document the viability and necessity for school counseling programs and their impact on student success and demonstrate accountability for their time and services (Green & Keys, 2001). Myrick (2003) stressed that school counseling evaluations help the counseling profession by providing necessary feedback to stakeholders, generating feedback about program effectiveness, and helping to clarify the role of school counselors. School counselors can use accountability practices to show they are actively and intentionally working to close achievement gaps and enhance the academic achievement of students (Stone & Dahir, 2011).

Through accountability measures, counselors will be able to demonstrate their significance in helping students to achieve their academic, personal/social, and career goals versus being seen as ancillary service providers. Accountability is one of the greatest tools for counselors to use in order to clarify their professional role. Accountability is at the forefront of the counseling field today (Stone & Dahir, 2006). Counselors must document and substantiate the way and degree to which their services are positively impacting student outcomes to their stakeholders.

Using accountability practices can link the school counselors’ programs to the academic achievement of all students (Young & Kaffenberger, 2009). Accountability strategies have three purposes: 1) to monitor student progress and close the achievement gap, 2) to assess and evaluate programs, and 3) to demonstrate school counseling program effectiveness (Young & Kaffenberger, 2009). It can be assumed that using accountability measures will not only help counselors to become more efficient and master their own professional skills and knowledge, but it will also enable them to bridge and narrow the achievement gap, ensure student success, improve their own practices and programs, and improve student outcomes (Paolini, 2012; Topdemir, 2010).

Paolini (2012) carried out a national study assessing the degree to which counselors engage in deliberate practice and accountability measures (data) and how using those measures impacts perceived student academic success, as well as perceived



counselor self-efficacy. There were a total of 1,084 participants in the study. An analysis of the data indicated that only 35.3% of counselors ‘sometimes’ collect data including pre- and post-surveys, questionnaires, and rating scales to assess the effectiveness of services provided. Further, only 36.3% of counselors ‘sometimes’ engage in deliberate practice (obtain feedback while practicing and mastering empirically proven techniques that elicit positive student outcomes). Moreover, only 37.6% of counselors ‘sometimes’ utilize accountability measures (collect data and implement feedback). Lastly, 29.6% of counselors stated that they ‘sometimes’ disaggregate data based on gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status to ensure that all students achieve high academic standards. These findings reflect the notion that many counselors are not engaging in accountability (using data or deliberate practice), are only moderately comfortable analyzing data, and aren’t disaggregating data on a frequent basis. Failure to be data-driven is a disadvantage for both counselors and students alike. Counselors will not have feedback as to the effectiveness of their services and students may not be receiving the counseling services that would enhance their academic, personal/social, and career success.

### **Accountability Mandate: Despite Limited Time and Fiscal Resources**

The issue of accountability is at the forefront of professional dialogue (Dahir & Stone, 2003). Despite the fact that counselors have limited time (due to the myriad of responsibilities they are required to complete), a strained budget, as well as the elimination of counselor positions, counselors are still being asked to demonstrate that their services positively impact student success in a holistic manner. Accountability for school counselors is an ongoing phenomenon that is occurring at the local, state, and national level. In order to be more data-driven, counselors need to have a paradigm shift in the way they view accountability (Gysbers, 2004). Counselors have to use data to their advantage, in that it is a way for them to differentiate themselves from other key stakeholders and it allows them to validate themselves as necessary stakeholders rather than expendable.

Duncan, Hubble, & Miller (2008) emphasized the importance of utilizing deliberate practice. Deliberate practice is a term coined by supershrinks; extraordinary counselors who go above and beyond to meet the needs of their clients/students. Deliberate practice requires counselors to practice and master empirically proven techniques that have been shown to elicit positive student outcomes. Counselors who use best practices have better outcomes, and they are also able to work smarter rather than harder and avoid using ineffective strategies, helping them to save time in their demanding schedules (Duncan, Hubble, & Miller 2008).

