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School Counselor Program Choice and Self-Efficacy: Relationship to Achievement Gap and Equity

This article reports the results of a national study of American School Counselor Association members (N = 860). Information includes level of school counselor self-efficacy, type of program, status of achievement gap, and equity in their schools. School counselors with higher self-efficacy were more aware of achievement gap data, and school counselors who indicated a program approach and high self-efficacy were more likely to report narrowing achievement gaps. One fifth reported no awareness of achievement gap data. Implications for school counselors are included.

A variety of changes have occurred in school counseling in the past decade. The American School Counselor Association's (ASCA) National Standards (Campbell & Dahir, 1997) and ASCA National Model® (2005) have been developed; a stronger push to link the results of school counseling programs to the mission of the school has been established; and advocacy for multicultural competency and impacting educational equity have been at the forefront of educational reforms. In their most general terms, these developments have resulted in a need for school counselors to understand what impact their programs have on student achievement levels and equity.

In 1997, the National Standards were proposed in the areas of academic, career, and personal/social development (Campbell & Dahir, 1997). Many states, and many individual school systems, have developed their own standards that may be used in lieu of the National Standards, but all standards-based school counseling programs focus on the results that the program has on the student (ASCA, 2005; Campbell & Dahir). The ASCA National Model was developed in 2003, presenting an organizational model grounded in a foundation tied to the school mission and needs assessments, and utilizing delivery and management systems to organize and evaluate services. Leadership, advocacy, systemic change, and collaboration are themes that surround and integrate all school counseling programmatic efforts (ASCA, 2005). The theme of leadership, specifically, is described as "leaders who are engaged in systemwide change to ensure student success. … School counselors promote student success by closing the existing achievement gap whenever found among students of color, poor students or underachieving students and their more advantaged peers" (ASCA, p. 24). Thus, school counselors are encouraged to be involved in school and system efforts leading toward academic equity, which remains a national educational concern.

Although the ASCA National Standards and the ASCA National Model have been introduced and implemented in many schools across the country, in addition to previously established school counseling programs such as the comprehensive guidance and counseling program introduced in the 1970s (Gysbers & Henderson, 1994), no research has yet been conducted to determine if schools with school counselors who implement different types of programs have different impacts on their students. Specifically, because the ASCA National Model includes a more direct pronouncement regarding the achievement gap than previous program types, it might be expected that school counselors who utilize the ASCA National Model work in schools where the achievement gap is closing.

Despite a focus on closing the achievement gap in recent legislation known as No Child Left Behind (U.S. Department of Education, 2001), a variety of national statistics still indicate gaps by ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status (SES). The high school dropout rate among 16- to 24-year-olds in 2005 was lower than in previous years, but was 6% for Caucasian students, 10.4% for African American students, and 22.4% for Hispanic/Latino students (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2008a). The dropout rate among young men continues to be greater than among young women: The national average in 2006 was 9.3% overall but was 10.3% among men and 8.3% among women (NCES, 2008b). On the most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 80% or more of Asian American and Caucasian students

scored at or above basic level on the eighth-grade reading test, compared to only 55%–58% of African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian students (NCES, 2007). Females score higher on the NAEP reading assessments, while Caucasian and Hispanic males score higher on the NAEP mathematics assessments than their female counterparts. Low SES, as classified by free or reduced lunch status, continues to correlate strongly with low scores on the NAEP, and it continues to be more concentrated in the African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian populations (NCES, 2007).

SAT scores from 2006 show similar trends, with combined (Verbal and Mathematics) average scores as follows: Asian Americans, 1,088; Caucasians, 1,063; African Americans, 863; Mexican Americans, 919; Puerto Ricans, 915; and American Indians, 981 (College Board, 2007). Overall, the achievement gaps in most U.S. schools remain, regardless of the assessment used. While multiple economic, historical, and social issues contribute to the educational achievement gaps that may seem to be beyond the scope of school counseling, school counselors are critical to coordinating efforts within the school and the broader community to both advocate for and develop programs that serve those students who are frequently left behind.

