

An Abstract of the Dissertation of Autumn Dolan

Autumn Dolan for the degree of Doctor of Education in Leadership, Learning and

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Title: Beliefs Matter: School counselor self-assessment of perceived advocacy, collaboration, and leadership mindset.

Abstract approved:

Marcel Lebrun

Dr. Marcel Lebrun, Dissertation Committee Chair

The purpose of this study was to examine self-perceived advocacy, collaboration, and leadership skills of school counselors and the ways in which they demonstrate the American School Counseling Association (ASCA), recommended mindsets. ASCA recommends that counselors self-assess their own mindsets and behaviors and formulate an appropriate professional development plan yet little guidance is given on how this should be done. School counselors can adopt a leadership posture that is consistent with the needs of schools and learners by using social-emotional insights and behaviors. A key common competency in both social emotional leadership and the ASCA professional standards requires counselors to be competent in self-awareness and be able to self-assess their own mindsets and beliefs. This mixed methods study was created to give school counselors within a single school district the opportunity for in-depth reflection to self-assess skills and beliefs so that they can advocate, collaborate, and lead effectively.

Beliefs Matter: School Counselor Self-Assessment of Perceived Advocacy,
Collaboration, and Leadership Mindset

By

Autumn Dolan

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Dissertation of Autumn Dolan

Presented on August 9, 2022

APPROVED:

Marcel Lebrun

Dr. Marcel Lebrun, Dissertation Committee Chair

Gary Goodnough

Dr. Gary Goodnough, Dissertation Committee

Jeffery Parks

Dr. Jeffery Parks, Dissertation Committee

Nathaniel Bowditch

Nathaniel Bowditch, Ph.D., Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs

I understand that my dissertation will become part of the permanent collection of Plymouth State University, Lamson Learning Commons. My signature below authorizes release of my dissertation to any reader upon request.

Autumn Dolan

Autumn Dolan, Author

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**Doctor of Education: Leadership, Learning and Community
Beliefs Matter: School counselor self-assessment of perceived advocacy,
collaboration, and leadership mindset.**

Autumn Dolan, Plymouth State University

Dissertation Defense: August 9, 2022

Executive Summary: August 11, 2022

Introduction: The purpose of this study was to examine self-perceived advocacy, collaboration, and leadership skills of school counselors and the ways in which they demonstrate the American School Counseling Association (ASCA), recommended mindsets.

Problem of Practice: ASCA recommends that counselors self-assess their own mindsets and behaviors and formulate an appropriate professional development plan yet little guidance is given on how this should be done.

Research Method: This mixed methods action research investigated school counselor advocacy, collaboration, and leadership mindset and skills. The study involved an intensive systematic understanding of a small group of school counselors within a single community and represents a bounded community of professionals. A survey was created that provided research participants the opportunity to respond using a 7-point Likert scale followed by six open-ended qualitative questions.

Summary of Findings: Finding from this study show that school counselors show a deep responsibility and connection to the role of advocate within the school community. Counselors in this study have high levels of self-efficacy about their capacity to collaborate related to individual success. A future goal for participant may be to build upon existing collaborations skills to advocate for systemic change through the development of enhance confidence in collaboration efforts at a system-wide level.

Limitation(s) of Study: The sample size is small and as a result does not provide an accurate representation of all school counselors. Additionally, counselors in this study were 92% female and 100% white, therefor the demographics do not represent a diverse population sample. The survey created used a Likert-type scale and results showed a restriction of range in response, and counselors seldom selected never, rarely, or occasionally.

Implications/Significance of Study: Having the desire to advocate, collaborate, and lead is different from possessing the skills necessary to do so. As is true for students, once a person identifies the desired mindset, learning to implement it requires practice and time. This study created meaningful opportunity for school counselors to reflect on mindset and make connections to advocacy, collaboration, and leadership skills.

Chapter 1

Introduction: Moving from a Problem to a Problem of Practice

The American School Counseling Association (ASCA) guides the school counseling profession and calls for school counselors to serve as leaders (ASCA, 2019). In 2019 ASCA developed new professional standards and competencies that outline the mindset and behaviors school counselors need to meet the rigorous demands of the profession and the needs of K-12 students. School counselors can adopt a leadership posture that is consistent with the needs of schools and learners by using social-emotional insights and behaviors. A key common competency in both social emotional leadership and the ASCA professional standards requires counselors to be competent in self-awareness and be able to self-assess their own mindsets and beliefs (ASCA, 2019; Bowers et al., 2018). Professional development opportunities are needed for school counselors to cultivate their own self-awareness of beliefs and mindsets, which will empower them to serve as leaders and change agents for social justice (ASCA, 2019).

The ASCA national model places advocacy, collaboration, and leadership (ACL) and the school counselor's role in systemic change as integral components of a comprehensive school counseling program (ASCA, 2019). Assessment of ACL mindsets and strengthening ACL skills are essential for being an effective school counselor (ASCA, 2019). Having the desire to advocate, collaborate and lead effectively is different from possessing the skills necessary to do so. Once a school counselor possesses the appropriate mindset, learning and implementing leadership skills requires practice and time (Smith, 2020).

This mixed methods action research investigated school counselor advocacy, collaboration, and leadership mindset and skills. School counselors have an ethical responsibility to engage in continual professional self-improvement to ensure they are providing excellent care to students and school communities (ASCA, 2019). This study gives school counselors time for professional and personal self-reflection to guide and develop ACL skills and mindsets.

Mindsets are assumed patterns of thinking that shape how people make sense of the world and often fuel behaviors, they emerge from, and are tied to social practices and institutions (Frameworks Institute, 2021). A mixed methods quantitative survey and qualitative open-ended questions are used to better understand counselor advocacy, collaboration, and leadership skills and mindsets. Findings from this study may influence counselor planning and sustaining a comprehensive school counseling program.

ASCA recommends that counselors self-assess their own mindsets and behaviors and formulate an appropriate professional development plan yet little guidance is given on how this should be done (ASCA, 2019). Findings from this action research can be used to direct counselor self-assessment opportunities to make clear and deliberate connections to improved counselor advocacy, collaboration, and leadership.

It has become commonplace that American schools need to provide instruction in more than just academic content, social emotional skills are needed to prepare young people for life in today's complex world (Mahoney et al., 2019). The U.S Department of Education defines social emotional learning (SEL) using the commonly used Collaborative for Academic Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL's) definition: "SEL is the process of developing students' and adults' social emotional competencies- the

knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors that individuals need to make successful choices” (Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2022, Fundamentals of SEL section).

When it comes to the impact of mental health on academic outcomes, the research is clear: developing social-emotional competencies is key to success in school and in life beyond (Durlak, 2017). Social emotional learning has shown to be a valuable and alternative approach to enhance academic achievement outcomes (Blair, 2002; Durlak et al, 2011; Sklad et al., 2012). Through meta-analysis, findings from hundreds of studies ranging from 1955 to 2020 show that SEL interventions help improve both academic achievement and school behaviors (Durlak et al., 2011; Sklad et al., 2012). The findings also demonstrate that skills can be taught through curricula and other forms of intervention programs. Programs include schoolwide opportunities for skill development, practice, and reinforcement in multiple contexts throughout the day (Durlak et al., 2017).

Developing student social emotional competencies creates an overall climate of caring, support, and high expectations (Devaney et al, 2006). This creation of a positive total school environment shows a reciprocal relationship between social-emotional skills and school climate (Bowers et al., 2018). However, despite widespread recognition of the importance of promoting social and emotional well-being in K-12 schools, most past efforts regarding SEL have been directed exclusively towards supporting students’ mental health with little focus on systems change including supporting social emotional competencies of school administrators, teachers, and counselors (National Commission of Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, 2019).

School counselors are positioned to play a unique and essential role in instructional leadership within schools SEL management and curriculum (Lashley & Stickl, 2016). ASCA guides the school counseling profession and calls for school counselors to serve as leaders (ASCA, 2019). It also calls for the implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program that incorporates three themes: advocacy, collaboration, and leadership (ASCA, 2019). A comprehensive program helps to ensure equity and access to rigorous education for all students and can lead to closing equity gaps (ASCA, 2019).

In 2019 ASCA used SEL-related outcome studies, and SEL literature to create the foundation for the Mindset and Behavior standards and competencies for both student and professional school counseling (ASCA, 2019). The ASCA Mindset and Behaviors standards for students includes 35 standards that identify specific attitudes, knowledge, and skills that students should gain through a comprehensive school counseling program. They are used as a guide to ensure that new and experienced counselors are enhancing student academic achievement, and career and social emotional development (ASCA, 2019).

The 35 standards for students are based on five general categories of noncognitive factors related to academic performance as identified in the 2012 literature review published by the University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School research. These categories include the five noncognitive factors of: academic behaviors, academic perseverance, academic mindsets, learning strategies, and social skills (Farrington et al. 2012). These categories represent a synthesis of research literature of subcategories such as: persistence, resilience, grit, goal setting, help-seeking, cooperation, conscientiousness,

self-efficacy, self-regulation, self-control, self-discipline, motivation, mindsets, effort, work habits, organization, homework completion, learning strategies and study skills (ASCA, 2019 p.2)

Student standards are divided into two categories, the first category student mindset standards, include the standards related to the psychosocial attitudes and beliefs students have about themselves in relation to academic work (ASCA, 2019). The second category, student behavior standards, include behaviors commonly associated with being a successful student (ASCA, 2019). The behaviors are grouped into three subcategories of learning strategies, self-management, and social skills (ASCA, 2019).

Likewise, the ASCA professional standards outline the mindset and behaviors school counselors need to meet the rigorous demands of the school counseling profession (ASCA, 2019). They include the beliefs that school counselors hold about student achievement and success. The behavior standards show direct and indirect behaviors school counselors demonstrate to facilitate academic achievement, career, and social emotional development for students. In this way, the beliefs, attitudes, and mindset of school counselors are clearly connected to school counselor behavior (ASCA, 2019). School counselor behavior standards represent broad topics such as knowledge, attitude, and skills school counselors need to implement a comprehensive program. Under each set of counselor behaviors ASCA lists competencies that give specific measurable indicators of the behavior standard. ASCA suggest that counselors should self-assess their own mindset and behaviors and review competencies to ensure implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program (ASCA, 2019).

School counselors can adopt a leadership posture that is consistent with the needs of schools using social-emotional insights and behaviors by using the SEL leadership framework developed by Bowers, Lemberger-Truelove & Brigman in 2018. Applying the SEL leadership framework for school counselors may encourage a school leadership dispositions that reflects the mindset and behaviors of the school counseling field, supported by ASCA standards (ASCA, 2019). SEL leadership is grounded in equity, social and emotional development, and a supportive total school environment for all students (Bowers et al., 2018).

School counseling leadership is equal parts disposition and behavioral and using SEL competencies provides a guide for school counseling practice, students and educators' in-school experiences, and social justice advocacy (Bowers et al., 2018). Using a SEL leadership framework ensures that comprehensive school counseling programs embody SEL dispositions and behaviors creating an ethos that affects each participant in the total school environment and one that is consistent with social justice advocacy (Bowers et al., 2018).

Global Perspectives of the Problem

Mental Health in Public School

Schools today face many challenges, in addition to advancing academic achievement, schools are also tasked with an increasing array of mental health barriers (Centers for Disease Control & Prevention [CDCP], 2021). The National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH) indicates that between 13% and 20% of children in the United States have a mental, emotional, or behavioral disorders each year. The survey results from the NSCH affirm that depression, anxiety problems, and behavioral conduct

problems remain common among children. The survey also extends what is known about the prevalence among subpopulations in whom treatment gaps persist. Furthermore, racial, and ethnic inequities in diagnosis, such as bias related to conduct problems, also may explain the higher prevalence of behavioral/ conduct problems among children in these subpopulations. NSCH survey results are consistent with previous research that note significant differences in the likelihood of diagnoses and related treatment among children of color or children who are economically disadvantaged (McGuire & Miranda, 2008).

Data-informed Decision Making

School counselors use data to advocate for student social/emotional and academic needs. Advocacy requires counselors to have an understanding of the impact cultural, social, and environmental influences have on student success and opportunities (ASCA, 2019). ASCA professional standards call for counselors to use evidence-based practices (EBP) to address complex student challenges and maximize student success (ASCA, 2019). School counselors use data and EBP to promote systemic change and create an effective learning environment for all students (ASCA, 2019).

ASCA recommends that school counselors include assessment, appraisal, and evaluation of delivery within a comprehensive K-12 school counseling program (ASCA, 2019). Program assessment demonstrates leadership and advocacy skills by committing to continuous improvement (ASCA, 2019). School counselors build environments where the needs of all students are met, and promote systemic change, when analysis of data is used to improve professional practices (ASCA, 2019).

School Counselor Burnout

Stress has become an epidemic in our society (CDC, 2022) fostering school counselor SEL competencies will help them as school leaders as well as all school stakeholders and the total school environment (Bowers et al., 2018). Counselor well-being enables counselors to cope effectively in situations involving intense emotional stress (Mills, 2006), and social/ emotional functioning also appears to have an influence on teaching behaviors, classroom climate, and professional burnout (Jennings & Greenberg, 2019).

SEL programs promote student emotional regulation skills, these same skills help counselors balance their own emotions and shift focus from personal problems to the needs of students (Bowers et al., 2018). Job related stress factors can lead to counselor burnout (Fye, 2022). Burnout occurs when professionals are unable to meet their own needs, as well as the client's needs in a high-pressure environment (Fye, 2022).

Morse et al. (2012) identifies that 21% to 67% of mental health professionals reported experiencing elevated levels of burnout. When school counselors experience feelings of burnout it may influence their ability to provide ethical and effective counseling services to the students they serve. School counselors may experience chronic fatigue, depersonalization, or feelings of hopelessness and leave their jobs because of the rigidity of school systems and limited support (Young & Lambie, 2007). Burnout is related to lower productivity, turnover, and lower levels of job commitment (Maslach et al., 2001).

2020 State of the Profession Survey

Now more than ever before, school counselors have the opportunity and the responsibility to assume a leadership role in their schools as proactive multicultural and social justice leaders within their schools (Ratts & Greenleaf, 2017). However, only 6 percent of school counselors in a *2020 State of the Profession Survey* reported having changed procedures for faculty through professional development or revised teaching practices. Many school counselors understand their role in creating an inclusive and supportive school culture where all students can thrive, but when it comes to empowering school counselors to take a leadership role in students social and emotional development at a systems level more professional development may be needed (ASCA, 2020).

The 2020 ASCA *State of the Profession Survey* gathered details about school counselors' effort in addressing racism and bias in their school counseling program, as well as how their individual schools are addressing racism and bias. Almost 17% of responding school counselors indicated that they have taken no specific action to address racism and bias in their program, and only 22% could identifying ways to revise or remove policies that disproportionately affect students of color (ASCA, 2020). Under the ASCA (2019) national model school counselors are encouraged to be leaders in their schools; comprehensive in their scope of efforts to support students, and responsible for removing systemic barriers to academic achievement.

Local Perspective of the Problem

School counselors have unique qualifications and skills to address K-12 students' academic, career and social emotional developmental needs (ASCA, 2019). The Massachusetts Department of Education (DESE) determine these qualifications and

include substantial experience and formal education with an earned master's degree in counseling (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [DESE], 2021). They apply professional standards and competencies, legal and ethical principles, and exercise leadership related to individual student success (ASCA, 2019; DESE, 2021).

Having vision is a characteristic of effective leadership (Dollarhide, 2013, ASCA, 2019). Locally, school districts write vision statements that often include a desire for students to have multiple pathways for academic excellence, leadership, and social emotional wellness. A school counseling vision statement communicates what school counselors hope to see for students, and aligns with district vision statements (ASCA, 2019). It is important to consider how school counselor beliefs influence vision. It is also important to consider how these beliefs inspire advocacy and systemic change (Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018).

School counselors advocate for student success and set goals where positive student outcomes are attainable for all students (ASCA, 2019). Clearly articulating beliefs and mindsets may help create a vision that motivates stakeholders and leads to a more socially and emotionally informed learning environment (Lemberger, 2016). Belief and mindset reflection opportunities may help give light to what influences counselor practice and inspire meaningful leadership goals. On a local context, this study hopes to cultivate professional reflection to ensure equity, and socially just counseling leadership.

Historical Perspectives and Policy Change

Understanding data and using data to inform, focus, and direct professional goals helps to ensure equitable school counseling services (ASCA, 2019). The drive toward increasing accountability has been clear through policy change like No Child Left Behind

Act (NCLB, 2002), which called upon school personnel to use scientifically based research to inform decision-making around intervention planning and to demonstrate how school initiatives are linked to academic outcomes. The reauthorization of NCLB, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2016) further stipulated that schools need to provide evidence-based interventions, programs, and support services for all students to create equitable educational opportunities (ASCA, 2019; Dahir & Stone, 2009). The provisions are intended to illuminate the academic inequities that exist in American public schools. Educators and researchers have known for many years that students from such sub-groups as African American, Hispanic, economically disadvantaged, students with disabilities, and second language learners do not perform as well on standardized test as their White and/or more economically advantaged peers (Jennings, 2015; Jennings & Rentner, 2006). This phenomenon has become known as the achievement gap, and school reform has been oriented around programs and strategies intended to close this gap.

Current thinking indicates that closing the achievement gap should include collection, disaggregation, and analysis, of student performance data by principals, teachers and other school personnel and subsequent planning and instruction should be based on the findings from the analyses (Guskey, 2003; Hamilton et al., 2009; Rigby, 2014). Disaggregated data that has been broken down into detailed sub-categories such as marginalized groups, gender, or religion helps to reveal deprivations in inequalities that may not be fully reflective in aggregated school data. Data disaggregation allows schools to see how specific groups of students are performing, identifies needs, reveals patterns, and can be used to help school become more reflective about methods (ASCA, 2019). An

often under-utilized, yet key educator, who could play a strategic role in utilizing data to close the achievement gap, is the school counselor (Lashley & Stickl, 2016).

