THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCHOOL COUNSELORS’ SELF-ADVOCACY SKILLS
AND THE IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL
OF COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL COUNSELING PROGRAMS

A thesis presented

by

Celestia Riggs

To

The School of Education

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

College or Professional Studies
Northeastern University
Boston, Massachusetts
February 4, 2020
Abstract

Comprehensive school counseling program implementation is the primary task of school counselors. However, role ambiguity regarding the role of school counselors has resulted in misconceptions about their professional responsibilities among administrators, parents, students, and teachers and has inhibited school counselors’ ability to implement comprehensive school counseling programs. Self-advocacy is a key tenet of closing the lack of consistency between school counseling practice and anticipated roles, as well as maintaining relevant school counselor activities within a school. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between school counselor self-advocacy skills and the level of school counseling program implementation at K–12 schools across the United States. A national survey was conducted based on the School Counseling Self-Advocacy Questionnaire, which was used to measure the skills that enable school counselors to advocate for their roles and programs, and the School Counselor Program Implementation Survey, which was used to measure the level of school counseling program implementation. Overall, this research demonstrated that there is a significant relationship between school counselors’ self-advocacy skills and the level of school counseling program implementation at K-12 schools across the United States. The study results suggest that implications exist for professional school counselors and other professionals who work in the education field who are responsible for comprehensive school counseling program implementation.

Keywords: school counselor self-advocacy, school counseling program implementation, role ambiguity, School Counseling Self-Advocacy Questionnaire, School Counselor Program Implementation Survey
Acknowledgements

I cannot express how grateful and blessed I am to have a strong support system throughout my dissertation journey. Thank you to my parents for instilling in me a drive to persevere through challenges and hardships. I am thankful for their unconditional love and support. Thank you to my brother, sister-in-law, and nieces for continually offering their encouragement and lending helpful hands when needed.

Thank you to my friends and colleagues for cheering me on, for keeping me lifted professionally and personally, and for celebrating with me at each milestone along the way.

Thank you to Dr. McCready for serving as my advisor. I appreciate your feedback, guidance, and assistance. Thank you to Dr. Gorman for your assistance and motivation.

To Dr. Williams, I cannot thank him enough for his gift of time and for helping me to master quantitative research methods. Thank you Dr. Williams for your endless patience and limitless support.
# Table of Contents

**Chapter 1: Introduction** ............................................................................................................................................. 9

- Statement of the Problem .............................................................................................................................................. 12
- Purpose Statement .......................................................................................................................................................... 13
- Significance of the Study ................................................................................................................................................ 13
- Definitions of Key Terminology .................................................................................................................................. 14
  - School Counselor ....................................................................................................................................................... 14
  - Comprehensive School Counseling Program ........................................................................................................... 15
  - Self-Advocacy ............................................................................................................................................................ 15
  - Professional Advocacy ............................................................................................................................................... 15
- Conceptual Framework .................................................................................................................................................... 16
  - Microsystem ............................................................................................................................................................... 17
  - Mesosystem ............................................................................................................................................................... 17
  - Exosystem ................................................................................................................................................................. 17
  - Macrosystem ............................................................................................................................................................. 18
- Research Plan ................................................................................................................................................................. 18
- Research Questions .......................................................................................................................................................... 19
  - Population and Sampling ........................................................................................................................................... 21
  - Data Collection .......................................................................................................................................................... 22
  - Data Analysis ............................................................................................................................................................ 23
  - Assumptions ............................................................................................................................................................... 24
  - Scope and Limitations ................................................................................................................................................. 24
- Summary .......................................................................................................................................................................... 24
## Chapter 2: Literature Review

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>History of School Counseling</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evolution of School Counseling as a Profession</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of the School Counselor</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensive School Counseling Program</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Benefits</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Counselor Benefits</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges of Implementation</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASCA National Model</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundation</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivery</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Model Themes</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Counselor Self-Advocacy</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of Professional Experience</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student to School Counselor Ratio</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecological Systems Theory and Education</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecological Systems Theory and School Counseling</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecological Systems Theory and School Counselor Self-Advocacy</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Microsystem and Mesosystem</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exosystem</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology ................................................................. 72

Research Questions ........................................................................................................... 72
Quantitative Research ........................................................................................................ 73
Research Design .................................................................................................................. 75
Participants and Research Setting ...................................................................................... 75
Instrumentation .................................................................................................................... 77
Demographic Questionnaire ............................................................................................... 78
School Counselor Self-Advocacy Questionnaire ............................................................... 78
The School Counseling Program Implementation Survey ................................................ 80
Data Collection Procedures ............................................................................................... 81
Data Analysis ...................................................................................................................... 83
Primary Analyses ............................................................................................................... 83
Analyses by Research Question Posed ................................................................................. 84
Ethical Considerations ....................................................................................................... 84
Limitations .......................................................................................................................... 85

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results .................................................................................. 87
Data Analysis Procedures .................................................................................................. 87
Sample/Sample Selection Analytics .................................................................................... 88
Missing Data Analysis ......................................................................................................... 88
Internal Reliability ............................................................................................................... 88
Participant Demographics ................................................................................................. 89
Survey Descriptive Statistics ........................................................................................................... 92
Results by Research Question ........................................................................................................ 95
  Additional Finding for Participant Age Range .............................................................................. 101
Summary ........................................................................................................................................ 103

Chapter 5: Implications and Discussion ......................................................................................... 107

Overview of the Study ....................................................................................................................... 109
Findings and Conclusions ................................................................................................................ 110
  Research Question One .................................................................................................................. 111
  Research Question Two .................................................................................................................. 115
  Research Question Three .............................................................................................................. 116
  Research Question Four .................................................................................................................. 119
Implications for Practice + Recommendations for Practice ....................................................... 121
Implications for Research + Recommendations for Future Research ......................................... 123
Theoretical Implications ................................................................................................................... 125
  Microsystem and Mesosystem ....................................................................................................... 125
  Exosystem ...................................................................................................................................... 126
  Macrosystem .................................................................................................................................... 126
  Education ...................................................................................................................................... 127
  Practice .......................................................................................................................................... 127
Limitations ......................................................................................................................................... 129

References .......................................................................................................................................... 130

Appendix A .......................................................................................................................................... 142
Appendix B .......................................................................................................................................... 143
Chapter 1: Introduction

School counselors are essential members of the educational leadership team who help all students achieve academically, develop socially, and fulfil career aspirations (American School Counselor Association, 2018b). Most school counselors hold a master’s degree in school counseling and are certified educators who are required to fulfill state licensure standards, uphold state laws, and adhere to the American School Counselor Association’s (ASCA) ethical and professional standards (ASCA, 2018a; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). The school counseling profession was established in the 1800s and has evolved continually as a result of educational, political, and economical influences (Paisley & Borders, 1995). The work of school counselors was originally termed vocational guidance, or guiding students according to their capacity in preparation for a job (Gysbers, 2001).

School counselors’ role and function has evolved from its vocational roots to include an emphasis on student assessment, classroom developmental lessons, consultation, mental health prevention and intervention, multiculturalism, and social justice (Goodman-Scott, Sink, Cholewa, & Burgess, 2018). Today’s school counselors are required to support every student to be successful academically, develop personally and socially, and plan for college and career success (ASCA, 2014). A timeline representing the evolution of the role of the school counselor is presented in Figure 1.
The most recent shift in the role of the school counselor came after the publication of the first edition of *The ASCA National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs* in 2003, which prompted several states and school districts to implement and evaluate comprehensive school counseling programs in schools. Such a program is defined by the ASCA as a “planned, written instructional program that is comprehensive in scope, preventive in nature and developmental in design” (p. 85). Comprehensive school counseling programs have been linked to positive student outcomes, including higher college entrance exam scores (Carey,
Harrington, Martin, & Stevenson, 2012), less discipline concerns, and higher graduation rates (Lapan, Gysbers, Stanley, & Pierce, 2012). However, school counselors’ day-to-day activities often do not align with developing and implementing comprehensive school counseling programs (Camelford & Ebrahim, 2017; House & Martin, 1999) because they frequently include noncounseling activities such as lunch and bus duty, assessment coordinator, and substitute teacher (Fye, Gnilka, & McLaulin, 2018; Moyer, 2011). Furthermore, school counselors with higher student ratios have less time to dedicate to developing school counseling programs. Decreasing school counselors’ student caseloads would allow them to effectively deliver a comprehensive school counselor program to better meet students’ academic, college and career, and social–emotional needs (ASCA, 2019a). The ASCA recommended for schools to employ a 250 to 1 counselor-to-student ratio and for a minimum of 80% of school counselors’ time to be spent working directly with or indirectly for students (ASCA, 2012; ASCA, 2019a). The average student to school counselor ratio is 464 to 1 nationwide (ASCA, 2019b). Approximately one in five students—or 8 million children—do not have access to a school counselor (ASCA, 2019b).

According to the ASCA and others, the changing role of the school counselor has resulted in professional identity ambiguity and role conflict (ASCA, 2012; Camelford & Ebrahim, 2017). Role ambiguity occurs when there is an unclear understanding of school counselors’ function, skills, and talents (Camelford & Ebrahim, 2017). As a result, school counselors’ day-to-day activities, which are performed at the direction of the school administrator, are not spent developing and implementing comprehensive school counseling programs (Camelford & Ebrahim, 2017; House & Martin, 1999), further contributing to a lack of role definition and inappropriate use of school counselors’ skills and talents (Cervoni, 2007).
Therefore, school counselors have been called on by the ASCA to advocate for their role in the implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs (ASCA, 2012).

The third edition of *The ASCA National Model* (2012) identified four themes: leadership, advocacy, systemic change, and collaboration. Particular attention was devoted to advocacy as an essential skill for all of the activities in which school counselors engage (ASCA, 2012; Trusty & Brown, 2005). The ASCA (2012) defined advocacy as an all-inclusive, systematic effort where the key role of the school counselor is to advocate for every student. This enhanced role as an advocate positions school counselors as change agents within schools (ASCA, 2012; Field & Baker, 2004).

**Statement of the Problem**

Implementing a comprehensive school counseling program is the primary task of school counselors (ASCA, 2012); however, role ambiguity regarding the role of school counselors has resulted in misconceptions about their professional responsibilities among administrators, parents, students, and teachers (Burrrham & Jackson, 2000; Camelford & Ebrahim, 2017; Cervoni & DeLucia-Waack, 2011) and has inhibited school counselors’ ability to implement comprehensive school counseling programs (Fye, Miller, & Rainey, 2018; Rayle & Adams, 2007). This role discrepancy has resulted in underdeveloped school counseling programs, which has been linked to low graduation rates among high school students, decreased teacher self-efficacy, higher course failures, and students feeling that teachers do not care about them (Salina et al., 2013). Therefore, clarifying the role of the school counselor is critical for protecting their position in schools and ensuring that students get the support they need to succeed academically and personally through comprehensive school counseling programs (Salina et al., 2013). As one
way of clarifying their responsibilities, school counselors can advocate for their professional role, as defined by the ASCA (2012).

Self-advocacy is a principal factor of lessening the gap between contemporary school counseling roles and anticipated practices, as well as sustaining expected professional school counselor activities within a school (Clemens, Shipp, & Kimbel, 2011). Literature within the school counseling profession falls short in identifying essential advocacy behaviors of school counselors (Field & Baker, 2004). This deficiency creates a need for definitional clarity and increased discussion regarding the advocacy behaviors of school counselors (Field & Baker, 2004; Haskins & Singh, 2016; Toporek & Reza, 2001).

**Purpose Statement**

Understanding whether a relationship exists among counselor self-advocacy practices in implementing comprehensive school counseling programs might illuminate which self-advocacy variables lead to more fully implemented school counseling programs. The findings of this study will illuminate how school counselors, administrators, and educational leaders promote school counselor advocacy skills alongside the implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between school counselor self-advocacy skills and the level of school counseling program implementation at K–12 schools across the United States.

**Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study to school counselors is the understanding of how they can become more effective advocates for the implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs. This is especially significant in the United States, where the majority of school counseling contingencies for funding are in Title IV, Part A: Student Support and Academic
Enrichment Grants of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which President Obama signed into law on December 10, 2015. One of the highlights of ESSA was that the law required, for the first time, that all students in America be taught to high academic standards that would prepare them to succeed in college and careers (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). The significance of this study to administrators and educational leaders is that it highlights the need to ensure school counselors advocate for and fully implement comprehensive school counseling programs. For school counselors, it supports advocacy for role clarification and the implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs.

The significance of this study emerged from the gap that currently exists in the understanding of the relationship between school counselors’ self-advocacy skills and the implementation level of school counseling programs. If a lack of school counselor self-advocacy skills were to be identified, then correcting that could promote clarification of the role of the school counselor and the full implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs within schools. This, in turn, could enable school counselors to include academic achievement and career readiness in their programming, resulting in striking changes to students’ overall success (Lapan et al., 2012).

**Definitions of Key Terminology**

This study investigated the relationship between school counselors’ perceived self-advocacy skills and the implementation level of comprehensive school counseling programs. The following key terms and their definitions were used throughout this investigation.

**School Counselor**

School counselors are certified educators who improve achievement for every student by implementing a comprehensive school counseling program (ASCA, 2019b). At minimum,
school counselors hold a master’s degree in school counseling, meet state licensure standards, and obey the state laws in which they work (ASCA, 2018a).

**Comprehensive School Counseling Program**

The comprehensive school counseling programs referred to in this study are defined by the ASCA national model. These programs are based on the *American School Counselor Association Mindsets and Behaviors for Student Success: K-12 College and Career Readiness Standards for Every Student* (ASCA, 2014) and consist of four components: foundation, management, delivery, and accountability. Comprehensive school counseling programs are data driven and preventive in design. Programs that follow the ASCA national model ensure equitable access to a rigorous education for all students (ASCA, 2012).

**Self-Advocacy**

Self-advocacy refers to the ability of school counselors to effectively communicate their role to those in a position to change the circumstances that contribute to the existing documented discrepancy (Clemens et al., 2011).

**Professional Advocacy**

Professional advocacy refers to the efforts by school counselors to promote awareness of and support for their professional role (Cigrand, Havlik, Malott, & Jones, 2015).

**Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports**

Positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) is defined as a “three-tiered continuum of preventative, culturally responsive, evidence-based, data-driven interventions based on applied behavior analysis principles with the aim of creating a positive school climate, teaching measurable and appropriate behavior to all students and staff, reinforcing desired
behaviors, and viewing the school as a system,” (Goodman-Scott, Betters-Bubon, & Donohue, 2015, p. 58).

**Conceptual Framework**

A model of professional advocacy developed by Cigrand et al. (2015) and framed by Bronfenbrenner’s (1977) ecological systems theory served as the theoretical framework for this study. Cigrand and colleagues (2015) developed this model based on Brofenbrenner’s (1977) ecological systems theory. As described in Bronfenbrenner’s systemic-ecological model (1977, 1994), multiple systems exist that affect the role of school counselors, including the school setting; the district and community; and broader systems such as professional associations, state boards or governmental bodies, and societal beliefs (Cigrand et al., 2015). The model of professional advocacy for school counselors uses Brofenbrenner’s (1977) four ecological systems (i.e., microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem) to develop a multilayered approach for school counselors to use when advocating for their role across these systems and when working as change agents (Cigrand et al., 2015). The four systems in the model of professional advocacy for school counselors are shown in Figure 2 (Cigrand et al., 2015).

![Figure 2. School counselor professional advocacy model.](image)

The ecological framework was used as a guideline for school counselor advocacy to identify the advocacy skills school counselors can most effectively adopt and whether or not they
relate to the implementation level of school counseling programs. To remain consistent with Bronfenbrenner’s (1977) theory, this study considered school counselors’ personal characteristics (e.g., age, gender) and what Bronfenbrenner (1977) referred to as contextual variables (e.g., ethnicity, years of experience, size of student caseload, state in which they work, number of years in their current position, type of school, school setting) to determine how school counselors’ self-advocacy efforts are influenced by individual school counselor differences (Cigrand et al., 2015; Hatfield, & Karnik, 2009; Tudge, Mokrova).

**Microsystem**

Bronfenbrenner (1977) defined the microsystem as the interactions occurring within an individual’s immediate workplace settings. Direct interrelations for school counselors include those with students, administrators, teachers, parents, and members of the community. Applied to school counselors, the microsystem may be defined as the primary school setting, community, and district in which the school counselor is employed (Cigrand et al., 2015).

**Mesosystem**

The mesosystem comprises the surroundings in a microsystem which become connected by interactions among individuals and their interrelations across microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The mesosystem for school counselor advocacy consists of how they interconnect, inform, and relate with parents, students, district staff, and community members to advocate for their role (Cigrand et al., 2015).

**Exosystem**

The exosystem is an extension of the mesosystem; however, the environment does not directly include a person, but impinges upon the primary setting of the individual, influencing the person’s environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). In a sense, the influence is second-hand, or what
Bronfenbrenner (1977) refers to as “second-order effects” (p. 520). For school counselors, the exosystem includes organizations that are not in their primary surroundings; however, these organizations may directly or indirectly affect their roles (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The ASCA is an example of an organization in a school counselor’s exosystem. School counselors follow the policies and guidelines of ASCA, but they do not participate in developing them.

**Macrosystem**

Bronfenbrenner (1977) defined the macrosystem as patterns shaped by social and organizational culture, subculture, and values. Applied to school counselors, the macrosystem comprises belief systems, mindsets, and norms of the school counseling profession, as well as societal expectations of their roles (Cigrand et al., 2015).

**Research Plan**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between school counselor self-advocacy skills and the level of school counseling program implementation at K–12 schools across the United States. The School Counselor Self-advocacy Questionnaire (SCSAQ) was used to measure school counselors’ use of advocacy skills (Clemens et al., 2011), and the School Counseling Program Implementation Survey (SCPIS) was used to measure the degree to which a school counseling program has implemented an ASCA national model program (Clemens, Carey, & Harrington, 2010). The following research questions guided the study’s investigation of the relationship between school counselor self-advocacy skills and the level of school counseling program implementation at K–12 schools across the United States
Research Questions

RQ1. What is the relationship between school counselors’ perceived self-advocacy skills, as measured by the School Counselor Self-advocacy Questionnaire, and comprehensive program implementation, as measured by the School Counseling Program Implementation Survey?

- H1: There is a relationship between school counselors’ perceived self-advocacy skills, as measured by the School Counselor Self-advocacy Questionnaire, and comprehensive program implementation, as measured by the School Counseling Program Implementation Survey.

- H0: There is no relationship between school counselors’ perceived self-advocacy skills, as measured by the School Counselor Self-advocacy Questionnaire, and comprehensive program implementation, as measured by the School Counseling Program Implementation Survey.

RQ2. What is the relationship between comprehensive program implementation, as measured by the School Counseling Program Implementation Survey, and student to school counselor ratio?

- H2: There is a relationship between comprehensive program implementation, as measured by the School Counseling Program Implementation Survey, and student to school counselor ratio.

- H0: There is no relationship between comprehensive program implementation, as measured by the School Counseling Program Implementation Survey, and student to school counselor ratio.

RQ3. What is the relationship between comprehensive program implementation, as measured by the School Counseling Program Implementation Survey, and the years of professional experience as a school counselor?

- H3: There is a relationship between comprehensive program implementation, as measured by the School Counseling Program Implementation Survey, and the years of professional experience as a school counselor.

- H0: There is no relationship between comprehensive program implementation, as measured by the School Counseling Program Implementation Survey, and the years of professional experience as a school counselor.

RQ4. What is the relationship between school counselors’ perceived self-advocacy skills, as measured by the School Counselor Self-advocacy Questionnaire, and the years of professional experience as a school counselor?
o H4: There is a relationship between school counselors’ perceived self-advocacy skills, as measured by the School Counselor Self-advocacy Questionnaire, and the years of professional experience as a school counselor.

o H4o: There is no relationship between school counselors’ perceived self-advocacy skills, as measured by the School Counselor Self-advocacy Questionnaire, and the years of professional experience as a school counselor.

Figure 3 shows the relationships among the research question variables. The overarching proposition was that there is a relationship between self-advocacy and comprehensive program implementation. This was informed by the study’s conceptual framework school counselor advocacy: an ecological model. According to this framework, years of professional experience was expected to correlate with self-advocacy and comprehensive program implementation. School counselor-to-student ratio was also expected to correlate with comprehensive program implementation.

Figure 3. Quantitative research diagram for investigating the relationship between school counselor self-advocacy skills and the implementation level of comprehensive school counseling programs.
This study was designed to determine if a relationship exists between school counselor self-advocacy and the level of comprehensive school counseling program implementation. The researcher employed quantitative research methods to conduct a correlational study. Inferential statistics using a correlational research design were used to analyze data from a volunteer sample of school counselors to draw conclusions about the relationship between school counselor self-advocacy and comprehensive school counseling program implementation (Creswell, 2015). Bivariate analyses were used to examine the relationship between the independent variable (i.e., school counselor self-advocacy) and the dependent variable (i.e., comprehensive school counseling program implementation).

**Population and Sampling**

The participants included in the study were solicited from the ASCA membership networking site ASCA SCENE and were either an elementary-, middle-, high-, or multiple-level school counselor. Studies that have used the ASCA membership database approximate 18,000 school counselors (Young, Dollarhide, & Baughman, 2015). Because ASCA is a national organization, members are expected to be dispersed in their demographics (Young, Dollarhide, & Baughman, 2015). To access the site, ASCA membership is required. Facebook groups for school counselors were also used to recruit participants. These groups included: a) School Counselors Connect, b) The Elementary School Counselor, c) Secondary School Counselor Network, d) Caught in the Middle School Counselor, e) High School Counselor Connection, f) High School Counselor Connection, and g) The Savvy School Counselor Tribe. Criteria for participation in the study required school counselors to be: (a) certified or licensed as a professional school counselor, (b) working as a professional school counselor in a school within any K–12 grade, and (c) working within the United States or for a school system that served
dependents of military members. A power analysis was performed, and it is described in more detail in Chapter 3.