Leadership, advocacy, systemic change, and collaboration are themes that surround and integrate all school counseling programmatic efforts.

Previous research has indicated that school counseling programs can support student achievement and attitudes. The largest study to date, conducted in Missouri with more than 22,000 high school students, found that those students who attended schools that more fully implemented school counseling programs rated their school climate and sense of safety in school more highly, and they indicated that learning was more likely to take place without being disrupted by peers (Lapan, Gysbers, & Sun, 1997). A similar study conducted with seventh-grade students indicated that those students who attended schools with more fully implemented school counseling programs reported better relationships with teachers, better grades, and higher satisfaction with the quality of education (Lapan, Gysbers, & Petroski, 2001). An elementary school study using treatment and control groups found that classroom guidance lessons on succeeding in school (Gerler & Anderson, 1986) had a positive impact on the mathematics grades of fourth- to sixth-grade students (Lee, 1993). In another study, most elementary students who participated in group counseling sessions that combined academic achievement and personal-social issues (anger management, changing families, friendships, social skills, or grief) were found to improve both behaviorally, as evaluated by both teachers and parents, and academically, as evaluated by improving language arts grades by at least one letter (Steen & Kaffenberger, 2007).

The studies cited above indicate that the school counseling program can be beneficial to students and schools in regards to academic grades and attitude. Indeed, in a review of school counselor outcome studies, Whiston and Sexton (1998) stated that "one can cautiously conclude that a broad range of activities school counselors perform often result in positive changes for students" (p. 422). Based on the results of their review, these authors suggested that further outcome studies of school counseling programs be conducted in order to more fully establish the impact of school counseling programs on student achievement.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

While the current study is not an outcome study that investigated the students directly, it aims to expand and update the knowledge about school counseling through a national study examining school counselors' perceptions of the status of the achievement gap and equity in their schools, school counselor self-efficacy, and the type of program approach that school counselors report implementing (i.e., ASCA National Model, National Standards, comprehensive, developmental).

School counselor self-efficacy was identified as an important variable to include in this study based on self-efficacy theory. *Self-efficacy* is defined as beliefs about one's own ability to successfully perform a given behavior, and it involves "a generative capability in which component cognitive, social, and behavioral skills must be organized into integrated courses of action to serve innumerable purposes" (Bandura, 1986, p. 122). People with higher levels of self-efficacy in a particular area of their behavior set higher goals; exhibit stronger commitment, motivation, resilience, and perseverance; and are therefore more likely to meet their goals (Bandura, 1986, 1995). Not only do these characteristics impact the person with self-efficacy, but students of teachers with high teaching self-efficacy have been found to perform better than students of teachers with lower teaching self-efficacy (Bandura, 1995), and some studies have found that counselors with higher levels of counseling self-efficacy perform better as rated by supervisors (Larson & Daniels, 1998). Based on self-efficacy theory and the research results indicating that students and clients are affected by levels of teacher and counselor self-efficacy, it seems plausible that school counselors with high levels of self-efficacy might impact their students in more effective ways than those with lower levels of school counselor self-efficacy. One way this effectiveness might be manifested is in the school's achievement gap.

To examine the potential relationships among

school counselor self-efficacy, school counseling program approach, and the achievement gap, we examined the following research questions: (a) Are there relationships between the school counseling program approach and the school counselor's perception of achievement gap status and equity in the school? (b) Are there relationships between school counselor self-efficacy and the school counselor's perception of achievement gap status and equity in the school? (c) Are there relationships between school counselor self-efficacy and the school counseling program approach utilized? Based on self-efficacy theory, we expected to find a positive relationship between school counselor self-efficacy and closing achievement gaps and school equity. Furthermore, based on the directness with which the ASCA National Model indicates the role of leadership in equity issues, one would expect to find a positive relationship between utilizing the ASCA National Model program approach and awareness of data, closing achievement gaps, and school equity.

