Superintendents & Principals: Partners in Success

Summary & Key Findings

Partnering for Student Success

Superintendents   Principals

School Counselors

June 2016

Prepared for: Indiana Chamber Foundation

INDIANA CHAMBER
FOUNDATION
RESEARCH THAT PRODUCES RESULTS

> *We hope by sharing the results of this study, we can inspire school superintendents, principals, and school counselors to examine the counseling relationships in their schools, strengthen partnerships, and work together to more effectively improve the educational outcomes for all students.*

Research Conducted by:
Dr. Brandie Oliver, Butler University
Mr. Matt Fleck, Fleck Education
Mrs. Jennifer Money-Brady, Graduate Assistant

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Purpose of the Study

This study aimed to explore various factors that impact the successful partnership between school counselors and school administrators. Specifically, researchers sought to better understand the decision-making processes of school administrators and school superintendents concerning the roles and responsibilities of the school counselor, funding of school counselor positions and supports as well as perceptions of the effectiveness of the school counseling program. Both survey research and focus groups were used to gather data.

Guiding Research Questions

Survey Key Questions
How do K-12 school principals and superintendents make decisions regarding school counseling programs, including staffing? Specifically:
1. What factors are considered when making management and hiring decisions?
2. What school counseling outcomes or tasks influence decisions?
3. How do perceptions of school counselors and/or data about what school counselors do impact these decisions?

Focus Group Key Questions
1. What are the essential duties of the school counselors in your building and/or school corporation?
2. How does your school make decisions around hiring additional school counselors and/or improving the school counseling program?
3. If funding were available to hire additional school counselors, what tasks would be most important to assign to these new positions? What would be the expected outcomes?

Summary & Key Findings

Twenty-two years ago this spring, a landmark Indiana research review called *High Hopes, Long Odds* found that parents and students wanted more information and support from their school counselors about preparing for college and careers. A key finding of the 1994 report stated the problem in one sentence:

"Many high school counselors aren't providing the academic and career guidance that Hoosier teenagers need…they are assigned too many tasks and receive mixed signals from their building principals about the priority of each task.

When the Indiana Chamber of Commerce Foundation commissioned a follow up study in 2014, it found that little had changed over the past 20 years. Overwhelmingly, school counselors stated that they lacked the time needed to help students with college and career guidance and continued to receive mixed signals from administrators about counseling program priorities.

This context formed the impetus behind the ***Superintendents and Principals: Partners in Success*** study which sought to dig deeper into how secondary school principals and superintendents made hiring and programmatic decisions related to school counseling.

RESULTS
A literature review of recent school counseling research found that an increasing amount of attention is being given to identifying the importance of leadership – including that of administrators concerning school counseling and leadership skills possessed by school counselors – as a critical component in effective school counseling programs.

Approximately 160 Indiana school principals and superintendents responded to a spring 2016 survey regarding school counselors. Overall, survey responses were very positive about the impact of school counselors with a large majority of administrators agreeing or strongly agreeing to multiple perceptions of school counselors.

Consistently, in question after question, the tasks which administrators found to be most important were the "individual meetings with students concerning social/emotional needs" and advancing college and career readiness. This was reflected in questions and open-ended statements about the roles of school counselors, professional development needs, and the outcomes administrators wanted most if additional funding for school counseling programs were available.

Administrators' top recommendations for improving school counseling included:
1. Increased funding for school counselors and counseling programs
2. Improved definition of school counselors' roles
3. Improved professional development
4. Enhanced advocacy for and by school counselors

In follow up in-person focus group meetings with superintendents and principals around the state, administrators reiterated much of what was captured through the online survey. But perhaps the most surprising observations, pertained to the lack of clarity, consistency, and

intention around school counseling hiring practices. Most focus group attendees reflected that hiring decisions were based strictly on openings and available funds with little consideration given to analyses of student needs or efforts to proactively address school counseling deficiencies.

Based on these results, this report posits six recommendations:
1. Institute school counselor leadership training
2. Improve administrator training programs
3. Enhance collaboration between administrators and school counselors
4. Develop a universal school counselor evaluation tool
5. Enhance overall professional development and consultation training, and
6. Create a statewide marketing campaign to educate the greater school community about the roles and responsibilities of an effective school counseling program

Literature Review

There is much attention and interest in school counseling and data driven comprehensive developmental school counseling models. While much of the focus is positive, many concerns exist related to assigned tasks and responsibilities of the school counselor as well as the large caseloads of school counselors.

While administrators are viewed as the key leaders in their buildings, school counselors have evolved as educational leaders in the last 10 years in education (Wingfield, Reese, West-Olatunji, 2010). The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) has driven the profession of school counseling to advocate and align its professional leadership role in schools with the updated ASCA National Model (2012). Many of today's school counselors are more data-driven and account for their time in advocating for students in a variety of tasks on a daily basis. As Scarborough and Culbreth (2008) found in their study of school counseling responsibilities, many school counselors believe that they should have a more active role in their schools, yet their day to day tasks demonstrate a supportive and paper-driven role in schools. The data on day to day tasks may not support what administrators and school counselors truly believe to be the most important task of a school counselor: supporting, motivating and advocating for students.

The vision of a school is a primary area of focus for administrators as they work to demonstrate their school's readiness to educate children. Administrators have stated that a school counselor with a shared vision of the future of their school can be a better leader and offer collaborative support more than a school counselor who follows their own vision (College Board Advocacy, ASCA & NASP, 2009). ASCA and College Board Advocacy completed a study of more than 2,300 school counselors and administrators investigating the best way for this relationship to thrive in schools while supporting students to the best extent possible (2009). The study found that administrators and school counselors have different visions for the smaller goals for students (i.e. state testing responsibilities, graduation tasks, etc.), but their biggest area of agreement revolves around the immense responsibility that school counselors must have in advocating and promoting positive growth in their students.

Administrators are the title leaders of their schools, yet studies show that school counselors have a key role in supporting their school's leadership team while also guiding and advocating for students (ASCA, 2012). Some pre-service training programs of school counselors and school administrators have incorporated interview techniques and advocacy efforts about the role of school counselors, yet most administrators do not evaluate a school counselor as a counselor, but instead as a support staff or teacher (Hensley, Smith, Thompson, 2003). If administrators view school counselors as leaders with an intentional focus on student support, then evaluations need to be more aligned to this focus (ASCA, 2012).

The perceptions of school administrators continue to show a need for more education on the role of school counselors in their buildings. This education could be provided through a myriad of opportunities including pre-service administrator training, advocacy skills training for school counselors, and education on the role of a school counselor for both professions (Fitch, Newby, Ballestero, Marshall, 2001). Finally, because the ASCA National Model (2012) has provided a solid framework for developing a school counseling program for all students, training should be provided to administrators and school counselors to support the ongoing delivery of a data-driven comprehensive school counseling program (Graham, Desmond, Zinsser, 2011).
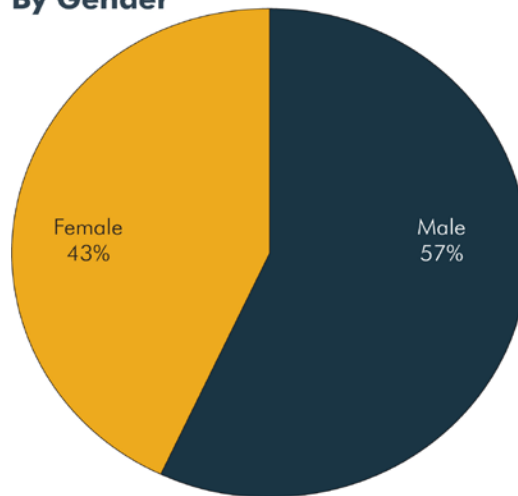
Survey Results

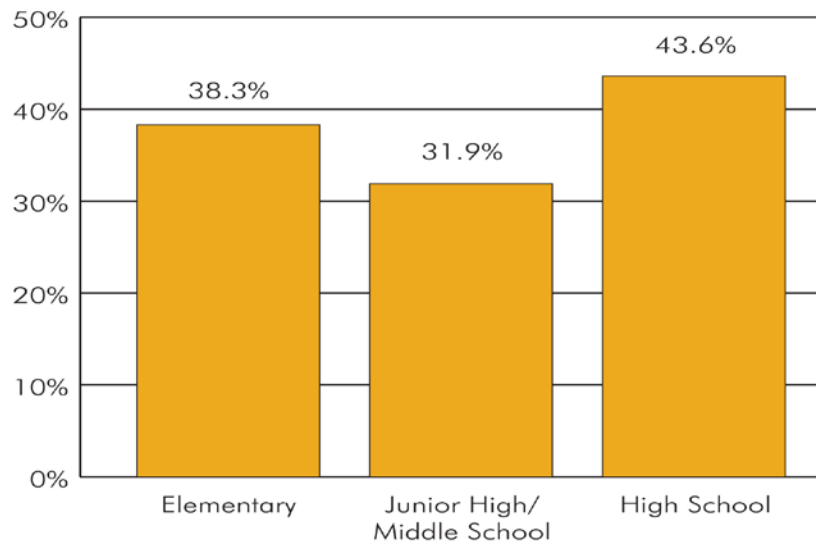## Demographic Information

Principals

Approximately 100 Indiana high school principals responded to the research survey including a mostly even mix of male and female administrators (54 males and 41 females). A majority of the male respondents represented the high school setting while the majority of female respondents were elementary school administrators. Respondents represented schools ranging in size from 230 to 3,300 students with the average student enrollment at 774 (median 600). Administrators with five years or less of experience as a principal were the majority of respondents (35%) while those with 16 years or more experience represented the smallest percentage (15%) though all experience levels were represented. Approximately 80 respondents answered most if not all of the survey questions.

By Gender

Female 43%
Male 57%

By Development Level

		43.6%
38.3%	31.9%	
Elementary	Junior High/Middle School	High School

Number of Years as Principal

Bar chart showing Number of Years as Principal:
- 16+ Years: ~15%
- 11-15 Years: ~18%
- 6-10 Years: ~32%
- 0-5 Years: ~35%

X-axis: 0%, 5%, 10%, 15%, 20%, 25%, 30%, 35%

Superintendents

Approximately 60 Indiana superintendents responded to the research survey. The majority, 83%, of the respondents were male while approximately 17% were female. Respondents represented schools ranging in size from 90 to 10,400 students with the average student enrollment at 2,900 (median 1900). Superintendents with five years or less of experience were the majority of respondents (57%) while those with 11-15 years of experience represented the smallest percentage (3%) though all experience levels were represented. Approximately 50 respondents answered most if not all of the survey questions.
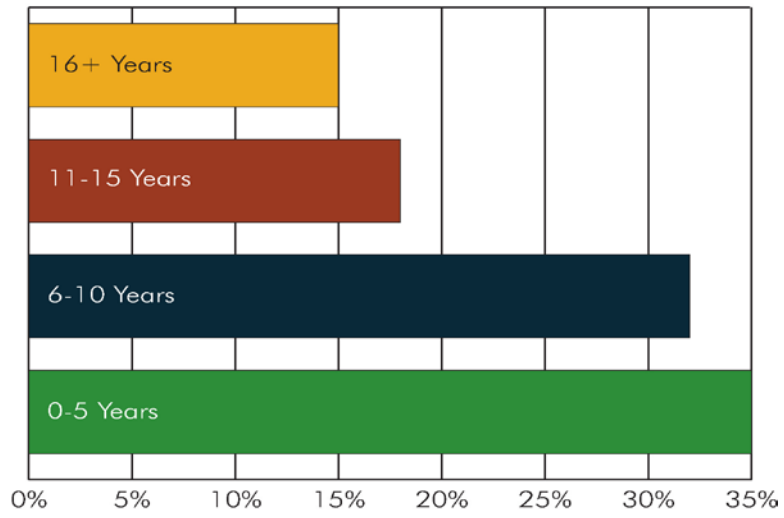
By Gender

Female 17.5%

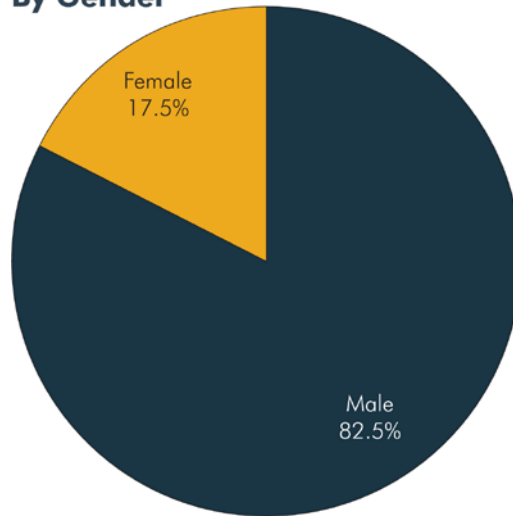Male 82.5%

Number of Years as Superintendent

16+ Years

11-15 Years

6-10 Years

0-5 Years

0%   10%   20%   30%   40%   50%   60%
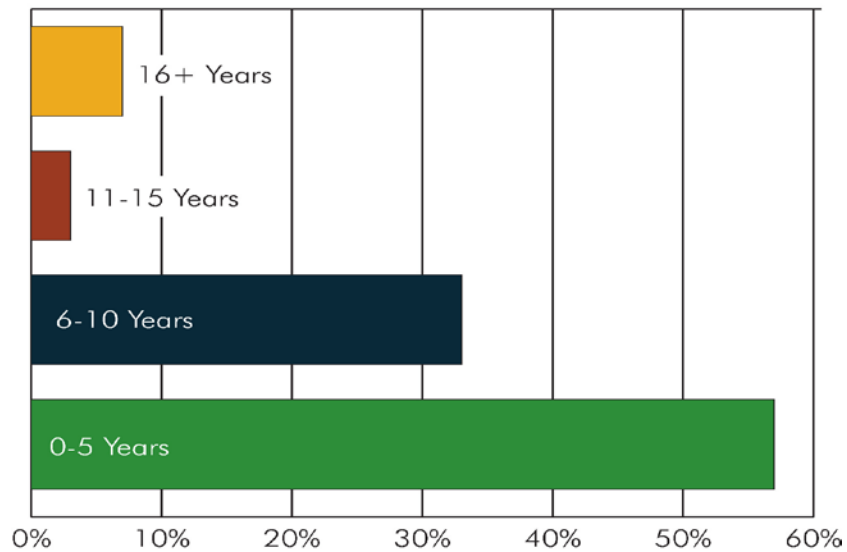
Survey Results: Perceptions & Attitudes

The first 10 questions on the survey sought to understand the attitudes and perceptions held by school superintendents and principals concerning the work of the school counselors in their respective school systems. The following tables illustrate the mean scores both from principals and superintendents as well as detail the variance between ratings on a likert scale as rated below.

        1-Strongly Disagree (SD)
        2-Disagree (D)
        3-Not Sure (NS)
        4-Agree (A)
        5-Strongly Agree (SA)

Perception Questions

This table illustrates a comparison of means scores between principals and superintendents.

Question	Prin. Mean Score	Supt. Mean Score
I consider our school counselors to be a vital part of our school's leadership team.	4.45	4.20
School counselors have a shared responsibility in the development of school goals and metrics that indicate success.	4.33	4.11
School counselors' tasks positively impact the overall school climate.	4.61	4.52
School counselors' responsibilities are aligned with the school's improvement plan.	4.25	4.11
Our school counselor(s) has/have the appropriate level of knowledge and skill to positively impact student outcomes.	4.31	4.11
The work being done by the school counseling program positively impacts our school's overall performance (e.g. A-F accountability measure).	4.14	4.04
I am satisfied with the school counselors' role in my school.	4.26	3.96
The school counselor program addresses the college and career readiness needs of our students.	4.04	4.11
The school counselor program addresses social and emotional student issues.	4.43	4.13
The school counselor program plays a pivotal role in the implementation of school wide strategies to improve student outcomes.	4.16	3.93

The following two tables show the number of responses specific to the rating.

Principal Responses

Question	SD	D	NS	A	SA
I consider our school counselors to be a vital part of our school's leadership team.	3	5	2	13	57
School counselors have a shared responsibility in the development of school goals and metrics that indicate success.	4	1	1	33	41
School counselors' tasks positively impact the overall school climate.	3	3	0	10	64
School counselors' responsibilities are aligned with the school's improvement plan.	3	3	3	33	38
Our school counselor(s) has/have the appropriate level of knowledge and skill to positively impact student outcomes.	3	4	2	27	44
The work being done by the school counseling program positively impacts our school's overall performance (e.g. A-F accountability measure).	3	4	8	28	36
I am satisfied with the school counselors' role in my school.	3	5	4	24	44
The school counselor program addresses the college and career readiness needs of our students.	3	6	10	26	34
The school counselor program addresses social and emotional student issues.	2	4	5	16	53
The school counselor program plays a pivotal role in the implementation of school wide strategies to improve student outcomes.	3	6	5	27	39

Superintendent Responses

Question	SD	D	NS	A	SA
I consider our school counselors to be a vital part of our school's leadership team.	1	5	1	24	25
School counselors have a shared responsibility in the development of school goals and metrics that indicate success.	0	4	6	26	20
School counselors' tasks positively impact the overall school climate.	1	1	0	20	34
School counselors' responsibilities are aligned with the school's improvement plan.	0	4	5	28	19
Our school counselor(s) has/have the appropriate level of knowledge and skill to positively impact student outcomes.	1	5	3	25	22
The work being done by the school counseling program positively impacts our school's overall performance (e.g. A-F accountability measure).	1	4	9	20	22
I am satisfied with the school counselors' role in my school.	2	5	4	27	18
The school counselor program addresses the college and career readiness needs of our students.	1	3	5	26	20
The school counselor program addresses social and emotional student issues.	1	2	5	29	19
The school counselor program plays a pivotal role in the implementation of school wide strategies to improve student outcomes.	2	4	3	34	13

Narrative Summary

A majority of the responses for all of the previous 10 questions fell into the "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" categories with the strongest agreement from both superintendents and principals given to the statement, "School counselors' tasks positively impact the overall school climate," closely followed by the statement, "I consider our school counselor(s) to be a vital part of the leadership team." When combining the number of "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" responses, two additional statements received the highest results; "School counselors' tasks positively impact the overall school climate," and "School counselor(s) have a shared responsibility in the development of school goals and metrics that indicate student success." When looking at solely mean scores, both principals and superintendents had the highest mean scores in areas focused on school counselor impact on school climate and being involved on the leadership team. Areas receiving lower mean scores included school counselor programs addressing college and career readiness needs of students and playing a pivotal role in implementing school wide strategies to improve student outcomes, and the work being done by the school counseling program positively impacts the school's overall performance (e.g., A-F accountability measure).

Survey Results: Tasks

The next series of questions asked participants to rate tasks that are viewed as a best match for the scope of work by school counselor(s) in the school community. A likert scale was also used for these questions.

> 1-Not Important (NI)
> 2-Somewhat Important (SI)
> 3-Not Sure (NS)
> 4-Important (I)
> 5-Very Important (VI)

The following table illustrates a comparison of means scores between principals and superintendents. Each bolded area indicates the highest ratings of the tasks selected by either superintendents or school principals.

Tasks of School Counselor	School Superintendent	School Principal
Academic scheduling	**4.51**	3.73
Individual meetings with students concerning social/emotional issues	**4.55**	**4.79**
Individual meetings with students concerning academic issues	**4.51**	4.37
Individual meetings with students concerning college and career readiness issues	**4.51**	3.95
Facilitating classroom guidance lessons (e.g., teaching a lesson in a classroom on a specific topic)	3.42	3.79
Facilitating small group counseling (e.g., study skills group, grief/loss group, test anxiety group, etc.)	3.85	4.18
Supervision duties (e.g., lunch supervision, bus duty, etc.)	2.18	2.64
Test coordination/proctoring (e.g., ISTEP, PSAT/SAT, Accuplacer, AP, IB, etc.)	3.84	3.79
Use of data (data collection, analysis, reporting)	3.96	3.85
Collaboration with school faculty (e.g., teachers, instructional assistants, administrators, etc.)	4.31	**4.40**
Parent outreach (e.g., education, student planning, etc.)	4.35	**4.56**
Facilitating professional development to school faculty (e.g., training on suicide prevention, anti-bullying, etc.)	3.65	3.73
Crisis response planning and response	4.16	4.05
Administrative tasks	3.02	3.14

When asked to rate the tasks that school superintendents and administrators believe to be the best matched for the role of the school counselor, there was a fairly aligned response. Both groups ranked highest the school counselor role of meeting individually with students to focus on their social and emotional needs. In addition, support was strong for individual meetings with students to assist with academic issues. However, superintendent responses were significantly higher in support academic scheduling and college and career readiness, whereas school principals rated collaboration and parent outreach slightly higher than superintendents.

The following two tables show the number of responses specific to the rating.

Principal Responses

Question	NI	SI	NS	I	VI
Academic scheduling	15	7	0	13	39
Individual meetings with students concerning social/emotional issues	1	7	1	22	47
Individual meetings with students concerning academic issues	0	0	2	12	64
Individual meetings with students concerning college and career readiness issues	7	9	3	21	38
Facilitating classroom guidance lessons (e.g., teaching a lesson in a classroom on a specific topic)	4	7	11	35	21
Facilitating small group counseling (e.g., study skills group, grief/loss group, test anxiety group, etc.)	1	6	3	36	32
Supervision duties (e.g., lunch supervision, bus duty, etc.)	21	23	2	25	6
Test coordination/proctoring (e.g., ISTEP, PSAT/SAT, Accuplacer, AP, IB, etc.)	10	7	3	27	31
Use of data (data collection, analysis, reporting)	5	9	5	33	26
Collaboration with school faculty (e.g., teachers, instructional assistants, administrators, etc.)	1	4	2	24	47
Parent outreach (e.g., education, student planning, etc.)	0	3	0	25	50
Facilitating professional development to school faculty (e.g., training on suicide prevention, anti-bullying, etc.)	4	12	7	33	22
Crisis response planning and response	3	9	2	31	33
Administrative tasks	12	14	9	35	7

Superintendent Responses

Question	NI	SI	NS	I	VI
Academic scheduling	0	2	0	20	31
Individual meetings with students concerning social/emotional issues	0	1	0	24	30
Individual meetings with students concerning academic issues	0	2	0	19	34
Individual meetings with students concerning college and career readiness issues	0	1	2	20	32
Facilitating classroom guidance lessons (e.g., teaching a lesson in a classroom on a specific topic)	3	7	16	22	7
Facilitating small group counseling (e.g., study skills group, grief/loss group, test anxiety group, etc.)	2	3	5	35	9
Supervision duties (e.g., lunch supervision, bus duty, etc.)	19	18	9	7	2
Test coordination/proctoring (e.g., ISTEP, PSAT/SAT, Accuplacer, AP, IB, etc.)	1	11	4	19	20
Use of data (data collection, analysis, reporting)	1	3	7	30	14
Collaboration with school faculty (e.g., teachers, instructional assistants, administrators, etc.)	0	3	5	19	28
Parent outreach (e.g., education, student planning, etc.)	0	2	3	24	26
Facilitating professional development to school faculty (e.g., training on suicide prevention, anti-bullying, etc.)	0	8	9	32	6
Crisis response planning and response	0	4	4	26	21
Administrative tasks	1	21	10	22	1

When looking at administrative tasks and supervision tasks of school counselors (specifically school principals), there were a mix of responses with varying degrees responding either "Somewhat Important" to "Important." This could be due to a lack of a common definition of the terminology used in the question (e.g. are "administrative tasks" defined as those typically assigned to an administrator or are they tasks related to administering tests or monitoring progress?). The lack of uniform responses could also indicate diverse opinions about the responsibilities of school counselors with some believing administrative tasks and/or supervision duties are an expected role of school counselors while others feeling strongly that they are not.

Survey Results-Considerations When Hiring

This series of questions examined the considerations most important to school administrators when considering hiring school counselors. Participants were asked to rank (1 being the highest) order the following considerations when making hiring decisions regarding school counselors.

- Support social/emotional needs of students
- Support academic outcomes of students
- Support college and career needs of students
- Response to data (e.g., student needs assessment)
- Support school improvement plan/goals
- Student to counselor ratios

Considerations	*School Superintendent*	*School Principal*	*Total Ranking*
Support social/emotional needs of students	**2.27**	**1.97**	**1**
Support academic outcomes of students	**2.48**	**2.58**	**2**
Support college and career needs of students	**3.02**	**3.64**	**3**
Response to data (e.g., student needs assessment)	4.06	3.92	4
Support school improvement plan/goals	4.42	3.97	5
Student to counselor ratios	4.75	4.81	6

When hiring school counselors, respondents made it clear that being able to "support social/emotional needs of students" ranked as the highest consideration followed by supporting both the academic and college and career readiness needs of students. When looking at the top three categories revealed in this data (social/emotional, academic outcomes, and college/career readiness), it appears the participants' attitude and perception related to school counseling closely aligns with the training and appropriate roles and responsibilities of school counselors as outlined by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA). According to ASCA, school counselors' primary focus and time spent should fall into the three domains of academic, social/emotional, and college and career readiness. Student to counselor ratios received the lowest ranking among respondents though survey responses indicating it is a concern in some communities. Further insight into the low ranking of student to counselor ratios is discussed in the open-ended response section. The other two categories receiving lower scores centered on using data and/or school improvement goals to inform hiring practices.

Respondents were provided an open-response format to provide additional insight into hiring practices. The majority of principal responses stated this decision was made at a level above them, either by the superintendent, central office, or through a school board at the district level. When the principal was involved in the decision to hire additional counselors, this typically involved assessing the need for another counselor and making a recommendation to the superintendent or school board.

The highest open response by both principals and superintendents focused on funding or budget concerns as primary factors in deciding whether to hire more school counselors with one respondent stating, "It depends on money, nothing else." A smaller number of administrators

asserted that student enrollment and the ratio of students per counselor were also important factors when making hiring decisions. Student and counselor needs were also factors with one respondent relaying, "Our district office makes assessments of the counselor needs at each school. As a school we then hire to fit within those limitations. Currently we have one counselor for each grade level with close to 500 students per grade."

Superintendent responses primarily focused on budget and student need as drivers behind hiring counselors. One respondent stated, "Unfortunately due to the state funding situation, our needs are primarily driven by funding. We have decreased the number of counselors and increased the number of social workers."

Additionally, superintendents expressed a collaborative approach to decision-making, reaching out to other building leaders when making these decisions while also working to best meet the needs of all students. Many superintendents reflected that numerous factors were considered when hiring additional school counselors including, "The number of students that need to be served, the money available, and the priority of the services needed versus all the other needs of the district."

Survey Results: Open-Ended Responses

Outcomes Desired

When asked about the outcomes participants would want to see if additional funding were available for school counseling programs, responses were concentrated around the following areas, ranked by number of comments:

1. Meeting the social/emotional/mental health needs of students
2. More college and career readiness counseling
3. Increased small group, individual, and classroom lessons
4. More support for parents/home visits/parent engagement
5. Additional academic/motivational support for students
6. Test coordination/administration

The largest number of responses reflected a significant need for increasing counselors' ability to address the social/emotional needs of their students. One principal said, "We have really got to address the social/emotional needs of students. The balance of scheduling, testing, academic needs often pushes the social/emotional needs to the side." A superintendent stated the highest priority as, "Trying to meet the emotional needs of at-risk students. Someone to meet with them on a daily basis if needed to work through their home issues to keep them coming to school."

Principals also discussed increasing individualized and group counseling with students to include more classroom lessons as well as reaching out and involving parents/guardians. One respondent declared, "I would love to be able to have more personnel to work with families in crisis: more home visits, more follow up to work with the agencies needed, to work more closely with their children DAILY in the school building."

Providing additional college/postsecondary and career readiness support for students was another area frequently mentioned by respondents, especially if more funding was available for the school counseling program. Several stated a need to designate a counselor devoted solely to college/career counseling and expanding or providing targeted lessons and support for students.

Several responses combined a concentration on academic or motivational support linked to college/postsecondary and career readiness of students. Instead of listing a specific outcome wanted by their school counseling program, many respondents stated that they would use additional funding to hire more staff to reduce the student to counselor ratio. One stated the need this way, "The current state of the family in this country has [deteriorated] and we are seeing several students who do not have the emotional support of the family and it is falling on schools (and more importantly) the school counselors to keep things together. I feel there needs to be more counselors in schools to handle these… main issues. I currently have 2 - we are a small school - but the work load is going to drive them from the position because it is just too much on them."

A variety of additional responses stated additional funding would be used to hire school counselors at the elementary level, testing coordinators, social workers, spending more time on mentoring, focusing on student transitions between grade levels, and working to meet the needs of all students.

National Trends
Administrators were asked if recent state or national research trends impact employment decisions and if research was used to inform employment decisions. Based on the majority of the responses, state and national research trends have no clear impact on school counselor employment decisions.

However, research did impact the hiring decisions for some respondents. One commented, "Yes!!!! Most of the school shootings have been done by young people with emotional issues. I see this every day and can only hope that these children somehow get help" and another respondent shared, "The federal and state push to prepare all students for college and careers has impacted our decisions in hiring counselors." Additionally, one respondent said, "Our district is committed to researched based programs and implementing best practices to ensure our students graduate high school prepared to succeed in life, whatever career path they choose."

Some respondents stated they did not keep track of current school counseling trends as closely as they would like while others reflected the importance of research often gets overshadowed by the reality of budget constraints. One said, "We are a small, poorly funded district. We do not get to jump on trends to make employment decisions. We have what we have and we make do with what we have to assist our students the best way we can."

One superintendent shared a concern about a hyper-focus on ratios and its negative impact on climate, "All the conversation about ratios negatively impacts the culture with counselors in our schools. Talk about specific outcomes and quit saying it is because they have too many students."

Open-ended survey responses indicated that respondents used varied ways of defining "research" – from specific to student or school counseling issues to research on broader educational and budget trends – which may have impacted the survey results.
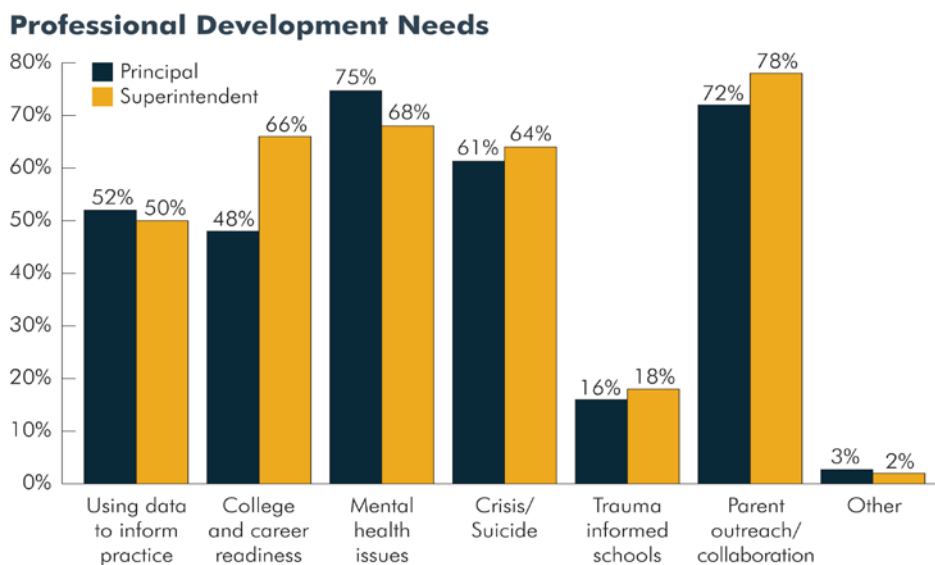
Professional Development Needs
Participants were asked to choose from a list of professional development topics that best connect to the needs of their school community if funding were available. In rank order, both superintendents and principals selected from the list below.
- Using data to inform school counseling programs
- College and career readiness
- Mental health issues (e.g., anxiety, depression, etc.)
- Crisis counseling/suicide prevention, intervention, postvention
- Trauma informed schools
- Parent outreach/collaboration

Respondents that replied "other" shared specific topics stated below:
- Behaviors
- Supporting students and families with issues due to "alternate" lifestyles
- Helping prepare students for the workforce when they don't know what they want to do

Professional Development Needs

When comparing the ratings from the professional development needs chart, the top needs closely mirror the tasks viewed as a best match for the scope of work by school counselor (see table on page 14). As indicated in the graph above, both superintendents and principals ranked parent outreach and collaboration as the most important professional development topics.

Recommendations to Address School Counseling Profession

The final question of the survey asked respondents to list recommendations to improve student outcomes, increase quality programming, and decrease high student-to-counselor ratios within the school counseling profession. The majority of responses fell into four areas:

- Increased funding to hire and support more school counselors
- Redefining school counseling
- Expanded professional development for school counselors, and
- Advocacy

Increased Funding

Principals and superintendents listed increased funding as their top recommendation for addressing school counseling with many commenting it was a responsibility of lawmakers and the state of Indiana to make this change. One stated it this way, "Indiana is going to have to fund schools in all areas to see improvement. Schools are stretched thin with budgets and it does not seem to show signs of improvement from lawmakers." Another stated, "Lawmakers should find a better [way] to fund schools so we would have the resources to hire and then support school counselors."

Other related statements included:

- "It really is all about funding. We do as much as we can with the number of counselors available, but our programs could expand and benefit the students more with additional staff. Increase funding so additional counselors can be hired to support students."
- "Getting more difficult to find qualified counselors because there is no longer a substantial pay increase for masters degree."

- "Increase funding for support staff outside of the classroom and acknowledge that emotional support of students is key to a healthy learning environment."

Redefine School Counseling
Within the open responses, several superintendents mentioned the need for the school counseling profession to evolve. One respondent stated, "School Counseling is not what it was 25 years ago, we need to adapt to the need of the current generation, as do the individuals educating our future teachers." Another respondent shared, "Quit the focus on ratios. Talk about successes and what the counselors are accomplishing. Too many times we, as leaders hear, 'Well that is nice there, but they have a lower student-counselor ratio.' While true, the real success is they have more dedicated counselors that are able to see beyond the routine alpha counseling assignment and ratios. I want to emphasize that I believe school counselors are instrumental to our success; however, the counseling profession has been slow to evolve in the traditional role." Several administrators believe the role of school counselors need to move toward a greater focus on academic improvement, data accountability, and college and career readiness. One respondent said it this way, "Counselors must be involved in academic decisions. The principal needs to see them as someone who can help with curriculum and instruction."

Professional Development
More professional development and additional training was another frequent suggestion by respondents. Many recommended professional development and training should include accountability and using data, running small groups, and modifying student behaviors, respondents said. One stated that all schools should complete Indiana's Gold Star program or the national Recognized ASCA Model Programs (RAMP) training.

Advocacy
A number of respondents also recommended that increased advocacy about the role of school counselors should be a priority. One respondent stated, "A campaign to increase the awareness of administrators as to the importance of school counselors would be beneficial. Superintendents and board members underestimate the value of counselors and their impact on student achievement and school improvement. They are vital to school communities, especially at the high school level where 60% of our school letter grade is predicated on graduation and CCR standards." Another respondent recommended that counselors do more to advocate for their roles and explain the value they bring to students and schools, saying, "Keep up the good fight and keep showing the worth [of] what a counselor brings to the table. The counselors in my district were phased out …because when cuts came they did not have data nor had they put in the 'road work' to make themselves invaluable."

Other Recommendations
A mix of additional recommendations included making it easier for teachers to be certified as school counselors, finding better ways to quantify the impact of school counselors, and additional training on helping school counselors handle the overwhelming responsibilities and caseloads of students.

Focus Group Key Findings

Administrator Focus Group

Face to face administrator focus groups were conducted across Indiana, gathering input from 14 administrators. The rich discussions provided greater depth and breadth to discern the survey responses received. It became apparent that the understanding of the school counseling profession within a K-12 school community truly depends on the school counselor. Our focus group findings indicated four overarching themes that included 1) a focus on leadership, 2) professional development needs, 3) roles and responsibilities of school counselors, and 4) the factors commonly considered in making school counselor hiring decisions.

In each focus group the below three questions were used to guide discussion.
1. What are the essential duties of the school counselors in your building and/or school corporation?
2. How does your school make decisions around hiring additional school counselors and/or improving the school counseling program?
3. If funding were available to hire additional school counselors, what tasks would be most important to assign to these new positions? What would be the expected outcomes?

School Counselor Leadership

When discussing question one, it became apparent that a school counselor's leadership abilities are critical when determining essential duties, tasks, and roles. The school counselor must have a high level of confidence and demonstrate strong advocacy skills to work toward the implementation of a data-driven comprehensive school counseling program. Since most school administrators are not provided training on the role of the school counselor nor are they equipped with information about comprehensive school counseling programs during their principal preparation programs, it is solely dependent on the school counselor to communicate, advocate, and clearly articulate the vision for the school counseling program. The following participant statement reinforces the emphasis placed on the need for strong leadership skills necessary for school counselors, "Change needs to start with them, it needs to trickle down from them."

Roles and Responsibilities

In each session, participants discussed how they value the work and expertise of school counselors. Many shared that the school counselors are a vital part of the leadership team and provide immense support to the overall goals and mission of the school. However, participants recognized the multiple tasks and responsibilities placed on the shoulders of school counselors. Though it appeared that participants understood how to best utilize school counselors, many said the lack of available staff led them to place several non-counseling tasks on the plates of school counselors (e.g., test coordination, supervision, etc.).

Hiring Decisions

When asked about how decisions were made regarding hiring school counselors, a common theme emerged that demonstrated no clear or purposeful process for hiring school counselors. That is, hiring decisions seemed to correlate to filling openings or be haphazard in nature. Rarely did participants reflect using a purposeful or intentional process for assessing the need for counselors or relating hiring practices to goals related to addressing student needs. Within focus group responses, participants indicated that they place a high value on having school counselors,

yet few could articulate specific outcomes demonstrated by school counseling programs. Focus group participants repeatedly stated that the needs (academic, social/emotional, and college/career) of their students are overwhelming and additional school counselors (and other support staff) to support their students would be very beneficial.

Professional Development

When exploring the possibility of available funding, many participants discussed the need for additional training for school counselors. In the survey, the topic of college and career readiness was in the top responses for professional development needs. However during focus group meetings there was an overwhelming emphasis on the need for additional and updated college and career training for school counselors. When drilling down into the conversation, participants shared a need for counselors to have additional training connected to not only college counseling but also skills and knowledge to assist students in considering other postsecondary options and career planning.

Another topic that consistently surfaced was about the increased mental health needs of students and the shortage of qualified support staff to work with these students and families. Participants expressed training for school counselors would be extremely beneficial in these areas. Other training ideas focused on refresher courses for veteran school counselors, technology training, leadership development, suicide and crisis intervention, and how to use and make sense of all the data that is available. Some participants also mentioned an interest in training for administrators to learn more about the profession, but specifically centered on best ways to evaluate school counselors. It was suggested to develop a consistent statewide evaluative tool -and related training- that could be used to observe and measure school counselor effectiveness followed with training on how to best use the tool.

Next Steps & Recommendations

Possible Next Steps & Recommendations

Survey responses and focus group input were used to inform the following recommendations. Overall, the next steps aim to support continued collaboration with administrators working to advance the school counseling profession as well as provide ongoing training and professional development to school counselors targeting gaps in the field. Continued outreach and education to school administrators to expand their knowledge and awareness of the school counseling profession (e.g., appropriate roles, comprehensive school counseling programs, evaluation tools, etc.) is critical.

Additional Areas

School Counselor Leadership Training: It is evident that school counselors must see themselves as leaders and change agents in their schools. Providing focused efforts to build leadership and advocacy skills in practicing school counselors through professional development is important. Furthermore, school counselor education programs need to bolster leadership training and advocacy skill development, and provide more information about the roles of principals and superintendents when students are being prepared for the profession.

Administrator Training Programs: It became evident through our conversations in focus groups that school administrator pre-service training programs rarely included adequate information about the school counseling profession. Continued outreach and education to school administrators to expand their knowledge and awareness of the school counseling profession (e.g., appropriate roles, comprehensive school counseling programs, evaluation tools, etc.) is critical. The development of training material to teach graduate students in principal preparation programs regarding effective school counseling practices/programs would be an excellent addition to pre-service administrator preparation programs.

Enhance Collaboration: While improving school counselor and administrator training is essential, it is equally important that counselors and administrators intentionally collaborate around goals, priorities, and expected outcomes of the school and/or district's counseling program. Though not specifically articulated in the survey or focus groups, this recommendation was derived from a lack of coherent responses from participants around counseling program expectations and the absence of data – such as a student needs assessment or counselor time usage figures – used when making hiring or funding decisions. Collaborative conversations between administrators and counselors, using common language and focused on counseling program goals and outcomes, have the potential of significantly impacting counseling program effectiveness.

Universal School Counselor Evaluation Tool: Participants frequently mentioned the lack of a consistent tool used to evaluate school counselors. The development of a comprehensive school counselor evaluation tool followed by training for principals on how to use this tool would help address this gap.

Professional Development & Consultation: Throughout the study, it became apparent that there are multiple training needs for school counselors in our state, yet the lack of time and financial resources are clear barriers. If grants were available to interested and invested schools,

these monies could be directed toward providing professional development and consultants to deliver ongoing support – specific to the needs of the school - for improving the effectiveness of school counseling programs.

Marketing Campaign: A handful of participants mentioned the need for a broad public relations campaign to educate the greater school community– including parents, business and industry, and others – regarding the goals, roles and responsibilities, and services provided through the school counseling program. A strategic and focused media campaign could help debunk common myths and help take steps to move the profession from traditional school counseling practices into innovative school counseling practices and programs to meet the needs of today's schools and students.

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Addendum

Focus Group Questions

Focus Group Key Questions

1. What are the essential duties of the school counselors in your building and/or school corporation?
2. How does your school make decisions around hiring additional school counselors and/or improving the school counseling program?
3. If funding were available to hire additional school counselors, what tasks would be most important to assign to these new positions? What would be the expected outcomes?

Sub-questions

Perception and Task Use Questions

- Tell us how school counselors are a part of your school's leadership team. What role (s) do they play?
- How do school counselors assist in the development of school goals and metrics that indicate success?
- How do school counselors' tasks positively impact the overall school climate? How do you measure this impact?
- Tell us what specific skill sets and knowledge the school counselors bring to your school to assist to impact student outcomes.
- What work does your school counselor program do to addresses the college and career readiness needs of your students?
- How does your school counselor program addresses social and emotional student issues?
- Are there areas that you see are not being addressed by your school counseling program?