Given the United States is in the accountability era of data collection to demonstrate achievement for all students, data utilization is often the focal point of school improvement measures (Dahir & Stone, 2009). Counselors in schools are responsible to support school aged children and school personnel, also they are expected to produce and respond to data as related to the many services they offer (Brown & Trusty, 2005). ASCA has consistently advocated for the proactive role of school counselors in closing the achievement gap through promotion of a comprehensive data-informed program, created to be closely aligned with the school's mission (ASCA, 2019).

It is the school counselor's ethical responsibility to review school and student data to determine needed interventions to close information, attainment, achievement, and opportunity gaps (ASCA Ethical Standards A.3. c & d, 2019). School counselors are encouraged to cultivate and lead with a social justice mindset that uses data to identify achievement gaps and serve as change agents to ameliorate those gaps using evidence-based practice (EBP) (Novakovic et al., 2020).

School-wide intervention practices have contributed to school counselor participation in a variety of positive outcome data-informed programs such as participating in multi-tiered system of support (MTSS), response to interventions (RTI), and positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS), all of which influence how schools use data to promote positive outcomes (Goodman-Scott et al., 2015; Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2016). Counselors must also use data to understand and share school counselor impact (ASCA, 2019; Dahir et al., 2009; Dahir & Stone, 2003), identifying and

remove systemic barriers (Bemak & Chung, 2005; Ratts et al., 2011) and address the needs of all students through the evaluation of programing interventions (ASCA, 2019; Dimmitt et al., 2007). Data collection and data disaggregation are the foundation of all previously listed topics, it is part of school reform and the foundation of transformative school counseling (Dimmitt et al., 2007, Young & Kaffenberger, 2011). School counselors must strive to make continual changes to programing and use data to drive and adjust what they do within schools (Lambie & Williamson, 2004).

Social Perspective of the Problem

Positive social conditions in schools are essential ingredients for learning and other educational outcomes (Walton et al., 2012). Hospitable social conditions are necessary in education settings and serve as the foundation for both the SEL (Greenberg et al., 2003) and social justice literature (Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018). In a wide range of studies many social and emotional skills, also known as noncognitive attributes or skills “are shown to have a direct positive relationship to students’ academic achievement” (Farrington et al., 2012 p.4)

Students learn best in environments that are “inviting, safe, inclusive and supportive of all” and where “human relationships are paramount” (Association for Middle Level Education [AMLE], 2022 p.1). SEL is a part of the civic development process, schools are places where students learn to be personally responsible, participatory, and social justice orientated (Jost & Kay, 2010). School belonging is viewed as one of the more important factors associated with students’ social and emotional well-being, academic self-efficacy, and motivation (Jost & Kay, 2010). Counselors play an important role in school belonging by advocating on behalf of

students and using collaboration skills to bring focus to the thoughts, ideas, and beliefs of others (Young & Dollarhide, 2018).

Jones et al. (2019) asserted that the next generation of SEL research should include how SEL efforts can contribute to more equitable learning experiences and outcomes for children, youth and adults from a diverse background of circumstances. It also points to the importance of professional development opportunities for educators in making SEL efforts maximally effective for all students. ASCA encourages counselors to look for ways to deliver as many standards as possible to as many students as possible (ASCA, 2019). Without assessing, collecting, and reviewing outcome data school counselors are blindly implementing activities and interventions that may or may not lead to improved SEL skills for all students (ASCA, 2019).

Teaching of noncognitive skills helps create a caring, supportive learning environment that includes relational trust and respect among students and adults (Darling-Hammond et al., 2018). Educational implications of SEL support optimal learning outcomes by including developmentally appropriate tasks and culturally responsive learning opportunities (Darling-Hammond et al., 2018). The CASEL 5 SEL competencies of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making represent large categories for organizing a range of intra- and interpersonal knowledge, skills, and abilities (Weissberg et al. 2015). School counselors with a SEL focus can help generate a school culture that supports optimal learning outcomes and extends SEL competencies into professional practices (Bowers et al., 2018).

The social implications of SEL in education also align well with CASEL's indicators of a high-quality schoolwide program (CASEL, 2022). These indicators include having a supportive classroom and school climate that focuses on adult SEL and relationships (CASEL, 2022). Learning is fundamentally a relational process, and benefits from positive relationships, characterized by warmth, consistency, attunement, and reciprocity (Center on the Developing Child, 2019). The ASCA Mindset and Behaviors are based on the premise that school performance is a complex phenomenon, shaped by a wide variety of factors intrinsic to students and external factors that include relationships (Farrington et al., 2012).

Social and emotional learning outcome research shows that SEL has a positive effect on academic performance; benefits physical health; improves citizenship; is demanded by employers; and is essential for lifelong success (Mahoney et al., 2019). However, little is known about how to foster SEL competencies in adults within a school (Gimbert et al., 2021). Successful SEL development in educators may work as a conduit for improving the total school environment by providing opportunities for self-reflection that support social justice advocacy (Ratts & Greenleaf, 2017).

School counselors are encouraged to intervene on behalf of all students, teachers and other stakeholders on issues that limit school and life success (ASCA, 2019). Considering the transformative potential SEL skills have on students and schools, school counselors who embody positive SEL behaviors, and show authentic reflection can be responsive to others and help to create a positive total school environment for all students (Bowers et al., 2018).

Local Context

The Massachusetts Educator Evaluation Framework was adopted by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education in 2011 (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [DESE], 2011). The framework was designed to promote student learning growth, and achievement by providing feedback and enhance opportunities for professional growth. Massachusetts educators use this evaluation framework to set student and professional goals. To achieve optimal results school counselors, assess their program to determine effectiveness (ASCA, 2019). Through this process school counselors demonstrate leadership through a commitment to continuous improvement. The process of assessing counselor programs and setting goals through the Massachusetts Educator Evaluation Framework, promotes systemic change (ASCA, 2019). Counselor self-assessment of advocacy, collaboration, and leadership mindset can be used as a guide to set professional development plans and guide meaningful goal setting using the Massachusetts evaluation framework.

Stakeholders

An important part of the SEL leadership model and the ASCA Mindset and Behavior standards includes the importance of collaborating with teachers, administrators, and guardians about the social and emotional development of students (ASCA, 2019; Bowers et al., 2018). Collaboration is the process in which multiple individuals work towards a common goal and shared responsibility for associated tasks (ASCA, 2019). A hallmark of SEL and one of the areas this research will focus, is the ability to be self-reflective, responsive, and adaptable to others (CASEL, 2022).

Counselor with social-emotional leadership skills might better support teachers, educators, and other stakeholders (Bowers et al., 2018). Leading with a SEL leadership mindset can support how adult reinforce and infuse school wide SEL opportunities. Counselors who have SEL leadership skills can work within the total school environment to assist fellow educators with managing stress and reflective practice that will in turn, maximize teaching potential (Bowers et al., 2018).

SEL leadership requires a transformative leader that is willing to realign structures and relationship to achieve genuine and sustainable change (Bowers et al., 2018). Leading with vision and courage, beginning, and integrating SEL efforts schoolwide, and implementing with integrity (Elias et al., 2006). Schools where academic and social-emotional learning are brought together requires leadership that recognizes the roles of students, teachers, parents, and community stakeholders have in making SEL-based school climate change (Bowers et al., 2018).

Social emotional instructional practice can guide the development of a counselor's ability to be socially and emotionally skilled and reflective (Lemberger, 2010). Within the context of leadership practices, a socially and emotionally intelligent leader will exhibit increased insight into emotional experiences to inform decision-making (George, 2000; Riggio & Reichard, 2008). For school counselors to be accepted as leaders, they should commit to dispositions and behaviors that support the total school environment. In this way school counselors should go beyond advocacy of individual students, and advocate with a SEL leadership disposition for all students and adults working within the total school environment (Bowers et al., 2018). For example, school counselors can use the SEL competency of self-awareness to show deepened awareness

of how they think and behave and are perceived by others to understand the impact of culture on student success and opportunities (ASCA, 2019, CASEL, 2022).

Effective leaders tend to have high self-awareness and recognize how their values, beliefs and emotions affect interactions and relationships (George, 2000; Riggio & Reichard, 2008). Students exposed to SEL programs learn how to regulate their emotions through techniques such as self-reflection, thereby enabling them to exhibit emotion regulation skills (Greenberg et al., 2003). SEL leadership framework encourages school counselors to use self-reflection to question their knowledge and assumptions, thereby enabling them to identify structural inequities that may be preventing student from realizing their full potential (Bowers et al., 2018).

For educators, social-emotional functioning also appears to have influence on teaching behaviors, classroom climate and professional burnout (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Teacher who can regulate emotions and express themselves in appropriate ways, tend to have stronger student relationships (Collie et al., 2011). As such, SEL appears to be a vital component to educational settings.

However, schools may be missing an untapped leadership resource within schools. The underutilization of school counseling leadership might be a function of misunderstanding of school counseling practices or outcomes (Beesley, 2004; Carey, 2008; Dollarhide et al, 2007). It may also be a result of the relationship that may exists between one's commitment to SEL, one's professional behaviors, and students experience of SEL (Miller et al., 2018). School counselors can model the guiding principles of advocacy, collaboration, and leadership to drive systemic change using the SEL competencies of self-awareness, self-assessment, and reflection (Smith, 2020).

Little focus has been placed on school counselor self-reflection as a tool for realizing counselor full potential. School counselors that have developed personal SEL skills and competencies are likely to recognize the importance of SEL and be better prepared to lead the implementation of SEL programs, policies, and practices at their schools (Frank et al., 2021).

SEL leadership development for school counselors should give intentional time for self-reflection so they may formulate clear mindsets and beliefs around student success (Bowers et al., 2018). This will allow counselors to amplify their own SEL capacities, so that they may better lead students, teachers, and other school stakeholders in a schoolwide SEL program that is comprehensive and effective to the total school environment (Bowers et al., 2018). Given the significant benefit of leaders and all school stakeholders to develop social emotional competencies, and the unique position school counselor have within a school, action steps should be taken to ensure the development of necessary skills to be effective school leaders and help create a school environment that promotes social emotional learning (Bowers et al., 2018).

The ASCA school counseling professional standards encourage counselors to self-assess advocacy, collaboration, and leadership (ACL) skills (ASCA, 2019). School counselors are uniquely positioned to be responsive to others' by using their own social emotional experiences and lead with authentic SEL leadership skills (Mills, 2006). Conceptual and practical overlaps occur between the behaviors expected of school counselors and SEL competencies deemed valuable in schools (Lemberger & Hutchison, 2014), with implications on SEL learning for students, social justice advocacy in schools, and school counselor leadership (Bowers et al., 2018).

Advocacy and Ethics

Ethical Standards

In addition to professional standards, school counselors work within a set of ethical standards (ASCA, 2016). These standards are the ethical responsibility of all school counselors and serve as a guide for ethical practices, provide support and direction for evaluation, and outline values and expected behaviors of the school counseling profession. Ethical standards hold responsibility to students, to parents/guardians, school, and self, and guide ethical decision making (ASCA, 2016).

ASCA Ethical Standards for School counselors (2016) specify the principles of ethical behavior necessary to maintain the highest standard of integrity, leadership, and professionalism. The school counseling field understands the facets of cultural identities and how they can have a powerful effect on our attitudes, perspectives, and behavior (ASCA, 2019). School counselors and other stakeholders cannot expect marginalized students to reach their potential if they feel unsafe or if they lack resources for success (Kozol, 2005). Recognizing multicultural and socially just counseling competencies, along with the ASCA Ethical Standards, places school counselors in a position to address oppression impacting students. Education Trust (2009), in its definition of school counseling, also positions school counselors firmly in the role of leader and advocates to support all students in pursuing dreams of high aspiration.

Combining the multicultural and social justice traditions with school counseling leadership is critical because it addresses the difficult realities of what marginalized student groups are experiencing in America's schools (Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018). The Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MSJCC), set the expectations

that school counselors should be adept at addressing issues of power, privilege, and oppression impacting students and understand the intersections as school leaders (Ratts et al., 2016).

Multicultural and Social Justice Competencies

MSJCC, which revised the Multicultural Counseling Competencies (MCC) developed by Sue Arrondo and McDavis in 1992, offers counselors a framework to implement multicultural and social justice competencies into counseling theories, practice, and research (Ratts et al. 2016). Self-awareness helps to explore attitudes beliefs, and worldview. MSJCC competencies guide counselors to understand client worldview and how this may influence counseling relationships. School counselors interested in advocacy may look to the MSJCC to intervene with, and on behalf, of clients at the intra- interpersonal, institutional, community, public policy, or global levels (Ratts et al., 2016). Using the MSJCC as a guide allows counselors to process awareness and knowledge of their own culture and that of their clients (students); this in turn, allows them to be skilled at tailoring counseling interventions, to align with student cultural backgrounds (Sue et al., 1992). The MSJCC call for counselors to explore problems within the context of an oppressive society and intervene both contextually and systemically. Settings clear expectation for school counselors to address issues of power, privilege, and oppression prevalent in K-12 schools (Ratts & Greenleaf, 2016).

Advocacy Competencies

The American Counseling Association (ACA) endorses the Advocacy competencies written by Lewis, Arnold, House & Toporek, 2002, that focus on the role of counselors as advocates working with and /or on behalf of their clients who struggle

with systematic barriers. The competencies describe necessary counseling skills, knowledge, and behaviors that can be implemented to address systematic barriers and highlight the importance of self-awareness (Lewis et al, 2002).

The Advocacy Competencies updated (2010) are organized around two dimensions: extent of client involvement in advocacy and the level of intervention needed (Ratts et al, 2010). The first dimension, extent of client involvement, distinguishes advocacy done in collaboration with or on behalf of a client or group. Done effectively, advocacy is viewed as a partnership and creates greater empowerment, however there are times it is necessary to advocate for/on behalf of client groups (Ratts et al., 2010). The second dimension, level of advocacy intervention, refers to the counselors focus of advocacy and whether that takes place at an individual level, or address issues faced by whole groups of clients or community members (Ratts et al., 2010).

The ACA (2014) shows the intersection of the two dimensions described above, within the six domains of advocacy: empowerment, client advocacy, community collaboration, systems advocacy, collective action, and social political advocacy. The role of a school counselor within the ACA advocacy competencies model show how advocacy interventions are organized by the extent that the client is involved. The competencies give focus on supports needed to facilitate planning and carry out advocacy in a comprehensive school counseling program. School counselors serve as agents for social change by using the ACA's advocacy competencies as a framework for executing social justice advocacy strategies (ACA, 2014; ASCA, 2019; Ratts et al., 2010).

Focused Problem of Practice

The ASCA (2019) developed a new set of professional standards and competencies. The professional standards outline the mindsets and behaviors school counselors need to meet the rigorous demands of the school counseling profession. For practicing school counselors, the standards and competencies can be used to make professional development plans, for administrators they can guide meaningful counselor performance appraisal, and for school counselor education programs they can be used as benchmarks for training. ASCA recommends counselor self-assess their own mindsets and behaviors and set appropriate professional development plans. Self-assessing mindsets and beliefs can be used to find ways to manifest the mindset/beliefs into skills important to school counseling leadership.

School counselors have the ethical responsibility to engage in continual professional development to ensure they are providing excellent care to students and school communities (ASCA, 2019). This includes professional and personal self-reflection that can lead to actionable next steps. Assessing counselor mindsets and skills requires counselors to ask themselves questions such as:

Do my mindsets and skills meet the needs of my students?

How does leadership mindset impact my skills?

What can counselors do to develop and improve leadership mindset and skills?

Professional development opportunities are needed for school counselors to cultivate their advocacy, collaboration and leadership mindset, and skills that will empower them to serve as leaders and change agents for social justice (ASCA, 2019).

Evidence may suggest that school counselors own SEL is being neglected, despite their critical role in school culture and student achievement (Mullen et al., 2018).

Dollarhide (2003) suggested that effective school counseling leaders understand and work within emotional intelligence skills and have shown that leadership effectiveness is tied to emotional well-being. However, professional development opportunities for school counselors focus on how to foster social-emotional well-being among students and teachers to promote academic achievement rather than how to promote their own social-emotional well-being (ASCA, 2019; CASEL, 2022).

In response to school counselor burnout ASCA's (2019) ethical standards note that school counselors are responsible for maintaining health, both physically and emotionally, and caring for their wellness to ensure their effective practice. ASCA's ethical standards also state that counselors have the ethical responsibility to monitor their feelings of burnout and remediate when their feelings potentially influence their ability to provide quality services to their stakeholders. However, ASCA provides no guidance on how school counselors should monitor their feelings to ensure effective practice.

The mindset standards include beliefs that school counselors hold about student achievement and success (ASCA, 2019). Mindsets can be assessed through counselor reflection about how they demonstrate each mindset in the implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program. School counselors using the social/ emotional skill of self-awareness have the power to positively influence student outcomes. Reflection opportunities may lead to better decision making, more self-confidence, and reduce assumptions and biases (CASEL, 2022).

Conclusion

New ASCA (2019) professional standards call for school counselors to self-assess their own mindset and competencies and formulate an appropriate professional development plan. ASCA standards further stipulate the need to demonstrate an understanding of the impact of cultural, social, and environmental influences on student success and opportunities (B-PF 6), demonstrate leadership (B-PF 7), advocacy (B-PF 8), create systematic change (B-PF 9), and support student social emotional well-being through direct and indirect services.

This action research aims to create an opportunity for school counselors to make meaningful reflections on self-perceived advocacy, collaboration, and leadership skills and ASCA (2019) recommended mindsets. School counselors are system change agents when assessment opportunities are focused on continuous improvement that ensure success for all students (ASCA, 2019). An important first step toward systemic change is to investigate the mindset and beliefs school counselors hold about advocacy, collaboration, and leadership.

School counselors participating in this research are taking time for belief reflection that will in turn, support the success of all students (ASCA, 2019). Findings from this action research can be used to direct counselor self-assessment opportunities to make clear and deliberate connections to improved counselor leadership. Counselors can use improved leadership skills to facilitate positive change and serves as leaders in the community to promote and support student success and equality.

Research Questions

- 1.) What are school counselors self- perceived beliefs about their own advocacy, collaboration, and leadership capacity?
- 2.) In what ways do school counselors demonstrate American School Counselor Association (ASCA) recommended advocacy, collaboration, and leadership mindsets?