METHODS

Participants

A random sample of 1,600 members of ASCA were invited to participate in the study. The overall response rate was 54% (860 individuals responded). Of the 860 participants, 721 were female (85%) and 756 were European American (89%). These characteristics are similar to demographic characteristics of school counselors found in most national studies. Forty-five African Americans represented 5% of the respondents; 16 Hispanic Americans/Latinos represented 2%; 16 multiracial, 2%; 6 Asian Americans, 1%; 6 Native Americans, 1%; and 14 (2%) did not respond to this question. The participants' mean years of experience as professional school counselors was 9.87 (*SD* = 7.74). Two hundred fifty-nine (32%) of the respondents worked in an elementary school, 151 (19%) in a middle school, 312 (38%) in a high school, and 90 (11%) either worked in a school with a different configuration or did not respond to this question. Of the 792 respondents who reported their caseloads, the average and median were 280 students and the range was 5 to 1,400 students. Three hundred one (36%) respondents described their school setting as suburban, 171 (20%) described the setting as urban, and 370 (44%) described it as rural or mixed. Due to a printing error in the surveys, response possibilities of "rural" and "mixed" appeared too physically close to separate those responses.

Procedures

Surveys, including the School Counselor Self-Efficacy Scale (Bodenhorn & Skaggs, 2005), questions regarding the school counseling program, achievement gap information, and demographics, were sent to a random sample of 1,600 ASCA members. Through random selection of these participants, half of the surveys were sent through postal mail and half through e-mail/Internet. The tailored design method (Dillman, 2007) was used for both groups. Specifically, participants were sent four personalized notifications: (a) a postal letter with a dollar coin appreciation indicating that the survey would be sent the following week; (b) either a postal letter with the survey and return envelope or an e-mail with the URL for the survey; (c) either a reminder postcard or a reminder e-mail if the survey had not been returned or completed; and (d) an additional copy of the survey and return envelope or a second e-mail reminder with the URL. Following this, nonresponders were requested to participate in the alternative medium—those who had received postal requests received one e-mail request, and those who had received e-mail requests received one postal request. Dillman suggested that a survey process based on features such as these—multiple contacts, provision of an unconditional incentive, and personalization of the content of the contacts—is likely to obtain the highest response rates as well as the most sincere efforts on the part of the respondents. In this study, unit nonresponse rate was higher for those initially contacted via the Web-based version (41% versus 77%, respectively) than via postal mail.

School counselors are encouraged to be involved in school and system efforts leading toward academic equity, which remains a national educational concern.

Variables and Instrumentation

School Counselor Self-Efficacy Scale (SCSE). The SCSE (Bodenhorn & Skaggs, 2005) is a unidimensional measure of school counselors' self-efficacy to perform various school counseling tasks. It is a 43-item instrument in which participants indicate their level of confidence in performing various school counselor responsibilities using a 5-point rating scale (1 = *not confident*, 2 = *slightly confident*, 3 = *moderately confident*, 4 = *generally confident*, 5 = *highly confident*). Sample items include "Change situations in which an individual or group threatens others in a disrespectful or harassing manner," "Help students identify and attain attitudes, behaviors, and skills that lead to successful learning," and "Develop school improvement plans based on interpreting school-wide assessment results."

In the development and validation study of the SCSE (Bodenhorn & Skaggs, 2005), the 43-item scale demonstrated reliability with a coefficient alpha of .95. In the current study, the reliability coefficient was .97. Several pieces of validity evidence were provided in the validation study. First, results indicated that respondents who had been school counselors for 3 or more years had higher SCSE scores than did

respondents with less experience. Second, practitioners who had received training in implementing the ASCA National Standards obtained significantly higher SCSE scores than those who had not. Third, SCSE scores were moderately correlated (r = .41) with measures from a self-efficacy scale designed for individual personal counseling. Fourth, SCSE scores were moderately negatively correlated (r = –.42) with measures of state anxiety, indicating that as self-efficacy increased, anxiety about performing school counseling duties decreased. No differences were found in the validation study between practitioners at different school levels or school settings.