**Data Collection**

The School Counselor Self-advocacy Questionnaire (SCSAQ) was used to measure school counselors’ use of advocacy skills (Clemens et al., 2011). This questionnaire assessed school counselors’ use of self-advocacy skills in the context of advocating for their roles within a school. For the purpose of this study, the questionnaire was used to determine if there was a relationship between school counselor self-advocacy and the implementation level of a comprehensive school counseling program. The authors expected their measure would be used in subsequent research to identify opportunities for schools to improve self-advocacy skills (Clemens et al., 2011). This study provided insight into the self-advocacy skills school counselors need to fully implement a comprehensive school counseling program. The findings from Clemens and colleagues’ (2011) instrument development study supported the use of the SCSAQ as a nine-item measure using a Likert scale with four options ranging from a ranking of 1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree. Trusty and Brown’s (2005) six advocacy skills sets were used as the foundation for the development of the SCSAQ nine items. The six advocacy skill sets included communication, collaboration, problem assessment, problem solving, organizational, and self-care. One recommendation as a next step in research was to use the questionnaire to consider the impact of school counselors’ self-advocacy skills on school counseling program implementation (Clemens et al., 2011). Prior to evaluating the impact, however, researchers must first determine if there is a relationship.

The School Counseling Program Implementation Survey (SCPIS) was used to measure the degree to which a school counseling program has implemented an ASCA national model
program (Clemens, Carey, & Harrington, 2010). The survey consisted of 20 items founded in research that identified characteristics of the ASCA national model and related comprehensive school counseling programs (Clemens et al., 2010). The survey asked school counselors to rate each item based on the extent it was implemented in their school counseling program using a 4-point Likert scale where: 1 = not present, 2 = development in progress, 3 = partly implemented, and 4 = fully implemented. In their initial instrument development and exploratory factor analysis study, Clemens et al. (2010) concluded the questionnaire suitable for research based on the internal consistency of the measured factors and a Cronbach’s alpha range of .79 to .83.

Generalizability was a concern with school counselors who volunteered to complete the survey for this study. School counselors who were members of ASCA and who had an email listed in the membership directory, as well as members of the following Facebook groups were invited to participate in this study: a) School Counselors Connect, b) The Elementary School Counselor, c) Secondary School Counselor Network, d) Caught In The Middle School Counselor, e) High School Counselor Connection, f) High School Counselor Connection, and g) The Savvy School Counselor Tribe. The survey remained open for 5 weeks.

Data Analysis

Survey subscores were totaled as a continuous variable and assessed for normal distribution. If data were normally distributed, Pearson’s correlation, a one-sample t-test, and ANOVA analyses would be conducted. In the event that data was not normally distributed, nonparametric tests would be utilized (i.e., Spearman correlation, one-sample Wilcoxon, Kruskal-Wallis).
Assumptions

One assumption was that school counselor self-advocacy was necessary to effectively fully implement a comprehensive school counseling program. Another assumption was that the possibility existed to identify the necessary school counselor self-advocacy skills required to fully implement a comprehensive school counseling program.

Scope and Limitations

The volunteer sample was drawn from professional, active school counselors who were members of the ASCA. Given their ASCA membership, it was assumed these school counselors were driven to improve professionally and were more likely to volunteer to participate in the study. Furthermore, the researcher was unable to state the results were inclusive of all school counselors. The study relied on self-reported information; therefore, participants may have altered their responses in an effort to appear aligned with the ASCA national model or the professional training they had received.

Summary

This study quantitatively measured school counselors’ self-advocacy skills and the implementation level of comprehensive school counseling programs. “What do school counselors do?” is a recurring question. As advocates for the school counseling profession, school counselors need to provide an answer to this question for teachers, administrators, parents, and themselves (Scarborough, 2005). Moreover, in order for improved student development to be perceived as a vital element of schools’ missions and of schools’ counseling programs, school counselors must be able to illustrate that their programs can increase the academic, relational, and career progress of students (Green & Keys, 2001). Therefore, school
counselors need to be trained and supported to become professional advocates for the value of their work and to fully implement school counseling programs.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter provides a description and analysis of the extant literature relevant to the role of the school counselor, school counselor self-advocacy, and the development of comprehensive school counseling programs. The first strand describes the history of school counseling as a profession and the changing role of the school counselor, which has resulted in role conflict and ambiguity. The second strand reviews comprehensive school counseling programs, including student and school counselor benefits and implementation challenges. The ASCA national model is also discussed. The third strand addresses school counselor self-advocacy and how it is affected by years of professional experience and the student-to-counselor ratio. The fourth strand of literature discusses the Cigrand et al.’s (2015) model of professional advocacy framed by Bronfenbrenner’s (1977) ecological systems theory.

History of School Counseling

Advocacy has been embraced by the school counseling profession as a key role and expectation for school counselors (Feldwisch & Whiston, 2016; Field & Baker, 2004; Ratts, DeKruyf, & Chen-Hayes, 2007; Singh, Urbano, Haston, & McMahon, 2010). The ASCA defined the role of the school counselor and established a framework for comprehensive school counseling programs called the ASCA national model (ASCA, 2012). However, school counselors in the United States have reported challenges implementing and maintaining comprehensive school counseling programs (Burnham & Jackson, 2000; Camelford & Ebrahim, 2017; Coll & Freeman, 1997; Fye, Gnilka et al., 2018; Fye, Miller et al., 2018; Niebuhr, Niebuhr, & Cleveland, 1999).
Evolution of School Counseling as a Profession

School counseling began at the turn of the 20th century (Gysbers & Henderson, 2001). Although the development of children was traditionally perceived as a parental responsibility, societal changes began to prescribe the necessity for programs and personnel in schools to play a more active role in supporting that development (Dollarhide & Saginak, 2008; Lucas, 2015). One of the first school counselor-related activities in the United States dates to 1889, when Jesse B. Davis, a Detroit school principal, introduced a guidance curriculum that was delivered in each English class in his school (Bauman et al., 2003; Coy, 1999; Lucas, 2015). Davis instructed his teachers to use journal writing in their English classes to address character, behavior, and career development (Lucas, 2015). As a result, Davis is considered to be the first school counselor in the United States because he was the first to establish a systematic guidance program in a public school (Pope, 2009). His work laid the foundation for the first definition of the role of school counselors which consisted of duties such as influencing students to remain in school, helping students who leave school to enter the workforce, arousing students’ ambition for a life career, and encouraging the establishment of vocational guidance in the community (Pope, 2009).

In 1908 Frank Parsons, the father of guidance, coined the concept of vocational guidance during his work with the Boston Vocation Bureau and developed a detailed system of vocational guidance in the Boston public schools (Lucas, 2015). Parsons’ work in vocational guidance greatly influenced the early constructs of school counseling and the need for vocational guidance in U.S. schools. School counselors, called vocational guidance counselors at the time, occupied an extra duty position typically assigned to teachers (Guidance and School Counseling, n.d.) and were without an organizational structure (Gysbers, 2012). However, The National Vocation Guidance Association was formed in 1913, which aided in legitimizing and increasing the
number of school counselors (Guidance and School Counseling, n.d.). By 1918, more than 900 high schools had a vocational guidance program (Lucas, 2015).

School counseling roles expanded beyond vocational guidance in the 1920s and 1930s when social–emotional and academic facets of students’ lives were recognized as needing attention (Guidance and School Counseling, n.d.). The mental hygiene, psychometric, and child study movements in the 1920s steered school counseling’s emphasis from vocational to a clinically oriented approach (Gysbers, 2012). These movements focused on the prevention of mental illness through counseling services that helped individuals whose problems were developing as well as through public health programs that assisted with the effects of poor living conditions (Stevenson, 1938). Thus, school counseling started to extend from an economic focus to a psychological approach, centralizing on students’ social–emotional wellness (Gysbers, 2012). School counselors began to provide services to students that were more directed toward the total development of students to assist them with handling the new demands of society (Lucus, 2015).

The 1940s and 1950s saw an increase in school counseling (Gysbers, 2012). From 1941 to 1945, most school counseling programs centered on contributing to the war effort. After 1945, emphasis on the need for school counseling and on improvement of the services provided came to the forefront (Gysbers, 2012). The passage of the Vocational Education Act of 1946 highlighted the need for attention and support related to the selection and training of school counselors (Gysbers, 2012). Furthermore, the ASCA was founded in 1952, giving school counselors a national organization and a say in national interests (Gysbers, 2012).

In the 1970s, school counselors and educators were charged with demonstrating school counseling program effectiveness (Lucus, 2015). Interest centered around accountability, and
program evaluation became an important component of school counseling programs (Gysbers, 2004; Lucus, 2015). At the time, there were differences in the way school counseling programs were structured; there was no comprehensive school counseling model (Lucus, 2015), and the application of comprehensive systematic approaches to school counseling program development intensified (Gysbers, 2004).

The publication of the first edition of The ASCA National Model in 2003 prompted several states and school districts to implement and evaluate comprehensive school counseling programs in schools. Publication of The ASCA National Model transitioned school counseling from a service to a program, which required advocacy from school counselors to drive the program. According to the ASCA national model, school counselors should support all students in their academic achievement, personal and social development, and college and career planning. However, the function and progress of school counseling continued to be a concern (Gysbers, 2001).

**Role of the School Counselor**

Positioned in elementary, middle, and high schools, school counselors provide student educational services that increase student prosperity (ASCA 2018a; Lapan, Gysbers, & Kayson, 2007). School counselors hold a master’s degree in school counseling and are certified educators who are equipped with the skills to undertake all students’ academic, college and career, and social–emotional needs through the development, implementation, evaluation, and enrichment of a comprehensive school counseling program that encourages and amplifies student achievement. School counselors fulfill state licensure standards and uphold their state’s laws as well as respect the ASCA’s ethical and professional standards in addition to those of respective professional counseling associations (ASCA, 2018a).
When school counselors are assigned duties unrelated to their training, role conflict and ambiguity occur (Ballard & Murgatroyd, 1999; Brott & Myers, 1999; Chandler et al., 2018; Coll & Freeman, 1997; Lieberman, 2004; Niebuhr et al., 1999). In addition, school counselors counteract misperceptions of their role, which is often not defined in accordance with the school counseling profession by a myriad of stakeholders (Chandler et al., 2018; Culbreth, Scarborough, Banks-Johnson, & Solomon, 2005; Freeman & Coll, 1997), and administrators’ perceptions of the school counselor’s role are often not aligned with the school counselor’s professional training, which results in auxiliary work requirements that lead to stress, burnout, and sustained role ambiguity (Chandler et al., 2018; Culbreth et al., 2005; Fried, Ben-David, Tiegs, Avital, & Yeverechyahu, 1998). When school counselors experience increased levels of job stress and burnout, the result may lead to negative effects on their students and schools (Falls & Nichter, 2007; Holman & Grubbs, 2018; Holman, Nelson, & Watts, 2019). Holman et al. (2019) explored institutional variables identified in the literature that contribute to school counselor burnout. These variables included role ambiguity, role conflict, assignment of noncounseling duties, coworker and supervisory support, and the amount of control school counselors felt they had over their time and activities. The quantitative study consisted of a nonrandom sample of 449 school counselors certified in Texas and working in a public elementary, middle, or high school. Findings indicated school counselors who encountered a greater degree of external demands, such as assignment of noncounseling duties; who perceived the school as a negative workplace; and who received minimal support from coworkers and leadership experienced increased levels of exhaustion and burnout (Holman et al., 2019).

Role conflict and role ambiguity in school counseling have two leading causes. The first is misconceptions about appropriate school counseling activities, which school counselors may
be assigned based on traditional practices or established norms (e.g., assessment coordinator, scheduling, clerical duties; Anderson, 2002; Baker, 2001; Burnham & Jackson, 2000; Chandler et al., 2018; Gysbers, 2001). The second cause occurs when administrators direct school counselors to complete inappropriate tasks (e.g., scheduling, duties related to registration; Chandler et al., 2018; Ribak-Rosethal, 1994) or direct them to accomplish large tasks immediately (Anderson & Reiter, 1995; Chandler et al., 2018; Lambie & Williamson, 2004).

Chandler et al. (2018) investigated counseling and noncounseling duties using the Assessment of School Counselor Needs for Professional Development (Dahir & Stone, 2003, 2004) to assess the activities of 1,244 school counselors and to examine the frequency of types of duties assigned to school counselors. Feedback was sought from a panel of school counseling experts prior to the data collection. The expert panel included three practicing school counselors, three counseling coordinators, one staff member from the department of education, and two counselor educators at state universities.

Researchers found a lack of consensus between the school counselors and the expert panel ratings; for example, there was a failure of certain items on the Assessment of School Counselor Needs for Professional Development (e.g., testing duties, scheduling, excessive fair-share duties) to be consistently recognized as counseling duties or noncounseling duties which illustrated role confusion in the school counseling profession. In addition, a study by Chandler et al. (2018) indicated adherence to noncounseling activities such as coordinating assessments, scheduling, and performing registrar functions. There are four limitations to the research by Chandler et al. (2018). The sample included school counselors and expert panelists from one state; the sample was weighted toward elementary school counselors; generalizability to other
states is uncertain, and survey participants may have received prior training related to the state and the ASCA national model (2012).

Other researchers have found similar ambiguity amid school counselors about appropriate and inappropriate school counseling activities (Astramovich, Hoskins, Gutierrez, & Bartlett, 2013; Burnham & Jackson, 2000; Dahir, Campbell, Johnson, Scholes, & Valiga, 1997; Day & Sparacio, 1980; Hatch & Bowers, 2002). Furthermore, research has indicated that some school counselors are uncertain about fair-share activities (ASCA, 2012). Many school counselors are unaware that noncounseling duties should be equally shared amongst the faculty as a whole (ASCA, 2012). The role ambiguity Chandler et al. (2018) found amid the panel experts illustrated uncertainty about the perceived activities of school counselors.

Although role ambiguity has been recognized as a noteworthy concern of school counselors, Astramovich et al. (2013) investigated role diffusion as a preceding factor contributing to role confusion amid school counselors. Astramovich et al. (2013) defined role diffusion as the process of fulfilling or being assigned to roles and activities that other individuals in different fields or specialties are equally qualified to assume in the school setting. For example, role diffusion occurs when an administrator assigns a school counselor as the system-wide assessment coordinator, which teachers, educational specialists, or school registrars are qualified to complete (Astramovich et al., 2013). Although school counselors are capable of coordinating assessments, this duty does not utilize school counselors’ master’s-level training, and therefore leads to role ambiguity (Astramovich et al., 2013).

Astramovich et al. (2013) surveyed 109 graduate students enrolled in a Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs accredited counseling program at a substantial southwestern university. The study’s findings suggested that the least diffused role
for school counselors is providing direct counseling services to students. Furthermore, the research indicated that teachers are perceived as equally capable of performing activities related to school counseling except direct counseling. Teachers are generally trained at the bachelor’s level, so some may infer that activities in the academic, college and career, and social–emotional domains do not require a master’s-level education (Astramovich et al., 2013). Therefore, school counselors who perform duties that do not utilize their advanced skills perpetuate role diffusion (Astramovich et al., 2013). Thus, school counselors must advocate for their role by informing administrators, teachers, parents, students, and other key stakeholders about the counseling services school counselors provide to students (Astramovich et al., 2013).

There are two limitations of the Astramovich et al. (2013) study. First, the sample included graduate counseling students from one university, thus generalizability to other populations should be done with caution. Second, the research centered on activities recommended by the ASCA (2012) national model domains, which do not necessarily represent the day-to-day practice of school counselors in school settings across the United States (Astramovich et al., 2013). Notwithstanding the existence of the ASCA national model for a comprehensive school counseling programs, role conflict and role ambiguity have remained concerns for school counselors (Astramovich, Hoskins, & Bartlett, 2010; Astramovich et al., 2013; Culbreth et al., 2005; Lieberman, 2004; Pyne, 2011). To address these concerns, school counselors need self-advocacy skills to clarify their roles.

**Comprehensive School Counseling Program**

School counselors are responsible for developing and implementing comprehensive school counseling programs to help students learn culturally appropriate knowledge, skills, and attitudes, and to achieve academic success (ASCA, 2012). School counseling programs
originated when Gysbers and Moore (1974) recognized the need to develop and implement school counseling programs in a manner equivalent to the manpower and expectations of other educational programs (Gysbers & Moore, 1975). Furthermore, Gysbers and Moore (1975) recognized that a reconceptualization of school counseling was required to accomplish this shift. Rather than focusing on services, events, and elements of human development, school counseling needed a comprehensive developmental conceptualization founded on student-centered goals and activities designed to meet students’ college, career, and social–emotional needs (Gysbers & Moore, 1975). In 2000, Gysbers and Henderson expanded this vision by outlining the processes required to develop and implement a school counseling program.

Gysbers and Henderson (2000) provided a guide for planning, designing, implementing, and evaluating school counseling programs. Gysbers and Henderson’s (2000) intent was to combat disparity in school counselor roles and standardize school counselor practice in the United States. Gysbers and Henderson’s (2000) school counseling program model was an answer to the need to organize and establish an identity for the school counseling profession. Prior to the establishment of school counseling programs, school counselors were viewed as supplementary personnel within schools (Hatch, 2008). Gysbers & Henderson (2000) defined needed human, financial, and political supports for school counselors and provided a school counseling program model for school counselors to utilize these resources.

**Student Benefits**

When school counseling programs are fully implemented, students experience benefits that include higher grades, fewer classroom disruptions, and better peer relationships (Carey & Carey, 2012; Dahir, Burnham, & Stone, 2009; Lapan, Gysbers, & Sun, 1997; Sink, 2005; Sink & Stroh, 2003). Lapan et al. (1997) explored the relationships between the statewide
implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs and the school experiences of high school students in Missouri. Data analyzed were collected from a student and school counselor survey from 1992 to 1995. The final sample consisted of 22,964 students from 236 high schools in Missouri. Students who attended schools with fully implemented comprehensive school counseling programs reported higher grades, believed their education was preparing them for their future, had access to college and career information, and experienced a positive school climate. Lapan and colleagues’ (1997) research indicated that there is a positive relationship between comprehensive school counseling programs and student achievement. Furthermore, the positive relationships found for the implementation level of these programs were equitably distributed across all students (Lapan et al., 1997).

Wilkerson, Perusse, and Huges (2013) provided further support for comprehensive school counseling programs through their research that compared school-wide annual proficiency results on English/language arts and math achievement tests in Indiana schools achieving the Recognized ASCA Model Program (RAMP) status to non-RAMP schools. RAMP designation is bestowed once school counselors complete a detailed application to provide evidence to support their efforts to build and implement comprehensive school counseling programs based on the ASCA national model framework (Wilkerson et al., 2013). The results indicated school-wide English/language arts and math proficiency outcomes for RAMP-designated schools exceeded non-RAMP schools across all grade levels. Particularly of note, in a longitudinal analysis, significance was shown in the school-wide proficiency levels for math for RAMP-designated elementary schools (81.4%) compared to non-RAMP elementary schools (74.5%).

Carey and Carey (2012) summarized research from four different states (i.e., Utah, Nebraska, Rhode Island, Wisconsin) to provide evidence of the relationship between positive
student outcomes and school counseling programs. Research conducted in Utah found evidence that having a strong ASCA national model school counseling program was associated with higher ACT scores, greater numbers of students taking the ACT, and improved student achievement in math and reading on state achievement tests (Carey & Carey, 2012). The Nebraska study found the ASCA national model school counseling program related to lower suspension rates, decreased discipline referrals, improved attendance, and increased math and reading scores on state achievement tests (Carey & Carey, 2012). In Utah, the study indicated school counselors use of data with the ASCA national model was also connected to increased student math and reading scores on state achievement tests. Additionally, the Utah study found improved graduation rates in vocational education (Carey & Carey, 2012). In addition, school counselors utilizing data as a component of the ASCA national model in Rhode Island demonstrated a link to lower suspension rates and a decrease in student self-reports of being teased or bullied (Carey & Carey, 2012). Furthermore, the Rhode Island study proved the more fully implemented the school counseling program the greater the percentages of students passing the state math achievement test (Carey & Carey, 2012). The Wisconsin study supported the evidence indicated in the Utah and Nebraska research that the ASCA national model implementation related to significant benefits for students (Carey & Carey, 2012).

School Counselor Benefits

The implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs has also benefited school counselors. Pyne (2011) studied the level of school counselor job satisfaction and implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs in Michigan secondary schools. The results indicated that school counselors who successfully implement a comprehensive school counseling program are more likely to have increased levels of job satisfaction. Specifically,
Pyne’s (2011) research suggested school counselors may indicate increased levels of job satisfaction in school counseling programs that have administrative support, facilitate collaboration among faculty members, have clear direction, serve all students, and provide time for planning and evaluation. Similarly, Steele (2014) examined the degree to which school counselors felt the ASCA national model was implemented in their schools and whether the degree of implementation related to school counselor job burnout. The study found the higher the level of implementation of the ASCA national model school counseling program, the less likely school counselors felt burnout (Steele, 2014).

Fye, Miller et al. (2018) examined school counselors and their capacity to implement the ASCA national model and suggested that school counselors want to use the ASCA national model framework to inform their administrators of their role, increase implementation of the ASCA national model, use data to demonstrate accountability, and provide evidence of students’ educational successes as an outcome of the school counseling program (Fye, Miller et al., 2018). Further, school counselors may use elements of the ASCA national model to advocate for appropriate roles and demonstrate program management, delivery, and accountability (ASCA, 2012; Fye, Miller et al., 2018). For example, school counselors may use data that shows a decrease in bullying or a decrease in suicide threats as an outcome of their school counseling program to help administrators and other key stakeholders understand and value what school counselors are trained to do and their appropriate role within schools.

Studies on comprehensive school counseling programs’ effectiveness and the work of school counselors across grade levels has consistently demonstrated that when school counselors are fully engaged in implementing a comprehensive program, they move away from a marginalized position and into a role that effectively supports critical academic and career goals.
for students (Lapan, Gysbers, & Petroski, 2003; Lapan et al., 1997). Comprehensive school counseling programs provide school counselors with their own subject matter content, thereby establishing school counselors as a nonancillary support services (Lapan et al., 1997). Lapan et al. (1997) examined the Missouri School Improvement Program database to explore relationships between how school counselors rated the extent to which their school counseling program was being implemented and how high school students rated their academic achievement, career development, liking for school, and school climate. Lapan et al. (1997) found that students who attended schools that had more fully implemented comprehensive school counseling programs reported earning higher grades. Moreover, students who attended schools with more fully implemented school counseling programs rated the climate in their school as being more positive. These findings supported comprehensive school counseling programs as a contributing factor to student academic success (Lapan et al., 1997).

Sink and Stroh (2003) conducted a causal comparative study to determine if school counselors’ work in elementary schools with well-established, comprehensive school counseling programs promoted higher academic achievement in students. A random selection of 150 public elementary schools from Washington State participated in the study. The authors found that early elementary-age students (i.e., Grades 3 and 4) who attended a school with a nonengaged comprehensive school counseling program and who have significantly lower initial academic achievement than similar students will close the achievement gap over a 2- to 3-year period when attending a school with a fully implemented comprehensive school counseling program. Students benefit academically, whether they are economically disadvantaged or not, by remaining for at least 3 years within schools with access to a comprehensive school counseling program that has existed for 5 or more years. Further, overtime, elementary students appear to
perform better on norm-referenced and criterion-referenced tests of academic achievement than their peers in schools without comprehensive school counseling programs (Sink & Stroh, 2003).

Lapan et al. (2003) conducted a state-wide study in Missouri to examine the impact of more fully implemented comprehensive school counseling programs on seventh grade students’ perceptions of safety in school, satisfaction with their education grades, perceptions of their relationships with teachers, and perceptions of the importance and relevance of education to their future. Using a Missouri database garnered from the school district accreditation statewide procedure, data was analyzed. The study found the implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs was affiliated with crucial measures of student personal wellbeing and achievement (Lapan et al., 2003). School counselors who participated in higher levels of engagement when delivering emotional and support services to students were more probable to positively influence students than counselors who were not. In addition, seventh graders in Missouri schools reported having better relationships with teachers (Lapan et al., 2003).

The ASCA national model and positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) are inherently interconnected due to their coinciding activities (Ziomek-Daigle, Goodman-Scott, Cavin, & Donohue, 2016). Goodman-Scott, Betters-Bubon, and Donohue (2015) defined PBIS as a “three-tiered continuum of preventative, culturally responsive, evidence-based, data-driven interventions based on applied behavior analysis principles with the aim of creating a positive school climate, teaching measurable and appropriate behavior to all students and staff, reinforcing desired behaviors, and viewing the school as a system” (p. 58). PBIS was designed to address behaviors such as student discipline and bullying (Goodman-Scott et al., 2015). Additionally, PBIS has been implemented extensively in the United States in approximately 22,000 schools across all 50 states, and several states have state-wide PBIS support teams
(Goodman-Scott et al., 2015). Goodman-Scott and colleagues (2015) recommended that school counselors relate their comprehensive school counseling programs to the three-tiered PBIS framework as one venue to professionally advocate for the role of the school counselor and comprehensive program implementation. In order to combat challenges, access resources, secure jobs, while also ensuring the time and support to implement comprehensive programs, school counselors may advocate systemically to stakeholders and decision makers including building, district and state educational leaders (Goodman-Scott et al., 2015). These stakeholders are likely familiar with PBIS and may better understand comprehensive school counseling programs when situated within its familiar structure (Goodman-Scott et al., 2015).

**Challenges of Implementation**

Research has demonstrated a myriad of challenges to school counselors and their ability to implement a comprehensive school counseling program (Fye, Miller et al., 2018). The most notable factor is school counselors’ regular engagement in nonschool counseling activities, which creates barriers to the implementation of the ASCA national model and decreases the capacity of school counselors to effectively address students’ career and college, educational, and social–emotional needs (Fye, Miller et al., 2018). Barriers reported in the literature included high student-to-counselor ratios (ASCA, 2013–2014, 2016, 2019a; Lapan et al., 2012; Niforos, 2016), role conflict and role ambiguity of school counselors (ASCA, 2012; Ballard & Murgatroyd, 1999; Brott & Myers, 1999; Camelford & Ebrahim, 2017; Coll & Freeman, 1997; Lieberman, 2004; Niebuhr et al., 1999), assignment of assessment coordinator responsibilities (Anderson, 2002; Baker, 2001; Burnham & Jackson, 2000; Chandler et al., 2018; Gysbers, 2001), and other nonschool counseling activities such as clerical or supervising duties.
Most frequently, discrepancies occur between how ASCA defines best practices and appropriate activities for school counselors versus those that they actually perform (Nelson et al., 2008). For example, the ASCA national model provided performance standards for school counselors and a framework for developing a comprehensive school counseling program (ASCA, 2012). Unfortunately, there is often a gap between the development of a comprehensive school counseling program and the actual implementation of the program (Nelson et al., 2008), referred to by Gysbers (2005) as the implementation gap. Gysbers (2005) described the main reasons for this implementation gap as traditional expectations of the old service-oriented model, resistance to new ideas, and assignment of tasks that are not related to school counseling, which inhibits implementation of a school counseling program. DeVoss and Andrews (2006) provided an additional cause for the implementation gap, which is the lack of understanding by administrators and teachers about the role of the school counselor in achieving the mission of the school.

Johnson, Nelson, and Henriksen (2011) conducted a case study that explored the experiences of three school counselors’ implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program at the elementary level in a large suburban school district in southeast Texas. The following themes emerged from the research: a) differences of knowledge regarding the program, b) benefits of the program, c) inconsistencies in the school counselor’s role expectations, and d) moving toward a fully implemented program. Time constraints and role inconsistencies were highly identified as a challenge for school counselors to implement a comprehensive school counseling program (Johnson et al., 2011).
Burkard, Gillen, Martinez, and Skytte (2012) analyzed data collected from 166 high school counselors’ surveys representing 116 out of 514 high schools in Wisconsin. The purpose of the study was to establish baseline data for the current implementation level of comprehensive school counseling programs in Wisconsin and challenges related to the implementation. Collectively, school counselors in Wisconsin reported that approximately 60% of a comprehensive school counseling program had been implemented in their schools, meaning that most high school students in Wisconsin were not receiving the benefits of fully implemented comprehensive school counseling programs. Moreover, high school counselors in Wisconsin reported spending a significant amount of time participating in non-school-counseling-related activities, most commonly in testing and scheduling (Burkard et al., 2012). Reducing these kinds of activities may help close the comprehensive school counseling implementation gap (Burkard et al., 2012).

**ASCA National Model**

School counselors advocate for the establishment of a school counseling program grounded in the ASCA national model’s four components: foundation, delivery, management, and accountability (ASCA, 2012, 2018a).

**Foundation**

School counselors design comprehensive school counseling programs that emphasize student outcomes, teach student standards, and are communicated with professional competencies. The ASCA student standards enriched students’ learning and drove the creation of fully implemented school counseling programs around three domains: academic, college and career, and social–emotional development (ASCA, 2012). The ASCA school counselor competencies established the knowledge, attitudes, and skills school counselors needed to fulfill
the demands of the profession. Furthermore, the *ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors* outlined the expectations of ethical behavior essential for the highest level of integrity and professionalism (ASCA, 2016), while state standards and district objectives strengthen and advise school counseling programs (ASCA, 2012, 2018a). Finally, school counselors craft a mission statement that connects with their school’s mission, and they construct program goals that specify how the vision and mission will be assessed (ASCA, 2012, 2018a).

**Management**

School counselors integrate professional elements and instruments such as school counselor competencies; evaluations to assess improvement in students’ skills and program domains; and calendars to inform and actively engage students, parents, teachers, and administrators in the school counseling program (ASCA 2012, 2018a).

**Delivery**

School counselors support students, parents, teachers, administrators, and the community through direct and indirect services. Direct services include personal interaction between the school counselor and the student such as delivery of school counseling core curriculum lessons developed to assist students’ learning, outlook, and ability as it is relevant to their grade level. In addition, school counselors provide activities on a continuum created to help students develop individual goals and plan for their futures. Moreover, direct services include school counselors responding to students’ circumstances (e.g., a crisis situation). Conversely, indirect services provided by school counselors support students as a product of collaboration (e.g., responding to requests for assistance by a student support team, consulting, and interacting with organizations; ASCA, 2012, 2018a).
Accountability

School counselors evaluate systemic assessments and their school counseling program information to ascertain whether or not students are different as a result of the school counseling program. The data is utilized to demonstrate the influence of the school counseling program on student success and to steer subsequent goals and activities to support students (ASCA, 2012, 2018a).

National Model Themes

School counselors acknowledge and welcome their critical part as members of educational leadership teams, and they embrace the responsibility of preparing students to meet the expectations of academic standards while helping students to become productive and contributing members of their school community as well as greater society (Dahir, 2009). Leadership, advocacy, collaboration, and systemic change are four themes that emerge from the analysis of multiple articles about the role of the school counselor and their required skills. These themes make up the framework of the national model (ASCA, 2012). Through leadership, advocacy, collaboration, and systemic change, school counselors support equitable access to a rigorous curriculum and career opportunities for every student (ASCA, 2018a).

Leadership. Authors of The ASCA National Model described school counselor leadership as fundamental for the development and execution of attainable comprehensive school counseling programs (ASCA, 2012). In reality, school counseling programs and services engage them squarely as educational leaders in their school (Young & Bryan, 2016). The ASCA (2012) defines the scope of school counselor leadership “as culturally responsive change agents who integrate instructional and school counseling best practices to initiate, develop and implement equitable services and programs for all students” (p. 11). Young and Bryan (2016) described
school counselor leadership as commencing services, recommending resources, establishing meaningful relationships, maintaining impact, and confidently designing and implementing comprehensive school counseling programs.

Leadership in school counseling reinforces students’ academic achievement and development, promotes effective implementation of the comprehensive school counseling program, supports professional legitimacy, and dispels role inconsistency (Shillingford & Lambie, 2010). Dollarhide (2003) detailed school counselors’ leadership potential and the transference in the school counseling profession from the school counselor as an adjunct resource to an equivalent colleague in the educational environment. Dollarhide (2003) conceptualized leadership in the school counseling context as a having structural, human resource, political, and symbolic leadership components. In order to be leaders of school counseling programs and reform initiatives, school counselors must understand the contexts in which leadership prevails, the activities required to succeed, and the skills necessary for those activities (Dollarhide, 2003). This is a way of conceptualizing and applying effective leadership of school counseling programs (Dollarhide, 2003). Applying leadership context to school counseling can help to identify the activities that correspond to each context (Dollarhide, 2003).

In the structural leadership context, school counselors lead through activities that establish an effective comprehensive school counseling program, which comprises having superior knowledge of counseling and education, planning for growth of the program, and implementing a strong program (Dollarhide, 2003). In the context of human resource leadership, school counselors lead by taking actions of trust, exerting confidence, being available and transparent, and accrediting others (Dollarhide, 2003). These actions necessitate skills in building
relationships, establishing rapport, empowering students, listening, and communicating (Dollarhide, 2003).

Political leadership, on the other hand, is a nontraditional role for school counselors and may cause counselors to feel uneasy (Dollarhide, 2003). In this leadership context, school counselors lead via activities that include assessing power structures within the school and district, connecting with substantial stakeholders such as parents and school board members, and providing encouragement and consultation (Dollarhide, 2003). These pursuits require skills in arbitration, mediation, collaboration, and advocacy. Finally, the context of symbolic leadership requires activities involving using symbols and metaphors to capture attention, conceptualizing experience meaningfully for stakeholders, and developing and publishing a vision (Dollarhide, 2003). In this context, school counselors build a relationship with their students, parents, and colleagues and serve as models for how to meet the needs of students, motivating others to follow in their steps (Dollarhide, 2003). Additionally, school counselors assist students, families, and other stakeholders to perceive their experiences as symbolic of advancement and development (Dollarhide, 2003). In this leadership context, school counselors lead by promoting students’ health, resiliency, and sustainment of their trust in beliefs (Littrell & Peterson, 2001).

Leadership is an indispensable skill for school counselors to possess in order to establish and maintain a comprehensive school counseling program. The themes of advocacy, collaboration, and systemic change involve leadership to various degrees; however, leadership is the foundation of the other skills needed to implement a comprehensive school counseling program (Mason & McMahon, 2009). The blueprint, purpose, and delivery of a comprehensive school counseling program adhering to the ASCA national model requires school counselors to learn and employ leadership skills (ASCA, 2012). Through the use of leadership practices,
school counselors can deliver a program that serves the academic, career, and social–emotional needs of all students (Mason, 2010).

**Collaboration.** Collaboration is a primary theme in the ASCA national model (ASCA, 2012) that spotlights the importance of relationships and associations as valuable components for powerful school counselor collaboration (Young & Bryan, 2016). Systemic collaboration empowers school counselors to cultivate relationships and prompt ownership for the implementation of school counseling programs and visions (Young & Bryan, 2016). School counselors can heighten their perceived reliability and trustworthiness by collaborating with other educational colleagues and community members in ways that center on the use of data (Janson, 2009). When school counselors use data efficiently, especially to recognize achievement and opportunity gaps that persist among groups of students, they illustrate their desire and ability to engage in collective school leadership initiatives that solicit educational change (Janson, 2009).

School counselors are viewed as educational leaders when they work collaboratively with other educators in schools and their practices and programs improve student learning (Janson, 2009; Sears, 1999). Schools in the 21st century need to be structured as learning communities in order to equip students with the skills citizens need in an evolving society (Newmann, 1993). A changed vocabulary around collaboration includes concepts such as networking, professional learning community, interdisciplinary teams, partnering, and seamless integration, all of which foster community involvement a necessary to educate students (House & Hayes, 2002). Developing into effective collaborators with teachers, administrators, staff, students, parents, and community leaders presents a challenge to school counselors as educational leaders (House & Hayes, 2002).
As Campbell and Dahir (1997) noted, “The school counselor is not the counseling program. The school counselor and the school counseling program use a collaborative model as their foundation” (p. 9). For this purpose, school counselors work with, versus for, other educational professionals in the school to establish and deliver intervention programs that promote the achievement of targeted goals for all students (Glickman, Hayes, & Hensley, 1992; House & Hayes, 2002). School counselors should contemplate a broadened role for themselves as educational counseling professionals who embody a leadership role that establishes a sense of community in their schools for each student. House and Hayes (2002) identified the central characteristics of this role: (a) a knowledge of how groups work, especially teams; (b) the skills to build effective teams and to encourage genuine collaboration among diverse and often competing members; and (c) a commitment to supporting every member of the school in working towards goals that benefit the entire community. Some individuals in a school will not have the skills required to work collaboratively or embrace participation opportunities, so school counselors will need to help these individuals evolve into contributing team participants (House & Hayes, 2002). Possessing the capacity to shepherd professionals together to work mutually in order to identify the desired outcomes of school-wide reform is the meaning of effective shared leadership (House & Hayes, 2002). School counselors help others recognize these skills by offering contexts for decision-making dialogue (Hayes, 1993).

The need to identify avenues for empowerment is a primary starting point in establishing effective collaborative teams (House & Hayes, 2002). Furthermore, creating a working collaborative model necessitates that differences such as perspectives, learning styles, work positions, race, gender, and experience be addressed (House & Hayes, 2002). As educational leaders, school counselors should inspire participants to accept differences, despite standpoint
conflicts, as a way to collectively solve problems (House & Hayes, 2002). By helping team members to refine their goals for school change and to communicate them to others, school counselors will help participants recognize that accomplishing goals requires collaboration (House & Hayes, 2002). Moreover, the identification of harmonious skills that parents and community members contribute to change efforts enables the employment of activities that interconnect their contributions with those of school personnel (House & Hayes, 2002). School counselors interact with stakeholders, both within and beyond the school walls, as part of the comprehensive school counseling program. This collaboration allows school counselors to access a wide array of resources for student achievement and social–emotional development that cannot otherwise be accomplished individually or as a school (ASCA, 2012).

**Advocacy.** As educational leaders, school counselors are positioned to perform as advocates for all students in meeting high standards, career expectations, and individual goals (ASCA, 2012). Advocating for the academic achievement of all students is a vital function of school counselors and situates them at the center of initiatives to support systemic change (ASCA, 2012). School counselors need the skills to promote student achievement and advocate for every students’ school and developmental success through grade levels K–12. Establishing an influential professional relationship with students, colleagues, support personnel, parents, and community members requires reciprocal understanding and respect for the benefactions others offer in educating all students. School counselors must be able to create a feeling of belonging within schools, which provides a forum from which to advocate for all students (House & Hayes, 2002). Encouraging sincere school reform, rather than surface changes, stipulates genuine growth and evolution that materializes via group interaction (Hayes, 1993; House & Hayes, 2002).
Wentzel (1999) reported a growth in research on effective schools that highlights the importance of establishing meaningful, resourceful relationships among students and caring educators. School counselors require the skills to be one of the foremost caregivers in the school, and they need to be prepared, as educational leaders, to advocate for all students in meeting high academic standards (House & Hayes, 2002). This advocacy capacity for school counselors is supported by professional school counseling institutions (House & Hayes, 2002). They recognize advocating for students is an essential and crucial element of success in schools (House & Hayes, 2002).

ASCA (2012), for example, has asserted that advocating for the academic success of all students is a key role of school counselors and centers them in the mission of schooling and school reform (House & Hayes, 2002). School counselors need to labor enterprisingly to abolish obstacles to learning by helping students improve their organizational skills, study skills, and test-taking skills (House & Hayes, 2002). In addition, school counselors must teach students and their families the skills needed to navigate the complexities of the education system and assist parents who wish to place their children in rigorous courses as pathways to college (House & Hayes, 2002). An additional advocacy skill that school counselors must have is the ability to teach parents how to submit official requests to school representatives and inform students and their families of support resources for academic achievement such as tutoring and enrichment opportunities (House & Hayes, 2002).

In a collaborative effort, school counselors provide professional learning for all school personnel to instill skills that will embed the promotion of high expectations for all students (House & Hayes, 2002). School counselors must possess the ability to work with the community to organize activities that advocate for supportive structures that set high standards for all
students (House & Hayes, 2002). Finally, school counselors should work with school stakeholders and community leaders to organize services to launch higher expectations for all students and work as advocates within the community to pinpoint all available supports to assist in these efforts (House & Hayes, 2002).

House and Martin (1999) stated: “Educational equity in a democratic society requires that all children, especially poor and minority youth who have traditionally been the least served by schools be better prepared for the future” (p. 284). Closing achievement gaps between students who are marginalized or come from a low socioeconomic status and their more privileged peers is a primary goal of comprehensive school counseling programs. Achievement gaps persist because systemically, less is expected of poor and minority students (House & Martin, 1999). School counselors found their student advocacy on the belief that action is required to right injustices and better circumstances that affect the performance of an individual or group (House & Martin, 1999). This necessitates school counselors have the skills to positively mediate the decision-making undertakings of students in social situations that negatively affect them (House & Martin, 1999). School counselors operate on the assumption that all students are capable of achieving at high levels and that school counselors should possess the necessary skills to be proactive leaders in closing prevailing achievement gaps in schools (House & Martin, 1999).

Social justice advocacy is a crucial role of 21st century school counselors (Ratts et al., 2007). The expressive reasons for school counselors to incorporate social justice advocacy as a platform are plentiful (House & Martin, 1999; Ratts et al., 2007), and the ASCA promotes advocating for social justice (2012). Ratts et al. (2007) proposed school counselors use the American Counseling Association’s (ACA) advocacy competencies to justify serving as agents for social change and to implement social justice advocacy interventions. ACA advocacy
competencies yielded a conceptual framework for school counselors to meet the increasing calls to be social justice advocates (Ratts et al., 2007). The advocacy competencies help school counselors promote academic, career, and personal goals of students, as well as their social well-being, which is delineated in the ASCA national model (Ratts et al., 2007). The ACA advocacy competencies are comprised of three levels, including:

- student, which is the student empowerment domain;
- school and community, which is the community collaboration domain; and
- public arena, which is the public information domain (Ratts et al., 2007).

Engaging in a discussion addressing the use of advocacy competencies to address social justice issues and the benefits for students with their school administration is recommended for school counselors (Ratts et al., 2007). Facilitating discussions aimed at understanding that advocacy at the micro- and macro levels is part of the advocacy competencies is significant because social justice-oriented school counselors will face resistance from colleagues and parents (Ratts et al., 2007). This occurs because social justice advocacy requires school counselors to examine the status quo, to voice concerns, and to advocate when injustices are identified (Kiselica & Robinson, 2001).

**Systemic change.** Schools are systems and comprehensive school counseling programs are essential components of them (ASCA, 2012). School counselors are situated to recognize systemic barriers to student success. Janson (2009) reported that there is a moral urgency for school counselor leadership to expedite systemic changes in schools. Leading as an effective support to others and using data efficiently are vital skills school counselors need to be systems change agents (Janson, 2009). Systemic change occurs on a continuum. Small change has the potential to lead to larger and more impactful progress (ASCA, 2012). Anderson (1993) related
six stages of systemic change founded in experiences in systemic change from varying levels of educational institutions across the United States:

- Maintenance of old system: Educators maintain the current system constructs.
- Awareness: Numerous stakeholders know the current system is not functioning properly but are uncertain of how to make improvements.
- Exploration: Educators and policy makers explore external systems that are implementing new methods.
- Transition: The number of leaders and members who agree to support a decision to make changes.
- Emergence of new infrastructure: Some operations are aligned with a new system and are eventually accepted.
- Predominance of the new system: As the new system succeeds, new leaders envision more changes for improvement.

Change occurs through the continual involvement of key leaders in a school, including school counselors. Educational leaders can help stakeholders reach a comprehensive perspective regarding needed systemic change (Anderson, 1993).

The belief that school counselors have a moral and ethical obligation to advocate for students and serve as change agents for social and political change (Ratts et al., 2007) is founded in Menacker’s (1976) recommendation that occasionally, the system rather than the student requires altering. Menacker (1976) asserted that school counselors need to help students adapt to the system while also advocating for systemic change. School counselors cannot disregard the realities of oppression (Ratts et al., 2007). Furthermore, school counselors cannot function from their offices alone to serve students (Vera & Speight, 2003). Instead, their responsibilities include interjecting themselves into the social contexts that affect students (Ratts et al., 2007).

**School Counselor Self-Advocacy**

The ASCA national model incorporates advocacy into all elements of the school counselor’s role (Field & Baker, 2004; Wood, 2012). School counselors who are effective advocates identify barriers to all students’ achieving academic success within the school system
and advocate for change (Field & Baker, 2004; Wood, 2012). Examples of school counselors’ advocacy practices include:

- eliminating barriers impeding students’ development,
- creating opportunities to learn for all students,
- ensuring access to a quality school curriculum,
- collaborating with others within and outside the school to help students meet their needs, and
- promoting positive systemic change in schools (ASCA, 2012).

To self-advocate, Trusty and Brown (2005) recommended that school counselors learn skills related to communication and collaboration, problem assessment and solving, organization, and self-care, while also practicing professionalism, autonomy, risk taking, and concern for others with an emphasis on family and ethics. Furthermore, school counselors must understand supports, policies, protocols, and legalities about their professional role, and Trusty and Brown (2005) suggested that school counselors should understand how to resolve disputes and address complex systems within schools, such as the school climate.

When Clemens et al. (2011) developed the School Counselor Self-Advocacy Scale, they reviewed research in the fields of health care, mental health, and education that investigated self-advocacy for groups other than school counselors (e.g., patients diagnosed with a chronic disease, parents of children with special needs, adults with cognitive disabilities, students advocating for their academic needs). Clemens and colleagues (2011) began their review with the research of Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, and Eddy (2005) and Brashers, Haas, and Neidig (1999), and they used the work of Trusty and Brown (2005) as a foundation because they provided a broad review of advocacy research, comprehensively integrated counseling literature on advocacy with school counseling-specific research, and conveyed skills that form a behavioral basis for instrument development (Clemens et al., 2011).
Test et al. (2005) developed a conceptual framework of self-advocacy to provide guidance for instructional planning, curricular development, and measurement of self-advocacy for students who have and who do not have disabilities. In addition, Test et al. (2005) recognized further research on skills needed to promote self-advocacy is warranted and indicated that their conceptual framework of self-advocacy could help other practitioners develop future instructional strategies, future research, and instruction. Furthermore, Brashers et al. (1999) research tested the reliability and validity of the Patient Self-Advocacy Scale, designed to measure the extent of increased illness and treatment education, increased assertiveness in health care interactions, and increased potential of nonadherence. The Patient Self-Advocacy Scale provided a basis for assessing and predicting communicative behaviors (Brashers et al., 1999).

Trusty and Brown (2005) presented and described school counselor advocacy competencies. These competencies included advocacy disposition, knowledge, and skills. School counselors with an advocacy disposition are aware of and embrace their professional advocacy roles (Trusty & Brown, 2005). To be effective advocates, school counselors need to have knowledge of their school settings. They should be familiar with local referral resources, other groups that provided supports for students, and others whose responsibilities have commonality with school counselors’ activities (Trusty & Brown, 2005). Furthermore, school counselors must possess skills in communication, collaboration, problem solving, and organization. Trusty and Brown (2005) also indicated that self-care skills and coping skills are essential for school counselors as not all advocacy efforts are successful.

Bemak and Chung (2008) explored reasons why a school counselor might not engage in self-advocacy and found that the need to be a team player, referred to as nice counselor syndrome, encourages school counselors to conform to a school environment that conflicts with
their appropriate professional role (Bemak & Chung, 2008). Nice counselor syndrome is characterized by school counselors who perpetuate the educational status quo by agreeing to the standards and desires of other school personnel and to traditional school operations and educational protocols that support the inequities contributing to the academic achievement gap (Bemak & Chung, 2008). Bemak and Chung (2008) explored the emotional and professional effects of nice counselor syndrome for school counselors. For example, feelings of dread and danger may prevent school counselors from using their self-advocacy skills when a situation warrants a particular action. Furthermore, school counselors may become indifferent when pressed to maintain the educational status quo rather than self-advocating for an appropriate school counseling role (Bemak & Chung, 2008).

To further explore why school counselors might not self-advocate, Bemak, Williams, and Chung (2015) examined school counselors’ capacity to utilize outcome data to demonstrate that their role and function is essential to the academic success of all students. The authors used a case study to illustrate four domains of accountability that could position school counselors as critical in promoting students’ educational achievement. Bemak and colleagues (2015) found that school counselors are not equipped with standard protocols for identifying, prioritizing, and targeting data that will demonstrate meaning and merit to administrators, teachers, parents, and students about the role of the school counselor. Barriers such as time restrictions, deficient professional development in research and evaluation methods, lack of funding and support resources, and need for clarity about appropriate criteria to measure, inhibit school counselors from demonstrating how their school counseling role can bring about student success (Bemak et al., 2015; Butler & Bunch, 2005; Myrick, 2003; Perera-Diltz & Mason, 2010). School counselors who demonstrate the self-advocacy skills required to eliminate these barriers are less
likely to be habitually assigned to administrative activities such as testing, supervising, and scheduling (Bemak, 2000; Bemak & Chung, 2008; Bemak et al., 2015).

Havlik, Malott, Yee, DeRosato, and Crawford (2019) conducted a mixed-methods study of 18 school counselor educators and investigated the ways school counselor educators prepare pre-service school counselors to practice professional advocacy and delved into school counselor educators’ experiences and challenges related to preparing pre-service school counselors to professionally advocate. Findings indicated that participants placed a high value on the importance of understanding the ASCA national model and using the model to advocate for school counseling roles. In addition, participants identified the need for school counselors to take part in professional organizations and attend conferences. Moreover, the school counselor educators recognized the need for school counselors to advocate for their roles within schools through a variety of venues such as websites, newsletters, and parent nights in addition to collaborating with others to obtain buy-in for their programs. Lastly, the participants identified the need for school counselors to develop effective communication skills (Havlik et al., 2019).

**Years of Professional Experience**

The literature suggests a potential relationship between school counselors’ years of professional experience and self-advocacy, but the results were conflicting. Niforos (2016) interviewed 259 middle school counselors and examined their experiences with academic interventions (i.e., use, extent of use, frequency of use) and how particular school counselor characteristics (e.g., years of experience, student-to-school-counselor ratios) and school variables (e.g., size, type, setting, number of students in the free and reduced lunch program) related to the use of academic interventions. Niforos (2016) found that middle school counselors actively used evidence-based, academic interventions to enhance student success; however, the school
counselors’ years of professional experience had no significant impact on the use of academic intervention. Nevertheless, as the school counselor’s caseload increased, the use of academic interventions decreased (Niforos, 2016). Furthermore, as student enrollment increased, the school counselor’s use of academic interventions decreased (Niforos, 2016). Varda et al. (2015) studied relationships among self-reported school counselor professional expertise, organization support of evidence-based practices, and professional development. Varda et al. (2015) examined data collected from 85 members of the ASCA. School counselors who self-reported higher expertise also indicated that they were more likely to participate in professional growth to improve their school-counseling skills. However, no linear relationship was found among organizational support of evidence-based practices and self-reported professional expertise, which may indicate a deficit in structural and organizational school supports (Varda et al., 2015).

Conversely, Scarborough and Culbreth (2008) examined the discrepancies between actual and preferred practice among 361 primary and secondary school counselors and found that counselors with more years of experience were more likely to engage in preferred school counselor activities associated with a comprehensive school counseling program. Their findings also indicated that school counselors at both the primary and secondary levels consistently expressed a desire to spend less time in non-school-counseling activities and more time engaging in the interventions associated with positive student outcomes. One explanation of this finding may be that more years of experience are necessary for school counselors to be able to effectively implement the myriad of interventions they are expected to perform (Scarborough & Culbreth, 2008).

Additionally, studies have found that school counselors with fewer years of experience may experience higher anxiety levels and stress about their professional capacity (Brott &
Brott and Myers (1999) conducted a qualitative study to develop a grounded theory that could be applied in order to understand school counselors’ professional identity development. Ten elementary and middle school counselors participated in the study. Brott and Myers (1999) found school counselors’ concept of their role and professional growth started during their pre-service education, evolved at their entry into the profession, and continued to develop as they internalized the role, which resulted in individualized personal guidelines determining the school counseling services provided. Furthermore, Brott and Myers (1999) discussed the impact of assigning administrative and clerical duties as significant influences on school counselors’ professional identity and role. Interactions between administrators and cocounselors to address appropriate school counselor activities may result in confrontation, arbitration, and collaboration that can be viewed as a productive struggle with the positive outcome of implementing appropriate and effective school counseling programs and services (Brott & Myers, 1999).

Similarly, Sink and Yillik-Downer (2001) examined data from 1,033 school counselors surveyed in eight states within the western, midwestern, and southern regions of the United States and found school counselors with less years of experience reported an increased rate of anxiety and doubted their professional capacity; furthermore, they also desired more collaboration in order to implement a comprehensive school counseling program. On the other hand, Sink and Yillik-Downer (2001) suggested that school counselors with more years of experience may be more confident in their role and expressed less desire to collaborate.

**Student to School Counselor Ratio**

In the United States, school counselors are overwhelmed with large caseloads of students, particularly at schools with an increased number of low-income and first-generation students
who have college potential (Murphy, 2016). The student-to-school-counselor ratio recommended by the ASCA is 250:1 (ASCA, 2012). For example, New York’s student-to-school-counselor ratio is 624:1; California’s ratio is 822:1, and Arizona’s ratio is even higher at 941:1. Overall as a nation, the United States has a student-to-school-counselor ratio of 491:1 (ASCA, 2013–2014). High student-to-school-counselor ratios represent an understudied component in the research on school counselor self-advocacy and comprehensive school counseling program implementation (Lapan et al., 2012).

Since the 1990s, empirical research conducted in the state of Missouri illustrated that when provided time, support, and comprehensive school counseling program frameworks, professional school counselors enhanced student academic success, college entry, career training, and career planning. In addition, school counselors contributed to the establishment and sustainment of positive and safe school environments (Lapan et al., 2012).

The ASCA (2013–2014) reviewed six state studies and found that lower student-to-school-counselor ratios increased student access to school counselors and produced positive student outcomes, such as higher attendance, fewer discipline referrals, and increased rates of course completion. Higher student to school counselor ratios may hinder school counselors’ capacity to effectively implement comprehensive school counseling programs and self-advocate for their professional role (ASCA, 2012). Furthermore, the ASCA (2016), collected data from all public schools and school districts in the United States for school year 2013–2014. The report revealed the following gaps in educational equity and opportunity for students:

- Approximately 21% of 850,000 high-school students do not have access to a school counselor.
- 1.6 million elementary, middle, and high-school students attend a school with a sworn law enforcement officer but not a school counselor.
• Black students have a 1.2 greater probability to have a law enforcement officer in their school; Asian students have a 1.3 greater probability; and Latino students have a 1.4 great probability (ASCA, 2016).

School counselors are an integral support for student efforts to achieve success at all grade levels (ASCA, 2016). They help to close educational gaps through comprehensive school counseling programs and services that result in fewer discipline referrals, greater access to courses and programs that prepare students for careers and college, teacher equity, and higher graduation rates (ASCA, 2016).

**Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory**

Bronfenbrenner (1979/1996) developed ecological systems theory (EST) as a theoretical approach to human development. Bronfenbrenner was inspired by the work of Kurt Lewin (1951) and Jean Piaget (1954) on the interplay between the environment and individuals. Lewin (1951) developed the person-environment formula, \( B = f[P \times E] \), which suggested that human behavior \( B \) is an activity of dynamic and sustained interactions between the person \( P \) and the environment \( E \). In the Lewinian formula, behavior is equal to a function of the interaction of an individual and the environment (McMahon, Mason, Daluga-Guenther, & Ruiz, 2014). The \( X \) refers not only to the interaction of an individual with their environment, but also to individuals’ interpretations of these interactions (McMahon et al., 2014). According to Piaget’s (1936) theory of cognitive development, a child forms an understanding of his or her environment (McLeod, 2018). Piaget (1936) disagreed with the concept that intelligence is a fixed trait and considered cognitive development as a series of actions that are founded in biological maturation and interaction with the environment (McLeod, 2018).

Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1994) suggested that human development is synergistic, occurring through interactions with the environment progressively with time. According to
Bronfenbrenner (1994), human development is influenced in a reciprocal way through personal engagement across four interrelated systems identified as the microsystem, mesosystem, ecosystem, and microsystem. EST includes a collection of models and research concerned with the processes and conditions that govern the progression of human development in individuals’ environments over time (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). To this end, schools are one of the most influential settings on human development, and interactions that occur in school settings can either impede or encourage learning (Bronfenbrenner, 1979/1996; Brown, 2016). Students spend the majority of their time in schools and interactions that occur in the educational setting can influence their academic and social-emotional development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979/1996; Brown, 2016).

The core argument for the use of EST and the proposed systems-based model (Cigrand et al., 2015) for this study is that the model clearly outlines a comprehensive approach to school counselor professional self-advocacy. This study employed EST and Cigrand et al. (2015) model to understand how school counselors can self-advocate through the development of a comprehensive school counseling program. In addition to providing clear self-advocacy methods for school counselors, through the use of a multitiered model, Cigrand et al. (2015) promoted the role of the school counselor throughout the different systems (i.e., microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem) as well as encouraged collective efforts for systemic educational change. Therefore, the intention of employing the Cigrand et al. (2015) model of school counselor professional advocacy, which was framed by Bronfenbrenner’s (1977) EST, was to understand the relationship between school counselors’ perceived self-advocacy skills and the implementation level of comprehensive school counseling programs. The aim was to offer a systemic model to school counselors, counselor educators, administrators, and other key
stakeholders to encourage school counselors to adopt self-advocacy actions that will help them reach all students and act as systemic change agents for students, schools, and communities (Cigrand et al., 2015).

**Ecological Systems Theory and Education**

EST (Bronfenbrenner, 1979/1996) is a purposeful approach to contextualizing educational systems. Hong and Eamon (2012) used Bronfenbrenner’s (1977, 1994) EST framework to examine factors associated with students’ perceptions of unsafe school environments. Hong and Eamon’s (2012) study contributed to understanding the relationship between multiple factors, including peer and family demographics, home and school environments, parental school involvement, and community safety issues that may lead to students’ perceiving school as an unsafe environment. Data were extracted and examined from a national sample of 10- to 15-year-old students. The results highlighted the importance of social workers engaging in an ecological assessment to determine the need for interventions or school safety programs that could enhance school safety (Hong & Eamon, 2012).

Haight, Gibson, Kayama, Marshall, and Wilson (2014) used Bronfenbrenner’s (1977, 1994) EST to examine the racial disproportionality in suspensions assigned. The study found that nationally, African-American students were 3 times more likely than White students to be suspended (Haight et al., 2014). Racial disproportionality in out-of-school suspensions is a persistent, multilevel social justice and child well-being concern in the United States (Haight et al., 2014). Haight et al. (2014) examined the perspectives of students, their caregivers, and their teachers on incidences of recent out-of-school suspensions. Study participants included 28 students with recent out-of-school suspensions, 25 of their caregivers, and 16 educators. Educators emphasized the need to maintain a positive learning environment for all students and
for taking preventive and flexible approaches to problematic student behaviors. They also described a variety of system constraints to implementing alternatives to suspensions. These included deficient school resources, legal liability issues, and a culturally diverse student population under the direction of a relatively homogeneous staff (Haight et al., 2014). Fish and Syed (2018) offered a reconceptualization of Bronfenbrenner’s (1979/1996) EST as an alternative framework for the experiences of Native American college students.

Haight et al. (2014) emphasized how historical and cultural factors interrelated with the multiple facets of circumstances that define Native American students’ ecology. In addition, Haight et al. (2014) clarified the multiple ways in which the current academic experiences of Native American college students extend the colonial dynamics that were characteristic of boarding schools, meaning educational institutions are constructed to encourage Euro-American values while de-emphasizing the cultural values, beliefs, and traditions of Native American students (Haight et al., 2014).

**Ecological Systems Theory and School Counseling**

School counselors are adopting an ecological research framework to account for diversity in populations, reconceptualizing the role of school counselors and their scope of practice to promote success for all students (McMahon et al., 2014). Brown (2016) studied school counselor advocacy for students with mental health issues in high-poverty schools. Brown (2016) sought to understand the lived experiences of eight elementary school counselors from various school districts across the United States. Brown (2016) used EST (Bronfenbrenner, 1979/1996) to identify chief factors that appeared to relate to poverty’s influence on student learning. The study indicated five themes that affect school counselors’ advocacy efforts for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds with mental health issues: (a) motivation to
advocate, (b) prioritizing mental health in schools, (c) complex trauma, (d) school- and district-based support, and (e) preparedness. Findings suggested that attention to school counselors’ professional identity development and trauma-informed training for school counselors serving high-poverty populations would increase their advocacy for mental health programs in schools (Brown, 2016).

Oehrtman (2018) used EST (Bronfenbrenner, 1979/1996) to explore school counselors’ utilization of intro-and interprofessional collaboration to diminish the barriers to implementing a comprehensive school counseling program. Nineteen school counselors were interviewed. The outcome of the study was a grounded theory detailing school counselors’ development and sustainment of intra-and interprofessional collaborative relationships and their perceived influence on student achievement (Oehrtman, 2018). The data suggested that school counselors developed intra- and interprofessional collaborative relationships with different education colleagues based on accessibility, necessity, or a shared vision (Oehrtman, 2018). Then, school counselors determined whether the collaborative relationship was positive or negative. When the relationship was positive, school counselors tried to preserve and fortify the connection (Oehrtman, 2018).

Beck, Rausch, Wikoff, and Gallo (2018) used Bronfenbrenner’s (1979/1996) EST as a framework to assist school counselors pilot possible ethical concerns when supporting and advocating for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students. Through intentional planning and engagement at each systemic level, school counselors can have an extensive effect on every student in their schools (Beck et al., 2018; Cigrand et al., 2015). Beck et al. (2018) encouraged school counselors to examine ecological-level risks and develop self-advocacy objectives to reduce prospective barriers with colleagues, administrators, and faculty. Beck et al.
(2018) suggested school counselors can become more effective advocates by communicating an acceptance of students on a personal level, such as individual counseling, fostering a safe and inclusive environment within their schools, changing school and district policy to protect against discrimination, and building relationships with the community to promote LGBT rights.

**Ecological Systems Theory and School Counselor Self-Advocacy**

Bronfenbrenner’s (1979/1996) EST permits school leaders to conceptualize their school systems as ecological environments comprised of a set of nested structures that can each affect various layers of the larger environment. The different levels of a school system influence the individuals that function in the school environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979/1996). McMahon et al. (2014) highlighted three core concepts of the EST. First, ecosystems consist of all components of the environment and everything within an ecosystem is interconnected. Second, ecosystems are comprised of smaller ecosystems and are nested within larger ecosystems, and third, ecosystems desire sustainability. Moreover, Chronister, McWhirter, and Kerewsky (2004) identified three main assumptions of the EST. The first was that individuals and their environments regularly interact and influence each other. The second was that individuals are active participants in their development, and the third was that a change in an ecological system may trigger an alteration in another system thereby influencing individuals.

Bronfenbrenner (1979/1996) suggested that active, growing human beings can create contextual and developmental change through high levels of incentive and perseverance (Cigrand et al., 2015; Rosa & Tudge, 2013). Therefore, school counselors can use Bronfenbrenner’s framework of four interrelated systems to organize and execute specific advocacy actions to promote the school counseling profession (Cigrand et al., 2015). Cigrand et al. (2015) described Bronfenbrenner’s (1979/1996) four structures of the EST, which includes
the microsystem, mesosystem, ecosystem, and the macrosystem. Furthermore, Cigrand et al. (2015) suggested school counselor self-advocacy actions within and across these systems.

**Microsystem and Mesosystem**

The microsystem consists of direct interactions within the primary environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Cigrand et al., 2015). Applied to school counselors, the microsystem is comprised of the immediate school environment, community, and school district. Direct interactions for school counselors include those with students, teachers, administrators, and engaged community members such as mental health professionals with whom the school counselor regularly interacts (Cigrand et al., 2015). The mesosystem implies a system of interactions across microsystems, to include the connections between microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Cigrand et al., 2015). For school counselors, the mesosystem involves how a school counselor interacts, communicates, or relates with parents, students, school district members, and community stakeholders to promote their role (Cigrand et al., 2015).

Strategically, school counselors can focus their advocacy efforts toward those in the microsystem who hold prominent influence over school counselors’ professional futures. These individuals can include students, parents, administrators, and people who may influence school or district policies that define the role of the school counselor or provide funding for school counselor allocation (Cigrand et al., 2015). School counselors can advocate for their role to key stakeholders by drawing on three factors: (a) external authorities, which includes school, district, state, and national policies regarding the school counselors’ role; (b) data that identify context-specific student needs, which can justify program planning and delivery; and (c) research outcomes, such as evidence-based practices and outcome assessments.
Exosystem

The exosystem comprises institutions that are not in school counselors’ immediate settings; however these organizations may directly or indirectly influence their school counselor role (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Some examples of these organizations include state government, community associations, counselor training programs, and affiliated associations such as the ASCA (Cigrand et al., 2015). Unlike the microsystem, the exosystem influences the school counselor in a more indirect way because the policies and procedures resulting from organizational decisions trickle down through others (e.g., university supervisors, school administrators) to ultimately impact the microsystem.

Macrosystem

The macrosystem is the outermost layer of the EST (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). This layer includes an umbrella of cultural patterns and subcultures that affect the broader systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). In the macrosystem, cultural norms and beliefs influence individuals directly and indirectly (Cigrand et al., 2015). Applied to school counselors, the macrosystem includes the expectations and beliefs of the school counseling profession, as well as stakeholders’ interpretations of the school counselor role (Cigrand et al., 2015). The role of the school counselors has transformed overtime, thus perceptions about the role of school counselors varies (Cigrand et al., 2015).

Through their self-advocacy, school counselors may promote possible norms related to school counseling such as: (a) the belief that seeking counseling support is acceptable; (b) information about how students’ social–emotional status influences their educational and career achievement and how it, in turn, should be addressed by school counselors; and (c) the understanding that school counselors possess advanced and unique skills to attend to the
academic, career, and social–emotional needs of students (Cigrand et al., 2015). In order to do so, school counselors may communicate the school counselor role, use consistent language, and utilize data to support the profession (Cigrand et al., 2015).

Using Bronfenbrenner’s (1977, 1994) EST, Cigrand et al. (2015) developed a model that offers specific strategies for school counselors to advocate at multiple levels in a variety of forms, providing a guide for a comprehensive approach toward self-advocacy planning. School counselors can effectively promote their role by engaging at each level in a planned and consistent manner (Figure 4; Cigrand et al., 2015). As individual school counselors collaborate with other school counselors, school counseling associations, and beneficiaries of the profession on professional advocacy efforts, systemic change can happen (Cigrand et al., 2015).
Figure 4. EST applied to the school counselor professional advocacy model (Cigrand et al., 2015).

Summary

Developing and implementing comprehensive school counseling programs in their schools is the main role of school counselors (ASCA, 2012). Although the ASCA clarified the role of school counselors and developed the ASCA national model, a framework for
comprehensive school counseling programs (ASCA, 2012), role ambiguity, role conflict, and the misunderstanding of school counselors’ professional role among key stakeholders hinders school counselors’ primary task of providing effective school counseling programs (Fye, Miller et al., 2018; Rayle & Adams, 2007). A review of the literature demonstrated that school counselors and educational leaders need to identify specific skills for school counselor professional advocacy through which to achieve effective systemic change (Cigrand et al., 2015).

Knowing whether a relationship exists among counselor self-advocacy practices in implementing comprehensive school counseling programs might uncover which self-advocacy variables promote more fully implemented school counseling programs. The findings of this study will inform how school counselors, administrators, and educational leaders may advance school counselor advocacy skills alongside the implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs.
Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

The purpose of the study was to investigate the relationship between school counselors’ perceived self-advocacy skills and the implementation level of comprehensive school counseling programs. The study was nonexperimental, quantitative, and correlational by design and utilized a survey research methodology. The research added to the body of knowledge regarding the skills school counselors need to effectively self-advocate for their school counselor role and the implementation of school counseling programs. This chapter contains a description of how the study was conducted. Elements addressed in the chapter include a rationale for selecting the quantitative method of correlational research and information about participant recruitment, data collection, data management, and data analysis procedures. Ethical considerations for human-subject research and limitations are also presented and discussed.

Research Questions

RQ1. What is the relationship between school counselors’ perceived self-advocacy skills, as measured by the SCSAQ, and comprehensive program implementation, as measured by the SCPIS?

- H1: There is a relationship between school counselors’ perceived self-advocacy skills, as measured by the SCSAQ, and comprehensive program implementation, as measured by the SCPIS.

- H10: There is no relationship between school counselors’ perceived self-advocacy skills, as measured by the SCSAQ, and comprehensive program implementation, as measured by the SCPIS.

RQ2. What is the relationship between comprehensive program implementation, as measured by the SCPIS, and student to school counselor ratio?

- H2: There is a relationship between comprehensive program implementation, as measured by the SCPIS, and student to school counselor ratio.

- H20: There is no relationship between comprehensive program implementation, as measured by the SCPIS, and student to school counselor ratio.
RQ3. What is the relationship between comprehensive program implementation, as measured by the SCPIS, and the years of professional experience as a school counselor?

- H3: There is a relationship between comprehensive program implementation, as measured by the SCPIS, and the years of professional experience as a school counselor.
- H30: There is no relationship between comprehensive program implementation, as measured by the SCPIS, and the years of professional experience as a school counselor.

RQ4. What is the relationship between school counselors’ perceived self-advocacy skills, as measured by the SCSAQ, and the years of professional experience as a school counselor?

- H4: There is a relationship between school counselors’ perceived self-advocacy skills, as measured by the SCSAQ, and the years of professional experience as a school counselor.
- H40: There is no relationship between school counselors’ perceived self-advocacy skills, as measured by the SCSAQ, and the years of professional experience as a school counselor.

**Quantitative Research**

A quantitative methodology was selected to evaluate the relationship between school counselors’ self-advocacy skills and the implementation level of comprehensive school counseling programs. Quantitative research has been defined as “explaining phenomena by collecting numerical data that are analyzed using mathematically based methods (in particular statistics)” (Aliaga & Gunderson, 2000, p. 81). The researcher’s investigation fell under a postpositivism paradigm which serves as the main basis and anchor for quantitative methods (Ponterotto, 2005). Whereas positivists recognize an objective, apprehendable reality, postpositivists accept an objective reality as imperfectly true (Ponterotto, 2005). In contrast to positivists, postpositivists view research as uncertain, and rather than focusing on absolute truth, postpositivists focus on confidence (Muijs, 2011). Postpositivists seek to represent reality within their best effort (Muijs, 2011).

Qualitative, mixed methods, and quantitative strategies were reviewed for suitability. Qualitative research is appropriate when the variables are unknown and exploration is warranted;
therefore, a qualitative method was not appropriate for use in this research due to the known variables to be studied (Creswell, 2015). Although personal interviews, observations, and content analysis may provide depth to a small sample of responses, a researcher using a qualitative method may not be able to demonstrate the strength of the relationship (Fraenkel et al., 2019). Mixed-methods research combines both qualitative and quantitative approaches in the same study (Fraenkel et al., 2019). A mixed methods approach was rejected due to the identified single sample needed for this study (Fraenkel et al., 2019). In addition, qualitative research was not needed to provide direction to the quantitative method, nor are quantitative results needed to validate qualitative findings (Fraenkel et al., 2019).

The rationale for selecting quantitative methodology was to clarify the relationship of school counselors’ self-advocacy skills to the implementation level of their school counseling programs (Fraenkel et al., 2019). Research questions drive the method of inquiry, so the research questions and hypotheses in this study were designed to allow the researcher to investigate variables believed to be related to the relationship between school counselors’ self-advocacy skills and the implementation level of comprehensive school counseling programs (Fraenkel et al., 2019). The primary independent variable, school counselor self-advocacy, and the dependent variable, comprehensive school counseling program implementation, were examined to address the overarching inquiry into the relationship between school counselors’ self-advocacy skills and the implementation level of comprehensive school counseling programs. In addition, two demographic variables were identified and hypothesized to be related to the two overarching variables. These demographic variables were student-to-school-counselor ratio and years of professional experience as a school counselor. The variables found to have a significant
relationship may serve as the focus of further research—using an experimental design—to determine whether the relationship is causal (Fraenkel et al., 2019).

Research Design

The study was designed to evaluate the relationship between school counselor self-advocacy skills and the implementation level of comprehensive school counseling programs by administering two surveys. The research approach was broadly nonexperimental, and as such, no manipulation of independent variables was required on the part of the researcher other than providing the surveys to garner the data (Fraenkel et al., 2019). Therefore, correlational research was a fitting quantitative research design to investigate the degree of mathematical relationship that might exist between school counselors’ self-advocacy skills and the implementation level of comprehensive school counseling programs. The purpose of correlational research was, in essence, to address the study’s topic and research problem by identifying relationships among variables (Fraenkel et al., 2019).

The researcher employed inferential quantitative research methods and utilized two survey instruments to collect the data for the study. Inferential statistics using a correlational research design were utilized to analyze data from a volunteer sample of school counselors to draw conclusions about the relationship between school counselor self-advocacy and the implementation level of comprehensive school counseling programs (Creswell, 2015).

Participants and Research Setting

Participants included practicing school counselor members from the ASCA database, which provided a wide national representation for this study (Young et al., 2015), and members of Facebook school counseling network groups. The study was, by definition, correlational and as such, a priori sample size parameters were determined by generally accepted conventions as
well as through formal power analysis using G*Power. Regarding generally accepted
conventions associated with correlational research, a sample size of no less than 50 is
recommended (van Voorhis & Morgan, 2007). Formal power analysis provided a more precise
range of the sample size convention for the study, dependent upon the anticipated correlation
coefficient in the findings. The low threshold for a large correlation coefficient ($r = .50$) would
require 23 participants to detect a statistically significant finding ($p \leq .50$), whereas 67 study
participants would be required for the low threshold for a medium correlation coefficient ($r = .30$). An anticipated correlation coefficient of $.20$ would require a participant sample size of 153
to provide sufficient statistical power ($d = .80$) to detect a statistically significant finding. The
study’s actionable sample size of 200 was, therefore, adequate in providing statistical power for
correlational coefficients as low as $r = .18$.

The study sample consisted of elementary-school, middle-school, high-school, or mixed
grade-level school counselors in the United States working as professional school counselors.
This sample included school counselors working in public school systems serving the dependents
of military members. Collecting data from each grade-level configuration added to the study’s
generalizability to school counselors as a whole (Fraenkel et al., 2019). Invitations were sent to
all school counselors on the ASCA database who met the participation criteria as well as to the
following Facebook school counselor networking groups: a) School Counselors Connect, b) The
Elementary School Counselor, c) Secondary School Counselor Network, d) Caught In The
Middle School Counselor, e) High School Counselor Connection, f) High School Counselor
Connection, and g) The Savvy School Counselor Tribe. The participants’ professional positions
were affirmed by a qualifying question at the beginning of the survey.
Demographic information was collected to discuss possible connections between these variables and the research questions in order to obtain a better understanding of the generalizability of the findings. In particular, the student-to-school-counselor ratio and years of professional experience as a school counselor were investigated based on the belief that these two variables may be associated with school counselors’ self-advocacy skills and the implementation level of their school counseling programs (ASCA, 2012; Lapan et al., 2012; Murphy, 2016; Niforos, 2016; Varda et al., 2015).

The sample was available for study purposes via an online electronic portal through the ASCA membership directory at no cost for professional school counselor members. The researcher received permission (Appendix A) to post information about the surveys and research to the ASCA SCENE as well as to invite school counselors to participate. Furthermore, the researcher used Facebook school counseling networking groups to post information about the surveys and to recruit participants. The survey was open for 5 weeks.

**Instrumentation**

Selection of the instruments (Appendix B) used in the study was based upon their validity and reliability in measuring school counselor’s self-advocacy skills and comprehensive school counseling program implementation. The SCSAQ was used to measure school counselors’ self-advocacy skills and the SCPIC was used to measure comprehensive school counseling program implementation. Permission to use these two assessments was granted by the authors of both instruments (Appendix C; Appendix D). In addition, the researcher developed a demographic survey to capture characteristics of school counselors identified by school counseling literature as relevant to school counselors’ self-advocacy skills, particularly student-to-school-counselor ratio and years of professional experience.
Demographic Questionnaire

Participants were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire consisting of 14 researcher-created questions based on professional literature regarding their personal characteristics and work environment. The questions included inquiries about: (a) location of school, (b) ASCA member status, (c) grade-level assignment, (d) highest degree earned, (e) gender, (f) years of professional experience, (g) type of school, (h) total number of years at current school, (i) total number of students enrolled in the school, (j) student-to-school-counselor ratio, and (k) total number of school counselors in their school. Through use of the demographic questionnaire, the researcher garnered descriptive information about the respondents and collected information specific to the research questions.

School Counselor Self-Advocacy Questionnaire

The SCSAQ was designed to measure the skills that enable school counselors to advocate for their roles and programs (Clemens et al., 2011). The questionnaire consisted of nine items to which participants were prompted to rate their agreement using a 4-point Likert scale. Questions focused on the use of specific advocacy skills, and possible responses ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree without an impartial alternative (Clemens et al., 2011). The questionnaire was scored by adding together the items for a total score or by dividing the total score by nine to factor a mean score (Clemens et al., 2011). Items were not reverse coded. The greater use of self-advocacy skills was indicated by higher scores (Clemens et al., 2011).

Internal consistency of participant response (reliability) measured by Cronbach’s alpha was high for a self-report attitudinal measure, \( \alpha = .84 \), which was considered an acceptable score (Clemens et al., 2011; Muijs, 2011). The overall model fit was measured by the goodness of fit index, the comparative fit index, and the root mean square error of approximation. The goodness
of fit index resulted in .80 which indicated that the data fit the model reasonability well. The comparative fit index which compares the model tested to a null or baseline model resulted in .86 which was a reasonable fit. The standardized root mean square residual (SRMSR) statistic for this model was calculated to be .08. The measurement of the SRMSR resulted in less than .10, which is regarded as reflective of fit (Clemens et al., 2011). Overall, the combination of indicators showed the data a reasonable fit for the model (Clemens et al., 2011).

In order to assess concurrent validity of the self-advocacy scale, Clemens et al. (2011) used three measures. Two of the measures were the Leader-Member Exchange Seven-Member Version (LMX7; Paglis & Green, 2002) and the SCPIS (Clemens et al., 2010). Researchers use the LMX7 to measure the quality of the relationship between a superior (i.e., administrator) and a subordinate (i.e., school counselor; Clemens et al., 2011; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Researchers use the SCPIS to assess ASCA national model program implementation. The correlation between the School Counselor Self-Advocacy Scale and the LMX7 was calculated to be .52, and the correlation between the School Counselor Self-Advocacy Scale and the School Counselor Self-Advocacy Scale was calculated to be .37 and .25. This suggested there was a slight to moderate relationship between the measurements by the two other scales (Clemens et al., 2011).

The third measure used to show divergent validity of the self-advocacy scale was the Burnout Measure, Short Version (Clemens et al., 2011; Malach-Pines, 2005). The Burnout Measure, Short Version is a self-report assessment that records the physical, mental, and emotional fatigue of burnout (Clemens et al., 2011). The correlation between the SCSAQ and the Burnout Measure, Short Version was calculated to be -.16 (p < .05; Clemens et al., 2011). This was a significant negative correlation. Clemens et al. (2011) anticipated finding a
significant negative association because burnout does not have a robust theoretical foundation to make an association to school counselors’ use of self-advocacy skills (Clemens et al., 2011).

**The School Counseling Program Implementation Survey**

Based on characteristics of the ASCA national model program, the SCPIS was developed to measure the level of school counseling program implementation (Clemens et al., 2010). School counselors may also identify the strengths and weaknesses in their school counseling programs based on the ASCA national model (Clemens et al., 2010). The SCPIS consists of 20 statements based on school counselors’ experiences related to the implementation of the ASCA national model in their schools (Clemens et al., 2010). Participants were prompted to rate the degree to which each statement represented the present implementation level in their school counseling program on a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from not present to fully implemented without an impartial alternative (Clemens et al., 2010). An example of one of these statements is: “A mission statement exists and is used as a foundation by all counselors” (Clemens et al., 2010). The SCPIS was scored by adding together the items for a total score. More fully implemented school counseling programs based on the ASCA national model were indicated by higher scores (Clemens et al., 2010).

The Cronbach’s alpha internal consistency reliability estimate on the 20 items was .81, which was an acceptable level (Clemens et al., 2010). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test was used to measure the sampling data for factor analysis. The KMO measure of sampling adequacy was .89, which was a creditable level (Clemens et al., 2010). Furthermore, results of the Barlett’s Test of Sphericity ($\chi^2$) was statistically significant ($p < .001$), which indicated consistency of variances and a sufficiently high degree of correlations for factoring purposes.
(Clemens et al., 2010). The KMO and Bartlett’s test results demonstrated the data were appropriate for factor analysis methods (Tinsley & Tinsley, 1987).

Clemens et al. (2010) conducted an exploratory factor analysis. First, a four-factor model was examined followed by models with three and two factors to identify which model best explained the data compared to a less complex model. Each model was evaluated based upon the amount of variance explained and its interpretability (Fabrigar, Wegener, MacCallum, & Strahan, 1999). The purest construct was established by the fewest cross-loading items and item loadings at about .32 (Clemens et al., 2010; Costello & Osborne, 2005). The two-factor model was determined to offer the purest structure because no items cross loaded (> .32). As a rule of thumb, a variable belongs to a factor when the factor loading on that factor is > 0.3 or < -0.3 (Muijs, 2011). When a variable loads strongly onto more than one factor, the structure is more difficult to interpret (Muijs, 2011). The estimated reliability of Cronbach’s alpha for the two-factor model fell within the .83 to .87 range, which was appropriate for research (Clemens et al., 2010). The two-factor model was the most appropriate for this study. Unlike the four- and three-factor models, the two-factor model allowed for a holistic assessment of program implementation (Clemens et al., 2010).

**Data Collection Procedures**

Participants were invited to participate via the ASCA SCENE, an online membership professional networking site for ASCA members, and school counseling network groups on Facebook. The ASCA SCENE allows ASCA members to share experiences with other school counselors, obtain assistance with concerns in the field, and get advice on products and programs. Members may also post research studies on the ASCA SCENE and ask for participants. Permission to use the ASCA SCENE to solicit participants for this study was
received. An initial invitation (Appendix E) was posted on the ASCA SCENE community message board, which automatically generated an email to all ASCA SCENE members. The post included the purpose of the study, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and a link to access the survey online. The survey was administered with Qualtrics, an online research software program that the researcher has free access to as a doctoral candidate through Northeastern University.

Participants began with a welcome screen instructing them how to proceed. Informed consent (Appendix F) was then obtained and researcher contact information provided. The surveys were designed using forced responses to ensure participants answered all questions before moving on to the next item. Fifteen demographic questions were presented first to verify participant eligibility. The first two questions of the demographic questionnaire included inclusion and exclusion criteria. If a participant answered a question that excluded them from the study, the survey closed, and the participant was thanked for their interest and informed that based on the responses, he or she was not eligible to participate in the survey. Participants whose answers to all demographic questions confirmed their eligibility were asked to proceed to answer the nine-item School Counselor Self-Advocacy Questionnaire and the 20-item School Counseling Program Implementation Survey. After 1 week, the desired sample size had not been met, so a reminder (Appendix G) was posted to the ASCA SCENE. After 2 weeks, the desired sample size had still not been met, so a call for more participants was posted to the ASCA SCENE using the original invitation email.

The researcher extended the participant recruitment period to a total of 5 weeks and posted the survey recruitment letter (Appendix E) to the following school counselor Facebook networking groups: a) School Counselors Connect, b) The Elementary School Counselor, c) Secondary School Counselor Network, d) Caught In The Middle School Counselor, e) High
Data Analysis

Data analysis consisted of preparing the data for analysis, conducting descriptive statistics, and analyzing the data using the appropriate statistical analyses. Data was first exported from Qualtrics into an Excel spreadsheet. Each participant was assigned a unique identification number and data was assessed for errors. Errors were fixed before importing the data into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences software version 26.

Primary Analyses

Prior to the analysis of the four research questions posed in the study, preliminary analyses were conducted. Specifically, missing data, internal consistency (i.e., reliability) of participant response, and key demographic information were analyzed. Missing data was analyzed primarily using descriptive statistical techniques. Frequencies and percentages constituted the central statistical methods of analysis and interpretation. Little’s MCAR test statistic was anticipated to be used to evaluate the randomness of possible missing data. However, in light of the relative intactness of the study’s data set (5.5% missing data), neither Little’s MCAR nor the imputation of missing data using both expectancy maximization and multiple imputations were considered necessary.

Internal reliability levels for participant responses to the study’s research instruments were assessed using the Cronbach’s alpha test statistic, with the statistical significance of findings evaluated using the $F$ test. Very high levels of internal reliability of study participant responses to the research instrument were reported for participant responses to self-advocacy ($\alpha = .81; p < .001$), program comprehensiveness ($\alpha = .91; p < .001$), and composite, or total item
response \(a = .91; \ p < .001\). Essential demographic information was analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques. Specifically, frequency counts and percentages were utilized for illustrative and comparative purposes.

**Analyses by Research Question Posed**

The study’s four research questions were addressed broadly using a variety of descriptive, associative, predictive, and inferential statistical techniques. Frequency counts, measures of central tendency, and variability represented the primary descriptive statistical techniques used to address the study’s four research questions. Research questions 1 through 4 were associative in nature, focusing upon an evaluation of the mathematical relationship between variables \(x\) and \(y\) in each respective question. The mathematical relationship in each of the four research questions was represented as a correlation coefficient. The statistical significance of each respective correlation coefficient was assessed using the threshold of \(p < .05\). The magnitude of effect in each respective mathematical relationship was evaluated through the interpretation of the coefficient of determination \((r^2)\). Coefficient of determination values at, or exceeding .138 (.14 rounded) were considered large magnitudes of associative effect. Each respective \(r^2\) was subsequently transformed into a Cohen’s \(d\) value for ease of interpretation. Follow-up applications of the linear regression test statistic, although not required in the research questions, were conducted for ancillary, predictive, and illustrative purposes.

**Ethical Considerations**

Potential harm to human subjects for this study was low as participation involved minimal risk. Prior to data collection, the researcher obtained approval from Northeastern University’s Institutional Review Board (Appendix H). The survey contained an informed consent notice, and completion of the survey indicated consent (Roberts, 2010). After
completing the screening questions, participants were presented with an informed consent notice which explained to the participants that by completing the survey, they were indicating their informed consent to participate in the study. Participants were asked to voluntarily complete the survey instruments. There were no consequences for participating in the survey, choosing to stop the survey at any time, or for contacting the researcher at any time to request withdrawal of their results (Roberts, 2010). Participants were not asked to indicate their name, and all data were de-identified, numerically coded, and reported in aggregate (Roberts, 2010). Results were reported in an anonymized manner to avoid identifying participants or their organizations (Roberts, 2010). No one other than the researcher had access to the data collected. Electronic data files were protected with a password, and paper files were contained in a locked cabinet away from public access (Roberts, 2010).

**Limitations**

The use of a convenience sample of school counselors who were members of the ASCA was one limitation of this study. Further, self-selection bias existed because participants who volunteered to participate may not have been representative of the larger population of school counselors. Other limiting factors included the following: School counselors who were members of a professional organization such as ASCA were more likely to fulfill their role as a school counselor according to professional standards (Baker & Gerler, 2004); the results may not have been representative of all school counselors working in the United States; the study relied on self-reported responses; and participants may have altered their responses to create the appearance of fulfilling their role as a professional school counselor in compliance with the ASCA national model, or to reflect professional development they had received.
The main disadvantage of convenience sampling that is tied to self-selection bias is that participants who are active in a professional organization and who are choosing to participate in research when there is no real benefit to them may have different responses from those who are not members of a professional organization and who do not volunteer to participate (Muijs, 2011). Therefore, generalizability of the findings may be limited by convenience sampling and self-selection bias. To help alleviate bias, a snowballing approach was used (Fraenkel et al., 2019). Upon completion of the survey, participants were asked if they knew of a school counselor that would be interested or eligible to participate in this study and to please send the survey link to them.

The main reason that the researcher used the ASCA SCENE was to reach hundreds of school counselors and not because the researcher only desired ASCA members to participate. Non-ASCA members’ participation strengthened the study and helped with some bias. Although non-ASCA members’ participation still represented a self-selected sample because they volunteered to complete the survey, their participation helped with the convenient sample limitations. In order to differentiate between ASCA members and non-ASCA members, a demographic question was included. This helped decipher whether ASCA members were more likely to self-advocate.

Another limitation of this study was the researcher’s personal biases as a professional school counselor and school counselor educator. The researcher was mindful of personal biases and avoided interpretations that were based on hunches, insights, and intuition (Creswell, 2015). The following chapter presents the data analysis procedures, sample selection analytics, participant demographics, and results by research question.
Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

The primary goal of this study was to investigate the relationship between school counselors’ self-advocacy skills and the level of school counseling program implementation at K-12 schools across the United States. This chapter describes the data analysis procedures, sample selection analytics, participant demographics, and results by research question.

**Data Analysis Procedures**

Data were exported from Qualtrics to the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 26, and were reviewed prior to analysis. A preliminary analysis of normal distribution was assessed using a One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) and the data were normally distributed. The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (Pearson’s $r$) Coefficient was the statistical method used to analyze the mathematical relationship between school counselor perceived self-advocacy skills and the level of comprehensive school counseling program implementation in the four formally posed research questions. The level of significance was established at 0.05; where a $p$-value of $< 0.05$ indicated a statistically significant relationship between the independent and dependent variable in the respective paradigm of each research question. Simple linear regression test statistic was used to further investigate the relationship between the effect variable (dependent) and one or more predictors (independent variable). For each predictor, the relationship was calculated to investigate the effect of the independent variable. The coefficient $b$ indicates the amount the dependent variable changes if the predictor goes up by 1 (Muijs, 2011).
Sample/Selection Analytics

The initial participant sample of 286 school counselors responded to the survey out of a population of 18,000 (1.6% response rate); however, 86 of the respondents were found ineligible due to complete non-response to the survey. As a result, the study’s sample size consisted of 200 respondents ($n = 200$).

Missing Data Analysis

Once the data were cleaned and the actionable total of 200 participants was established, an evaluation of missing data was conducted. The extent of missing data was considered “inconsequential” for subsequent analytics by virtue of the 5.5% level ($n = 329$) noted after the initial data screening phase. Data imputation procedures using expectation-maximization (EM) and multiple imputations (IM) were not considered in light of the acceptable level of missing data in the study’s essential data arrays.

Internal Reliability

The internal consistency of study participant response (reliability) to the research instruments (surveys) was assessed using the Cronbach’s alpha ($\alpha$) statistical technique. The alpha levels for “Self-Advocacy” ($\alpha = .81$), “Program Comprehensiveness” ($\alpha = .91$), and “Total or Composite” ($\alpha = .91$) were considered very high and statistically significant. Table 1 presents the internal reliability assessment results using the Cronbach’s alpha ($\alpha$) statistical method.
Table 1.

*Internal Reliability: Statistical technique- Cronbach’s alpha (a)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>a</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Self-Advocacy”</td>
<td>.81***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Program Comprehensiveness”</td>
<td>.91***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>.91***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***p < .001

**Participant Demographics**

Almost all regions of the United States were represented in the sample. However, the greatest proportion of respondents (25.0%; n = 50) reside in the southeastern United States and slightly over eight in 10 study participants (82.9%; n = 165) stated that they were ASCA members. Considering level of service as a school counselor, the single greatest category represented in the study identified with the high school level (36.2%; n = 72). Approximately eight in 10 study participants were holders of a master’s degree (82.4%; n = 164). Approximately nine in 10 study participants (92.0%; n = 183) identified as “feminine” by gender category. Regarding type of school setting of study participant employment, approximately nine in 10 (91.0%; n = 181) identified as serving in the public school setting. Nearly seven in 10 (65.3%; n = 130) noted that they had served students in their current school for five years or less. Participant demographics are displayed in Table 2.
Table 2.

**Participant Demographics (N = 200)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>n (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicate the United States geographic region in which your school is located:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West (Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, Washington, Oregon, Utah, Nevada, California, Alaska, Hawaii)</td>
<td>41 (20.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southwest (Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Arizona)</td>
<td>15 (7.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midwest (Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, Missouri, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota, North Dakota)</td>
<td>39 (19.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southeast (West Virginia, Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana, Florida)</td>
<td>50 (25.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northeast (Maine, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New Hampshire, Vermont, New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland)</td>
<td>30 (15.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States Territory (American Samoa, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands)</td>
<td>2 (1.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Regions (i.e. a virtual or online school)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armed Forces Europe</td>
<td>9 (4.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armed Forces Pacific</td>
<td>13 (6.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District of Columbia (DC)</td>
<td>9 (0.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>1 (0.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Are you an ASCA member?</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>165 (82.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>34 (17.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>1 (0.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicate your current grade level assignment as a school counselor:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary School</td>
<td>63 (31.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle School</td>
<td>40 (20.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>72 (36.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-12 Unit School</td>
<td>10 (5.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>4 (2.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>10 (5.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>1 (0.5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Indicate the highest degree earned**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree Type</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Associate’s Degree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s Degree</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>82.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialist Degree (Ed.S.)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctorate Degree</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**What gender to you identify as?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Masculine</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminine</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>91.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Years of professional service as a school counselor:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Duration</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-5</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>41.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>17.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-20</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>24.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25+</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Indicate the location of school where you work**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location Type</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>22.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>39.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtual (Online)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Indicate the type of school in which you work:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Type</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public (includes a school system serving the dependents of military members)</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>90.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charter</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtual (Online)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**How many years have you been at your current school?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-5</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>65.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-20</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>17.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25+</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total number of students enrolled in your school:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enrollment Range</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-250</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>251-500</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>29.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>501-750</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>26.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>751+</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>34.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Total number of professional school counselors assigned at the school. Part-time is 0.5 and fulltime is 1.0.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>36.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>21.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5+</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What is the approximate school counselor to student ratio at your school?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ratio</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1:250</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>49.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:50</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>38.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:750</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:751+</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Age range

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-35</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-40</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-45</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-50</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-55</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56-60</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61-65</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66+</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Survey Descriptive Statistics

The mean ($M$) and standard deviation ($SD$) were calculated for each survey question (Table 3). To calculate the mean, the sum of all the scores was divided by the number of scores (Creswell, 2015). The square root of the variance, the standard deviation ($SD$) was also calculated as an indicator of the spread of the scores (Creswell, 2015).
Table 3

*Mean and Standard Deviation of Survey Responses*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>School Counselor Self-Advocacy Questionnaire</strong></th>
<th><strong>Mean</strong></th>
<th><strong>SD</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I maintain positive working relationships with professionals in the school.</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>.711</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I effectively communicate my perspective on my role to my principal.</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>.744</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I “choose my battles” when advocating for my role as a school counselor.</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>.675</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I listen to my principal’s perspective on my role as a school counselor.</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>.590</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use problem-solving skills to find solutions to role challenges.</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>.600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I present information clearly about my role as a school counselor to my principal.</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>.653</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I share data with my principal to support or to make changes to my role as a school counselor.</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>.756</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I follow up appropriately with my principal about my role as a school counselor.</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>.651</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I cope effectively with challenges to my role as a school counselor.</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>.633</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>School Counseling Program Implementation Survey</strong></th>
<th><strong>Mean</strong></th>
<th><strong>SD</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A written mission statement exists and is used as a foundation by all counselors.</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>1.175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services are organized so that all students are well served and have access to them.</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>.789</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The program operates from a plan for closing the achievement gap for minority and lower income students.</td>
<td>2.55</td>
<td>1.032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The program has a set of clear measurable student learning objectives and goals are established for academics, social/personal skills, and career development.</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>1.048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>Score</td>
<td>Standard Error</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs Assessments are completed regularly and guide program planning.</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>1.042</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All students receive classroom guidance lessons designed to promote academic, social/personal, and career development.</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>.995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The program ensures that all students have academic plans that include testing, individual advisement, long-term planning, and placement.</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>1.098</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The program has an effective referral and follow-up system for handling student crises.</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>.774</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School counselors use student performance data to decide how to meet student needs.</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>.919</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School counselors analyze student data by ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic level to identify interventions to close achievement gaps.</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>1.055</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School counselor job descriptions match actual duties.</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>.978</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School counselors spend at least 80% of their time in activities that directly benefit students.</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>.967</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school counseling program includes interventions designed to improve the school’s ability to educate all students to high standards.</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>.862</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An annual review is conducted to get information for improving next year’s programs.</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>1.097</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School counselors use computer software to access student data.</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>.676</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Counselors use computer software to analyze student data.</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>.965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School counselors use computer software to use data for school improvement.</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>.999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school counseling program has the resources to allow counselors to complete appropriate professional development activities.</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>1.014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School counseling priorities are represented on curriculum and education committees.</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>1.090</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School counselors communicate with parents to coordinate student achievement and gain feedback for program improvement.</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>.920</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results by Research Question

Based on the overarching proposition of the study, that there is a relationship between self-advocacy and comprehensive program implementation, four research questions generated four hypotheses which form the foundation of this research:

**RQ1: What is the relationship between school counselors’ perceived self-advocacy skills, as measured by the School Counselor Self-advocacy Questionnaire (SCSAQ), and comprehensive program implementation, as measured by the School Counseling Program Implementation Survey (SCPIS)?**

H1: There is a relationship between school counselors’ perceived self-advocacy skills, as measured by the SCSAQ, and comprehensive program implementation, as measured by the SCPIS.

H10: There is no relationship between school counselors’ perceived self-advocacy skills, as measured by the SCSAQ, and comprehensive program implementation, as measured by the SCPIS.

There was a moderate, statistically significant degree of a mathematical relationship between school counselors’ perceived self-advocacy skills and comprehensive program implementation ($r = 0.37; p < .001$). As a result, the alternative hypothesis (H1) for research question one was retained and the null hypothesis (H10) was rejected. Figure 5 contains a visual representation (scatter plot) of the mathematical relationship between school counselors’ perceived self-advocacy skills and perceived comprehensiveness of program implementation. Follow-up evaluation of the predictive ability using the simple linear regression test statistic, the independent variable of study participant perceived self-advocacy skill represented a statistically
significant predictor of subsequent comprehensiveness of program implementation. As a result, and for interpretive purposes, for every full unit of increase in perceived self-advocacy, there is a predicted half-unit (.53) of increase in perception of program comprehensiveness. The predictive effect ($r^2 = .14$) is considered large ($d = .81$). Table 4 contains the statistical summary of the predictive model used in the follow-up assessment in research question one.

![Simple Scatter with Fit Line of Practices_Mean by Advocacy_Mean](image)

**Figure 5.** Scatter plot of mathematical relationship ($r$) between school counselors’ perceived self-advocacy skills and comprehensive program implementation ($N = 200$).

**Table 4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predicting Program Comprehensiveness by Participant Self-Advocacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Advocacy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***$p < .001$
RQ2: What is the relationship between comprehensive program implementation, as measured by the SCPIS, and student to school counselor ratio?

H2: There is a relationship between comprehensive program implementation, as measured by the SCPIS, and student to school counselor ratio.

H20: There is no relationship between comprehensive program implementation, as measured by the SCPIS, and student to school counselor ratio.

There was not a statistically significant relationship between comprehensive program implementation and student to school counselor ratio ($p = .06$). As a result, the alternative hypothesis (H2) for research question two was rejected and the null hypothesis (H20) was retained. Figure 6 contains a visual representation (scatter plot) of the mathematical relationship between study participant perceived comprehensiveness of program implementation and student to school counselor ratio. A table is not provided because the findings were not significant.

Figure 6. Mathematical relationship between comprehensive program implementation and student to school counselor ratio ($N = 200$).

RQ3: What is the relationship between comprehensive program implementation, as measured by the SCPIS, and the years of professional experience as a school counselor?
H3: There is a relationship between comprehensive program implementation, as measured by the SCPIS, and the years of professional experience as a school counselor.

H30: There is no relationship between comprehensive program implementation, as measured by the SCPIS, and the years of professional experience as a school counselor.

There was a small, statistically significant degree of a relationship between years of experience and comprehensive program implementation ($r = 0.21; p = 0.005$). As a result, the alternative hypothesis (H3) for research question three was retained and the null hypothesis (H30) was rejected in light of the statistically significant finding ($p = .005$). Figure 7 contains a visual representation (scatter plot) of the mathematical relationship between study participant perceived comprehensiveness of program implementation and study participant years of experience as a professional school counselor.

![Figure 7. Mathematical relationship between school counselor years of experience and comprehensive school program implementation ($N = 200$).](image)

Follow-up evaluation of the predictive ability of participant years of experience as a professional school counselor using the simple linear regression test statistic, the independent variable of study participant years of experience as a professional school counselor represented a
statistically significant predictor of perceived comprehensiveness of programming implementation. The variable “years of experience” was statistically significantly predictive of subsequent comprehensiveness of “program implementation” at a high significance level ($p = .005$). Simply interpreted, for every full unit of increase in study participant “years of experience,” there is a predicted one-tenth unit (.10) of increase in perception of program comprehensiveness of implementation. The predictive “effect” ($r^2 = .04$) is considered to be approaching the lower threshold of a medium effect ($d = .41$) (Table 5).

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Standardized $\beta$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Years of Experience”</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>.21***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***$p = .005$**

**RQ4: What is the relationship between school counselors’ perceived self-advocacy skills, as measured by the SCSAQ, and the years of professional experience as a school counselor?**

$H_4$: There is a relationship between school counselors’ perceived self-advocacy skills, as measured by the SCSAQ, and the years of professional experience as a school counselor.

$H_{4o}$: There is no relationship between school counselors’ perceived self-advocacy skills, as measured by the SCSAQ, and the years of professional experience as a school counselor.

This chapter provides the results of the statistical analysis based upon the data collected for this study.

There was a small, statistically significant degree of a relationship between participant years of experience and perceived self-advocacy skills ($r = 0.12; p = 0.046$). As a result, the alternative hypothesis ($H_4$) for research question four was retained and the null hypothesis ($H_{4o}$)
was rejected in light of the statistically significant finding \( (p = .046) \). Figure 8 contains a visual representation (scatter plot) of the mathematical relationship between study participant perceived comprehensiveness of program implementation and study participant years of experience as a professional school counselor.

*Figure 8.* Scatter plot of mathematical relationship between school counselor years of experience and self-advocacy skills \((N = 200)\).

In a follow-up evaluation of the predictive ability of participant years of experience as a professional school counselor using the simple linear regression test statistic, the independent variable of study participant years of experience as a professional school counselor represented a statistically significantly predictor of perceived participant “self-advocacy skills” which was statistically significantly predictive of subsequent perceived “self-advocacy skills” at the more liberally interpreted statistical significance level of \( p < .10 \). Simply interpreted, for every full unit of increase in study participant “years of experience” as a professional school counselor, there is a predicted .04 unit of increase in perception of “self-advocacy” skills. The predictive
“effect” ($r^2 = .014$) is considered “small” ($d = .24$). Table 6 contains the statistical summary of the predictive model used in the follow-up assessment in research question four.

Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Standardized $\beta$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Years of Experience”</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>.12; $p = .09 (&lt; .10)$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Additional Finding for Participant Age Range**

Although not formally included for study purposes, the independent variable of study participant “age range” represented a statistically significant correlate and predictor of perceived “self-advocacy skills” ($r = .16; p = .01$). Simply interpreted, for every full unit of increase in study participant “age range,” there is a predicted .03 unit of increase in perception of “self-advocacy” skills. The predictive “effect” ($r^2 = .014$) is considered “small” ($d = .24$). Figure 9 depicts the mathematical relationship between study participant “age range” and perceived “self-advocacy skills” and Table 7 contains the statistical summary of the predictive model used in the ancillary analysis of study participant age range:
Figure 9. Scatter plot of mathematical relationship ($r$) between school counselors’ perceived self-advocacy skills and study participant age range. ($N = 200$)

Table 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Standardized $\beta$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Age Range”</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>.16*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p = .03

The independent variable of study participant “age range” also represented a statistically significant correlate and predictor of perceived “comprehensiveness of program implementation” ($r = .18; p = .01$). Simply interpreted, for every full unit of increase in study participant “age range,” there is a predicted .05 unit of increase in perception of “comprehensiveness of program implementation” skills. The predictive “effect” ($r^2 = .033$) is considered between “small” and “medium” ($d = .37$). Figure 10 depicts the mathematical relationship between study participant “age range” and perceived “comprehensiveness of program implementation” and Table 8 contains the statistical summary of the predictive model used in the ancillary analysis of study participant “age range.”
Figure 10. Scatter plot of mathematical relationship between study participant age range and perceived comprehensiveness of program implementation.

Table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Standardized $\beta$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Age Range”</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>.18**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**p = .01

Summary

Chapter 4 provided the particulars of the collected data, how the data were analyzed, and then presented the results. Data analysis procedures used in this quantitative study included a One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) to determine that the population sample was normally distributed. The sample size was 286; however, 200 respondents completed the survey in full ($n = 200$). Missing data was evaluated and determined inconsequential. Internal reliability was
assessed using the statistical technique Cronbach’s alpha \((a)\) which calculated very high and statistically significant alpha levels of consistency. The population of this study consisted of current professional school counselors working in a K-12 American school setting. The frequencies of population demographics were included in Table 2.

The statistical method Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (Pearson’s \(r\)) Coefficient was used to analyze the mathematical relationship between school counselors’ perceived self-advocacy skills and the level of comprehensive school counseling program implementation presented in the four research questions. In addition, the simple linear regression test statistic was used to predict future outcomes by analyzing the relationship between one effect variable (dependent variable) and a predictor (independent variable).

The results for the first research question indicated there was a moderate statistically significant relationship between perceived self-advocacy skills and comprehensive program implementation. Resultantly, the null hypothesis (H10) was rejected. Using the simple linear regression statistical test, the study participant perceived self-advocacy skills (independent variable) indicated a statistically significant predictor of subsequent comprehensiveness of program implementation. Conversely, there was not a statistically significant relationship found for research question two between comprehensive program implementation and student to school counselor ratio. The null hypothesis (H20) was accepted. However, the results for research question three indicated there was a slight significant relationship between years of experience and comprehensive program implementation. The null hypothesis (H30) was rejected. Further evaluation of the predictive ability of participant years of experience as a professional school counselor showed the independent variable of study participant years of experience as a professional school counselor represented a statistically significantly predictor of perceived
comprehensiveness of programming implementation. Lastly, research question four indicated a slight significant relationship between participant years of experience and perceived self-advocacy skills. As a result, the null hypothesis (H40) was rejected. Additional evaluation of the predictive ability of participant years of experience as professional school counselor indicated the independent variable of study participant years of experience as a professional school counselor indicated a statistically significantly predictor of perceived participant “self-advocacy skills” was statistically significantly predictive of subsequent perceived “self-advocacy skills.”

Even though “age range” was not included as a research question variable, the independent variable of study participant “age range” represented a statistically significant correlate and predictor of perceived “self-advocacy skills.” Moreover, the independent variable of study participant “age range” also represented a statistically significant correlate and predictor of perceived “comprehensiveness of program implementation.” To provide an understanding of the range of scores between the highest and the lowest for each SCSAQ question and for each SCPIS question, the mean and standard deviation was calculated for each item on both instruments.

The first hypothesis, that there is a relationship between school counselors’ perceived self-advocacy skills and comprehensive program implementation, was accepted. The second hypothesis, that there is a relationship between comprehensive program implementation and student to school counselor ratio, was rejected. The third hypothesis, that there is a relationship between comprehensive program implementation and the years of professional experience as a school counselor, was accepted. The fourth hypothesis, that there is a relationship between school counselors’ perceived self-advocacy skills, as measured by the SCSAQ, and the years of professional experience as a school counselor, was accepted.
Chapter 5 will present conclusions based on the results of the study and discuss the findings light of the literature presented in Chapter 2. Implications of the research, theoretical implications, as well as recommendations for future research will also be discussed. Additionally, limitations of the study will be observed.
Chapter 5: Implications and Discussion

This quantitative study investigated the relationship between school counselors’ self-advocacy skills and the level of school counseling program implementation at K-12 schools across the United States. The study addresses a gap in the literature regarding a lack of understanding of the relationship between school counselors’ self-advocacy skills and the implementation level of school counseling programs. The results of this study contribute to the body of knowledge on comprehensive school counseling programs implementation and the importance of developing school counselors’ self-advocacy skills. To further explore school counselor self-advocacy skills and the relationship to the level of school counseling program implementation, this doctoral dissertation examined the connection between years of professional experience and school counselor to student ratio.

Based on a gap in the literature, in order to investigate the relationship between school counselors’ self-advocacy skills and the implementation level of school counseling programs the following four research questions and hypotheses were proposed:

RQ1. What is the relationship between school counselors’ perceived self-advocacy skills, as measured by the SCSAQ, and comprehensive program implementation, as measured by the SCPIS?

  o H1: There is a relationship between school counselors’ perceived self-advocacy skills, as measured by the SCSAQ, and comprehensive program implementation, as measured by the SCPIS.

  o H10: There is no relationship between school counselors’ perceived self-advocacy skills, as measured by the SCSAQ, and comprehensive program implementation, as measured by the SCPIS.

RQ2. What is the relationship between comprehensive program implementation, as measured by the SCPIS, and student to school counselor ratio?

  o H2: There is a relationship between comprehensive program implementation, as measured by the SCPIS, and student to school counselor ratio.
RQ3. What is the relationship between comprehensive program implementation, as measured by the SCPIS, and the years of professional experience as a school counselor?

- H3: There is a relationship between comprehensive program implementation, as measured by the SCPIS, and the years of professional experience as a school counselor.
- H30: There is no relationship between comprehensive program implementation, as measured by the SCPIS, and the years of professional experience as a school counselor.

RQ4. What is the relationship between school counselors’ perceived self-advocacy skills, as measured by the SCSAQ, and the years of professional experience as a school counselor?

- H4: There is a relationship between school counselors’ perceived self-advocacy skills, as measured by the SCSAQ, and the years of professional experience as a school counselor.
- H40: There is no relationship between school counselors’ perceived self-advocacy skills, as measured by the SCSAQ, and the years of professional experience as a school counselor.

The researcher used the Pearson product-moment correlation statistical technique to investigate the relationship between the independent variable, school counselor self-advocacy, and the dependent variable, comprehensive school counseling program implementation. Furthermore, the simple linear regression test statistic was used to analyze the relationship between one effect variable (dependent variable) and a predictor (independent variable) to predict future outcomes.

Chapter 5 describes how the data analysis approach reported in Chapter 4 aligns with the hypotheses and research questions. Moreover, Chapter 5 presents an overview of the study, summary of findings and conclusions, implications for practice, implications for research, theoretical implications, and limitations.
Overview of the Study

This study employed quantitative research methods to determine if a relationship exists between school counselor self-advocacy and the level of comprehensive school counseling program implementation. Chapter 1 presented the purpose of the study, the conceptual framework, and research plan. Chapter 2 provided a review of literature that included history of school counseling, comprehensive school counseling programs, school counselor self-advocacy, and conceptual framework; a model of professional advocacy developed by Cigrand et al. (2015) and founded in Bronfenbrenner’s (1977) ecological systems theory. School counselors are charged with designing and delivering school counseling programs that address the developmental needs of all students. School counseling programs provide education, prevention and intervention activities, learning strategies, and self-management and social skills; all of which are incorporated into all aspects of student’s lives (ASCA, 2012). Thus, this research sought to investigate whether the lack of school counselor self-advocacy skills prevents the full implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs within schools, which make striking results to students’ overall success to include academic achievement and career readiness (Lapan et al., 2012).

Chapter 3 described how the study was conducted. In Chapter 3, the rationale for selecting the quantitative method of correlational research and information about participant recruitment, data collection, data management, and data analysis procedures. Furthermore, ethical considerations for human-subject research and limitations were discussed. The study garnered survey data from 200 professional school counselors working in a school within any grade-level K-12 in the United States or for a school system that serves dependents of military members and children of civilian employees who are military connected.
Participants completed a demographic questionnaire that consisted of 14 researcher-created questions based on professional literature regarding their personal characteristics and work environment. The School Counseling Self-Advocacy Questionnaire (SCSAQ) was used to measure the skills that enable school counselors to advocate for their roles and programs (Clemens et al., 2011). The questionnaire consisted of nine items which prompted participants to rate their agreement using a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree without an impartial alternative (Clemens et al., 2011). The School Counselor Program Implementation Survey (SCPIS) consisted of 20 statements based on school counselors’ experiences related to the implementation of the ASCA national model in their schools (Clemens et al., 2010). The SCPIS measured the level of school counseling program implementation (Clemens et al., 2010). School counselors identified the strengths and weaknesses in their school counseling programs based on the ASCA national model (Clemens et al., 2010). Participants were prompted to rate the degree to which each statement represented the present implementation level in their school counseling program on a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from not present to fully implemented without an impartial alternative (Clemens et al., 2010). Data were exported from Qualtrics to the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 26, and were reviewed prior to analysis. Chapter 4 presented the analysis of the data. The remainder of Chapter 5 contains a summary of findings and conclusions, recommendations for future research and practice, and final section on implications derived from the study.

Findings and Conclusions

Overall, this research demonstrated that there is a significant relationship between school counselors’ self-advocacy skills and the level of school counseling program implementation at
K-12 schools across the United States. There was a moderate, statistically significant degree of a mathematical relationship between school counselors’ perceived self-advocacy skills and comprehensive program implementation ($r = 0.37; p < .001$). Based on this finding, the alternative hypothesis (H1) for research question one was accepted. Conversely, there was not a statistically significant relationship between comprehensive program implementation and student to school counselor ratio ($p = .06$). As a result, the alternative hypothesis (H2) for research question two was rejected. There was a small, statistically significant degree of a relationship between years of experience and comprehensive program implementation ($r = 0.21; p = 0.005$). Based on this finding, the alternative hypothesis (H3) for research question three was accepted. There was a small, statistically significant degree of a relationship between participant years of experience and perceived self-advocacy skills ($r = 0.12; p = 0.046$). As a result, the alternative hypothesis (H4) for research question four was accepted.

This section is organized by research question and hypothesis. Conclusions are presented based on the data analysis and findings of the study as well as the literature and significance of the study.

**Research Question One**

RQ1. What is the relationship between school counselors’ perceived self-advocacy skills, as measured by the SCSAQ, and comprehensive program implementation, as measured by the SCPIS?

- H1: There is a relationship between school counselors’ perceived self-advocacy skills, as measured by the SCSAQ, and comprehensive program implementation, as measured by the SCPIS.

- H10: There is no relationship between school counselors’ perceived self-advocacy skills, as measured by the SCSAQ, and comprehensive program implementation, as measured by the SCPIS.
Hypothesis 1 was accepted based on the finding of a moderate, statistically significant relationship \((r = 0.37; p < .001)\) between school counselors’ self-advocacy skills and comprehensive program implementation. This finding indicates that school counselors who perceive to have higher self-advocacy skills work at schools with more fully implemented school counseling programs. Self-advocacy is school counselors’ ability to effectively communicate their role as school counselors to those in a position to change the circumstances that contribute to the documented discrepancy that exists (Clemens et al., 2011). This finding is not surprising given the recognized importance of self-advocacy in closing the gap between current school counseling practice and expected roles, as well as maintaining appropriate counselor roles within a school (ASCA, 2012; Clemens et al., 2011; Field & Baker, 2004; Haskins & Singh, 2016; Toporek & Reza, 2001).

School counselors are primarily responsible for implementing comprehensive school counseling programs (ASCA, 2012); however, role ambiguity has led to misconceptions about their role among administrators, parents, students, and teachers (Burham & Jackson, 2000; Camelford & Ebrahim, 2017; Cervoni & DeLucia-Waack, 2011), and inhibited school counselors’ ability to implement comprehensive school counseling programs (Fye, Miller, & Rainey, 2018; Rayle & Adams, 2007). Further, barriers such as time restrictions, deficient professional development in research and evaluation methods, lack of funding and support resources, and need for clarity about appropriate criteria to measure, have prevented school counselors from demonstrating how their school counseling role can positively impact student success (Butler & Bunch, 2005; Myrick, 2003; Perera-Diltz & Mason, 2010; Bemak, Williams, & Chung, 2015). School counselors who demonstrate self-advocacy skills required to eliminate these barriers are less likely to be habitually assigned to “clerk-work” activities such as testing,
supervising, and scheduling (Bemak, 2000; Bemak & Chung, 2008; Bemak, Williams, & Chung, 2015), and able to dedicate the time needed to fully develop a comprehensive school counseling program.

Hypothesis 1 concerns the relationship between school counselors’ perceived self-advocacy skills. School counselors’ perceived self-advocacy skills were measured by the SCSAQ, and comprehensive program implementation was measured by the SCPIS. Further evaluation was completed to determine the predictive ability of school counselors’ perceived self-advocacy skills on comprehensive program implementation using the simple linear regression test statistic. As a result, the independent variable of study participant perceived self-advocacy skill represented a statistically significant predictor of subsequent comprehensiveness of program implementation. The result indicated that for every full unit of increase in perceived self-advocacy, there is a predicted half-unit (.53) of increase in perception of program comprehensiveness. The predictive effect ($r^2 = .14$) is considered large ($d = .81$). For instance, when analyzing the SCSAQ subscales, the mean ($M = 3.58$) for SCSAQ question number one, “I maintain positive working relationships with professionals in the school,” calculated roughly one half unit higher than the mean ($M = 3.14$) for SCPIS question number six, “All students receive classroom guidance lessons designed to promote academic/social/personal, and career development.” The delivery component of the ASCA national model centers on the method of implementing the school counseling program to students (ASCA, 2012). ASCA (2012) recommends that school counselors spend 80 percent or more of their time delivering direct and indirect student services. In order to secure time with students to deliver a comprehensive school counseling program, there is a need for school counselors to self-advocate for their counseling programs and maintain positive working relationships with professionals in their school.
conducive to securing time with students during the school day to deliver elements of a comprehensive school counseling program such as classroom guidance lessons designed to promote academic, social-emotional, and career development.

Another illustration of this predictive effect is evident with the mean ($M = 3.48$) for SCSAQ question number five, “I use problem-solving skills to find solutions to role challenges,” calculated roughly one half unit higher than the mean ($M = 2.95$) for SCPIS question number nine, “School counselors use student performance data to decide how to meet student needs.”

Comprehensive school counseling programs are data driven and preventive in design. School counselors evaluate systemic assessments and their school counseling program information to ascertain whether or not students are different as a result of the school counseling program. The data is utilized to demonstrate the influence of the school counseling program on student success and to steer subsequent goals and activities to support students (ASCA, 2012; 2018a). School counselors may use data and demonstrate the self-advocacy skills required to eliminate these barriers are less likely to be habitually assigned to administrative activities such as testing, supervising, and scheduling (Bemak, 2000; Bemak & Chung, 2008; Bemak et al., 2015). Furthermore, school counselors may use data to show a decrease in bullying or a decrease in suicide ideation as an outcome of their school counseling program. School counseling outcome data may help administrators and other key stakeholders value what school counselors are trained to do and their appropriate role within schools (ASCA, 2012; Fye, Miller et al., 2018).

School counselors may use the ASCA national model to inform their administrators of their role, increase implementation of their school counseling program, use data to demonstrate accountability, and provide evidence of students’ educational successes as an outcome of the school counseling program (Fye, Miller et al., 2018). Using the ASCA national model to
effectively define the role of the school also emerged as a self-advocacy skill that predicts a higher level of program implementation. For example, the mean \((M = 3.35)\) for SCSAQ question number two, “I effectively communicate my perspective on my role to my principal,” calculated roughly one half unit higher than the mean \((M = 2.89)\) for SCPIS question number seven, “The program ensures that all students have academic plans that include testing, individual advisement, long-term planning, and placement.” Empirical research dating back to the 1990s conducted in the state of Missouri indicated that when school counselors are provided time, support, and comprehensive school counseling program frameworks such as the ASCA national model, professional school counselors enhanced student academic success, college entry, career training, and career planning (Lapan et al., 2012). Moreover, school counselors contributed to the establishment and sustainment of safe school environments (Lapan et al., 2012).

**Research Question Two**

RQ2. What is the relationship between comprehensive program implementation, as measured by the SCPIS, and student to school counselor ratio?

- H2: There is a relationship between comprehensive program implementation, as measured by the SCPIS, and student to school counselor ratio.
- H20: There is no relationship between comprehensive program implementation, as measured by the SCPIS, and student to school counselor ratio.

Hypothesis 2 concerns the relationship between comprehensive program implementation and student to school counselor ratio. This finding indicated the lack of a relationship between comprehensive program implementation and student to school counselor ratio. Therefore, hypothesis 2 was rejected because there was not a statistically significant relationship \((r = -.14; p = .06)\) between comprehensive program implementation and student to school counselor ratio.
found. This finding was surprising given the literature regarding the importance of a low school counselor ratio for comprehensive programing implementation (ASCA 2013-2014, 2016, 2019a; Lapan et al., 2012: Niforos, 2016). Several studies have reported high student to counselor ratios as barriers to comprehensive programing implementation (ASCA 2013-2014, 2016, 2019a; Lapan et al., 2012: Niforos, 2016). Further, the ASCA (2019a) established that decreased school counselors’ student caseloads allow them to effectively deliver a comprehensive school counselor program to better meet students’ academic, college and career, and social/emotional needs (ASCA, 2019a). Close to half (49.5%) of the participants of this study reported a 1:250 school counselor to student ratio, which is the ASCA recommendation, and 38 percent reported a 1:500 ratio, which is double the ASCA recommendation. Given the approaching significant relationship and number of counselors who worked in settings that adhered to the ASCA recommendation, it cannot be concluded that student to school counselor ratio has no bearing on comprehensive program implementation.

Research Question Three

RQ3. What is the relationship between comprehensive program implementation, as measured by the SCPIS, and the years of professional experience as a school counselor?

- H3: There is a relationship between comprehensive program implementation, as measured by the SCPIS, and the years of professional experience as a school counselor.

- H30: There is no relationship between comprehensive program implementation, as measured by the SCPIS, and the years of professional experience as a school counselor.

Hypothesis 3 was accepted based on the finding of a small, statistically significant relationship ($r = 0.21; p = 0.005$) between years of experience and comprehensive program implementation.

Among the sample of school counselors who participated in this study, 58 percent indicated 0 – 10 years of experience, and 41.5 percent indicated 11-25+ years of professional experience
This finding aligns with existing literature, which indicates that school counselors with more years of experience were more likely to engage in preferred school counselor activities associated with a comprehensive school program (Scarborough & Culbreth, 2008), and participate in professional growth to improve their school counseling skills (Varda et al., 2015). Further, Sink and Yillik-Downer (2002) suggested that school counselors with more years of experience may be more confident in their role and expressed less of a desire to collaborate.

Hypothesis 3 concerns the relationship between comprehensive program implementation and the years of professional experience as a school counselor. Further evaluation was completed to determine the predictive ability of years of professional experience as a school counselor on comprehensive program implementation using the simple linear regression test statistic. As a result, the independent variable of study participant years of experience as a professional school counselor represented a statistically significant predictor of perceived comprehensiveness of school counseling program implementation. In other words, the result indicated that for every full unit of increase in study participant “years of experience,” there is a predicted one-tenth unit (.10) of increase in perception of program comprehensiveness of implementation. The predictive “effect” ($r^2 = .04$) is considered to be approaching the lower threshold of a medium effect ($d = .41$).

To gain further understanding, the percentage of participants’ responses to each item in each range of years of professional experience were analyzed. Upon further analysis of the SCPIS subscales, the participants with 21 years of professional experience or more answered the questions more positively, indicating greater program implementation. School counselors with more professional years of experience indicated the highest percentages of “fully implemented” for sixteen of the twenty questions on the SCPIS. For example, 54 percent of participants with
25 or more years of professional experience as a school counselor indicated fully implemented for the statement, “A written mission statement exists and is used as a foundation by all counselors,” whereas 22 percent of participants with 0 – 5 years of professional experience indicated fully implemented. Additionally, 69 percent of participants with 25 or more years of professional experience as a school counselor indicated fully implemented for the SCPIS item, “School counselors spend at least 80% of their time in activities that directly benefit students,” whereas 36 percent of participants with 0 – 5 years of professional experience indicated fully implemented. Moreover, based on analysis of the SCSPIS subscales, as school counselor gains more experience they are likely to fully implement a program that operates from a plan for closing the achievement gap for minority and lower income students and that has a set of clear measurable student learning objectives and goals for academics, social-emotional skills, and career. Furthermore, as school counselor gain more experience they are likely to deliver classroom guidance lessons designed to promote academic, social-emotional, and career development to all students and to deliver programs that include interventions designed to improve the school counselor’s ability to educate all students to high standards. Interestingly, school counselors’ job descriptions are more likely to match actual duties as school counselors gain more years of professional experience.

There was not a lot of difference in years of professional experience in services that are organized so that all students are well served and have access to them; programs that ensure all students have academic plans that included testing, individual advisement, long-term planning, and placement; school counselors analyze student data by ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic level to identify interventions to close achievement gaps; and the school counseling program has the resources to allow counselors to complete appropriate professional development activities.
These indicators were fully implemented equally among the ranges of years of professional experience.

Research Question Four

RQ4. What is the relationship between school counselors’ perceived self-advocacy skills, as measured by the SCSAQ, and the years of professional experience as a school counselor?

- H4: There is a relationship between school counselors’ perceived self-advocacy skills, as measured by the SCSAQ, and the years of professional experience as a school counselor.

- H4o: There is no relationship between school counselors’ perceived self-advocacy skills, as measured by the SCSAQ, and the years of professional experience as a school counselor.

Hypothesis 4 was accepted based on the finding of a small, statistically significant relationship ($r = 0.12; p = 0.046$) between participant years of experience and perceived self-advocacy skills.

The existing literature suggests a potential relationship between school counselors’ years of professional experience and self-advocacy (Brott & Myers, 1999; Havlik et al., 2019), but a direct correlation has not been demonstrated prior to this study. Brott and Myers (1999) found school counselors’ concept of their role and professional growth started during their pre-service education, evolved at their entry into the profession, and continued to develop as they internalized the role, which resulted in individualized personal guidelines determining the school counseling services provided. Therefore, it is logical additional years of professional experience would lead to a higher perception of self-advocacy skills. A more recent study by Havlik et al. (2019) investigated how school counselor educators prepare pre-services school counselors to practice professional advocacy and found that school counselor educators placed a high value on the importance of understanding the ASCA national model and using the model to advocate for school counseling roles.
Hypothesis 4 concerns the relationship between school counselors’ perceived self-advocacy skills and the years of professional experience as a school counselor. Further evaluation was completed to determine the predictive ability of years of professional experience as a school counselor on school counselors’ perceived self-advocacy skills using the simple linear regression test statistic. As a result, the independent variable of study participant years of experience as a professional school counselor represented a statistically significantly predictor of perceived participant “self-advocacy skills.” In other words, the result indicated that for every full unit of increase in study participant “years of experience,” there is a predicted .04 unit of increase in perception of “self-advocacy” skills. The predictive “effect” ($r^2 = .014$) is considered “small” ($d = .24$).

When analyzing the subscales, the percentage of participants’ responses to each item in each range of years of professional experience were analyzed. Upon further analysis of the SCSAQ subscales, the participants with 21 years of professional experience or more answered the questions more positively, indicating greater self-advocacy. School counselors with more professional years of experience indicated the highest percentage of “fully implemented” for all of the nine questions on the SCSAQ. For example, 79 percent of participants with 25 or more years of professional experience as a school counselor indicated strongly agree for the question, “I maintain positive working relationships with professionals in the school,” whereas 67 percent of participants with 0 – 5 years of professional experience indicated strongly agree. Additionally, 71 percent of participants with 25 or more years of professional experience as a school counselor indicated strongly agree for the question, “I use problem-solving skills to find solutions to role challenges,” whereas 44 percent of participants with 0 – 5 years of professional experience indicated strongly agree. Moreover, based on analysis of the SCSAQ subscales, as
school counselor gain more experience they are likely to effectively communicate their school counselor role to their principal; “choose their battles” when advocating for their role as a school counselor; listen to their principal’s perspective on their role as a school counselor; present information clearly about their role as a school counselor to their principal; share data with their principal to support or make changes to their role as a school counselor; follow-up appropriately with their principal about their role as a school counselor; and cope effectively with challenges to their role as a school counselor.

After exhaustive searches, no extant research was found which investigated this relationship between school counselors’ perceived self-advocacy skills and comprehensive program implementation. Therefore, this study contributes a first step toward understanding the relationship between school counselors’ self-advocacy skills and the level of comprehensive school program implementation. The findings of this study indicate that there is a relationship between school counselor self-advocacy skills and program implementation, years of professional experience and comprehensive program implementation, and participant years of professional experience and perceived self-advocacy skills. Conversely, although the literature suggests there is a relationship between comprehensive program implementation and student to school counselor ratio, this study did not find a statistically significant relationship.

**Implications for Practice + Recommendations for Practice**

The study results suggest that implications exist for professional school counselors and other professionals who work in the education field who are responsible for comprehensive school counseling program implementation. This research demonstrated that professional school counselors who engaged in professional advocacy experienced higher levels of comprehensive program implementation. Furthermore, the overwhelming majority of responses were more
positive among participants with the greater number of years of professional experience as a school counselor across both the SCSAQ and the SCPIS. Given this significant finding, educational decision makers might consider implementing a policy in schools for first year professional school counselors to be paired with more experienced school counselors who have implemented a comprehensive school counseling program.

School counselors need to develop skills to advocate for themselves and the profession which can assist in alleviating barriers and challenges that prevent them from fully implementing a comprehensive school counseling program (ASCA, 2012). School counselors are trained to design and implement comprehensive programs and to self-advocate to remove barriers to implementation. Havlik et al. (2019) found that school counselor educators placed a high value on the importance of understanding the ASCA national model and using the model to advocate for school counseling roles when providing training to pre-services school counselors. One finding of this study was that there is a statistically significant relationship between school counselors’ self-advocacy skills and comprehensive program implementation. This finding suggests that school counselors who have higher self-advocacy skills also more fully implement school counseling programs. Therefore, school counseling pre-service programs should continue to include curriculum and coursework related to self-advocacy.

This research demonstrated that there is a significant relationship between school counselors’ self-advocacy skills and the level of school counseling program implementation among K-12 schools across the United States. However, there is often a gap between the development of a comprehensive school counseling program and the actual implementation of the program (Gysbers, 2005; Nelson et al., 2008). One contributing factor to this implementation gap is that school counselors’ regular engagement in nonschool counseling activities, which
creates barriers to the implementation of the ASCA national model and decreases the capacity of school counselors to effectively address students’ career and college, educational, and social–emotional needs (Fye, Miller et al., 2018). DeVoss and Andrews (2006) provided an additional factor, which is the lack of understanding by administrators and teachers about the role of the school counselor in contributing to the mission of the school. One possible suggestion is to add a course of study of school counselor programs to pre-service administrator professional training. In addition, district school counseling program specialists may provide professional development to assist educational leaders to have a better understanding of the role of a school counselor which may generate support for school counselors in their educational settings. School counseling specialists and administrators should provide professional development that addresses self-advocacy skills and comprehensive program implementation as well as provide opportunities for school counseling students and new school counselors to collaborate with more experienced school counselors to discuss applications of self-advocacy and program implementation.

**Implications for Research + Recommendations for Future Research**

The extant literature indicates that little research has been conducted on school counselor self-advocacy skills and the level of comprehensive school counseling program. One limitation of this study is that the types of professional self-advocacy skills of school counselors were not explored. Therefore, future research that explores the specific types of professional advocacy skills school counselors use and which are the most effective to eliminating barriers preventing full program implementation could be beneficial to the school counseling profession. By conducting further research to reveal the specific types of school counselor self-advocacy skills that contribute to higher levels of school counseling program implementation may also assist
with school counselors receiving equal training. In addition, research investigating administrators’ expectations of school counselor pre-service training requirements may be helpful to further understand administrators’ knowledge and understanding of school counselor self-advocacy skills. Researchers may also want to investigate school counselors’ self-advocacy skills and their school assignment.

The findings of this study demonstrated that for every full unit of increase in perceived self-advocacy, there is a predicted half-unit of increase in perception of program comprehensiveness. Therefore, future research should explore how to assist school counselors in identifying characteristics and practices that can hinder or advance their professional self-advocacy skills. In addition, future research is needed to investigate effective ways of developing positive and proactive working relationships between school administrators and school counselors. Moreover, further exploration is needed to identify effective professional self-advocacy skills required by school counselors to gain the support of educational leaders as well as to increase their knowledge of the school counselor role as defined by ASCA (ASCA, 2012). Furthermore, research that considers the relationship between school counselor self-advocacy and systemic change agent as part of school counselor preparation would be beneficial.

With regard to the finding that years of experience as a professional school counselor predicts self-advocacy skills, future research could focus on the challenges school counselors face when fulfilling their professional role in order to understand the complexity of these challenges and to provide direction on developing pre-service training and professional development for school counselors that successfully addresses these barriers. Researchers might also want to investigate best practices school counselors engage in to address such challenges. Furthermore, future researchers may explore the specific training practices needed to promote
school counselor professional self-advocacy skills, to more fully recognize what effects school counselors’ capacity to victoriously communicate their roles, as well as to consider what venue is best for communication. Moreover, future researchers may to investigate the best training practices to enhance school counselors’ confidence to advocate for their roles.

**Theoretical Implications**

The overarching proposition for this study was to investigate the relationship between self-advocacy and comprehensive program implementation. This was informed by the study’s conceptual framework school counselor advocacy: an ecological model (Cigrand et al., 2015). The key argument upon which the ecological framework is based is that schools are ecosystems (McMahon, et al., 2014). Cigrand et al. (2015) described Bronfenbrenner’s (1979/1996) four structures of the ecological systems theory, which includes the microsystem, mesosystem, ecosystem, and the macrosystem, and situated the school counselor advocacy: an ecological model within them. School counselors may use the conceptual framework to develop a multi-layered approach to advocate for their professional school counselor role (Cigrand et al., 2015).

**Microsystem and Mesosystem**

Strategically, school counselors can focus their advocacy efforts toward those in the microsystem who hold prominent influence over school counselors’ professional futures, including students, parents, administrators, and people who may influence school or district policies that define the role of the school counselor as well as provide funding for school counselor allocation (Cigrand et al., 2015). School counselors can advocate for their role to key stakeholders by drawing on three factors: (a) external authorities which include school, district, state, and national policies regarding the school counselors’ role, (b) data that identify context-
specific student needs which can justify program planning and delivery, and (c) research outcomes such as evidence-based practices and outcome assessments (Cigrand et al., 2015).

At the macrosystem level, school counselors may demonstrate the benefits of the school counselor role by sharing data reports that illustrate the effectiveness of the school counseling program to the essential school stakeholders. Furthermore, researchers may gather data about school counseling practices. Thereby, school counselors should consider participating in school counselor research in an effort to gather data across the nation on best practices for school counselors.

**Exosystem**

Unlike the microsystem, the exosystem impacts the school counselor indirectly, as the effects (e.g., policies and procedures) of institutional decisions “trickle down” through others such as university supervisors and school administrators to eventually influence the microsystem. Some examples of constructs in the exosystem that may affect school counselors include school counselor pre-service programs, accreditation organizations, and governmental agencies (Cigrand et al., 2015). School counselors can advocate for their roles in the exosystem by engaging in the following: (a) engage community groups, (b) participate in professional associations, (c) create connections with constituency groups, and (d) collaborate with university programs and accreditation bodies (Cigrand et al., 2015).

**Macrosystem**

In the macrosystem, cultural norms and beliefs influence individuals directly and indirectly (Cigrand et al., 2015). Applied to school counselors, the macrosystem includes the expectations and beliefs of the school counseling profession, as well as stakeholders’ interpretations of the school counselor role (Cigrand et al., 2015). The role of the school
counselors has transformed overtime, thus perceptions about the role of school counselors varies (Cigrand et al., 2015).

Some of possible beliefs related to school counseling that could be encouraged include: (a) the basic idea that seeking counseling support is acceptable, (b) information about how one’s socio-emotional status impacts career and academic success and therefore should be addressed in school settings by school counselors, and (c) the expertise of the school counselor as uniquely and highly trained to attend to the socioemotional, academic, and career needs of youth and their families in the school setting. As a result, advocacy within the macrosystem concerns educating others regarding such beliefs and countering misconceptions regarding school counselors (Cigrand et al., 2015).

**Education**

To influence key school stakeholders, school counselors may educate other professionals within the educational system and community about appropriate school counselor activities as defined by the ASCA. Ensure administrators understand the school counselor's role by experiencing the good work school counselors are doing, hearing from parents about their work, and school counselors informing administrators what they are doing and whether or not the outcomes are effective or not. In the school setting, common language and school counselor titles should be used. An example of consistent use of a single description of the school counselor role is to use the title “professional school counselor” rather than “guidance counselor” (ASCA, 2006).

**Practice**

The ASCA national model (ASCA, 2012) calls upon professional school counselors to advocate for their school counselor role and to fully implement a comprehensive school
counseling program. The conceptual framework school counselor advocacy: an ecological model (Cigrand et al., 2015) may be incorporated into the use of the ASCA national model which is a theoretical structural model (McMahon, et al., 2014). Ecological tenants as a theoretical foundation may be integrated into the fundamental system, where their impact could be seen in how a school counselor develops the program mission statement, vision, and program objectives. Furthermore, the basic process of assessing student and school needs (management), designing and implementing interventions (delivery), and evaluating the impact of the interventions (accountability) are highly compatible with the ecological model, as the role of the school counselor within schools (e.g., leader, advocate, collaborator, leader, systemic change agent) (Cigrand et al., 2015; McMahon, et al., 2014).

Essential to the ASCA national model or a comprehensive school counseling program is that school counselors design a systematic blueprint that provides comprehensive supports to increase success in three areas for every student: academic, college and career, and social-emotional well-being (ASCA, 2012; Cigrand et al., 2015). School counselors advocate for themselves and the profession which can alleviate the assignment of non-school counseling duties and lead to fully implemented school counseling programs. School counselors recognize when they are assigned non-school counseling duties, how often, and beyond what may be considered as fare-share school duties. By becoming aware of non-school counseling duties and how they affect the level of program implementation, school counselors may work toward eliminating them and fully implementing programs. School counseling specialists at the district office may help to identify activities that prevent school counselors from fully implementing their programs and assist school counselors to self-advocate in order to address them. Additionally, school counselors may obtain buy-in from the administration, faculty, staff,
students, and parents to build/establish an entire school effort. Show administrators how the school counseling program aligns with school’s continuous improvement plan along with data that illustrates school counselors are working to assist with strategic school success through a comprehensive school counseling program.

**Limitations**

This study was not without its limitations. The first limitation was self-selection bias. Self-selection bias occurs when study participants volunteer to participate in a research study. This study used of the ASCA membership networking site ASCA SCENE. School counselors who are members of ASCA might be highly motivated to participate in a research study over school counselors who are not ASCA members. The second limitation was the ASCA SCENE and school counseling Facebook groups do not provide a database that includes all school counselors in every state. Thus, the participants are a representative sample of school counselors. The third limitation was the expectation that school counselors were able to self-report accurate information about their self-advocacy skills and the level of school counseling program. The researcher was unable to state the results were inclusive of all school counselors given the study relied on self-reported information. Participants may have responded in an effort to appear to be aligned with the ASCA National Model or professional training they have receive. The fourth limitation was the researcher’s personal biases as a professional school counselor and school counselor educator. The researcher was mindful of personal biases and careful to not make interpretations based on hunches, insights, and intuition (Creswell, 2015).
References


Hi Celestia,

Thanks for your email. Since you are an ASCA member, you can post information about your questionnaire and research to the ASCA SCENE. See: schoolcounselor.org

There you can post more about what you are looking for and invite fellow school counselors and ASCA members to participate.

To log into the SCENE, you would use the same login credentials you use to log into the main website. If you have any questions, please let me know!

Lachelle S. Metcalf
Marketing, Public Relations, and Social Media Coordinator
American School Counselor Association
(571) 329-4199
www.schoolcounselor.org
Appendix B

Survey Instrument

Demographic Questionnaire

Instructions: For the purpose of this survey a professional school counselor is a certified and/or licensed professional school counselor and working as a professional school counselor in a school within any grade-level K-12.

For the purpose of this survey, a professional school counselor is not a school psychologist, school nurse, social worker, clinical mental health counselor, or other related field.

Professional school counselors who are assigned to more than one school that is not a K-12 unit school or combined school such as a middle high school, please complete one survey for each school for which you are assigned.

Please choose a response for each item.

1. Do you work within the United States or for a school system that serves dependents of military members?
   - Yes
   - No

2. Indicate the United States geographic region in which your school is located
   - Southwest (Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Arizona)
   - Midwest (Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, Missouri, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota, North Dakota)
   - Southeast (West Virginia, Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana, Florida)
   - Northeast (Maine, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New Hampshire, Vermont, New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland)
   - United States Territory (American Samoa, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands)
   - Multiple Regions (i.e., a virtual or online school)
   - Armed Forces Europe
   - Armed Forces Pacific
   - District of Columbia (DC)
3. Are you currently working as a professional school counselor at an elementary school, middle school, high school, or combined grade-level school (i.e., K–12 unit school or middle high school) in the United States? This includes a school system serving the dependents of military members.
   o Yes
   o No

4. Are you an ASCA member?
   o Yes
   o No

5. Indicate your current grade level assignment as a school counselor:
   o Elementary School
   o Middle School
   o High School
   o K-12 Unit School
   o Middle High School
   o Other

6. Indicate the highest degree you have earned:
   o Associate’s Degree
   o Bachelor’s Degree
   o Master’s Degree
   o Specialist Degree (Ed.S.)
   o Doctorate Degree

7. What gender do you identify as?
   o Masculine
   o Feminine
   o Choose not to report

8. Years of professional experience as a school counselor
   o 0-5
   o 6-10
   o 11-20
   o 21-25
   o 25+
9. Indicate the location of the school where your work
   o Urban
   o Suburban
   o Rural
   o Virtual (Online)

10. Indicate the type of school in which you work
    o Public (includes a school system serving the dependents of military members)
    o Private
    o Charter
    o Virtual (Online)

11. How many years have you been at your current school?
    o 0-5
    o 6-10
    o 11-20
    o 21-25
    o 25+

12. Total number of students enrolled in your school
    o 0-250
    o 251-500
    o 501-750
    o 751+

13. Total number of professional school counselors assigned at your school (including yourself). Part-time is 0.5 and fulltime is 1.0.
    o 0.5
    o 1
    o 1.5
    o 2
    o 2.5
    o 3
    o 3.5
    o 4
    o 4.5
    o 5
    o 5+
14. What is the approximate school counselor to student ratio at your school?
   - 1:250
   - 1:500
   - 1:750
   - 1:751+

15. What is your age range?
   - 20-25
   - 26-30
   - 31-35
   - 36-40
   - 41-45
   - 46-50
   - 51-55
   - 56-60
   - 61-65
   - 66+

School Counselor Self-Advocacy Questionnaire

Please indicate the extent to which you agree that you use these skills to advocate for your role as a counselor.

1. I maintain positive working relationships with professionals in the school.
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Agree
   - Strongly Agree

2. I effectively communicate my perspective on my role to my principal.
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Agree
   - Strongly Agree

3. I “choose my battles” when advocating for my role as a school counselor.
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Agree
   - Strongly Agree
4. I listen to my principal’s perspective on my role as a school counselor.
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Agree
   - Strongly Agree

5. I use problem-solving skills to find solutions to role challenges.
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Agree
   - Strongly Agree

6. I present information clearly about my role as a school counselor to my principal.
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Agree
   - Strongly Agree

7. I share data with my principal to support or to make changes to my role as a school counselor.
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Agree
   - Strongly Agree

8. I follow-up appropriately with my principal about my role as a school counselor.
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Agree
   - Strongly Agree

9. I cope effectively with challenges to my role as a school counselor.
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Agree
   - Strongly Agree
School Counseling Program Implementation Survey

Please rate each statement below in terms of the degree to which it is currently implemented in your school’s School Counseling program. Circle your response using the following Rating Scale:

1 = Not Present; 2 = Development in Progress; 3 = Partly Implemented; 4 = Fully Implemented

1. A written mission statement exists and is used as a foundation by all counselors.
   - 1 Not Present
   - 2 Development in Progress
   - 3 Partly Implemented
   - 4 Fully Implemented

2. Services are organized so that all students are well served and have access to them.
   - 1 Not Present
   - 2 Development in Progress
   - 3 Partly Implemented
   - 4 Fully Implemented

3. The program operates from a plan for closing the achievement gap for minority and lower income students.
   - 1 Not Present
   - 2 Development in Progress
   - 3 Partly Implemented
   - 4 Fully Implemented

4. The program has a set of clear measurable student learning objectives and goals are established for academics, social/personal skills, and career development.
   - 1 Not Present
   - 2 Development in Progress
   - 3 Partly Implemented
   - 4 Fully Implemented

5. Needs Assessments are completed regularly and guide program planning.
   - 1 Not Present
   - 2 Development in Progress
   - 3 Partly Implemented
   - 4 Fully Implemented
6. All students receive classroom guidance lessons designed to promote academic, social/personal, and career development.
   - 1 Not Present
   - 2 Development in Progress
   - 3 Partly Implemented
   - 4 Fully Implemented

7. The program ensures that all students have academic plans that include testing, individual advisement, long-term planning, and placement.
   - 1 Not Present
   - 2 Development in Progress
   - 3 Partly Implemented
   - 4 Fully Implemented

8. The program has an effective referral and follow-up system for handling student crises.
   - 1 Not Present
   - 2 Development in Progress
   - 3 Partly Implemented
   - 4 Fully Implemented

9. School counselors use student performance data to decide how to meet student needs.
   - 1 Not Present
   - 2 Development in Progress
   - 3 Partly Implemented
   - 4 Fully Implemented

10. School counselors analyze student data by ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic level to identify interventions to close achievement gaps.
    - 1 Not Present
    - 2 Development in Progress
    - 3 Partly Implemented
    - 4 Fully Implemented

    - 1 Not Present
    - 2 Development in Progress
    - 3 Partly Implemented
    - 4 Fully Implemented
12. School counselors spend at least 80% of their time in activities that directly benefit students.

- 1 Not Present
- 2 Development in Progress
- 3 Partly Implemented
- 4 Fully Implemented

13. The school counseling program includes interventions designed to improve the school’s ability to educate all students to high standards.

- 1 Not Present
- 2 Development in Progress
- 3 Partly Implemented
- 4 Fully Implemented

14. An annual review is conducted to get information for improving next year’s programs.

- 1 Not Present
- 2 Development in Progress
- 3 Partly Implemented
- 4 Fully Implemented

15. School counselors use computer software to access student data.

- 1 Not Present
- 2 Development in Progress
- 3 Partly Implemented
- 4 Fully Implemented

16. School Counselors use computer software to analyze student data.

- 1 Not Present
- 2 Development in Progress
- 3 Partly Implemented
- 4 Fully Implemented

17. School counselors use computer software to use data for school improvement.

- 1 Not Present
- 2 Development in Progress
- 3 Partly Implemented
- 4 Fully Implemented
18. The school counseling program has the resources to allow counselors to complete appropriate professional development activities.

   o 1 Not Present
   o 2 Development in Progress
   o 3 Partly Implemented
   o 4 Fully Implemented

19. School counseling priorities are represented on curriculum and education committees.

   o 1 Not Present
   o 2 Development in Progress
   o 3 Partly Implemented
   o 4 Fully Implemented

20. School counselors communicate with parents to coordinate student achievement and gain feedback for program improvement.

   o 1 Not Present
   o 2 Development in Progress
   o 3 Partly Implemented
   o 4 Fully Implemented

Thank you for completing this survey and for participating in this study.

Click here if you need to complete this survey again for another location.

Do you know of a school counselor that would be interested or eligible to complete this survey? Please send this link to them.
Appendix C

Permission to use the School Counselor Self-Advocacy Questionnaire

From: Clemens, Elysia
To: Riggs, Celestia Ms.
Subject: Re: Permission to use the School Counselor Self-Advocacy Questionnaire for my dissertation

Date: Monday, June 25, 2018 11:10:56 PM

Dear Celestia,

Thanks so much for reaching out. Yes, you are welcome to use the school counselor self-advocacy questionnaire.

Best,
Elysia

Elysia V. Clemens, PhD, LPC

On Jun 24, 2018, at 7:38 PM, Riggs, Celestia Ms. wrote:

I am a doctoral student at Northeastern University, Boston, MA. I am writing to ask for your permission to use the School Counselor Self-Advocacy Questionnaire for my dissertation. The purpose of this research is to determine the relationship between school counselor self-advocacy and school counselor activity. School counselors are the focal point of this study and the school counselor self-advocacy capacity required to fully engage in school counseling duties that align with appropriate responsibilities of a school counselor.

May I have your permission to use the School Counselor Self-Advocacy Questionnaire?

Sincerely,

Celestia
Appendix D

Permission to use the School Counseling Program Implementation Survey

From: <careyandassoc@comcast.net>
Date: Mon, Nov 12, 2018 at 6:16 PM
Subject: Re: May I use SCPIS for my dissertation research?
To: <celestiak1973@gmail.com>

You have my permission to use the SCIPIS. Sounds like a very worthwhile study, best of luck with it. Please let me know the results.

Sent from Xfinity Connect Application

-----Original Message-----
From: <celestiak1973@gmail.com>
To: <careyandassoc@comcast.net>
Sent: 2018-11-12 1:18:09 PM
Subject: May I use SCPIS for my dissertation research?

Dear Dr. Carey,

My name is Celestia Riggs, and I am currently a doctoral student pursuing a doctorate in Curriculum, Teaching, Learning, and Leadership at Northeastern University, Boston, MA. I am ABD, and I am writing to ask your permission to use the School Counseling Program Implementation Survey in my dissertation research?

I am looking to see if there is a relationship between school counselor self-advocacy and the level of school counseling program implementation. I am conducting a non-experimental correlational study, and I would like to use the School Counseling Program Implementation Survey and the School Counselor Self-Advocacy Questionnaire as the instruments of measurement.

Thank you for your consideration, and I welcome your thoughts on the topic.

Sincerely,

Celestia Riggs
Doctoral Student
CTLL
Northeastern University
Dear School Counselors,

I would greatly appreciate your participation and help. I am seeking participants for a quantitative research study to determine if there is a relationship between how school counselors advocate for their role as a school counselor and the level of implementation of their school counseling program. As a doctoral candidate at Northeastern University, I am investigating this topic as part of my doctoral degree program; and as a school counselor educator, I desire an understanding how to effectively focus professional learning to help school counselors become more effective advocates for their professional school counselor role and the implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs.

My name is Celestia Riggs, and this study has approval from Northeastern University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB number: CPS19-06-28).

Participants for this study must meet the following criteria:

A. Be employed as a certified and/or licensed professional school counselor and working as a professional school counselor within any grade-level K-12
B. Work within the United States or for a school system that serves dependents of military members

If you meet the above criteria, may I ask for your participation in this study? The survey is online and takes approximately 15 to 20 minutes to complete.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. Please be assured your responses will be kept completely confidential. You have the right to withdraw at any point during the study, for any reason, and without any prejudice.

If you have questions about this research study, you can contact me, Celestia Riggs, at riggs.c@husky.neu.edu or the Principal Investigator, Dr. Al McCready, at a.mccready@northeastern.edu

Thank you in advance for your participation. Click here to access the survey.

Sincerely,

Celestia Riggs
Doctoral Candidate, Student Researcher
Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies
Appendix F

Online Consent Form for Survey

Northeastern University, Department of Education
Name of Investigator(s):

Principal Investigator/Advisor: Dr. A. McCready

Student Researcher: Celestia Riggs

Title of Project: The Relationship between School Counselors’ Self-Advocacy Skills and the Implementation Level of Comprehensive School Counseling Programs

Request to Participate in Research
We would like to invite you to participate in a web-based online survey. The survey is part of a research study to determine if there is a relationship between how school counselors advocate for their role as a school counselor and the level of implementation of their school counseling program. This survey should take about 15 to 20 minutes to complete.

We are asking you to participate in this study because you are certified and/or licensed professional school counselor, working as a professional school counselor in a school within any grade-level K-12, and working within the United States or for a school system that serves dependents of military members. You must be at least 18 years old to take this survey.

The decision to participate in this research project is voluntary. You do not have to participate and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the web-based online survey, you can stop at any time.

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to you for taking part in this study.

Your part in this study will be handled in a confidential manner. Any reports or publications based on this research will use only group data and will not identify you or any individual as being affiliated with this project.

If you have any questions regarding electronic privacy, please feel free to contact Mark Nardone, NU’s Director of Information Security via phone at 617-373-7901, or via email at privacy@neu.edu.

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Celestia Riggs, [contact information], the person mainly responsible for the research. You can also contact Dr. Al McCready, [contact information], the Principal Investigator.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, Mail Stop: 560-177, 360
This study has been reviewed and approved by the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board (# xx-xx-xx). [protocol # will be provided to you by the HSRP office].

By clicking on the “accept” button below you are indicating that you consent to participate in this study. Please print out a copy of this consent form for your records.

Thank you for your time.

Celestia Riggs
Appendix G

Reminder

Dear School Counselors,

I am hoping you are able to give 15 to 20 minutes of your time to help me collect information to investigate the relationship between school counselors’ self-advocacy skills and the implementation level of comprehensive school counseling programs.

Participants for this study must meet the following criteria:

A. Be employed as a certified and/or licensed professional school counselor and working as a professional school counselor within any grade-level K-12
B. Work within the United States or for a school system that serves dependents of military members

Please click the link below to begin the survey.

If you have already completed the survey, I very much appreciate your participation. If you have not yet responded to the survey, I would greatly appreciate you taking the time to do so.

I plan to end the study soon, and I want to ensure all potential participants have an opportunity to contribute. Your response is important, confidential, and anonymous.

Thank you in advance for completing this survey.

This study has approval from Northeastern University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB number: CPS19-06-28).

If you have questions about this research study, you can contact me, Celestia Riggs, or the Principal Investigator, Dr. Al McCready,

Sincerely,

Celestia Riggs
Doctoral Candidate, Student Researcher
Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies
Appendix H

IRB Approval

Northeastern

Notification of IRB Action

Date: August 13, 2019  IRB #: CPS19-06-28
Principal Investigator(s): Al McCready
                         Celestia Riggs
Department: Doctor of Education
            College of Professional Studies
Address: 42 Belvidere
        Northeastern University
Title of Project: The Relationship between School Counselors’ Self-Advocacy
                Skills and the Implementation Level of Comprehensive School
                Counseling Programs
Participating Sites: N/A
Informed Consent: One (1) unsigned consent

As per CFR 46.117(c)(2) signed consent is being waived as the research presents no more than
minimum risk of harm to subjects and involves no procedures for which written consent is normally
required.

DHHS Review Category: Expedited #7
Monitoring Interval: 12 months

Approval Expiration Date: AUGUST 12, 2020

Investigator's Responsibilities:
1. Informed consent form bearing the IRB approval stamp must be used when recruiting participants
   into the study.
2. The investigator must notify IRB immediately of unexpected adverse reactions, or new
   information that may alter our perception of the benefit-risk ratio.
3. Study procedures and files are subject to audit any time.
4. Any modifications of the protocol or the informed consent as the study progresses must be
   reviewed and approved by this committee prior to being instituted.
5. Continuing Review Approval for the proposal should be requested at least one month prior to the
   expiration date above.
6. This approval applies to the protection of human subjects only. It does not apply to any other
   university approvals that may be necessary.

[Signatures]

C. Randall Colvin, PhD, Chair
Northeastern University Institutional Review Board

Nan C. Regina, Director
Human Subject Research Protection

Northeastern University FWA #4630