Funding Questions
- How do you make decisions around the hiring of school counselors?

- If funding were to become available to support your existing school counseling program and/or hire additional school counselors, what outcomes would you want the school counseling program to impact with these funds?

  Additional questions:
  - If funding were available for professional development for your school counselor, what training topics would be a priority? Do you see gaps in skills or knowledge that you would want the counselors to have training to address?
  - How do you measure school counselor effectiveness? (trying to understand their evaluation tool/metric)

- How does recent state or national research trends impact your employment decisions?

Principal Survey

1. I consider our school counselors to be a vital part of our school's leadership team.
2. School counselors have a shared responsibility in the development of school goals and metrics that indicate success.
3. School counselors' tasks positively impact the overall school climate.
4. School counselors' responsibilities are aligned with the school's improvement plan.
5. Our school counselor(s) has/have the appropriate level of knowledge and skill to positively impact student outcomes.
6. The work being done by the school counseling program positively impacts our school's overall performance (e.g. A-F accountability measure).
7. I am satisfied with the school counselors' role in my school.
8. The school counselor program addresses the college and career readiness needs of our students.
9. The school counselor program addresses social and emotional student issues.
10. The school counselor program plays a pivotal role in the implementation of school wide strategies to improve student outcomes.

Please rate the following tasks as you see a best match for the scope of work by your school counselor (s).

1-Not important
2-Somewhat important
3-Not Sure
4-Important
5-Very important

- Academic Scheduling
- Individual meetings with students concerning academic issues
- Individual meetings with students concerning social/emotional issues
- Individual meetings with students concerning college and career readiness issues
- Facilitating classroom guidance lessons (e.g., teaching a lesson in a classroom on a specific topic)
- Facilitating small group counseling (e.g., study skills group, grief/loss group, test anxiety group, etc.)
- Supervision duties (e.g., lunch supervision, bus duty, etc.)
- Test coordination/proctoring (e.g., ISTEP, PSAT/SAT, Accuplacer, AP, IB, etc.)
- Use of data (data collection, analysis, reporting)
- Collaboration with school faculty
- Parent outreach (e.g., education, student planning, etc.)

- Facilitating professional development to school faculty (e.g., training on suicide prevention, anti-bullying, etc.)
- Crisis response planning and response
- Administrative tasks
- Other (offer write-in response)

QUALITATIVE QUESTIONS

Main Question #1: How are decisions made about how many school counselors are employed/hired in your school?

Please rank order the following considerations when making hiring decisions regarding school counselors in your building.
- Student to counselor ratios
- Response to data (e.g., student needs assessment)
- Support school improvement plan/goals
- Support social/emotional needs of students
- Support college and career needs of students
- Support academic outcomes of students

Main Question #2: If funding were to become available to support your existing school counseling program and/or hire additional school counselors, what outcomes would you want the school counseling program to impact with these funds? Please be specific as possible.

   Sub-questions:
   o If funding could be used for professional development for your school counselor, what training topics would be a priority?
   o Check all that apply.
      - Using data to inform school counseling programs
      - College and career readiness
      - Mental health issues (e.g., anxiety, depression, etc.)
      - Crisis counseling/suicide prevention, intervention, postvention
      - Trauma informed schools
      - Parent outreach/collaboration
      - Other (offer write-in response)
- Do recent state or national research trends impact your employment decisions? If yes, please describe.

Superintendent Survey

*These questions would be answered in likert scale format.

1-Strongly disagree
2-Disagree
3-Not Sure
4-Agree
5-Strongly Agree

1. I consider our school counselors to be a vital part of each school's leadership team.
2. School counselors have a shared responsibility in the development of school goals and metrics that indicate success.
3. School counselors' tasks positively impact the overall school climate.
4. School counselors' responsibilities are aligned with the school's improvement plan.
5. Our school counselor(s) has/have the appropriate level of knowledge and skill to positively impact student outcomes.
6. The work being done by the school counseling program positively impacts the school's overall performance (e.g. A-F accountability measure).
7. I am satisfied with the school counselors' role in my school system.
8. The school counselor program addresses the college and career readiness needs of our students.
9. The school counselor program addresses social and emotional student issues.
10. The school counselor program plays a pivotal role in the implementation of school wide strategies to improve student outcomes.

Please rate the following tasks as you see a best match for the scope of work by school counselor (s) in your school community.
1-Not important
2-Somewhat important
3-Not Sure
4-Important
5-Very important

- Academic Scheduling
- Individual meetings with students concerning academic issues
- Individual meetings with students concerning social/emotional issues
- Individual meetings with students concerning college and career readiness issues
- Facilitating classroom guidance lessons (e.g., teaching a lesson in a classroom on a specific topic)
- Facilitating small group counseling (e.g., study skills group, grief/loss group, test anxiety group, etc.)
- Supervision duties (e.g., lunch supervision, bus duty, etc.)
- Test coordination/proctoring (e.g., ISTEP, PSAT/SAT, Accuplacer, AP, IB, etc.)
- Use of data (data collection, analysis, reporting)
- Collaboration with school faculty
- Parent outreach (e.g., education, student planning, etc.)

- Facilitating professional development to school faculty (e.g., training on suicide prevention, anti-bullying, etc.)
- Crisis response planning and response
- Administrative tasks
- Other (offer write-in response)

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- Support academic outcomes of students

Main Question #2: If funding were to become available to support your existing school counseling program and/or hire additional school counselors, what outcomes would you want the school counseling program to impact with these funds? Please be specific as possible.

Sub-questions:
- o If funding could be used for professional development for your school counselor, what training topics would be a priority?
- o Check all that apply.
  - Using data to inform school counseling programs
  - College and career readiness
  - Mental health issues (e.g., anxiety, depression, etc.)
  - Crisis counseling/suicide prevention, intervention, postvention
  - Trauma informed schools
  - Parent outreach/collaboration
  - Other (offer write-in response)
- Do recent state or national research trends impact your employment decisions? If yes, please describe.