Perceived achievement gap status. A key variable of interest in this study was the perceived achievement gap status in the respondent's school. The question designed for this analysis defined an achievement gap as different levels of accomplishment related to different ethnic groups when data are disaggregated, and it asked the respondents to indicate the response representing the achievement levels of ethnic groups on the most common standardized test used in their school. Responses were the following: (a) "An achievement gap exists, which has gotten *smaller* in the past 3 years." (b) "An achievement gap exists, which has *stayed the same* in the past 3 years." (c) "An achievement gap exists, which has gotten *larger* in the past 3 years." (d) "An achievement gap exists. The gap is getting smaller between some groups and larger between others (*varied*)." (e) "I am *not aware* of data about an ethnic achievement gap." (f) "My school has not had an ethnic achievement gap (*no gap*)."

Despite a focus on closing the achievement gap in recent legislation known as No Child Left Behind, a variety of national statistics still indicate gaps by ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status.

Equity variable. Another variable, called equity, was created from the combination of results from four questions: (a) "My students have an equal opportunity to succeed educationally regardless of gender." (b) "My students have an equal opportunity to succeed educationally regardless of ethnicity." (c) "My students who need support receive it." (d) "My students are prepared to take the steps necessary to choose or enter a career of their choice as developmentally appropriate for the age of the student." Response possibilities for each of these items ranged from 1 to 4 (1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *agree,* 4 = s*trongly agree*). Each variable was calculated as a sum of responses to the four items included in the variable, so each variable score ranged from 4 to 16. Cronbach's alpha for this variable was .77.

School counseling program approach. School counselors also indicated the approach or approaches on which their school counseling program is based. Options included (a) the ASCA National Model, (b) the ASCA National Standards, (c) comprehensive guidance and counseling (CGC), (d) developmental counseling, (e) the Education Trust's Transforming School Counseling Initiative, (f) statewide developed standards, and (g) other (specification requested). Respondents could indicate any numbers of approaches, as these programs are not mutually exclusive. Very few respondents (n = 29; 3%) indicated that they used an approach identified with the Education Trust, so this was dropped from the analysis. Almost 10% (n = 87) did not identify any approach to their school counseling program (no choice). Over 90% of the program-endorsing respondents indicated using more than one approach.

After examining the responses on program approaches, and keeping in mind the models and timeline of introduction of the various approaches, the best fit for further analysis was determined to be the following groupings. The Model group (n = 463) includes all respondents who indicated that they use the ASCA National Model, including those who use it solely and those who use it in combination with any of the other approaches. The Standards group (n = 179) includes those respondents who did not indicate using the ASCA National Model but did indicate using either ASCA, state, or locally developed standards. The CGC group (n = 131) includes those respondents who did not indicate using the ASCA National Model or the standards, but did indicate using CGC and/or developmental programming. The No Choice group (n = 87) includes those respondents who did not indicate using any of the program approaches identified and did not name any in the space provided for alternatives.

ANALYSES AND RESULTS

Research Question 1

The first research question posed was "Are there relationships between the school counseling program approach and the school counselor's perception of achievement gap status and equity in the school?" Analysis of the relationship between perceived achievement gap and program approaches used a chi-square statistic for the contingency table of these two variables. Analysis relating to the relationship between program approaches (independent variable) and equity (dependent variable) was conducted using an analysis of variance.

The relationship between the perceived achievement gap status and the program approaches variables, as shown in Table 1, was statistically significant, $\chi^2_{(18)} = 47.36$, $p = .0002$. The contribution of each cell to the overall chi-square statistic was converted to standardized indexes by taking its square root, which, under the assumption of normality of expected cell frequencies, can be subjected to a statistical significance test to determine which of the cell frequencies departed from their expected values. Of the 28 cells in this matrix, three of them pro-

Table 1. Contingency Table of Achievement Gap and Program Endorsement

	Achievement Gap Status							
Counseling Approach	No Gap	Smaller	Stayed Same	Larger	Varied	Not Aware	No Answer	Total (%)[a]
Model *(n)*	82	124	55	10	52	89	51	463
(%)[b]	(17.7)	(26.8)	(11.9)	(2.2)	(11.2)	(19.2)	(11.0)	(53.8)
Standards *(n)*	27	42	29	7	16	42	16	179
(%)	(15.1)	(23.5)	(16.2)	(3.9)	(8.9)	(23.5)	(8.9)	(20.8)
CGC *(n)*	31	34	13	3	10	31	9*	131
(%)	(23.7)	(25.9)	(9.9)	(2.3)	(7.6)	(23.7)	(6.9)	(15.2)
No choice *(n)*	15	11*	7	1	5	20	28**	87
(%)	(17.2)	(12.6)	(8.1)	(1.1)	(5.7)	(23.0)	(32.2)	(10.1)
Total	155	211	104	21	83	182	104	860
	(18.0)	(24.5)	(12.1)	(2.4)	(9.7)	(21.2)	(12.1)	

[a]Percentages in the Total column are percentages within that column.

[b]Percentages in the Achievement Gap Status box are percentages per row (i.e., % of those who utilize model, % of those who utilize standards, etc.).

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

duced statistically significant results, and only one of them produced a statistically significant result when a Bonferroni adjustment was applied. With the Bonferroni adjustment, the school counselors in the No Choice group were more likely to provide no answer to the achievement gap question than would be the case under the independence assumption ($z = 5.39$, $p = .0001$). Without the Bonferroni adjustment, the participants in the No Choice group also were less likely to indicate that the achievement gap at their school was getting smaller than would be the case under the independence assumption ($z = 2.24$, $p = .02$). Finally, the school counselors for which the counseling program was based on CGC were less likely to answer the question about achievement gap than would be expected under the independence assumption ($z = 1.72$, $p = .04$).

Analyses relating to the relationship between program approaches and the equity variable revealed a statistically significant main effect [$F_{(3, 845)} = 5.52$, $p < .001$, $R^2_{adj} = .02$]. The effect size was small with only 2% of the variance being explained by differences between program approaches. The mean equity response for the Model group was 3.20 on the rating scale that ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*) points; for the Standards group it was 3.12, for the CGC group it was 3.15, and for those who indicated no choice, it was 3.05. Follow-up analyses were conducted using Tukey's honestly significant difference test for equality. These comparisons revealed that the difference between the Model group and the Standards group, and between the Model group and the No Choice group, was statistically significant.

Research Question 2

The second research question posed was "Are there relationships between school counselor self-efficacy and the school counselor's perception of achievement gap status and equity in the school?" Analysis relating to the relationship between SCSE (independent variable) and equity (dependent variable) employed bivariate regression. Analysis concerning the relationship between SCSE (independent variable) and perceived achievement gap (dependent variable) utilized logistic regression.

The relationship between SCSE and the equity variable produced statistically significant results ($F_{[1,847]} = 104.70$, $p < .001$, $R^2_{adj} = .11$), indicating that as school counselors' self-efficacy increases, so do the counselors' positive perceptions of equity within their school. The effect size was large, with 11% of the variance in SCSE scores being explained by its linear relationship with equity, and the standardized regression coefficient indicates that the equity variable increases about one third of one standard deviation for each one standard deviation increase in SCSE measures.

The logistic regression analysis conducted using SCSE measures (a continuous variable) as predictors of perceived achievement gap (a categorical variable—we designated those who believed that the achievement gap at their school had become smaller as the reference group) also produced a statistically

Table 2. Contingency Table for SCSE Quartiles and Perceived Achievement Gap

SCSE Quartile	Smaller	Larger	No Answer	No Gap	Not Aware	Stayed Same	Varied	Total
1 (lowest)	38 18%	2 10%	24 23%	40 26%	64 35%	27 26%	20 24%	215 25%
2	47 22%	6 29%	29 28%	38 25%	53 29%	23 22%	19 23%	215 25%
3	64 30%	6 29%	28 27%	35 23%	34 19%	27 26%	22 27%	216 25%
4 (highest)	62 29%	7 33%	23 22%	42 27%	31 17%	27 26%	22 27%	214 25%
Total	211 25%	21 2%	104 12%	155 18%	182 21%	104 12%	83 10%	860