In a study conducted by Lapan, Gysbers, and Petroski (2001), the researchers compared middle school students enrolled in a school with a comprehensive counseling program which utilized data to middle school students enrolled in a school that did not follow a comprehensive program model. Longitudinal data was collected over the course of the year. The researchers determined that those students enrolled in a school with a comprehensive counseling program earned higher grades, found school to be more relevant, had healthier relationships with teachers and other stakeholders, were more satisfied with their education, and felt safer in school. This study substantiates the fact that using data is dually beneficial for students and counselors alike. Students reap the rewards, as they are receiving the most impactful strategies that are congruent with their

needs and goals. Counselors thrive from using data, since they are able to demonstrate that their services are beneficial to all students.

### **Accountability: From Foe to Friend**

Accountability needs to be integrated into the profession everyday, as it is vital that counselors document and show that their services are in fact enhancing student success. Rather than avoiding utilizing data, counselors need to embrace this four-letter word and use it to their advantage. Counselors have to make a conscious effort toward being results oriented. In the midst of developing counseling activities and services, it would be advantageous for counselors to begin by first determining and identifying the outcomes that are anticipated (Gysbers, 2004). In turn, counselors will be enabled to implement the most appropriate services to elicit the desired outcomes. Paolini's (2012), research found that although 43.4% of counselors reported feeling 'moderately comfortable' analyzing data, 16% were 'neutral,' 9.2% reported being 'moderately uncomfortable,' and 1.7% reported being 'very uncomfortable.' Therefore, it would be advantageous to ensure that during graduate school or post-graduation, counselors receive proper training addressing how to obtain, disaggregate, interpret, and implement data. Thus, all counselors could feel comfortable using data to make necessary improvements to their counseling programs, while working to close the achievement gap. Additionally, counselors who are uncertain about which aspects of the curriculum that they should focus on need to refer back to the school's improvement plan. These plans state the outcomes that schools deem significant and relevant for student success.

As leaders, change agents, and collaborators, counselors have to remember that talking about accountability is insufficient. Counselors need to accept and embrace accountability and integrate it into their practice on a daily basis (Gysbers, 2004). There are several steps that counselors can take to demonstrate accountability. Counselors are encouraged to obtain feedback from stakeholders. According to Duncan and Miller (2008), feedback is an essential tool, as it's used to gauge the impact of counselors' services on student and stakeholder growth. Therefore, after each workshop, classroom guidance session, or individual/group session, counselors can obtain feedback from the stakeholders to assess their interventions. A standard feedback form can be created to administer after conducting a workshop, classroom session, or group to obtain immediate feedback on the effectiveness of services provided. Feedback forms can be brief in nature and can be composed of Likert scale questions, multiple choice, or open-ended questions. The purpose of the feedback form is for counselors to be aware of which interventions work and which are deemed ineffective so that they can modify their programs accordingly (See Appendix A).

Further, Lee (2009) recommended that counselors utilize strategic planning. Strategic planning is defined as the process of using data to drive school counselor goal development, program planning and development, and practice for measureable results that align with the school's improvement process. Strategic planning is a cyclical cycle which requires counselors to use data, set goals, plan, implement the data, document results, and sustain positive outcomes (Lee, 2009). Strategic planning has several benefits in that it maximizes counselor time and resources, links goals and strategies to outcomes, provides evidence to advocate for systemic change, and provides results that are assessed and measured in student outcomes (Lee, 2009). In regards to developing and selecting

possible solutions to problems that challenge students, counselors are encouraged to conduct a gap analysis that compares current initiatives and identified needs, develop potential interventions for each, ensure that interventions are culturally responsive and feasible, and lastly, select and prioritize interventions.

Another helpful suggestion to assist counselors in becoming more data-driven is to develop a MEASURE report (Stone & Dahir, 2011). MEASURE is a six-step accountability process which helps counselors to set goals at the beginning of the school year and allows them to assess the effectiveness of their ability to attain these goals by the end of the year, keeping them focused and on track. MEASURE confirms the impact of the counseling program on critical data. MEASURE supports the accountability component of the ASCA National Model and moves counselors from a 'counting tasks' system to helping the counseling program to be aligned with standards-based reform (Stone & Dahir, 2011).