Chapter Two

Literature Review: Knowledge for Action

Theories related to school counselor practice indicate that mindset may play an important part in professional development planning. Beliefs are personal and they are derived from our life experiences, culture, and background (American School Counseling Association [ASCA], 2019). Beliefs also drive our behavior and are an important ingredient when defining priorities in both personal and professional life. For this reason, examining and reflecting upon beliefs is an imperative part of leadership (Dollarhide, 2008). This review of literature aims to explain why school counselor beliefs matter and how critical the social emotional competency of self-awareness is to professional growth.

Review of School Counseling Research Literature: Theoretical Sources

Self-awareness of beliefs helps illuminate how to take critical steps to determine professional goals that ensure high professional performance and equity for students (ASCA, 2019). Without personal reflection, we act without clear awareness of our own biases and influencers when making decisions or setting goals (Stone & Dahir, 2015). Understanding one's own beliefs also helps to understand personal limitations.

Social emotional learning (SEL) and mindset theories have been widely applied to the educational setting through the lens of student achievement (Durlak et. al., 2011; Renaud-Dube et al., 2015; Yeager et al., 2019; Yeager et al., 2022). The mission of schools has long been to educate students to be knowledgeable, responsible, socially skilled, healthy, caring, and contributing citizens (Greenberg et al., 2003). Decades of research supports schools' efforts to have a broader educational agenda that involves enhancing a student's social-emotional competence (Durlak et al., 2003). One such

social-emotional competence is self-awareness, and this construct helps us to understand mindset (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2021).

There have been more than 40 years of prolific research in mindsets with both students and adults in educational settings. This research includes how a teacher's mindset may impact students (Kim et al., 2020; Rattan et al., 2015). The findings have shown that teachers' personal mindsets can influence student beliefs about their abilities and can encourage them to try harder (Schmidt et al., 2017). School counselor's mindset may be just as critical and influential in facilitating students' beliefs to grow and achieve their highest potential; however, little is known about their beliefs. Through a review of literature, this counselor has found that the SEL behaviors associated with mindset, and the belief that mindset can influence achievement and lead to greater confidence and competence, has yet to be applied to school counselor professional development goals (ASCA, 2019; Molden & Dweck, 2006). To better understand why this lack of information exists, it is important to first understand the role of a school counselor and the professional standards that guide their practice.

History of American School Counseling

School counseling has been a profession for over 100 years (Gysbers, 2010). School counseling as we know it today has shifted and changed throughout the years to mirror the needs of students and schools. Starting in the early 1900s school counseling began as vocational guidance; however, by the end of the 1920s school counseling new emphasis was on personal adjustment and psychological needs of students (Gysbers, 2010). By the 1930s a new structure of pupil personnel services had emerged and with this the position of school counseling was organized with a list of duties under this

service (Gysbers, 2010). Throughout the next few decades school counseling programs improved, and the American School Counselor Association was established in 1952 (ASCA, 2019). By the 1960s and 1970s the school counseling service model was developed and focused on the need for a comprehensive program approach (Gysbers, 2010). Discussions continued in the first decade of the 21st century about the focus of the school counseling program and the importance of social and emotional development of students (Gysbers, 2010). The publication of the first ASCA National Model in 2003 was adopted by many states and school districts (ASCA, 2019). This model was republished in 2005, 2013, and most recently the fourth edition in 2019 (ASCA, 2019).

Schoolwide intervention practices have contributed to school counselor participation in a variety of positive outcome data-informed programs such as participating in multi-tiered system of support (MTSS), response to interventions (RTI), and positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS), all of which influence how schools use and disaggregate data to promote positive outcomes (Goodman-Scott et al., 2015; Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2016).

Counselors must also use data to understand and share school counselor impact (ASCA, 2019; Dahir et al., 2009; Dahir & Stone, 2003), identify and remove systemic barriers (Bemak & Chung, 2005; Ratts et al., 2011), and address the needs of all students through the evaluation of programing interventions (ASCA, 2019; Dimmitt et al., 2007). Data collection and disaggregation is the foundation of all previously listed topics; it is part of school reform and the foundation of transformative school counseling (Dimmitt et al., 2007, Young & Kaffenberger, 2011). School counselors must strive to make

continual changes to programing and use data to drive and adjust what they do within schools (Lambie & Williamson, 2004).

The ASCA national model reflects a comprehensive approach to the design, implementation, and assessment of a school counseling programs (ASCA, 2019). Student success is a broad term that educational institutions use to evaluate student outcomes, especially academic achievement (ASCA, 2019). In 2007 the Association for Curriculum Development and Supervision (ASCD) outlined a whole child approach to education as its core mission. The whole student approach, which draws form Maslow's hierarchy of needs, transitioned schools away from a narrower academic achievement framework, to one that incorporates social and emotional development in students (ASCD, 2007). School counselors working within this environment are involved both with academic achievement and the development of social/emotional skills and attitudes needed to be successful (ASCD, 2020; Maslow, 1943).

The ASCA (2019) National Model requires school counselors to think in leadership paradigms. It calls for school counseling programs to be comprehensive in scope, results-oriented in design and developmental in sequence (ASCA, 2019). The framework of the ASCA (2019) National Model consists of four components: define, manage, deliver, and assess. Counselors define their program using three sets of standards as a guide: students standards, ethical standards, and professional standards (ASCA, 2019).

ASCA (2019) encourages school counselors to manage their programs by setting a clear program focus. Program focus is based on counselor beliefs, vision, and mission

and are used to guide the implementation of a results-focused program (ASCA, 2019). Delivery is defined as how the counselor implements the school counseling program.

The final component to the national model asks counselors to regularly assess their program to determine effectiveness and inform improvement (ASCA, 2019). School counselors demonstrate leadership skills when designing, implementing, and assessing their school counseling program. The newest ASCA model encourages counselors to move away from simply running a comprehensive school counseling program to showing leadership by enacting a vision and motivating others to work together to achieve that vision (ASCA, 2019; Young et al., 2018).

ASCA (2019) advocates that school counselors use data to evaluate and amend school counseling programs. It recommends that school counselors include assessment, appraisal, and evaluation of delivery to manage student outcomes (ASCA, 2019). Specifically, ASCA (2019) standards call for school counselors to “identify gaps in achievement, attendance, discipline, opportunity and resources” (p. 7), “develop annual student outcome goals based on student data” (p. 7), and “develop and implement action plans aligned with program goals and student data” (p. 7).

This drive toward increasing counselor accountability is also clear through school policy change like the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002), which called upon school personnel to use scientifically based research to inform decision-making around intervention planning and to demonstrate how school initiatives are linked to academic outcomes. The reauthorization of NCLB, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015) further stipulated that schools need to provide evidence-based interventions, programs, and support services for all students to create equitable educational opportunities (ASCA,

2019; Dahir & Stone, 2009). Since ESSA was re-authorized the education community began seeing the need for not only social emotional learning (SEL) opportunities, but also interventions targeted to closing SEL competency gaps (CASEL, 2022).

Despite the benefit of a comprehensive counseling program, and the clear connections between school counselors, the ASCA national model, and the social emotional needs of students, counselors often still struggle to implement programs (Burkard et al., 2012; Fye et. al., 2017; Studer et al., 2011). This is perhaps because counselors are too often asked to support ancillary duties and their curriculum is often considered secondary to the academic content valued in contemporary schools (Dahir & Stone, 2009; Dollarhide & Lemberger-Truelove, 2019).

Theoretical Analysis

Counseling Theory. Numerous formal school counseling theories exist, and each can be used to refine the school counselor's beliefs and lead to improved professional practices and outcomes (Dollarhide & Lemberger-Truelove, 2019). School counseling theories should link together essential skills for both student and school functioning, and link behaviors that best support optimal functioning for the total school environment.

Professional school counselors apply a variety of clinical approaches in their work, and there are hundreds of clinical counseling approaches to choose from. The 2019 edition of *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Theory in Counseling and Psychotherapy* lists over 300 different approaches to counseling practice. It is first necessary to understand that no one counseling approach is better than the rest. This is because counseling approaches are based upon theories about human function and change as opposed to hard evidence (Neukrug, 2015).

Determining whether one counseling approach works better than another is difficult because there are so many variables to consider in the counseling process (Cunningham, 1973; Lemberger-Truelove et al. 2020). For example, in comparing the effectiveness of two counselors applying the same theoretical model, there can be major differences in the counseling outcome due to differences in the clients' histories and situations, differences in the counselors' communication styles, and even differences in client and counselor mood on the day of the comparison (Lemberger-Truelove et al., 2020). Such differences are hard to control for experimentally, thus making it almost impossible to prove that one approach to counseling is the absolute best way.

School counselors may consider a common factors theory of counseling. This theory has a long history in the field of psychotherapy (Lemberger, 2018). It proposes that different approaches and evidence-based practices share common factors that account for the effectiveness of a treatment (Wampold, 2015). The contextual model of this theory suggests that psychotherapy produces benefits when a genuine relationship between therapist and patient (student) exists, when the expectations are cogent, and patient (student) and therapist work together to elicits healthy change (Wampold, 2015). School counselors use theoretically informed practices to bond with students and create important counseling alliances to develop agreements about the goals of counseling.

All the many theoretical models of counseling fall into one or more of six major theoretical categories: humanistic, cognitive, behavioral, psychoanalytic, constructionist and systemic (Neukrug, 2015).

Humanistic. Humanistic counseling theories hold that people have within themselves all the resources they need to live healthy and functional lives, and that

problems occur because of restricted or unavailable problem-solving resources (Neukrug, 2015). Humanistic counselors see their role not as one of directing clients in how to address their problems but, rather, as one of helping clients to discover and access within themselves the restricted resources they need to solve problems on their own (Neukrug, 2015). Some currently preferred humanistic counseling therapies include person-centered, existential, emotion-focused, and positive psychology (Neukrug, 2015).

Cognitive. Cognitive counseling theories hold that people experience psychological and emotional difficulties when their thinking is out of sync with reality (Neukrug, 2015). When this distorted or faulty thinking is applied to problem-solving, the result understandably leads to faulty solutions. Cognitive counselors work to challenge their clients' faulty thinking patterns, so clients can derive solutions that accurately address the problems they are experiencing. Currently preferred cognitive-theory-based therapies include cognitive behavior therapy, reality therapy, motivational interviewing, and acceptance and commitment therapy (Neukrug, 2015).

Behavioral. Behavioral counseling theories hold that people engage in problematic thinking and behavior when their environment supports it. When an environment reinforces or encourages these problems, they will continue to occur (Neukrug, 2015). Behavioral counselors work to help clients identify the reinforcements that are supporting problematic patterns of thinking and acting and replace them with alternative reinforcements for more desirable patterns. Currently preferred therapies based in behavior theory include behavior therapy and dialectical and behavior therapy (Neukrug, 2015).

Psychoanalytic. Psychoanalytic counseling theories are based on the idea that psychological problems result from the present-day influence of unconscious psychological drives or motivations stemming from past relationships and experiences (Neukrug, 2015). Dysfunctional thought and behavior patterns from the past have become unconscious working models that guide clients toward continued dysfunctional thought and behavior in their present lives (Neukrug, 2015). Psychoanalytic counselors strive to help their clients become aware of these unconscious working models so that their negative influence can be understood and addressed. Currently preferred therapies grounded in psychoanalytic theory include psychoanalysis, attachment therapy, object relations therapy, and Adlerian therapy (Neukrug, 2015).

Formal Counseling Theories that Inform School Counselors

School complexities challenge school counselors to commit to theoretically informed behaviors in a consistent manner within the school culture (Lemberger-Truelove et al., 2020). Examples of theories that school counselors often adopt include person-centered, solution-focused, or cognitive behavioral (Cook et al., 2010). Many of these counseling theories are designed for settings outside of the school environment and have been refashioned to the work of school counselors (Cook et al., 2010).

Person-Centered. Carl Rogers (1942) developed person-centered counseling. This type of counseling works well within a school environment because it can be used to guide students in the process of self-actualization. Person-centered counseling is built upon the fundamental ideology that human beings have an innate desire and ability to be the best they can be and live happy, fulfilling lives (Rogers, 1942), an ideology that fits well within school settings and the beliefs schools hold about students' potential. This

type of counseling focuses on one's ability to be self-aware, set personal goals, and balance freedom with responsibility (Rogers, 1942).

Results or Solution-Focused. Results or solution-focused counseling is a future-oriented, goal-directed approach to solving human problems (De Shaver, 1985). This is a strength-based approach that focuses on skills, resources and coping abilities that would help in reaching future goals. This approach is less interested in the unique past experiences of individual students and can be applied to entire student body. For this reason, solution focused counseling is a common counseling theory used in a comprehensive school counseling program, as it focuses on the present to achieve future goals (Cook et al., 2010)

Cognitive Behavioral. Another counseling theory, cognitive behavioral, is used in school counseling, especially in recent years. Beck (1979) was the founding father of the cognitive behavior therapy movement. His approach to psychotherapy at that time was radical and groundbreaking; however, today this counseling theory is often applied not only to clinical settings, but in educational settings as well (Beck, 1979). This theory suggests that our thoughts, emotions, body sensations, and behaviors are all connected, and what we think and do impacts how we feel (Beck, 1979). School counselors often apply the cognitive behavioral theory when working with students to encourage self-compassion to address the prevalence of depressive and anxiety symptoms in children and adolescence in schools today (Neukrug, 2015).

School counseling theory should apply to each of the direct services expected of the profession both with direct and indirect student services (Lemberger-Truelove, 2018). Counseling theories that focus on addressing clinical depression or anxiety certainly have

a place in school counseling but school counseling theories that are designed to help students in a preventative and structural way can maximize the school counselors' impact within the school environment (Lemberger-Truelove, 2020).

Evidence-based school counseling requires that practitioners utilize formal counseling theory (Lemberger-Truelove et al., 2020). This is consistent with a results-focused approach to school counseling and the recommendations of the ASCA (2019) National Model, and the evidence-based school counseling movement (Zyromski & Dimmit, 2019). For school counselors this means a commitment to practices that are predictably successful and that can result in reliable evidence.

Schools are complex environments with a variety of student experiences (Lemberger-Truelove et al., 2020). For school counselors these complexities influence the way they pursue various practices that are intended to result in desirable student outcomes (Lemberger-Truelove et al., 2020). As a result, to work in a way that is consistent with the prevailing school culture, school counselors might feel compelled to abandon formal counseling theories all together (Lemberger-Truelove, 2020). For this reason, school counselors may lean towards counseling theories that have a broader impact based on assumptions about optimal functioning and psychologic or social pathology (Cook et al., 2010).

As Duad (2016) stated, "Good understanding of school ethos and systems is essential for all counselors. In this vein, it is asserted that examination of organizational values, beliefs, and training may inform capacity building for counselors" (p. 27). The inclusion of relevant theory strengthens the professional identity of school counselors,

and it may also improve the quality of general evidence-based practice and scholarship (Lemberger-Truelove et al., 2020).

Lemberger-Truelove et al. (2020) proposed that each of the following constituents are necessary in the inclusion of theory for evidence-based school counseling practice: qualities of student and school environments, empirical and professional endorsement, school counseling customs, and methodological relevance. Once a counselor has identified theories that are appropriate to the qualities of student and school environments, they should heed outcomes sanctioned by previous research (Lemberger-Truelove et al., 2020).

However, the intricacies of public education and students therein often make it difficult for school counselors to commit to theoretically informed counseling behavior in a consistent manner (Lemberger -Truelove et al., 2020). The ASCA (2019) national model, and the evidence-based school counseling movement adhere to practices that are predictably successful and that can result in reliable evidence (Zyromski & Dimmitt, 2019).

This research will draw inspiration from previously generated knowledge in the field of SEL (CASEL, 2022). This will strengthen the research design and interpretation and make relevant findings applicable to previous SEL scholarship (Bowers & Lemberger, 2018). Conceptual and practice continuities exist between the behaviors expected of school counselors and SEL activities deemed valuable in schools (Lemberger & Hutchinson, 2014). Table 2.1 shows the SEL competency continuities between SEL behaviors of students and counselors. It also shows the corresponding counselor mindset.

Table 2.1*SEL Competencies and Counselor Mindsets and Behaviors*

SEL Competencies	Definition	Counselor Mindsets	SEL Behaviors	Counselor Behaviors
Self-awareness	The abilities to understand one's emotion, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across context	M 8. School Counselors' background, experiences, knowledge, attitudes, skills, interests, values, and beliefs determine their sense of identity and influence student relationships	Examining prejudices and biases, integrating personal and social identities, and developing a sense of purpose.	B-FS 2. Create school counseling program beliefs, vision and mission statements aligned with school and district.
Self-management	The abilities to manage one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations and to achieve goals and aspirations.	M 7. Comprehensive school counseling programs promote and enhance student outcomes.	Showing courage to take initiatives and demonstrating personal and collective agency.	B-PS 2. Design implement and evaluate a comprehensive school counseling program
Social awareness	The abilities to understand the perspectives of others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and contexts	M 2. Every Student should have access to and opportunity for a high-quality education.	Perspective taking, identifying diverse social norms including unjust ones	B-PS 1. Demonstrate understanding of educational systems, law, policies, research, and trends in education.
Relationship skills	The abilities to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate setting with diverse individuals and groups	M 5. Effective school counseling is a collaborative process involving school counselors, students, families, teachers, administrators, community leaders and other stakeholders.	Showing leadership in groups, standing up for the rights of others, demonstrating cultural competency and developing positive relationships.	B-SS 6. Collaborate with families, teacher, administrators and education stakeholders for student achievement and success
Responsible decision making	The abilities to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations.	M 6. School counselors are leader in the school, district, and nation	The capacities to consider ethical standards and safety concerns and evaluate the impact of various actions for personal, social, and collective well-being.	B-SS 7. Demonstrate leadership in a comprehensive school counseling program.

Much of contemporary school counseling research is either atheoretical or theoretically ambiguous (Davies et al., 2010). Choosing the appropriate theory can help dictate the constructs measured and the types of outcomes expected related to the intervening practices. Using a social-emotional leadership framework for school counselors is consistent with SEL instructional practices and focuses on the counselor's ability to be socially and emotionally adroit and responsive (Bowers et al., 2018).

School counselors should choose theories designed specifically for school counseling practice (Lemberger- Truelove et al., 2020). School counseling theories are more likely to work in a school because they fit the characteristics of student and school, and the school counselor is more likely to commit to consistently effective practice behaviors (Lemberger-Truelove et al., 2020). School counselors that use theories designed towards change affecting the entire system commit to systemic change, and focus on not only the individual student, but the dynamic of the individual students within a school environment (ASCA, 2019).

School Counseling Leadership Theory

Schools today are writing vision, mission, and goals that align with student social-emotional competencies (Mullen et al., 2018). School counselors who demonstrate insights through social-emotional leadership can impact the total school environment by creating a culture of solidarity and encouragement (Bowers et al., 2018). Schools where counselors build an environment that promotes systemic change through leadership will apply a model of leadership that can promote positive change (ASCA, 2019).

Counselors who utilize leadership models that are congruent with students SEL goals move beyond counseling technique, into committing to a disposition that can create

an ethos that affects each participant in the total school environment (Bowers et al., 2018). In this way counselors engage in a thoughtful, intentional approach around selection of strategies, activities, and interventions creating a comprehensive school counseling program (ASCA, 2019).

Having a vision is a characteristic of effective leadership (Dollarhide, 2003). A school counselor demonstrates this characteristic by developing individual vision and mission statements that align with their schools' (ASCA, 2019). Without school counselor leadership the counseling program may be disconnected with the overall mission and vision of the school (ASCA, 2019).

School counselors can adopt a leadership posture that is consistent with the nature of the profession and the social emotional needs of the students (Bowers et al., 2018). For school counseling programs to be delivered effectively, the school counseling program must be efficiently and effectively managed (ASCA, 2019). School counselors use leadership skills to design, implement and assess a school counseling program. Social emotional insights help organize and allocate resources to accomplish personal and collective goals (ASCA, 2019; CASEL, 2022).

Leadership models that challenge the positionality of the leader and the followers, such as transformative leadership, are especially interesting to those counselors who seek social justice (Sheilds, 2013). Counselors who use transformative leadership seek systematic change for students for life both inside and outside the organization of education. This leadership model focuses primarily on what can be done within educational institutions while also considering the conditions and realities of students that impinge on students' abilities to function (Shields, 2011).

Another leadership model that is appealing for school counselors interested in social justice is servant leadership (Greenleaf, 2012; Newman et al., 2017), in which the leader assumes a subordinate position to serve the needs of others, brings his or her best authentic self to the leadership, and ensures that outcomes are ethical, thoughtful, and moral (Shields, 2016). This leadership model provides counselors with the mindsets and tools needed to address the holistic and systemic change needed in schools (ASCA, 2019).

Young and Bryan (2015) looked at school counselor leadership practices in the areas of social justice advocacy, resourceful problem solving, interpersonal influence, systemic collaboration, and professional efficacy. They wanted to explore what leadership looks like from a school counselors' perspective in each of these five dimensions. Their findings show a vast difference between leading and managing a school counseling program. The difference is "clearly, knowing what to do is within a school counselor's scope and practice, but responding to needs and closing gaps require leadership action" (Young & Bryan, 2015, p. 3). The five-dimensional framework also validates leadership literature that notes the importance of skills such as awareness, vision, imagination, responsibility, and action (Dollarhide, 2003).

Counselor Mindset and Leadership. ASCA (2019) endorsed a series of theory-informed mindsets and behaviors that pertain to the types of outcomes expected of students exposed to school counseling services. Each of the mindset and behaviors are conceptual themes derived from findings found in large reviews of empirical literature (Bowers et al., 2018; Durlak et al., 2011; Farrington et al., 2012).

Mindset standards include the psychosocial attitudes and beliefs that counselors have about themselves and in relation to the work they do for students (ASCA, 2019). Counselors play an essential role in instructional leadership with schools' SEL management and curriculum (Lashley & Stickl, 2016). School counselor must demonstrate the SEL skill of self-awareness to self-assess mindset and apply this to improved counselor behavior, and this includes leadership behaviors (ASCA, 2019).

Self-efficacy is positively associated with both mindset and leadership (Grant & Dweck, 2003; Dollarhide, 2003). Self-efficacy was popularized through the works of Bandura (1986), who defined self-efficacy as "the beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (Bandura, 1997, p. 3).

Bodenhorn et al. (2010) found that school counselors with higher self-efficacy reported a higher awareness of achievement gap data. Similarly, Mullen and Lambie (2016) identified that school counselors' level of self-efficacy was positively related to the rate for which they executed school counseling services. Both studies show counselor self-efficacy levels may indicate an increase in school counselor skills.

Furthermore, Mullen et al. (2016) found that counselor general self-efficacy was associated with counselor self-efficacy around handling legal and ethical issues in schools. They also noted school counselor levels of leadership self-efficacy was closely related to related leadership behaviors (Bandura, 1997), meaning if a person has a higher degree of perceived leadership efficacy, they are more likely to engage in leadership practices.

Emotional Intelligence and Leadership. Leadership is a vital skill set for school counselors (ASCA, 2019). ASCA (2019) aligns a counselor's responsibility to lead and create systemic change to enhance equity for students. School counselors use their leadership skills to advocate with and on behalf of students and lead the management of their counseling program (ASCA, 2019). Many leadership constructs show the importance of emotional intelligence (EI). Salovey and Mayer (1990) described EI as the "ability to monitor one's own and other's feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions" (p. 189). The relationship between EI and advanced social-emotional functioning can be linked to numerous studies looking at leadership attributes such as self-leadership (Houghton et al., 2012) team performance (Jordan & Troth, 2011), and job performance (Joseph et al., 2015).

Golman et al. (2013) described leadership as a process that taps into emotional aspects of groups and stated that EI is a vital set of abilities that leads to more effective leadership. Golman (2013) added that "leaders who utilize EI drive the emotions of those they lead in the right direction" (p. 6). Assessing, collecting, and analyzing the emotional aspects of a group requires a diligent focus on thoughts, ideas, and beliefs of others that can be used to inform better understanding of data and better leadership decisions (ASCA, 2019).

EI can be positively linked to servant leadership ideology, where a leader's primary task is to serve and support others (Barbuto et al., 2014). It can also be linked to transformational leadership, which is a focus on developing skills and inspiring motivation in others through feedback and positive outlook (Bass, 1990). Both leadership

theories are often included in school counseling literature around topics such as serving as accountability leaders (Sink, 2009) and advocating with and on behalf of students (Bemak & Chung, 2005).

Results from a 2018 study show that school counselors have an elevated level of EI compared to a normative group sample (Mullen et al., 2018). These findings are consistent with an earlier Gutierrez et al. (2016) study that found the counselor trainees' EI was positively related to their empathy, a skill taught in counselor preparation.

The Mullen et al. (2018) study determined that school counselors who report elevated levels of self-awareness have better levels of success with the management of others. Furthermore, counselors with greater ability to read and manage emotions in others also incorporate strategies of self-management and self-motivation (Mullen et al., 2018).

It is clear the EI and leadership are linked and counselors paying close attention to their own social-emotional growth and development is important. Therefore, practicing school counselors can engage in strategies to develop a greater awareness of self in relationship to leading others and seek ways to develop their EI as it relates to leadership (Mullen, 2018).

Mindset Theory

Mindset Theory can be attributed to the psychologist Carol Dweck. Dweck and her proponents believe that an individual with growth mindset believes that their characteristics and abilities can be changed with effort, and over time, these people are more likely to adopt learning goals, choose challenging tasks and apply adaptive strategies to improve their abilities (as cited in De Castella et al., 2013). Those with a

fixed mindset, however, are more likely to adopt performance goals and prioritize positive assessments over learning (De Castella et al., 2013).

The differences in behavior for growth or fixed mindset can have a considerable impact on individuals both individually and within a system (De Castella et al., 2013). School counselors that understand the importance of mindset may set mindset goals that directly impact the decision-making process for themselves and the organization for which they work (ASCA, 2019).

In a review on growth mindset for human resource development Han and Stieha (2020) identified that growth mindset is a crucial factor in enhancing workplace engagement, employee productivity, mentoring, leadership, openness to feedback and creativity within an organization. For schools, Dweck's research has suggested that students with growth mindset are more likely to have higher grades, which has led to the implementation of mindset trainings and curriculum (ASCA, 2019; Dweck, 2003).

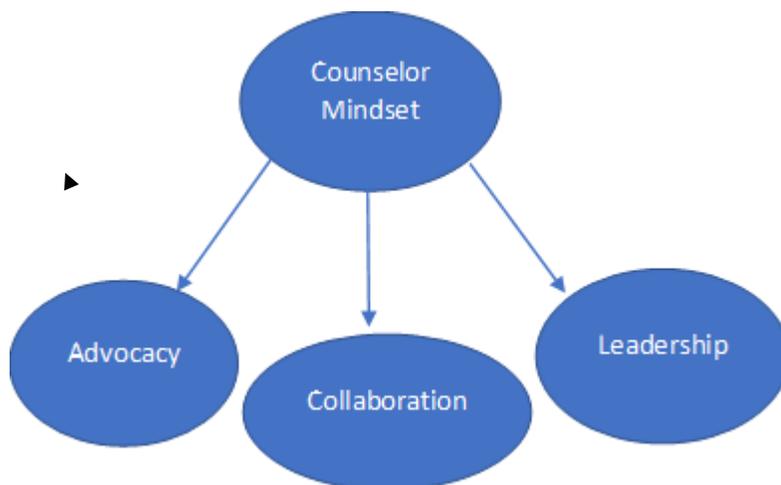
Literature on how mindsets influence behavior and the importance of noncognitive factors in academic performance, such as social emotional competency skills, has gained increasing attention from both researchers and practitioners in recent years (ASCA, 2019; Dweck, 2012, Yeager et al., 2019). However, the lack of conceptual clarity among the many noncognitive factors that affect student performance has made the research evidence lag behind the elevated level of interest (Farrington et al., 2012).

Noncognitive skills have been broadly defined as representing the patterns of thought, feelings, and behavior (Borghans et al., 2008) of individuals that may continue to develop throughout their lives (Bloom, 1956). This researcher has included a framework for considering the role that noncognitive patterns of thoughts, beliefs, and

mindsets develop school counselor advocacy, collaboration, and leadership skills (Borghans et al., 2014).

Figure 2.1

Counselor Mindset Conceptual Framework



Academic Mindsets

Academic mindsets are beliefs, attitudes, or ways of perceiving oneself in relation to leaning intellectual work that supports academic performance (Farrington et al., 2012). The theoretical and empirical research on academic mindset has looked at the psychological factors in student performance. The research has involved correlational studies where researchers ask student questions that measure student academic beliefs and attitudes and analyze the findings compared to academic performance scores on data points like standardized tests and GPA (Farrington et al., 2012).

The extensive body of research on mindsets suggests that psycho-social approach could have major implications for reform efforts aimed at closing racial/ethnic gaps in student performance and educational attainment (Farrington et al., 2012). Psycho-social research “shows it can be as important to change people’s interpretation of the social

world and their place in it as it is to change the objective environment” (Wilson, 2006, p. 1252). ASCA (2019) expressed the need for school counselors to advocate for equity, inclusion, and social justice. The national school counseling model acknowledges a need for school counselors to move beyond academic skills and competencies related to individual success; and advocate for systemic change (Shields et al., 2017). Even with the acknowledgement and call to action, many aspects of school counseling leadership remain uncharted (Young et al., 2018).

Theoretical Framework

Social Emotional Learning Theory

The SEL approach to education integrates competence-promotion in youth development (CASEL, 2022). SEL is defined as the process of acquiring core competencies to recognize and manage emotions, set, and achieve positive goals, appreciate the perspectives of others, establish, and maintain positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and manage interpersonal situations constructively (CASEL, 2022).

The noncognitive skills considered fundamental to successful academic and social outcomes include (a) cognitive and metacognitive skills such as goal setting, progress monitoring, and memory skills; (b) social skills such as interpersonal skills, social problem-solving, listening, and teamwork skills; and (c) self-management skills such as managing attention, motivation, and anger (Durlak et al., 2011; Jennings et al., 2009).

SEL theory is not new; in ancient Greece Plato recognized the importance of teaching children a “holistic curriculum” (p. 557c) with a balance of academic growth with development in character and moral judgment (*The Republic*, trans 1987). However,

despite an extensive research agenda supporting Durlak et al.'s (2017) claims that students' "social-emotional competencies relate to good adjustment outcomes" (p. 11) and how SEL interventions positively influence student behavior, few studies target how to cultivate SEL for the adults who impact students' lives daily (Gimbert et al., 2021). Further, although CASEL (2022) offers a framework to develop healthy and productive students no insight is given to advance SEL knowledge and behavioral skills in educators.

ASCA (2019) developed the student learning standards of Mindset & Behaviors that identify and prioritize the specific attitudes, knowledge and skills students should be able to demonstrate to be successful in school and in life beyond. The standards are based on research about college and career readiness. They are based on the framework of noncognitive factors presented in the critical literature review by Farrington et al. (2012). This report summarized five categories of noncognitive factors related to academic performance: academic behaviors, academic perseverance, academic mindset, leaning strategies, and social skills (Farrington et al., 2012). The report suggests a framework for thinking about how these factors intersect to affect academic performance and whether there is substantial evidence that noncognitive factors matter for student long-term success (Farrington et al., 2012). Despite the positive effect that integrating SEL has had on academic achievement and the fact that school counselors are in a unique position to contribute to the academic and SEL interventions, they are often underutilized in this role (Villares & Dimmitt, 2017).

School counselors using social emotional leadership insights may choose to focus on the SEL competencies of relationship skills and self-awareness. These SEL skills are strongly associated with the concepts of growth mindset (Norrish et al., 2013), and have

the potential to ground school counselors' disposition and practice as a school leader (Bowers et al., 2018).

CASEL (2022) defined relationship skills as the abilities to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups. Relationship skills are associated with the academic mindset of belonging. Students who report a strong sense of belonging in a school or classroom have higher levels of academic achievement (Mahoney et al., 2019). Osterman (2004) stated that "students who experience belongingness have more positive attitudes toward school, classwork, teachers, and their peers and invest more of themselves in the learning process" (p. 343). When students feel a sense of belonging in a classroom community, believe that their efforts will increase their ability, and believe that success is possible and within their control, they are more likely to persist at academic tasks (Osterman, 2004). Conversely, when students feel as though they do not belong, or are not smart enough, they are much more likely to give up and withdraw from academic work (Farrington et al., 2012).

Relationship skills offer educators the tools they need to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships (Siffredi et al., 2021). Competence in this skill involves communicating clearly, listening actively, collaborating, negotiating conflict constructively, and seeking help when needed (Durlak et al., 2017). A school counselor that shows empathy through relationship skills may foster a caring climate where social and emotional needs are prioritized (Gimbert et al., 2021).

A Ryu et al. (2020) study examined the critical role of school leaders in creating and maintaining a culture of care in their school environments. In this study the

researchers used semi-structured interviews with educators and school leaders and found that intent alone is not enough to maintain caring school environment. This study shows that the system school leaders implement to promote a caring culture and the behaviors they show are most important (Ryu et al., 2020).

When students have high-quality relationships with educators in safe learning spaces, they have better social adjustment and higher academic performance (Jones et al., 2013). Educators with stronger SEL competencies have more positive relationships with students, manage their classrooms more effectively, and implement SEL programs with more fidelity (Jones et al., 2013). These findings have yet to be applied to school counselor relationships with students, and the social emotional skills they use to support a healthy climate and positive student outcomes (Jones et al., 2013).

Self-awareness is the ability for a person to understand their own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across context (CASEL, 2022). Students who believe they can increase their academic abilities by their own efforts are more likely to work toward building competence (Cury et al., 2006). In this way self-awareness is closely related to a person's ability to experience self-efficacy and have a growth mindset (ASCA, 2019). "I can succeed at this" is a mindset based on the theory that individuals tend to "engage in activities that they feel confident in their ability to complete and avoid those in which they lack such confidence" (Bandura, 1986, p. 98).

People's efficacy beliefs are the perception that they will be able to do something successfully. Efficacy beliefs mediate the effect of skills and the self-beliefs of students' effort, persistence, and perseverance (Bandura, 1986; Bandura & Schunk, 1981). Students who have self-awareness skills have higher levels of growth mindset, showing

that a person believing they can be successful is a prerequisite to putting forth sustained effort.

Self-reflection is a process important to school counselors looking to assess programs and develop professional development plans (ASCA, 2019). In their study of how school leaders can model SEL knowledge and skills, Patti et al. (2012) investigated the relationship between principals' personal reflection on what matters most to them both individually and as a collective school environment. The study found that leaders that take time to reflect on their daily decisions connect their emotions to a personal vision and engage with others to develop collective organizational vision. Taking deliberate actions to reflect made the leaders able to recognize individual values and built higher levels of self-efficacy (Patti, 2012). In the Patti et al. study higher levels of self-efficacy are linked to effective leadership and the social emotional competency of self-awareness.

Self-awareness helps to expose and eliminate barriers for students by exposing implicit bias, which is described as underlying attitudes, involuntary actions, reactions, thoughts, and feelings toward others based on an individuals' experience or understanding (Devine et al., 2012). Implicit bias is strongly associated with a lack of self-awareness, and the process that exposes bias requires individuals to use reflective thinking to develop cultural consciousness. School counselors that reflect on experiences to uncover, process, and confront their bias are in this way likely to lean on SEL competencies of self and social awareness (ASCA, 2019).

In counselor education programs, counseling students are trained to be reflective learners beginning with their own self-awareness (Pellitteri & Pellitteri, 2006). Through

self-awareness counselors best understand themselves and their role in effective school counseling relationships (Sweitzer & King, 1999). Specifically, during training counselors are asked to consider how their biases impact the counseling relationship and their professional identity as an advocate and ally (Sweitzer & King, 1999). Despite self-awareness being a valued competency during counseling training programs, few studies offer insight about how to grow and sustain this competency for practitioner beyond initial school counseling preparation programs (Siffredi et al., 2021).

Review of the Educational Research Literature: Empirical Sources

Social Emotional Learning Interventions Delivered by School Counselors

A large body of research supports the use of SEL programs and the positive impact they have on K-12 students' academic achievement (CASEL, 2022; Durlak et al., 2017; Winne & Nesbit, 2010). Durlak et al. (2011) conducted a meta-analysis review of SEL interventions and found that students with additional SEL supports showed an overlap of skills and strategies used to influence their behaviors, thoughts and feelings also showed an increase in student achievement (Durlak et al., 2011).

Mahoney et al. (2019) completed a comprehensive examination of SEL outcome research. SEL outcomes are based on the assumptions that American educators believe they must provide instruction in more than just academic content and skills. In fact, SEL skills are critical to students' long-term success (Bridgeland et al., 2013; DePaoli et al., 2017; Mahoney et al., 2019; Weissberg et al., 2015). For this reason, many schools in the United States have implemented SEL programs and have issued standards for the development of specific SEL skills (Weissenberg & Cascarino, 2013; Wigelsworth, 2021).

School counselors often look toward empirical intervention studies that illustrate the helpful influence of SEL interventions on students and schools delivered by trained school counselors (Bowers et al., 2015; Lemberger et al., 2018; Lemberger & Clemens, 2012; Lemberger et al., 2015). Several empirical intervention studies show the helpful influence of SEL interventions on student and schools delivered by trained school counselors (Bowers et al., 2015; Lemberger et al., 2018; Lemberger & Clemens, 2012; Lemberger et al., 2015). These studies show the important impact school counselors have on the development of student SEL skills

One such evidence-based school counseling program is the Student Success Skills program. This program is an evidence-based, counselor-led intervention founded on a variety of humanistic principles (Villares et al., 2011). Five studies and a meta-analysis provide evidence the Student Success Skills program results in substantial student gains. School counselors can use this evidence-based program to improve students' achievement in the academic areas of math and reading (Villares et al., 2011).

Overall, however, few evidence-based studies have been completed. Griffith et al. (2020) completed a content analysis that spanned over a 10-year period of school counseling interventions research. This study looked at both the ASCA and the American Counseling Association (ACA) affiliated journals to investigate and summarize the scope of research published about school counseling interventions (Griffith et al., 2020).

Griffith et al. (2020) noted a lack of rigorous intervention research published in ACA journals and determined a need for a content analysis. There were 6,656 articles published between 2006 and 2016 in the 21 ASCA-and ACA- affiliated journals. The criteria for being included in this study were that a) the article had to have been published

in one of the of the 21 identified journals, b) the article had to have a publishing date between January 2006 and September 2016, c) the purpose of the article had to be to share the findings from an intervention study (Griffith et al., 2020.) Of these articles 54 (.08%) met the criteria for inclusion in the study. The result of this 10-year investigation provided an important window into the current state of intervention research in the field of school counseling.

The Griffith et al. (2020) findings suggest that not only were few intervention research studies published, but those published had significant issues related to rigor. Past studies have highlighted this concern about both the quality and rigor of published school counseling research. McGanon et al. (2004) found that an elevated level of rigor was lacking in outcome research published in 1984-2004, and the authors highlighted the scarce number of quality studies.

School counselors that look to draw from empirical outcome data as a part of the evidence-based decision-making process may see this lack of published studies as disheartening. A connection might be made to counselor levels of self-efficacy and the belief in the likelihood of a successful intervention.

Griffith et al. (2020) looked at intervention research specifically and did not focus on program evaluation, and research designed the content analysis to only include the articles that would be considered under the established criteria to be rigorous intervention-based research. A substantial number (34%) of the qualifying intervention research was completed by practicing school counselors, emphasizing the fact that practitioners in the field of school counseling see a need for more intervention-based research studies (Griffith et al., 2020).

School counselors are asked to use qualifying intervention research when working towards advocacy of systemic change by using interventions that promote positive student outcomes for all students and emphasize equity, access, and success for all students (ASCA, 2019). Without outcome studies that show successful interventions, it is difficult for counselors to determine what SEL interventions work best within a given population (Griffith, 2020).

SEL competency is important for school counselors when increasing student achievement outcomes, and for this to happen, school counselors need to be fully informed SEL educators (Siffredi et al., 2020). Self-reflection is an important competency of being a fully informed SEL educator. For reflection to happen, school counselors need a safe space to reflect, dialogue, and make connections to their experience to see practical relevance (Siffredi, et al. 2020). Offering counselors, a dedicated time for reflection allows them to assess their current levels of SEL, create a personalized plan, and develop professional goals.

ASCA (2019) stated that “school counselors need to engage in open, honest dialogue with other stakeholders to reach understanding of each other’s beliefs” (p. 67). According to Schon (2017), professionals grow in their craft when they can view things critically and question the outcomes of their actions. Opportunities for open dialogue with stakeholders requires counselor use of self-reflection (ASCA, 2019). For counselors, self-reflection provides an opportunity to process interactions with students, colleagues, and parents. Additionally, being reflective allows counselors to think about the impact of their practices on students and the adjustments needed (ASCA, 2019).

With everything that is known about the importance of SEL in K-12 schools (Mahoney et al., 2019), and the importance of evidence-based practices (Dimmit et al., 2007), further justification rests on examining how school counselors can advance their own social and emotional competence, especially when they are often charged with fostering SEL learning in students. Counselors are asked to operationalize SEL standards and use them as a foundation for classroom lessons, small groups, and addressing individual student needs (ASCA, 2019).

Growth Mindset Improves Achievement

School counselors teach the ASCA student standards to promote academic achievement, college and career readiness, and social/emotional growth for all students. Connecting school counselors to student achievement is a complex phenomenon shaped by a wide variety of factors intrinsic to student and the external environment (Farrington et al., 2012). However, through direct student services of instruction, appraisal, advisement and counseling, school counselors help students develop important skills and attitudes outlined in the ASCA (2019) Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success Standards. School counselors engage in leadership through selection of strategies, activities, and interventions that focus on the ASCA (2019) mindsets and behaviors standards.

Research by Dweck et al. (2022) evaluated the effect of carefully constructed brief treatments focused on student mindsets and the findings show the treatments have lasting effects on students' academic performance. A growth mindset promotes performance in academic and occupational settings. Individuals' beliefs and assumptions about their intelligence, personality, and abilities often produce patterns of thought and

feeling that impact behavior and this is known as mindset (Dweck, 2006). There has been more than 40 years of prolific research in mindset with students and adults in educational settings. The literature has described differences in mindsets, either fixed or growth, that impact student and adult performance. A growth mindset encourages persistence when encountering prolonged challenges (Dweck, 2012; Renaud-Dube et al., 2015;Yeager et al., 2019).

In a similar study Yeager and Walton (2011) looked at a group of college students that were exposed to video that suggested that academic setbacks upon entering college are common and not indicative of a lack of innate ability. The control group was exposed to videos about academic interests. Both groups were randomly selected and looked similar on key variables before the experiment began. The group of students exposed to videos that talked about academic setbacks not being an unchangeable factor had higher college GPAs and were 80% less likely to have dropped out of school than control students. The authors interpreted the findings as evidence that students can be influenced to have a growth mindset (Yeager & Walton, 2011).

In another study on growth mindset by Blackwell et al. (2007), seventh grade students in a randomized treatment group participated in a 25-minute, eight-session advisory group. Another group, the control group, did not participate in the growth mindset advisory group. Prior to the treatment both groups had been identified as having declining math grades. After the intervention, the treatment group stabilized while the control group continued to decline (Blackwell et al., 2007).

Wilson (2006) showed that simple, short-term interventions directed at changing student mindsets have been shown to have surprisingly lasting effects on school

performance. This study suggests that “it can be as important to change people’s interpretation of the social world and their place in it-as it is to change the objective environment” of schools and classrooms (Wilson, 2006, p. 1252). The extensive body of research on mindset further suggests that a person’s academic beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions may be an essential approach at reform aimed to closing achievement gaps (Farrington et al., 2012).

The results of these various school-based interventions suggest not only that mindset is important but also that changing students’ mindset can result in improvements on academic performance as measured by grades (Blackwell et al., 2007; Farrington et al., 2012; Wilson et al, 2006; Yeager & Walton, 2011). Mindset constructs have been evaluated on their contribution to academic performance in students. Mindset has also been studied within workplace populations and through a leadership skills lens. However, few studies have looked at counselor mindset and how counselor beliefs impact performance.

In one such study Larberg and Sherlin (2021) investigated whether school counselors’ grit and mindset, independently and together, were predictive of higher performance. They included previous studies that focused on other factors such as efficacy, leadership practices, and caseload as factors that impede a school counselors’ abilities (Ernst et al., 2017; Mullen & Lambie, 2016; Mullen & Lambie, 2017; Scarborough & Culbreth, 2008). The Larberg and Sherlin study is the first study to determine new factors of grit and mindset related to counselor performance. Their study indicates a positive, statistically significant predictive relationship between grit and growth mindset to counselors’ professional performance (Larberg & Sherlin, 2021).

Research Gaps

According to a 15-year meta-analysis study conducted by Erford et al. (2014) showed only 3.2% of articles published in *The Professional School Counseling Journal* were devoted to school counselor leadership. We know little about school-based and district-level leadership implications for school counselors, how school counselor leadership can influence instructional practices, how to train cohorts of school counselor leaders, or which school counselor leadership variables are the most effective for specific program delivery (Young et al., 2018).

What is known is that school counselors who reported higher levels of emotional intelligence also reported greater levels of leadership experience (Mullen et al., 2018). Counselors with leadership experience credit SEL skills such as the ability to read and manage emotions and self-management as key factors in their leadership success (Mullen et al., 2018). More than just counseling techniques, counselors need social-emotional insights such as self-awareness to evaluate the way mindsets and beliefs influence counselor behavior (Mullen et al., 2018). As such, SEL competencies appear to be a necessary, albeit underutilized, ingredient in a school counselors' ability to manage a comprehensive school counseling program.

Although school counselors are asked to heed the call to self-assess mindsets, little guidance exists about how to train them to identify their mindsets (ASCA, 2019). Little is known about the predictive relationship of school counselor mindset and their advocacy, collaboration, or leadership skills (Larberg, & Sherlin, 2021).

Four major reviews of school counseling research have all pointed to the need for more research strengthening the link between school counselors and student achievement

(Brown & Trusty, 2005; Dimmit et al., 2007; Whiston & Quinby, 2009; Whiston & Sexton, 1998.) Student achievement, which include SEL competencies believed to be critical to students' long-term success in and out of school, merit careful, sustained attention (Bridgeland et al., 2013). Regardless of these finding and the unique position counselors play, little is known about the mindsets counselors hold about themselves and the role they play in the social emotional leadership in schools.

The Bodenhorn et al. (2010) study found that school counselors with higher self-efficacy also reported higher awareness of achievement gap data, and Mullen and Lambie (2016) found that counselors' general self-efficacy levels related to their self-efficacy in specific leadership skills. This is in line with behavior related to general self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), in which if a person has a higher level of perceived competence in a skill, they are more likely to attempt that given skill. Thus, school counselors with a higher level of confidence in evidence-based interventions may show higher performance levels. Unfortunately, research suggests too few intervention studies exist, and little is known about school counseling leadership, this in turn may be negatively impacting school counselor levels of self-efficacy (Griffith et al., 2020).

In a 2020 survey completed by 7,000 ASCA practicing school counselors, counselors were asked to identify the most pressing research question in the field. The highest ranked questions were those concerning the best practices related to evidence-based interventions and practices; interventions to improve social justice, equity, advocacy, and closing achievement gaps; and the impact of using evidence-based practices (as cited in Villares & Dimmitt, 2017). With what is known about self-efficacy and the importance of an individual's belief in their own abilities, one could argue that

the lack of evidence-based practices may hinder self-efficacy levels in school counselors. However, little is known about the beliefs that counselors hold about their own abilities.

In this vein, school counselors are asked to self-assess their program to evaluate counselor mindset and align their professional development goals to support the success of various constituents (ASCA, 2019). Research in the field of school counseling shows a lack of evidence-based intervention studies (Griffith et al., 2020). Confidence in practice and counselor effectiveness likely plays a key role in counselor self-efficacy. However, no research currently exists about counselor mindset and how this relates to self-efficacy and the beliefs in their abilities.

Teachers with a growth mindset influence students' belief about their ability and may be just as critical and influential in facilitating students' beliefs to grow and reach their highest potential (Bridgeland et al., 2013). Yeager et al. (2022) found the students cannot simply carry a growth mindset into any environment and implement it there. Rather, the classroom environment needs to support, or at least permit, the mindset (Walton & Yeager, 2020). These findings point to the urgency and value of understanding the mindsets behind the educators tasked with implementing student mindset interventions. Yet little is known about the mindsets counselor have when working towards setting student achievement goals.

Conclusion

ASCA (2019) outlined the mindsets and behaviors school counselors need to meet the rigorous demand of the school counseling profession. School counselors are asked to self-assess their mindset with little connection to how mindsets should direct professional development goals and evaluate counseling programs. School counselor examination of

their own beliefs and consideration of how these beliefs drive counselor advocacy, collaboration, and leadership skills may have a positive impact on practice. For this to happen counselors must use self-awareness to assess mindset and make personal reflection a professional practice (CASEL, 2021).

Despite the extensive research agenda supporting Durlak et al.'s (2017) claims that students' "social-emotional competencies relate to good adjustment outcomes" (p. 11) and how SEL interventions positively influence student behavior, few studies target how to cultivate SEL for the adults that impact students' lives every day (Siffredi et al., 2021). Although CASEL (2022) offers a framework to develop psychologically healthy and productive students, policy makers and school leaders have limited insight how to advance SEL knowledge and behavioral skills in educators.

Further, ASCA (2019) has developed new standard that require counselors to think in new paradigms. The new standards show a transition from service focused counseling to a comprehensive program. This new focus necessitates that school counselors become leaders; to do this, counselors can no longer operate in isolation, and they need to be more collaborative with other school staff, community resources and students (ASCA, 2019).

This study is designed to gain a better understanding of school counselor self-perceived advocacy, collaboration, and leadership mindset and skills. This reflection opportunity is designed to foster self-awareness so that counselors can self-assess mindsets and beliefs to inform professional practice. Further justification rests on the premise that counselors play an important role in SEL leadership in schools (Bowers et al., 2018), while also playing an important role in student's development of SEL

competencies (Mahoney et al., 2019) and school counselors may benefit from opportunities to strengthen their own understanding and skills to better support the students in their care.

The ASCA (2019) national model states that “school counselors should self-assess their own mindsets, and behaviors to inform their professional development” (p. 85). The concept of mindset is important to finding meaning to decisions and actions and can motivate professional development goals that lead to improved skills (FrameWorks, 2021). However, little guidance is given to how counselors should self-assess the tacit nature of mindsets.

School counseling has addressed academic achievement, career readiness, and SEL since Gysbers introduced the idea of comprehensive school counseling programs in the late 1960s. When SEL becomes a school focus, student-teacher relationships improve, classroom management challenges decrease, instruction thrives and teacher burnout diminishes (Durlak et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2013).

For this reason, this study uses a social emotional leadership posture that includes EI and is consistent with the nature of the profession and the needs of schools and learners (Bowers et al., 2018). Using a social-emotional leadership framework may translate into improved quality of services delivered by school counselors using the Mindset & Behaviors ASCA professional standards (ASCA, 2019). Without school counselor leadership the school counseling program is disconnected to the overall mission of the school (ASCA, 2019).

School counselors should model the mindsets and behaviors expected in the ASCA national model (ASCA, 2019). Their role is important in the education and

development of student social emotional competencies (ASCA, 2019). This study aims to better understand the mindsets that guide school counselor practice towards advocacy, collaboration, and leadership.

Chapter 3

Methods: Design for Action Study

Study Purpose and Design

This mixed methods study gave school counselors within a single school district the opportunity for an in-depth reflection of their advocacy, collaboration, and leadership skills and mindsets. School counselors are asked to reflect and assess mindsets and behaviors to develop professional development goals (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2019); however, little guidance is given to how this should be done. This action study was created to give school counselors the opportunity to assess skills and beliefs so that they can advocate, collaborate, and lead effectively to ensure they are providing excellent care to students and school communities.

Social emotional learning (SEL) and school leadership play an essential role in creating a positive school climate (Lemberger, 2018), and decades of research highlight the importance of social/emotional skills on student success (Farrington et al, 2012). School counselors use data to identify how school, district, and state educational policies, procedures and practices support and/or impede student success (ASCA, 2019). Time for reflection fosters growth and allows for making meaning and disaggregating data. School counselors play an important role in advocacy, and systemic change requires meaningful opportunities for counselors to self-reflect and assess leadership skills (ASCA, 2019).

The concept of mindset is at the heart of this study, and for the purpose of this study, the researcher defines mindsets as deep, assumed patterns of thinking that shape how people make sense of the world, and what they do (Frameworks Institute, 2020). Studying school counselor mindset can help explain how individual counselors arrive at a

particular belief and how this belief influences advocacy, collaboration, and leadership (ASCA, 2019).

Mindset shifts can lead to change in behavior, policy, and social justice advocacy (Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018). Exploring the connections school counselors make between mindsets and advocacy, collaboration, and leadership skills is important to making important social justice shifts through changed counselor behavior (Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018).

Mindsets are embedded in human cognition, personal history, and behaviors. This is also why they can be difficult to measure (Frameworks Institute, 2020). The fact that mindsets are often tacit can cause a methodological challenge. The unspoken beliefs behind mindsets and behaviors can shift school counselor efforts and refocus professional development goals; the challenge is, however, measuring mindset (Maul, 2017).

Measuring counselor mindset is difficult without explicitly asking about belief in a specific mindset (ASCA, 2019). Often individual ideas are embedded but it is nearly impossible to determine whether the mindset was available to the research participant before asking explicitly about a given mindset (Frameworks Institute, 2020). For example, ASCA school counselor professional mindset standards ask that all counselors believe “every student can learn, and every student can succeed” (p. 95). This researcher assumes that most research participants would agree with this mindset. However, simply agreeing with a recommended mindset does not tell researchers about how a counselor demonstrates a mindset in professional practice. For this reason, it was important to this study to get a better understanding of the ways counselors demonstrate a mindset and

how this mindset is linked to perceived advocacy, collaboration, and leadership skills (Maul, 2017).

This study looked at two dimensions of the ASCA (2019) recommended mindsets for school counselors. The first dimension was how counselors self-perceive their levels of advocacy, collaboration, or leadership skills. The second dimension was how counselors relate to the mindset as a way of making sense of their profession through action. Using the two dimensions gave an in-depth understanding to how mindset is present during the demonstration of a professional skill.

Methods

Qualitative methods that rely on open-ended questions are best suited for examining mindsets, as this will elicit insights on how salient the mindset is in daily professional practice (Creswell, 2014). However, quantitative methods may be better suited to provide precision in the way counselors interpret perceived skills (Creswell, 2014). For this reason, a mixed-method approach that combines the strengths of qualitative and quantitative methods was necessary to accurately measure how school counselors assess self-perceived advocacy, collaboration, and leadership skills (Creswell, 2014).

A mixed methods approach to research is based on the assumptions that collecting diverse types of data can give a better understanding of the topic than either quantitative or qualitative data alone could provide (Creswell, 2014). A quantitative survey (Appendix A) asked research participants to self-assess perceived advocacy, collaboration, and leadership skills. The results give a clear comparability among research participants and have the potential for greater generalizability among all school

counselors in future studies (ASCA, 2019). The second part in this mixed method approach was qualitative, open-ended questions (Appendix B) regarding how counselor participants demonstrate advocacy, collaboration, and leadership mindsets in professional practice (Creswell, 2014).

This mixed methods study involved an intensive systematic understanding of a small group of school counselors within a single community, and represents a bounded community of professionals (Creswell, 2014). A mixed method design was used to discover a sense of reality from the perspectives of the participants by providing a deepened understanding of counselor mindset. Rather than an agree-or-disagree model, this study required counselors to make connections between mindset and implementation of advocacy, collaboration, and leadership skills.

A convergent parallel mixed methods design approach was used to merge the quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive analysis (Creswell, 2014). The survey provided research participants the opportunity to respond using a 7-point Likert scale followed by six open-ended qualitative questions (Creswell, 2014). The Likert and open-ended questions were converged to give insight to counselor self-perceived advocacy, collaboration, and leadership skills and the beliefs that support each mindset.

The following research questions guided this study:

- 1.) What are school counselors self-perceived beliefs about their own advocacy, collaboration, and leadership capacity?

- 2.) In what ways do school counselors demonstrate American School Counselor Association (ASCA) recommended advocacy, collaboration, and leadership mindsets?

Participants and Data Sources

Participants

The target population in this study was school counselors within a single school district. Participants included 16 members of a K-12 counseling department within a suburban town in Massachusetts. This study used a nonprobability sample, as respondents were chosen based on convenience (Creswell, 2014). The sampling design asked all school counselors to participate by completing both Likert and open-ended response questions.

Qualifying research participants had to be practicing school counselors employed within a single school district. A total of 16 school counselors were asked to complete a survey that consisted of 21 Likert scale question and six open-ended response questions. If the number of respondents yielded at least a 50% response rate, this would allow for data saturation (Guest et al., 2006) and would be considered representative of the population (Kruskal, 1979). Data saturation is the key to excellent qualitative data and the goal for concept mapping and response coding (Markram, 2005). The sample size for this study needed enough participation to achieve data saturation to achieve significant response patterns (Creswell, 2014).

This study required participants to provide information regarding demographic markers (Appendix C). This descriptive non-experimental study used the demographic information provided to describe the characteristics of participants. A detailed description

of the research population and can be used to apply findings to future studies. The variables measured in this study are variables in which no manipulations occurred. This study looked at individual counselor self-perceived advocacy, collaboration, and leadership skills, and the ways in which they demonstrate corresponding mindsets.

Inclusion or Exclusion Criteria

To be included in this study participants had to be practicing school counselors within a single school district therefor, a nonrandom selection process was used . This study includes a naturally formed group of counselors within a single K-12 school community. All participating school counseling staff (excluding this researcher) needed to agree to complete both the quantitative and qualitative portions of data collection.

This was an optional study, and the likelihood of a one hundred percent participation rate was unlikely. The objective of the study was to gain a deepened understanding, therefor a redundancy of themes within data collection needed to be met within this number of research participants (Markram, 2005). The total number of school counselor participants needed to be between eight and sixteen to meet the size criteria.

Sample Size

Counselor mindset and beliefs about self-perceived advocacy, collaboration, and leadership skills has the potential to enhance understanding of self-assessment skills and professional development goals (ASCA, 2019). The sample size was based on an in-depth look at the tacit nuances of mindset and ACL skills within a single group. The richness of the findings was found in the individual Likert and open-ended responses as a multifaceted process to understanding school counselor mindset. This descriptive study

shows a single school districts journey to deepened awareness of school counselor beliefs.

Data Collection and Specific Practices

For this mixed methods study, both qualitative and quantitative data was collected through the use of a survey. The survey was designed through Qualtrics survey software, the chosen survey software for the University of New Hampshire system. The quantitative component to the survey was comprised of 21 questions that required participants to respond using a 7-point Likert scale. The second element of data collection was six open-ended questions with two questions for each advocacy, collaboration, and leadership mindset. The open-ended qualitative questions asked participants to reflect on ASCA recommended mindsets and apply them to experience by sharing ways they demonstrate each mindset. The survey questions were developed by this researcher and combined questions from a previous school counselor leadership survey developed by Young and Bryan (2019) and the ASCA self-assessment tool provided in the 2019 ASCA manual. The survey was created by this researcher and is called the Advocacy, Collaboration, and Leadership (ACL) survey.

The ACL open-ended response section asked questions about the application of the ASCA recommended professional mindsets. For example, ASCA (2019) has asserted all school counselors should have the mindset that “every student can learn, and every student can succeed” and a counselor may apply this mindset by the “use of learning theory to support student achievement and success, including students with diverse learning needs” (p. 95). Asking research participants to reflect on how they demonstrate

each mindset provides insight into the application of a given mindset on advocacy, collaboration, and leadership practices.

Open-ended questions examined the connections counselors made to ASCA mindsets, how salient the mindset, what assumptions are made, and how they apply this mindset to beliefs and behaviors. The open-ended questions encouraged meaningful reflection about how the counselor relates to an individual mindset standard and was ideal for seeing the natural connections counselors make.

Instrumentation

The ACL survey asked participants to respond to 21 questions using a 7-point Likert-type scale about their perceived competency of advocacy, collaboration, and leadership skills (ASCA, 2019; Creswell, 2014). The focus was on participants' perceptions and experience and was designed to reflect the behaviors and beliefs that support advocacy, collaboration, and leadership (ASCA, 2019; Fraenkel & Wallen, 1990). The second component in the ACL survey asked participants to respond to six open-ended questions that ask participants to share ways they demonstrate each of the ASCA (2019) professional mindset standards.

Variables

For this study there were two sets of dependent variables measured. The first was school counselor perceived competency of advocacy, collaboration, and leadership skills, measured by response using a Likert scale. The second dependent variable in this study was how school counselor demonstrate ASCA advocacy, collaboration, and leadership mindsets. This study was not designed to change or manipulate counselor mindsets but may result in enhanced reflection practices.

The demographic information provided by research participants was used to give a detailed description of the characteristics of the group. This information can be used to compare future ACL survey findings and applications to future exploratory studies (Creswell, 2014). The demographic information provides the unique attributes of the research participants and gives insight to the markers that may be meaningful for testing future mindset theories.

Procedures

All members in the counseling department were asked to participate in a mixed methods study that included Likert and open-ended questions. The invitation to participate in this study (Appendix D) was sent out on behalf of the primary researcher through school district issued email. The potential participants read a consent form (Appendix E) before starting the survey and needed to agree before starting the ACL survey. The ACL survey took participants approximately 30 minutes to complete and was carefully designed for ease of use. The survey remained open for two weeks, with a reminder sent out after week one. The response rate was monitored and after determining over 50% participation and confirmation that the ACL survey was being answered fully, the survey was closed after two weeks.

Confidentiality

Measures were taken to ensure that research participants responses were kept anonymous and included important procedural steps to omit names. This researcher attached random identification numbers to survey respondents and used these numbers to identify research participants. During data collection all information collected was

password protected through the analysis and evaluation phase. Confidentiality measures were carefully explained to all research participants before their agreement to participate.

Due to the small community of counselors involved in this study, identification of individuals may be easily deduced. For this reason, additional measures such as creating pseudonyms and fictionalized information when preparing to report results may be necessary. This made-up information about research participants will allow for anonymity within a small community.

Validity and Reliability

Validity using this mixed methods approach was based on establishing both quantitative validity and qualitative validity. The key assumption to this approach is that both the quantitative and the qualitative data provide different types of information that together will provide an in-depth view of counselor beliefs (Creswell, 2014). This researcher used both validity measures that are commonly found in the quantitative field and trustworthiness measured typically found in the qualitative field to establish study credibility.

One of the potential threats to validity in this study was the potential for participants to provide answers to the survey questions and not to the open-ended questions or respond with brief answers making it difficult to merge findings (Creswell, 2014). Another potential threat to this study was inadequate sample size for generalizability. This study looked for attributes within a single community and findings may not be reflected in a larger, more general population.

Validity strategies included a triangulation of the different data sources to formulate mindset themes based on the converging data sources (Creswell, 2014). The

use of member checking was used about specific themes found within the open-ended questions to determine if the research participants agree with the findings (Creswell, 2014). This also allowed for an open and honest narrative between the researcher and the research participants. The researcher needed to be reflective of how personal bias may influence the interpretation of the findings and shape the interpretation of mindset themes, and consequently journaling and professional dialog opportunities were used.

Data Analysis and Evaluation

In this mixed method study both datasets, the quantitative Likert Scale, and qualitative open-ended questions, were divided into the three themes of advocacy, collaboration, and leadership. The Likert and open-ended questions were analyzed separately. Results from the quantitative data were used to answer research question one, and qualitative data were used to answer research question two.

This researcher also used side-by-side data comparisons between counselor self-perceptions of skills and mindset reflections for each of the three themes of advocacy, collaboration, and leadership (Creswell, 2014). The results section looked at findings from both the quantitative and qualitative data to descriptively show how school counselors self-perceive their ACL skills and demonstrate ACL mindsets.

Limitations

The value of this research study lies in the detailed description of the tacit nuances of mindsets. The intent of this research was not to generalize the findings outside of those involved in this study. The research value lies in the themes developed in the context of the research site. The findings from this study can, however, be replicated at other sites and can give a more generalizable understanding of counselor mindset and beliefs.

This study applied a reflective approach to potential research bias and look at how the finding in this study may be influenced by external and internal bias. Included are several research biases that were taken into consideration during the study with a brief description of each.

Inclusive Response Bias

Inclusive bias occurs when samples are selected out of convenience and fit a narrow demographic range (Creswell, 2014). This study was an action research inquiry process that looked to gather information within a local community and research participants represented a small demographic range.

Procedural Bias

This is when an unfair amount of pressure is applied to the subjects forcing them to complete their responses (Heppner et al., 2008, p. 385). This study was used to build professional knowledge and enhance school counseling professional practices within a single school district. Procedures that eliminated forced participation were used to reduce research participants from feeling that participation was mandatory versus encouraged professional development (Creswell, 2014).

Inflated Response Measurement Bias

Subjects may be reluctant to give socially unacceptable answers for fear of being judged (Creswell, 2014). ASCA (2019) counselor mindsets represent ideal professional mindsets, and completely disagreeing with the mindset suggested was unlikely. The ACL survey was designed to give counselors the opportunity to reflect on ways in which they demonstrate each mindset. The open-ended question format allowed counselors to make connections to daily practice to reduce the potential for inflated responses.

Response Bias

Response bias is when the subject consciously or subconsciously gives responses they think the researcher wants to hear (Heppner et al., 2008). The subject may also believe that they understand the study and are aware of the expected findings so they may adapt their responses to suit the predicted outcome (Heppner et al., 2008). This study required participants to self-report and use the skill of self-awareness to respond to both Likert and open-ended questions. This type of bias is common in research that is heavily reliant on individual responses (Heppner et al., 2008, p. 387). This researcher emphasized the anonymity of the survey and stated that this would not be used in an evaluative way. The survey questions were written in a professional, nonjudgmental way and used a tone that was consistent with personal reflection practices (Heppner et al., 2008).

Summary

The purpose of this action research study was to gain a deepened understanding of school counselor self-perception of advocacy, collaboration, and leadership mindsets within a single community of colleagues. This mixed methods study asked participants to respond to Likert and open-ended questions using a newly developed ACL survey. The ACL survey questions are based on advocacy, collaboration, and leadership skills and mindsets deemed essential by the ASCA National Model for school counseling (ASCA, 2019).

The findings from this study demonstrate how school counselors can self-assess ACL skills and apply ASCA recommended mindsets to professional practices. Beliefs matter and using the social and emotional skill of self-awareness can deepen an individual's understanding of how mindset motivates advocacy, collaboration, and

leadership (ASCA, 2019). School counselors have the potential to build an environment that promotes systemic change when counselor self-assessment is used to ensure all students can be successful (ASCA, 2019).

Mindset shifts can lead to change in behavior, policy, and social justice advocacy (Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018). Exploring the connections school counselors made between mindsets and behaviors is important for social justice and equity work in schools (ASCA, 2019). The tacit nature of mindset requires assessment tools that allow counselors to make deep connections to fully understand the beliefs behind important professional behaviors and skills (Frameworks Institute, 2020).

Chapter 4

Results and Discussion: Data Analysis and Recommended Actions

The purpose of this study was to examine self-perceived advocacy, collaboration, and leadership skills of school counselors and the ways in which counselors demonstrate the American School Counseling Association (ASCA) recommended mindsets.

Understanding of self and using the social/emotional skill of self-awareness is a critical component of leadership. As such, a large percentage of ASCA school counseling research uses literature about the Social Emotional Learning (SEL) competency of self-awareness as a construct to evaluate and assess school counseling programs (Brigman et al., 2015; Farrington et al., 2012; Lemberger et al., 2018; Villares & Dimmitt 2015).

Examining and reflecting upon beliefs in the field of education is imperative because unexamined beliefs can lead to inequities and limited access for some students (ASCA, 2019).

Professionals school counselors are charged with fostering student learning and well-being and should demonstrate social emotional competence (Gimbert, 2021). In this descriptive study the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) framework was applied to ascertain what SEL competencies school counselors' use when self-assessing skills and mindsets. This is a framework consistent with the nature of the profession and the needs of schools and learners, which might translate into improved quality of SEL services counselors deliver (Bowers et al., 2018). The findings from this study can contribute to improved professional learning opportunities for strengthened daily pedagogical practice that ensure advocacy, collaboration, and leadership.

Research participants answered questions about self-perceived skills and reflected on ways they demonstrate ASCA recommended mindsets. Using a mixed method approach, this study answered two questions: What are school counselors self-perceived beliefs about their own advocacy, collaboration, and leadership capacity? In what ways do counselors demonstrate corresponding ASCA mindsets?

The findings from this study are organized into three of the ASCA (2019) guiding principles of advocacy, collaboration, and leadership. Research results will also be compared to previous school counselor leadership scholarship. The research tool created for this study is called the Advocacy, Collaboration, and Leadership (ACL) survey. Within each guiding principle, themes emerged from both Likert-scale questions and open-ended responses.

Discussion of the Findings

Quantitative and qualitative data was used to descriptively analyze school counselors' self-perceived advocacy, collaboration, and leadership skills and counselor mindset. The ACL survey focused on three components of school counselor beliefs. The ASCA (2019) national model applies the guiding principles of advocacy, collaboration, and leadership to drive systemic change; consequently, assessing mindsets and strengthening skills are essential for an effective school counselor (ASCA, 2019).

Participants

A total of 16 school counselors in a single school district were asked to participate by completing a Qualtrics Survey, to which 14 out the 16 counselors responded, giving this study an 87% response rate. The research participants answered demographic questions about gender, race, years' experience, and school level. Demographic questions

were carefully selected to reflect other school counseling research, so the results can be easily compared to past and future school counseling research (Larberg & Sherlin, 2021; Mullen et al., 2013; Mullen et al., 2019; Strear et al., 2019).

Table 4.1

Years of Experience

<u>Years</u>	<u>Percent of ACL Survey Respondents</u>	<u>Count</u>
0-3	21.43%	3
4-6	21.43%	3
7-10	14.28%	2
11-15	14.28%	2
16 and above years	21.43%	3
<u>Prefer not to answer</u>	<u>7.15%</u>	<u>1</u>
Total	100%	14

Table 4.2

School Level

<u>School</u>	<u>Percent of ACL Survey Respondents</u>	<u>Count</u>
Elementary School	21.43%	3
Middle School	28.57%	4
High School	42.86%	6
<u>Prefer not to answer</u>	<u>7.14%</u>	<u>1</u>
Total	100%	14

This study includes 14 participants employed full-time as school counselors; their employment duration ranged between approximately 0-3 (n=3) to 16 and above years (n=3). They identified as female (n=13) and male (n=1). All participants identified as White (n=14). Participants were employed at the elementary level (n= 3), middle level (n=4), and high school level (n= 6), with one participant preferring not to answer (n=1).

The research participants in this study represent a range of work experience and school level within a public school district. Each level school within this district has similar student-to-school counselor ratios of approximately 275 students per one counselor. Counselors provide direct and indirect student service and deliver developmentally appropriate classroom curriculum (ASCA, 2019).

All participants were employed in Massachusetts, a state that currently requires both a master's degree in school counseling and a school counseling license. All participants were employed by a public school district, with a total of eight schools, and an enrollment of approximately 4,943 students. The town is located south of the New Hampshire border, 25 miles northwest of Boston in the Merrimack River Valley. The student body at the schools served was 68.2% white, 4% Black, 16.5 % Asian or Pacific Islander, 7.5% Hispanic/ Latino, .2% American Indian or Alaska Native (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2022) .

It is a suburban community with 24.3% first language not English, 4.3% English language learners, 19.2% low-income, 16.7% students with disabilities, putting the high needs population within district at 34.6% of the total study body (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2022).

Quantitative Survey Data

The goal of the quantitative data is to answer the following research question: What are school counselors' self-perceived beliefs about their advocacy, collaboration, and leadership capacity? The ACL survey provided three areas of focus: advocacy, collaboration, and leadership. Research respondents answered questions in each category, which reflected their self-perceived capacity.

The quantitative portion of the survey included 21 statements, each connected to one of the themes. Participants responded by choosing one response from a 7-point Likert scale that represented their self-perceived capacity for each statement. The Likert scale included a range of responses with each of the statements from never to always. Each response option was assigned a numerical value: 1 = Never, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Occasionally, 4 = Sometimes, 5 = Often, 6 = Very Often, 7 = Always.

For the quantitative ACL survey data, descriptive statistics were applied to find the central tendency of responses. Arithmetic methods were used to calculate, describe, and summarize collected data to find an average or mean. The mean was found by adding all of the Likert responses together and dividing them by $N=14$. The central tendency, or mean, was used to help visualize what the average response was in a logical, meaningful, and efficient way.

The standard deviation was used to determine how spread out the data points were from the mean. A standard deviation score of zero indicates no variation in responses, and a higher standard deviation value indicated a greater spread in the data. Data analysis showed that 48% of response values fell below one standard deviation of the mean, and 52% of responses fell within one standard deviation of the mean. No questions had a standard deviation larger than two.

A range was included to show the spread of responses. The range was calculated by subtracting the lowest response value from the highest response value. A large range represents a larger variability in response, and a small range shows low variability in responses. A potential limitation in the survey results was that school counselors seldom selected never, rarely, or occasionally, resulting in a restriction of range. The results show

that school counselors in this study frequently selected sometimes, often, very often, and always, indicating high levels of self-perceived capacities in all areas.

Self-Perceived Advocacy Capacities

Advocacy

Table 4.3

Mean, Standard Deviation, and Range of Advocacy Response

Questions	M	SD	R	N
I promote positive change	6.29	0.8	3	14
I maintain high expectations for all students	5.79	1.08	3	14
I know and promote my schools' instructional vision	5.57	1.35	4	14
I accomplish goals that have school-wide/ district impact	4.93	1.79	6	14
I know and recognize social justice inequities	5.79	1.08	3	14
I have power to affect positive change	5.64	0.97	3	14
I respond to social just inequities that may affect the future if students' academic achievement	5.43	0.98	3	14
I challenge status quo to advocate for all students	5.5	0.98	3	14

Note. M= Mean, SD= Standard Deviation, R=Range, N=Total respondents

The findings from this study indicate that counselors show a deep responsibility and connection to the role of advocate within the school community. Perhaps the clearest example is how counselors responded to the question about promoting positive change. The ACL results show that counselors very often or always perceive themselves as agents of positive change. The second highest positive response rate in the ACL survey was to the question about recognizing social justice inequities, showing that counselors often or

very often recognize social injustices. Findings from this study complement and extend the previous scholarship about what motivates school counselor advocacy and shows similar intersections among counseling leadership, social justice, and culturally responsive counseling techniques (Peters et al., 2020).

The results of the advocacy questions provide further support for the current literature on how advocacy influences participants to engage in counseling leadership (Dollarhide et al., 2018; Hargons et al. 2017). The responses confirm the advocacy relationship between school counselors and students/other stakeholders (Strear, 2019), and the position that school counselors hold in educational equity (Shields & Dollarhide, 2017).

Having counselors believe in their own capacity to advocate for students shows a commitment to social justice and equity. The ASCA (2019) National Model emphasized the importance of school counselors using advocacy and collaboration to foster systemic change. The results from the ACL survey show a high level of self-efficacy about their capacity to execute advocacy behaviors within schools.

The capacity to advocate is important when understanding school counselor leadership practices. Shields and colleagues (2018) applied eight tenets of transformational leadership to the ASCA National Model to show how a comprehensive school counseling programs should be designed using transformational leadership to improve the environment for all students. A key factor in this approach is leadership that begins by identifying the values school counselors work toward (Shields, 2018). The advocacy component of the ACL survey results shows a connection between school counselor beliefs and advocacy in their daily practices.

School counselors are uniquely positioned to bridge social justice leadership practice to traditional models of school leadership based on training, access to data, and the belief in their own capacity to advocate (Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018). ASCA (2019) asked for counselors to create systemic change through the implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program. ACL survey results from this study show that counselors believe they have the power to impact positive change.

Additionally, counselor research participants show confidence in their capacity to monitor systems of accountability for addressing inequities and improving access to opportunities. ACL survey respondents show this confidence in capacity by maintaining high expectations and responding to barriers that impact student academic achievement. Despite showing high levels of confidence for addressing inequities and responding to barriers, previous research reveals that school counselors often lack the time necessary to commit to advocacy work, which may result in counselor burnout (Mullen, 2017).

Self-Perceived Collaboration Capacities

Table 4.4

Mean, Standard Deviation, and Range of Collaboration Response

Questions	M	SD	R	N
I ask for help when needed to advocate on behalf of students and parents	5.86	1.06	4	14
I encourage my colleagues to share their new ideas	6	1.07	4	14
I work with stakeholders to accomplish goals	5.86	1.19	4	14
I am often chosen to lead school-wide/ district initiatives committees, or councils	4.36	1.54	6	14
I can be persuasive to gain buy-in for implementation of new school-wide programs	4.57	1.35	6	14
I share my innovative ideas	5.29	1.16	4	14

Note. M= Mean, SD= Standard Deviation, R=Range, N=Total respondents

ASCA (2019) has recommended that counselors demonstrate the belief that effective school counseling is a collaborative process. Collaboration is inherent in most school counselor activities and is shown throughout the day in their interactions with students, school staff and community partners.

The ACL survey results show that counselors demonstrate a diligent focus on the thoughts, ideas, and beliefs of others. Emotional intelligence (EI) may play an important role in how counselors view themselves in a collaborative role within schools (Mullen et al., 2019). EI among school counselors is shown through their ability to monitor their

own and others' feelings and emotions and use this information as a guide when taking action (Mullen et al., 2019).

The highest self-perceived collaboration capacity scores of 5.86, 6, and 5.86 are seen in areas where the counselor directly works with students, parents, colleagues, and stakeholders. These direct services include counseling, classroom instruction, and advisement (ASCA, 2019). The data shows that relationships with students and communication on an in-person level are a self-perceived strength.

The responses are slightly lower, 4.36, 4.57, and 5.29, when counselors reflect on their ability to collaborate effectively at a school-wide or district level. This shows that school counselor believe they may not be persuasive in gaining support for implementation of programs and curriculums at a school-wide or district level. Counselors may primarily focus on working to support individual achievement and the fulfillment of individual potential. However, school counselor leadership requires collaboration at an educational organization level. The capacity to lead in schools requires a willingness to respect the opinions of students and colleagues (Bowers et al., 2018), the courage to challenge status quo (Ratts, 2016), and the ability to apply social emotional intelligence techniques (Bowers et al., 2018).

The work of Van Velsor (2009) highlighted school counselors' inherent strength in authentic relationships with stakeholders. ACL survey results show an inherent collaboration strength that counselor participants perceive they have when working with stakeholders. Counselors can call upon this perceived strength when working on a team, collaborating with others, and using communication skills to advocate at a system level (Goleman et al., 2013).

School counselor collaboration capacity can help build relationships, open lines of communication, and improve student achievement, attendance, and discipline (ASCA, 2019). It is also important for school counselors to look at self-perceived collaboration capacity as an opportunity to demonstrate transformative leadership by improving learning environments for all students. School counselors in this study showed a high level of self-efficacy about their capacity to collaborate related to individual success. A future goal for participants may be to build upon existing collaboration skills to advocate for systemic change through the development of enhanced confidence in collaboration efforts at the system-wide level.

Self-Perceived Leadership Capacities

Table 4.5

Mean, Standard Deviation, and Range of Leadership Response

Questions	M	SD	R	N
I accomplish goals with certainty and confidence	5.43	0.82	3	14
I consider myself a leader	5.21	0.94	3	14
I have confidence in my ability to lead	5.36	0.81	2	14
I am a change agent	5	0.85	2	14
I will take risks that do not breach ethical standards	5	0.93	2	14
I use data to inform strategies and identify interventions needed	5.29	0.8	2	14
I initiate new programs and interventions in my school district	4.36	1.29	4	14

Note. M= Mean, SD= Standard Deviation, R=Range, N=Total respondents

ASCA (2019) has asserted that school counselors are leaders and enhance student academic, career, and social/emotional outcomes. School leadership is an essential

ingredient for each person in the school environment to thrive (Bowers et al., 2018). Effective school leaders understand others and can translate these understandings to maximize others' abilities (Bowers et al., 2018).

Considering the social and emotional needs of students, counselors may be prime candidates to embrace school leadership roles. The ACL survey shows self-perceived capacity scores that indicate counselors perceived themselves *often* using collaborations skills. However, the lowest mean of the entire survey, a 4.36, was the average response to the question asking counselors about their self-perceived capacity to initiate new programs and interventions within their school district.

Furthermore, all ACL survey questions that included the words *school wide* or *district* had a mean score close to four. This pattern shows that school counselor participants were less likely to show high levels of self-perceived skills in areas that include system-wide advocacy, collaboration, or leadership skills. The findings from this research study can be compared to the recent *ASCA State of the Profession 2020*, which looked at school counselor actions to address racism and bias in school counseling programs. The state of the profession survey had 42% of counselors point to addressing issues related to racism and bias at an individual student level, with interventions such as individual counseling and monitoring student behavior. The counselors that participated in the national ASCA survey pointed to practices at a districtwide level at a much lower rate, with 15% of respondents saying they systematically tackle equity work across the school district.

The findings from this research can be applied to the body of school counselor leadership scholarship (Bowers et al., 2018; Mullen et al., 2018; Strear et al., 2019;

Young & Dollarhide, 2018) in an effort to advance knowledge about school counselor leadership capacity. Moreover, assessing perceived beliefs about school counselor leadership capacity may contribute to the evidence on what areas can be developed in future professional development and training.

The disconnect between school counselor self-perceived leadership skills and their lack of confidence to initiate district-wide programs and interventions could be concerning, especially considering how contemporary schools are required to evince increasing student learning outcomes concurrent with greater social emotional needs of students (Lemberger, 2018). In fact, several empirical intervention studies illustrate the helpful influence school counselors have on the development of SEL (Bowers et al., 2018; Brigman et al. 2015; Dimmit et al., 2015).

Leadership practices of school counselors are also tied to greater implementation of school counseling programs (Mullen & Lambie, 2016). School counselors are charged with fostering social emotional learning and showing leadership through intentional selection of strategies and interventions (ASCA, 2019). Building counselor confidence about their influence on student success and opportunities may help create a greater sense of leadership capacity.

Furthermore, the findings from this ACL survey may be applied to future studies that look to make connections between school counselor leadership disposition and the leadership practices they use. Future research could lead to a deeper understanding of an imbalance that may exist between the leadership dispositions of advocacy and collaboration and the leadership behaviors needed for system change. Further studies that use self-awareness constructs may highlight the disconnect that may exist between school

counselors' desire to advocate and collaborate and counselors' belief in their own capacity to lead.

ACL survey findings can be applied to what is known about personal beliefs and self-efficacy. In previous studies, self-efficacy has been examined as a factor that contributes to the frequency of school counselor participation in leadership duties within a school (Mullen & Lambie, 2016). Self-efficacy is also positively associated with growth mindset (Dweck, 2006), and future research could apply the ACL survey to investigate how growth mindset contributes to school counseling leadership growth (Larberg & Sherlin, 2021).

Qualitative Open-ended Responses

The qualitative component for this descriptive research study examined themes across participant open-ended response questions (Creswell, 2014). Congruent with Creswell's data analysis steps, the researcher grouped the meaningful statements into themes based on the response to advocacy, collaboration, and leadership-based questions (Creswell, 2014). The data was analyzed using reflective thematic analysis in response to the open-ended questions and the qualitative approach (Creswell, 2014). Reflective thematic analysis is a flexible and recursive process, which uses six phases:

- Familiarization with data
- Coding
- Generalizing initial themes
- Reviewing themes
- Defining and naming themes
- Writing the results

The researcher used trustworthiness strategies to verify the rigor of the qualitative component of the study (Creswell, 2014). The researcher examined biases throughout the

study by having in-depth conversations and using reflexive journaling during the planning, data collection, and analysis of data (Creswell, 2014). The researcher also used a peer debriefer to discuss the findings as well as an external auditor to engage in researcher triangulation.

The qualitative open-ended questions were designed to help answer the research question: In what ways do school counselors demonstrate the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) recommended advocacy, collaboration, and leadership mindsets?

This study used reflective thematic analysis coding to interpret the raw data to develop concepts. This was done by reading the responses to the open-ended questions multiple times and using interpretive reasoning to find themes under each topic. Two independent coders were included in this process to ensure intercoder reliability. The transcripts of the responses were read and re-read to ensure familiarity with the data.

For each question, the response was placed into one of three topics: advocacy, collaboration, or leadership. After the questions were divided, a response coding sheet was constructed. The sheet contained all possible themes and sub-themes for each open-ended question. References from each response were recorded under each theme.

Advocacy Themes

The two themes that emerged from qualitative data analysis of school counselors' demonstration of an advocacy mindset are student empowerment and challenging assumptions. All participants described ways they demonstrate having an advocacy mindset in daily practice. Research participants answered two advocacy questions: In what ways do you demonstrate that all students are able to learn and succeed in school,

and in what ways do you demonstrate the belief that students should have equal access and opportunity to a high-quality education?

The first advocacy theme was defined as student empowerment. This theme was shown through how counselors help students identify barriers, learn approaches to address student barriers, and share resources and tools to enhance student development. Of the research participants, 13 of the 14 reported demonstrating advocacy through a student-centered action, such as individual counseling or team meeting. Research participant “Nora” described how she demonstrates advocacy as “ensuring that all students feel safe, cared for, respected and valued.” Other participants similarly described how they demonstrate advocacy “by creating a safe and inclusive space,” and by “being open-minded and accepting and welcoming all students.”

The second advocacy theme was defined as challenging assumptions. School counselors in this study use data to determine whether their perceptions about student success match reality by making meaning out of data and taking actions towards desired student outcomes. One research participant, “Mary,” demonstrate the belief that all students can learn and succeed at school “by advocating for students through observation, assessments, and child/parent interviews to understand what each student may need to be successful.” Ten of the 14 research participants demonstrate advocacy by “looking” at how students succeed in school. Each of these responses used the word “look” as a way to examine and ensure that all students have what they need to learn and succeed.

The ACL open-ended responses show advocacy themes that empower students and challenge assumptions by using data to ensure equity. Findings can be applied to the field of transformational leadership (Northouse, 2016), in which leaders work as change

agents and advocates. Transformational school counseling leadership may be most clearly shown in how counselors advocate and collaborate with others in promoting positive student outcomes (Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018).

An important finding in the ACL advocacy theme is that school counselors are using data as a tool to examine trends, make comparisons, and reveal information. This data-focused approach to school counseling is consistent with recommendations found in the ASCA (2019) National Model and the evidence-based school counseling movement (Dimmitt & Zyromski, 2019). Previous scholarship shows that counselors may best support students and other members of the school community by committing to practices that are predictably successful and that can result in reliable evidence.

Assumptions about students and schools are commonly drawn from a combination of a person's personal experience and beliefs (Lemberger-Truelove et al., 2020). Counselors who take time to reflect on beliefs about student success may improve professional practice and learning outcomes (Dollarhide & Lemberger-Truelove, 2019). Furthermore, counselors who are focused on systemic change need to know how individual students are performing and use data to decrease barriers and increase achievement for all students (ASCA, 2019).

ASCA recommended advocacy mindsets are derived from a large review of the social emotional learning empirical literature (Bowers et al., 2018; Durlak et al., 2011). Therefore, it is important to consider what positive implication the social/emotional skill of self-awareness may play in counselor ability to demonstrate advocacy. Ratts et al. (2016) emphasized that working toward counselor social justice competency requires a life-long process of self-awareness.

The ACL open-response questions encouraged counselors to reflect about ways they demonstrate that all students are able to learn and succeed in school (ASCA, 2019). In this study counselors show a commitment to working for and on behalf of students within the existing constructs of school. Research participants mentioned academic programming, Individual Education Plans, and 504 accommodations as ways to address opportunity gaps. No responses included answers that showed advocacy demonstrated through systemic change or answered the question with ways they change the school environment.

Socially just interventions for system change can have a greater impact on students than individual or group counseling alone (ASCA, 2019). School counselors can use ACL responses to set social justice goals that address current conditions and advocate for programs, policies, and practices that promote achievement and success for all students (ASCA, 2019).

Collaboration Themes

A single main theme of communication and a sub-theme of speaking on behalf of students emerged during the analysis of the collaboration mindset responses. It was difficult to separate the two themes because so many of the open-ended responses included ways counselors communicate on behalf of the students they serve. Research participants answered two questions about collaboration mindset: In what ways do you demonstrate the belief that effective school counseling programs are a collaborative process involving counselors, students, families, teachers, administrators, other staff , and education stakeholders, and in what ways do you demonstrate collaboration through information gathering about students?

The main theme of communication found in the ACL collaboration open responses was revealed through interpersonal relationships, individual and small group facilitation, communication within the school community, and where the community views the school counselor as a leader and expert on behalf of student needs. Participants in this study identified listening skills and student alliances as ways to be supportive and collaborative during student-centered problem-solving.

Respondent Karen (pseudonym) said in her open response questions about collaboration that “communication and collaboration is the best way to help a child. It shows them that we are all a team and that we are on their team to support them in anything they might need.” This respondent also answered the open-ended question about information gathering that she demonstrates collaboration by “really knowing the student and their strengths and needs, so that I can provide insight during meetings that will promote their academic, emotional, and social goals.”

The sub-theme of communication related to speaking on behalf of students. This is done through the support of students and was represented in the ways school counselors use their role to speak on behalf of individual students in meetings. The collaboration open-ended responses show that counselors have a deep commitment to communicating the needs of students to teachers, families, and other stakeholders. Research participants noted “constantly collaborating with all stakeholders to make sure students have the support they need” and “attending meetings every day with all staff members that I work with.”

Regular forms of communication, both with and on behalf of students, show that to collaborate effectively research participants rely on being good listeners, empathy,

open-mindedness, and respect. Counselor responses often reflected these important communication skills. Research participant Sally noted that “sharing information and asking questions” are important skills when demonstrating collaboration.

ACL findings can be applied to prior research about how EI plays an important role in school counselor leadership (Mullen et al., 2019). Considering EI has been shown to have a positive relationship with leadership in previous studies, counselors not only need to be familiar with the ASCA (2019) National Model and the directives for leadership; they also need to possess effective interpersonal skills to help navigate leadership interactions (Mullen et al., 2019).

Future implications of the ACL open-ended questions could be used with the EI construct to assess school counselor ability to collaborate. The leadership qualities in this study showed counselors demonstrate the social/emotional skills of managing emotions in themselves and others, perspective taking, and showing concern for others (CASEL, 2022). This adds to the Bowers et al. (2018) scholarship that school counselors extend SEL practices into leadership dispositions and behaviors. School counselors can develop socially just practices, scholarship, and program evaluation by using the ACL survey tool to self-assess individual SEL leadership skills.

Leadership Themes

There are two main themes and a single sub-theme that emerged during the analysis of leadership mindset responses. The first theme is knowledge contribution, and the second theme is professional leadership skills including a sub-theme of professional development. Research participants answered two questions about their leadership mindset: In what ways do you demonstrate the belief that school counselors are leaders in

the school, district, state, and nation, and in what ways do you demonstrate the belief that school counseling programs promote and enhance student academic, career, and social/emotional outcomes?

The first leadership theme was defined as knowledge contribution. Research participants view themselves as the leader or expert with regard to the social emotional needs of the school community. The school counselor supports student needs and contributes to courses of action needed for students (ASCA, 2019). Research participant Karen wrote that “school counselors are leaders as they often have the knowledge and skills on how best to build relationships with students and families and how to approach supporting students with mental health concerns.” Another participant, June, wrote “school counselors are leaders in their school, district, state, and nation because they are the biggest advocates for students and social emotional needs.” As professionals charged with fostering student SEL goals, it is important to look at previous scholarship on the importance of educator competence in SEL. Goleman (2013) promoted social emotional intelligence competencies as essential components for school leadership, and Gimbert et al. (2021) believed schools should look for ways to better understand how to foster SEL competence in all educators.

For school counselors to be accepted as leaders, they may consider a commitment to a leadership disposition that benefits all constituents (Bowers et al., 2018). ACL open-ended response questions can help make connections between the SEL mindsets expected of school counselors and the SEL competencies deemed valuable for students (Lemberger, 2016; Van Velsor, 2009). In this vein school counseling leadership may

have positive implications on student learning, social outcomes, and social justice advocacy (Lemberger, 2016; Lemberger et al., 2018).

The second leadership theme was professional leadership skills. When answering one or both of the leadership questions, all 14 participants noted that school counselors contribute to the school, and are leaders in the school, by using professional skills such as interpersonal skills, group facilitation, communication, and continual training. ASCA (2019) has encouraged school counselor to be effective managers of resources, and programs, and demonstrate effective leadership practices. School counselors who demonstrate professional leadership skills can have a profound impact on systemic change through indirect services to students such as collaborating and consulting with stakeholders (ASCA, 2019).

The sub-theme that surfaced for professional leadership skills was professional development or professional learning opportunities. Twelve out of the 14 responses noted learning or professional development as a way they model high expectations, setting an example for students by doing their best and always working their hardest, and being an important resource in their school district. These findings can be applied to previous studies that found counselors who had clear, focused goals, and showed a willingness to expand their leadership skills often have increased levels of leadership opportunities in their district (Dollarhide et al., 2008).

School counselors in this study demonstrated the belief that they are leaders in the school district, state, and nation by engaging in professional development and personal growth opportunities. Research participant Mary wrote that “school counselors are needed now more than ever to help meet student social emotional needs; school

counselors teach these basic but very important life skills.” The importance of professional development and growth opportunities aligns with the foundations of evidence-based school counseling (Dimmitt & Zyromski, 2020). Evidence-based school counseling requires practitioners to think critically about what they are doing, ensure they are serving students effectively, and engage in professional development to maximize positive student outcomes (Dimmitt & Zyromski, 2020). School counselors act as leaders when collaborating and consulting with stakeholders about best practices, programs, and policies (ASCA, 2019). Especially in considering the importance of social/emotional learning (CASEL, 2021), it is paramount the school counselors be visible leaders in the SEL needs of the school (Bowers et al., 2018).

Previous research has focused on many factors such as self-efficacy, leadership practices, mindset, and caseload, that can improve or impede school counselor leadership (Ernst et al., 2017; Larberg & Sherlin, 2021; Mullen & Lambie, 2016). The ASCA (2019) professional standards ask school counselors to self-assess to set professional goals. By using self-assessments counselors demonstrate leadership through a commitment to continuous improvement (ASCA, 2019). Importantly, this was the first study to use an ACL survey as a tool to help achieve counselor self-awareness.

Organization and Field Impacts

This action research was an inquiry process conducted to find new ways of assisting school counselors in refining the action of self-assessment and giving pause for professional reflection. The survey and the reflection process were designed for the purpose of gathering local data about school counselor mindset. Future professional development opportunities will take the information collected during this study to drive

conversations about new thinking and reflective goal setting practices that reinforce the link between counselor mindset and student achievement goals.

ASCA (2019) professional mindset standards include beliefs school counselors hold about student achievement and success. Findings from this study can be used within local organizations to recognize ways school counselors demonstrate ASCA mindsets. Study findings will be shared with colleagues as a way to foster openness and reflect a mutual commitment to improved advocacy, collaboration, and leadership capacities within the school counseling community.

Contributions to the Field of Educational Leadership

Advocacy, collaboration, and leadership exploration and self-reflection may spark rich conversations among colleagues and professional learning communities (Smith, 2020). Having the desire to advocate, collaborate, and lead is different from possessing the skills necessary to do so. As it is true for students (Dweck, 2012; Yeager et al., 2019), once a person processes the appropriate mindset, implementing the skills requires practice and time. The responses for the ACL survey can and should be used to strengthen school counselor professional foundation and illuminate direct and indirect student service planning (ASCA, 2019). Responses can inform strategic planning for implementing and sustaining a comprehensive school counseling program and professional development.

School counselors enhance the collaboration of school-family-community stakeholders by being the catalyst through which these collaborations occur (Bryan & Henry, 2012). School counselors lead by demonstrating care and empathy (ASCA, 2019).

This kind of leadership fosters a climate where the social, emotional, and cognitive needs of students are met (Bowers et al., 2018) .

Recommendations and Implications to Educational Leadership for Social Justice

School counselor change agents align passion, vision, and courage to use their leadership mindsets and advocacy skills to change the world (Smith, 2020). Schools are complex social institutions that operate under historical models that do not always serve their students (Goldstein, 2014). School counselors are often charged with supporting if not generating school-wide interventions in order to support all students (Lemberger, 2018). Doing so requires wide scale collaboration and extensive understanding of the school context/student population being served. Using leadership skills counselors create powerful positive outcomes for their students that ultimately create a better world for the students they serve (Lemberger & Hutchisin, 2014).

School counselors are uniquely positioned to serve as social justice leaders (Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018). The transformation of the profession has included systemic change practices to meet both the academic and social/emotional needs of the students (ASCA, 2019; Bowers et al., 2018). School counselors have professional mandates for leadership that emphasize advocacy and collaboration (ASCA, 2019). Counselors use the professional advocacy and collaboration mindsets to act as systems change agents to create an environment promoting and supporting student success (ASCA, 2019).

Using self-reflection is an important part of social justice leadership (Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018). Leaders need to have awareness of their own dispositions, beliefs, identities, and mindsets (Strear et al., 2019). This critical skill of self-awareness is a process where counselors take deliberate time for self-reflection to assess school

counseling programs (ASCA, 2019). Using this study as a guide counselors can use the ACL survey as a self-assessment tool creating an opportunity to reflect and set advocacy, collaboration, and leadership goals that align with the ASCA (2019) recommended professional mindset standards.

Reflective Summary

The ASCA (2019) mindset standards include beliefs school counselors hold about student achievement and success. Individual counselors may draw on mindsets in different ways for different social positions, individual perspectives, and personal experiences. In other words, while ASCA mindsets are encouraged and supported in the school counseling profession, the ways that an individual draws from that mindset may not be uniform (Dweck, 2006).

School counselors have an ethical responsibility to engage in continual professional self-improvement to ensure they are providing excellent care to the students and school communities (ASCA, 2019). School counselors within a single suburban Massachusetts town used the ASCA (2019) National Model as a guide to self-assess advocacy, collaboration, and leadership mindsets using a newly developed ACL survey.

Having the desire to advocate, collaborate, and lead effectively is different from having the skills to do so (Smith, 2020). To achieve the best results for students and schools, counselors should regularly assess their program to ensure counseling programs are meeting the needs of all students (ASCA, 2019). However, little guidance is given to how this should be done. This action research study addressed the call for self-assessment and the lack of guidance ASCA provides for this to happen.

This study developed a tool for counselors to use for personal self-reflection. The questions gave relevance to the tacit concept of mindset (FrameWorks Institute, 2020). Previous school counselor leadership research has shown that leadership requires willingness to expand and grow using self-reflection (Dollarhide et al., 2008). Giving school counselors the opportunity to reflect on specific mindsets and skills may help counselors develop actionable next steps for continual self-improvement and can be advantageous for establishing and maintaining leadership practices (Strear et al., 2019).

In this descriptive non-experimental study, this researcher was interested in the unique characteristics of a school counseling population. Using self-assessment data to answer questions about school counselors' perceived beliefs about their own advocacy, collaboration, and leadership skills and the ASCA mindsets they hold. This study can be used to make future connections to how self-assessment of skills capacity and mindsets reflection can be used as a planning tool for professional development and social justice practices.

This study showed that counselors have high levels of self-perceived skills in advocacy, collaboration, and leadership and make connections to how they demonstrate this in daily practice. The ability to reflect and show self-awareness is an important SEL skill (CASEL, 2021) that can be applied to school counseling leadership dispositions (Bowers et al., 2018). This researcher suggests that school counselors extend the social emotional skill of self-awareness into their leadership practices, in turn, making schools a more socially just place for all students, and a place where social-emotional insights can create a positive environment for all students.

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Appendix A

Advocacy Collaboration and Leadership Survey

The items will be measured on a 7-point Likert Scale

(1 = Never, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Occasionally, 4 = Sometimes, 5 = Often, 6 = Very Often, 7 = Always)

Advocacy

I promote positive change

I maintain high expectations for all students

I know and promote my school's instructional vision

I accomplish goals that have school-wide/ district impact

I know and recognize social justice inequities

I have power to affect positive change

I respond to social just inequities that may affect the future if students' academic achievement

I challenge status quo to advocate for all students

Collaboration

I ask for help when needed to advocate on behalf of students and parents

I encourage my colleagues to share their new ideas

I work with stakeholders to accomplish goals

I am often chosen to lead school-wide/ district initiatives committees, or councils

I can be persuasive to gain buy-in for implementation of new school-wide programs

I share my innovative ideas

Leadership

I accomplish goals with certainty and confidence

I consider myself a leader

I have confidence in my ability to lead

I am a change agent

I will take risks that do not breach ethical standards

I use data to inform strategies and identify interventions needed

I initiate new programs and interventions in my school district

Appendix B

Advocacy, Collaboration, and Leadership Open-ended Questions

Mindsets

Advocacy

ASCA Mindset- Every student can learn, and every student can succeed.

In what ways do you demonstrate that all students are able to learn and succeed in your school?

ASCA Mindset- Every student should have access to and opportunity for a high-quality education, graduate from high school prepared for postsecondary opportunities, and have access to a comprehensive school counseling program.

In what way do you demonstrate the belief that students should have equal access and opportunity to a high-quality education?

Collaboration

ASCA Mindset- Effective school counseling is a collaborative process involving school counselors, students, families, teachers, administrators, and other school staff and education stakeholders.

In what ways do you demonstrate the belief that effective school counseling programs are a collaborative process involving counselors, students, families, teachers, administrators, other staff, and education stakeholders?

In what ways do you demonstrate collaboration through information gathering about student needs?

Leadership

ASCA Mindset- School counselors are leaders in the school, district, state, and nation

In what ways do you demonstrate the belief that school counselors are leaders in the school, district, state, and nation?

In what ways do you demonstrate the belief that school counseling programs promote and enhance student academic, career, and social/ emotional outcomes?

Appendix C

Demographic Information

Please provide information regarding the following demographic markers:

Gender Identity (select all that apply)

Female-identifying

Male-identifying

Agender

Transgender

Non-binary

Genderqueer

Genderfluid

Prefer not to answer

Race/ Ethnicity (select all that apply)

Native American or Alaska Native

Asian

Black or African American

Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

White

Hispanic or Latino or Spanish Origin

Not Hispanic or Latino or Spanish Origin

Prefer not to answer

Years of Experience in the Field of School Counseling

0-3

4-6

7-10

11-15

16 and above years

Prefer not to answer

What level school do you currently work

Elementary School

Middle School

High School

Prefer not to answer

Appendix D Call for Participation

Hello Fellow School Counselors,

I am a doctoral candidate at Plymouth State University within their Ed. D. program, and I am currently recruiting participants for my dissertation research entitled *Beliefs Matter: School counselor self-assessment of perceived advocacy, collaboration, and leadership mindset*.

Interested persons must fall into the following criteria to be considered for participation:

Must currently be employed as a school counselor within our school district

If you are interested in participating, please follow this link [Qualtrics Link](#) [link to be added], which will prompt you to complete the Informed Consent Form before answering 21 survey and 6 short-answer questions.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding participation in this study, please feel free to reach out to me via email – amsayers03@plyouth.edu

Thank you for your consideration,

Autumn Dolan

Appendix E
INFORMED CONSENT FORM
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE
VOLUNTARILY IN RESEARCH INVESTIGATION
PLYMOUTH STATE UNIVERSITY

INVESTIGATOR NAME: Autumn Dolan

STUDY TITLE: Beliefs Matter: School counselor self-assessment of perceived advocacy, collaboration, and leadership mindset.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this research study is to give school counselors in a professional setting the opportunity to self-reflect and assess advocacy, collaboration, and leadership mindset and skills.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you work as a school counselor and are currently employed by the same district.

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY

The participants of this study will be asked demographic questions regarding their identity, and year experience as a school counselor. Then, participants will be asked to answer 24 questions using a 7-point Likert scale about their self-perceived advocacy, collaboration, and leadership skills. They will also be asked to reflect on advocacy, collaboration, and leadership mindsets and provide open-ended responses with times a mindset was demonstrated. The time required to participate in the study is anywhere between 10 to 30 minutes. Participants will need to answer both survey and open-ended questions to be included in this research study.

RISK AND DISCOMFORTS

As a participant in this study, you will be given the opportunity to reflect on your professional practices, this will in no way be used as a program evaluation. The information you provide will not be shared to adjust district or department goals and is meant to give you an opportunity for personal reflection.

BENEFITS

By giving yourself the opportunity to self-reflect and assess advocacy, collaboration, and leadership skills and mindsets you show a commitment to continuous improvement. Setting aside time to reflect may give you the opportunity to set meaningful professional goals and enhance practices.

ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES

The alternative procedure is to not participate in this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All document and information pertaining to this research study will be kept confidential in accordance with all applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations. The data generated by the study may be reviewed by Plymouth State University's Institutional Review Board, which is the committee responsible for ensuring your welfare and rights as a research participant. All presentations or publications including dissertation from the research will not include names of participants.

I plan to maintain confidentiality of your response through assigning participant numbers to each set of responses as well as pseudonyms in the data analysis phase. No identifiable information will be shared with a third-party processor, and all data generated through Qualtrics will be downloaded and deleted from the website once the study is complete. The information downloaded will be saved on a flash drive that will be stored by the principal investigator for seven years. All findings from this study will be presented using pseudonyms to ensure that your identity is protected. The results may be used in reports, presentations, and publications.

TERMINATION OF PARTICIPATION

You may choose to withdraw from this study at any time and for any reason. If you would like your answers to not be included even after completion/submission of survey and short-answer questions, you may contact the investigator and your research answers will be destroyed and will not be included in the research study.

COMPENSATION

You will not receive payment of any kind for participation in this study. Participation in this study is strictly voluntary. There is no cost to you for participating.

INJURY COMPENSATION

Neither Plymouth State University nor the Public School System will provide special services, free care, or compensation for any injuries for this research. The treatment for such injuries will be at your own expense.

QUESTIONS

If you have any questions about this study, you may contact Autumn Dolan at amsayers03@plymouth.edu. If you have any additional questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Plymouth State Institutional Review Board.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

You understand that your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and that refusal to participate will not result in any penalty. Refusal to participate will not be reported to district level administration or to any other entities. You are free to discontinue participation in this study at any time.

You voluntarily give your consent to participate in this research study.

Signatures:

Participants Name Print:

Participants Name Signature:

Date:

I, Understand, certify that to the best of my knowledge, the subject signing this consent form has had the study fully and carefully explained by me and have been given an opportunity to ask questions regarding the nature, risks, and benefits of participation in this research study.

Autumn Dolan

Investigators Name

Autumn Dolan

Investigators Signature

Date: May 9, 2022