Note. Numerals indicate counts. Percentages shown in the Total row and column are marginal percentages. Percentages shown in the body of the table are conditional on SCSE Quartile. In our original analyses, SCSE was treated as a continuous variable, and the "Smaller" category was chosen as the reference group. "Smaller" represents responses that the gap was getting smaller; "Larger" that the gap was getting larger; "No Answer," those who did not respond to the question; "No Gap," there was no gap in their school; "Not Aware," the school counselor was not aware of any data about a gap; "Stayed Same," there was a gap and it has remained the same; and "Varied," there was a gap that is narrowing for some ethnicities and growing for others.

significant result, $\chi^2_{(6)} = 25.52$, $p = .0003$, $R^2 = .01$. Although the analyses were conducted with the continuously distributed SCSE measures, in order to simplify presentation, we have collapsed SCSE measures into quartiles in Table 2. That table reveals that those with higher self-efficacy scores were more likely to indicate that the achievement gap in their school was either getting smaller or getting larger, and those with lower self-efficacy scores were more likely to be unaware of data about an achievement gap. For example, relative to the reference group (smaller), there was no statistically significant effect for SCSE measures for the group that indicated that the achievement gap at their school was getting larger, $\chi^2_{(1)} = 0.09$, $p = .76$. However, each of the remaining groups did differ from the reference group by a statistically significant degree: no gap, $\chi^2_{(1)} = 4.35$, $p = .04$; no answer, $\chi^2_{(1)} = 5.80$, $p = .02$; stayed same, $\chi^2_{(1)} = 4.27$, $p = .04$; not aware, $\chi^2_{(1)} = 21.53$, $p < .0001$; and varied, $\chi^2_{(1)} = 5.41$, $p = .02$.

Research Question 3

The third research question posed was "Are there relationships between school counselor self-efficacy and the school counseling program approach utilized?" Analysis for this question utilized a logistic regression.

The analysis using SCSE measures as a continuous predictor of the categorical dependent variable, program approaches, produced a statistically significant result, $\chi^2_{(3)} = 33.69$, $p < .0001$, $R^2 = .02$. As we did for Table 2, we summarize the trends in program approaches across levels of SCSE quartiles in Table 3, although our analyses treated SCSE measures as a continuous variable. This table reveals that those with higher self-efficacy scores were considerably more likely to utilize the ASCA National Model, and those with lower self-efficacy scores were more likely to indicate that they used CGC or indicated no choice. All three of the program groups differed in these trends from the reference group: Model group, $\chi^2_{(1)} = 21.89$, $p < .0001$; Standards group, $\chi^2_{(1)} = 5.13$, $p = .02$; and CGC group, $\chi^2_{(1)} = 3.91$, $p = .05$.

DISCUSSION

The results verified some, but not all, of the expected hypotheses indicated in the previous section. Specifically, we expected to find a positive relationship between using the ASCA National Model and reporting narrowing achievement gaps, but this was not found in the results. Additionally, school counselors in the ASCA National Model group were not more likely to be aware of the data in their schools regarding the achievement gap. Nevertheless, the hypothesized difference in the equity variable was found for participants in the Model group when compared to those using the standards or who did not endorse a program choice, yet the effect size was a small one.

From the results of this study, we determined that the type of school counseling program endorsed

Table 3. Contingency Table for SCSE Quartiles and Program Approach

SCSE Quartile	No Choice	Standards	CGC	Model	Total
1 (lowest)	35 40%	52 29%	47 36%	81 17%	215 25%
2	22 25%	40 22%	33 25%	120 26%	215 25%
3	16 18%	57 32%	22 17%	121 26%	216 25%
4 (highest)	14 16%	30 17%	29 22%	141 30%	214 25%
Total	87 10%	179 21%	131 15%	463 54%	860

Note. Numerals indicate counts. Percentages shown in the Total row and column are marginal percentages. Percentages shown in the body of the table are conditional on SCSE Quartile. In our original analyses, SCSE was treated as a continuous variable, and the "None" category was chosen as the reference group.

does not seem to be related to the achievement gap status or have a strong relationship with equity issues in the school. Furthermore, participants who did not identify a school counseling program choice had lower school counselor self-efficacy scores, were least likely to respond to the achievement gap question, and were least likely to report a closing achievement gap in their schools. From these results we concluded that it seems more important that the school counselor be aware of the intentionality and process of the school counseling program (at least enough to name the type of program) than it is to utilize any particular type of program. This finding is related to the results of the Lapan et al. (1997) study on the Missouri comprehensive guidance program that indicated better student results on various measures with fuller school counseling program implementation. School counselors who develop goals, prepare programs, and are proactive about serving their community seem to also have more successful outcomes.

Descriptive data also provided an interesting result in that 21% of the school counselors responding to this survey reported that they were not aware of the data regarding ethnic achievement gaps in their school. According to No Child Left Behind (U.S. Department of Education, 2001), disaggregated achievement data are mandated public information, so they should be readily available to all educational staff. Advocacy efforts have been made through professional literature for school counselors to be more involved in social justice and equity issues for the past decade (i.e., Bemak & Chung, 2005; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; House & Sears, 2002; Nelson, Bustamante, Wilson, & Onwuegbuzie, 2008). Most documents relating to school counseling, including the ASCA ethical standards (ASCA, 2004a), the role description (ASCA, 2004b), and the ASCA National Model (2005), include statements referring to the responsibility to advocate and provide alternatives for students who are not being served by the standard school programs. One is left to wonder how active school counselors can be in the process of leading and advocating for equity and achievement if they are unaware of the data in their own schools.

The results of this study also indicate that school counselors with higher levels of self-efficacy seem to be having a different impact on their students than those with lower levels of self-efficacy. Results with small effect sizes included higher likelihoods of awareness of the achievement gap data and implementing the ASCA National Model among those with high self-efficacy. The fact that these effect sizes are small indicates that there are other variables, not yet identified, that account for most of the variation of responses in the dependent variables (awareness of gap data and implementing the ASCA National Model), in addition to the small amount of the variation that is accounted for by school counselor self-efficacy.

The result with a large effect size included a higher likelihood of reporting equitable opportunities in the school among those with higher self-efficacy. In addition to the 11% of the variation in reporting on the equity variable that is accounted for by school counselor self-efficacy, an additional small effect of 2% was found to be accounted for by indicating the use of the ASCA National Model. When one considers the vast number of programs, initiatives, and

people working in the schools to create equitable treatment of students, the fact that school counselor self-efficacy accounts for a relatively large amount of the variation for the equity variable is promising in terms of the impact that school counselors are having on the broader school community.

Assuming that school counselors have adopted the educational goals of equity and closing the achievement gap, this result is consistent with the basis of self-efficacy theory—that those with higher self-efficacy will set higher goals, be more persistent, and develop more flexible alternatives to attain goals, and thus are more likely to meet their goals than those with lower self-efficacy. In other words, all school counselors might start out with a similar goal of narrowing the achievement gap in their schools, but those with stronger self-efficacy might be more likely to retain and meet that goal and those with lower self-efficacy could be more likely to give up on the goal or revert to the status quo of practice. The direction of this relationship is not clear. Those school counselors who are part of a team that is successfully closing the achievement gap in the school might develop higher self-efficacy as a result of that success; or school counselors with higher self-efficacy may impact the students and other staff in a way that results in higher achievement.

From the results it seems more important that the school counselor be aware of the intentionality and process of the school counseling program (at least enough to name the type of program) than it is to utilize any particular type of program.

LIMITATIONS

Limitations to this study include the fact that the sample consisted only of ASCA members. ASCA members receive professional information from the association regarding effective practice and research as well as endorsement of the ASCA National Model, so they may be more aware of current issues and practices than nonmembers. The results may not be generalizable to the entire population of school counselors.

The respondents indicated an average student caseload of 280, which is much closer to the ASCA-recommended caseload of 250 than it is to the actual caseload of 475 (2006-2007) (ASCA, n.d.). There is no way to determine why this sample includes so many school counselors with relatively low caseloads, but this also raises questions about the generalizability of the results, as the caseload report is an anomaly, while the other descriptive data seem to be consistent with other studies.

Additionally, the responses relied entirely upon self-report. We are not able to verify the perceptions of the school counselors regarding the achievement gap status and equity. Self-report surveys are subject to social desirability, which might have impacted some of the questions in this study more than others. *Social desirability* in survey questions refers to respondents answering a question in a way that makes them look good. The responses to each of the items in the SCSE and the equity variable can be interpreted as being positive or negative, while indicating one school counseling program over another does not evoke the same understanding.

Finally, the questions that make up the equity variable were not inclusive or exhaustive in terms of measuring that construct, but were meant to provide a collapsed snapshot of the issue. Regardless of the limitations to this study, the results offer an insight into the relationships that exist between school counselors who have high self-efficacy, and who follow a programmatic approach, and achievement gaps and serving all students equitably.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The implications from this study suggest that the school counseling program used does not relate to some student equity outcomes as much as the fact that a program is in place. The profession, at least the professional organization of ASCA, seems strongly invested in promoting the ASCA National Model, which may not be warranted based on the results of this study. Outcome research, as called for previously by Whiston and Sexton (1998), is needed specifically regarding the various programmatic approaches that school counselors are using in the schools. That is, examining differences in student outcomes based on programmatic approach would be an important addition to the professional literature if the profession is potentially moving toward one program type.

There may or may not be factors within the self-efficacy construct that also merit additional research. Holcomb-McCoy, Harris, Hines, and Johnston (2008) postulated that school counselor multicultural self-efficacy might be unrelated to general school counselor self-efficacy. The dependent variables in this study (achievement gap and equity) are at the heart of multicultural and social justice issues, so the question of relationship between multicultural and general self-efficacy among school counselors also deserves additional research.

The directions of the relationships found in this study remain undetermined. In other words, it is not clear whether the awareness of data increases the likelihood of adopting a program and increasing self-efficacy through involvement in activities, or whether self-efficacy and/or adopting a program prompts school counselors to ask about and therefore become more aware of data. Additionally, it is unclear whether higher levels of self-efficacy lead to using the ASCA National Model or whether using the model increases the school counselor's self-efficacy. Further research is needed to determine the direction of these relationships.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL COUNSELORS

Studies have shown that schools that are the most successful in high-poverty areas and with closing achievement gaps include characteristics of purposeful leadership, commitment of the entire staff, data-based decision making, and professional development (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). School counselors can be instrumental in each of these areas as leaders in the school to meet the goals and professional directives involved in maximizing each student's potential. As school counselors continue to embed themselves into school leadership, the issues of data awareness and utilization need to be developed as well. The results of this study indicate that the use of some programmatic approach and a professional belief in one's capacity to perform the activities that are involved in school counseling (self-efficacy) are related to differences in student achievement level. The results regarding the equity variable are similar to the results regarding the achievement gap, in that programmatic approaches and higher self-efficacy were found to be related to more positive scores on the equity variable.

Clearly, school counselors need to be aware of the data in order to be part of a data-driven decision-making process. High levels of self-efficacy have a larger effect on equity, and the two most direct ways to increase one's self-efficacy are through personal and vicarious accomplishments (Bandura, 1986). Thus, school counselors increase their self-efficacy by participating in activities successfully or by observing or reading about others who have achieved. In order to determine if they are being successful, school counselors must be aware of the data to see how it might have changed. As they see change in aspects of their work, then they gain self-efficacy and are likely to continue working toward and increasing their goal. Awareness of data, self-efficacy, and establishing a programmatic approach to school counseling seem to be related to important goals such as increasing equity in our schools and narrowing the achievement gaps. School counselors should continue in their efforts to develop a coherent program, understand the data relevant to their school, and increase their self-efficacy. ▮

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