Additionally, recordkeeping is a helpful accountability tool in that it allows for written documentation, self-reflection, and evaluation (Astramovich & Coker, 2005). Recordkeeping systems assess reasons as to why students utilize counseling services, helping counselors to make more informed decisions regarding any necessary changes they need to make to their counseling programs in order to better meet the students' needs.

Furthermore, integrating technology into developing comprehensive counseling programs is essential as it gives counselors a platform to display and market their counseling services, while also allowing for other stakeholders to immediately provide feedback as to the effectiveness of their services (Sabella & Booker, 2003). Technology can also be utilized to help manage student information in the school setting and can be used to show how the counseling program is helping students to succeed academically, personally/socially, and vocationally.

## **Discussion**

School counselors are challenged to raise the educational expectations and enable attainment of academic, personal/social, and career goals for every student. Counselors have to be cognizant of the national performance standards by which students are evaluated and compared and to understand that the accountability movement has required a shift in the focus of school counseling (Wong, 2002). As a result, counselors have moved from service providers to program and student advocates (Stone & Dahir, 2006). Today, school counselors must link interventions to the academic mission and purposes of their schools while holding themselves accountable for their contributions to student outcomes. School counselors are now disaggregating data and using student achievement data (standardized test scores, GPA, etc.) and background data (absenteeism, discipline data, etc.) to further show their value to stakeholders and towards student academic achievement (Topdemir, 2010).

School counselors are often the most capable stakeholders to assess any systemic barriers that may prevent success in all domains of student development, particularly their grade point averages (Paisley & Hayes, 2003). Counselors today use accountability and evidenced-based practices in order to serve as advocates, to remove barriers, to design programs, to overcome role confusion, and to help all students in their academic,

career, and personal/social development (Paisley & Hayes, 2003). Counselors serve as leaders and team members who work with teachers and other school stakeholders to ensure that all students succeed. Counselors help students to define their goals and then guide them to reach these objectives as well as play a critical role in educational reform.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

The issue of school counselor role confusion still exists even after the publication of the ASCA National Model (2012) and the mandate for counselor accountability. In order to enable counselors to clarify and validate their unique role in the school setting, several suggestions for future research are indicated. First, further research on the relationship between self-efficacy and role confusion among school counselors is needed. Paolini (2012) found that school counselors who engaged in accountability measures on a more frequent basis reported having higher perceived levels of self-efficacy, as they were able to empirically show via data that their services enhanced student outcomes. Holcomb-McCoy, Gonzalez, and Johnston (2009) found that 25% of the variance related to school counselor data usage was due to self-efficacy. Future research should assess whether there is a relationship between self-efficacy and role confusion. Self-efficacy may mitigate role confusion, enhance counselor performance, and/or improve student success.

In addition, Hatch and Chen-Hayes (2008) found that the participants in their study believed that items related to program foundation components (mission, goals) and administrative support were more important than that of using data or accountability measures. More research on the use of the ASCA National Model and accountability measures and the possible effects on or correlation with role confusion needs to be conducted. Specifically, research to determine whether following the guidelines indicated in the ASCA National Model (2012) clarifies or reduces a school counselor's level of role confusion.

Future research also needs to investigate which counseling strategies and interventions are most beneficial to use with students to aid in academic, personal, social, and career success. Time has been mentioned as a main factor in why school counselors are not using accountability measures (Edwards, 2009; Topdemir, 2010). If time is a major factor, training school counselors as to the most effective practices for student success may allow them to use their time more wisely and result in raising their self-efficacy.

Moreover, future research is required to determine the level of training provided in graduate level programs regarding developing data-driven school counseling programs as well as the training that's being offered to practicing school counselors, as the current research indicates that many counselors have not received sufficient instruction in the use of data and accountability practices (Paolini, 2012).

Research regarding current parent perceptions of the school counselor's role is also warranted, as there are large gaps in the research literature. There has been a limited number of research studies conducted regarding parental perceptions of the counselor role. It would be advantageous to conduct research in this area to determine current parental perceptions and expectations regarding the role of school counselors.

## **Implications for School Counseling**

Many implications for the school-counseling field have been ascertained from the literature in this area. There is definitely a need for school counselors to be trained in the use of data in their graduate level programs so they are knowledgeable about accountability practices. School counselors believe one of their greatest needs in being able to implement accountability practices is to receive formal training (Topdemir, 2010). Similar results were found by Borders (2002) in that school counselors did not feel adequately prepared to design or conduct program evaluations. School counselors who are implementing accountability practices most frequently reported learning these practices from professional conferences (Edwards, 2009; Topdemir, 2010). Surprisingly, learning about accountability practices from a district training or a university course was significantly less reported (Topdemir, 2010). Brott (2006) suggested that counselor education programs begin to train school counselors in these practices, but little has been written about how to actually implement formal training in school counseling master's programs. Besides the need to train students in their counselor education programs, it is suggested that continued training and professional development be offered for counselors in the field. Astramovich and Coker (2007) also asserted that conferences should actively solicit for programs involving research and evaluation.

Therefore, although the ASCA National Model (2012) and the use of accountability practices help to reduce role confusion and clarify counselors' responsibilities, role confusion still exists amongst school counselors. Additional strategies need to be developed to further mitigate role confusion and allow counselors to spend time working on only counseling-related duties. If school counselors are losing autonomy when they assume unrelated duties (Ross & Herrington 2006), then they may feel disempowered and develop a low self-efficacy, which directly impacts student outcomes.

District school counseling supervisors could also assist with the issue of role confusion by providing adequate training to new counselors and principals as to what exactly the role of the school counselor entails. Counseling supervisors could also provide supervision for new school counselors, experienced counselors who need support in effectively using data in their counseling practice, or counselors suffering from role confusion in order to gain a clearer understanding of their expectations and most pressing duties. It is imperative for school counselors to receive formal training in assessing, analyzing, and disaggregating data so that they are better able to understand the needs of students, their strengths and weaknesses, as well as to utilize and implement stakeholder feedback in order to develop comprehensive counseling programs in their schools.

## **Despite Role Confusion, the Profession Is Moving Forward**

Schools need professional school counselors who are skilled at developing systems that promote change and build strong and healthy relationships within the community. As change agents, leaders, advocates, and collaborators, school counselors encourage students' academic achievement and personal success by implementing a comprehensive school counseling program such as the ASCA National Model (2012) that encompasses areas of academic, career, and personal/social development for all students.

Moreover, school counselors have the potential to be extremely important forces within the school setting. School counselors have the ability to empower, guide, and mentor youth from different backgrounds, ethnicities, socioeconomic statuses, and sexual orientations. School counselors are in the unique position to reach out to diverse populations, encourage collaboration and cohesion amongst stakeholders, and work to create a college and career ready environment for students. School counselors have a rewarding and fulfilling role in that they have the distinctive opportunity to foster school cultures that promote the well-being of students while helping them achieve their academic, personal/social, and career objectives.

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Appendix A

**Sample Baseline Student Feedback Form  
Grades K-12**

Directions: Utilize this form during the first school counseling session in order to obtain pertinent information from your student(s) that will guide your future sessions.

Please state your purpose for seeking counseling:

If I waved a magic wand and your problem(s) disappeared, in what way(s) would your life be different?

List THREE goals that you would like to achieve over the counseling process:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

My strengths include:

My weaknesses include:

On a scale from one to five (one being the lowest and five being the highest), rate the following:

Ability to communicate effectively \_\_\_\_\_

Ability to problem solve \_\_\_\_\_

Ability to manage anger \_\_\_\_\_

Ability to form and maintain healthy relationships with friends and family \_\_\_\_\_

Ability to complete school assignments in a timely manner \_\_\_\_\_

FIVE adjectives I would use to describe myself:

COMMENTS: