

State Licensure Requirements for School Counselors: Implications for
Multicultural Continuing Education

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Abstract

While most counselor education programs offer training or coursework in multicultural counseling at the pre-service level, it is unclear to what extent school counselors continue to pursue professional development in multicultural counseling after obtaining state certification or licensure. This manuscript presents a discussion on the state credentialing and professional development requirements of school counselors. Implications for future research on the professional development of school counselors in multicultural training will also be discussed.

State Licensure Requirements for School Counselors: Implications for Multicultural Continuing Education

There are 191 school counselor education programs endorsed by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Education Programs (CACREP, 2007). Within these programs, increased attention has been paid to preparing multiculturally competent school counselors (Holcomb-McCoy, 2005). Nationally, almost ninety percent of CACREP accredited programs offer multicultural training (Dinsmore & English, 1996; Ponterotto, 1997).

Multicultural counseling as an aspect of training in counselor education programs was not officially recognized until 1994 when CACREP added a social and cultural foundation requirement to the core curricula (CACREP, 1994). As more counselor education programs developed courses in cross-cultural or multicultural counseling, there was a debate over which multicultural training model should be used (Lewis & Hayes, 1991). At that time, there were six training models: traditional program, workshop design, separate course, interdisciplinary cognate, subspecialty cognate and integrated program (Ridley, Mendoza, & Kanitz, 1994). The most common multicultural training model has been separate course according to Dinsman & English (1996). Moreover, the focus of multicultural courses has been on the three primary domains of multicultural counseling competence: knowledge, skills, and awareness of various cultural groups (Arrendondo et al., 1996). Recently, experiential activities have become another multicultural training model used in some counselor education programs (Kim & Lyons, 2003).

Despite the various models used in multicultural training, many have argued that the multicultural training of school counselors is inadequate (Herr, 1989; Hobson & Kanitz, 1996) since the majority of counselor education programs only offer one required multicultural counseling course. Locke & Kiselica (1999) assert that the separate course model is not enough to prepare counseling trainees for the complex issues involved in multicultural counseling. Other scholars have suggested that the separate course model also does not provide the necessary multicultural training required for proficiency or competency (D'Andrea, Daniel, & Heck, 1991; Quintana & Bernal, 1995). Furthermore, research has not been able to determine to what extent school counselors are competent in the area of multicultural counseling. Although Holcomb-McCoy and Myers (1999) discovered that counselors who had taken a multicultural counseling course self-report higher levels of perceived multicultural counseling competence than those who had not taken a course, Constantine and Ladany (2000) cautioned that self-reporting methods might be measuring a type of multicultural counseling self-efficacy rather than demonstrated abilities to work with diverse populations. In addition, research has revealed that school counselors feel less competent in certain multicultural counseling areas. These areas were identified as racial identity development and multicultural knowledge (Holcomb-McCoy, 2001).

Since there has been an urgent need in recent years for school counselors to be proficient or competent in working with an increasingly diverse student population in public schools, many scholars have suggested that school counselors obtain additional training in multicultural counseling (Constantine, 2002; Holcomb-McCoy, 2000; Schwallie-Giddis, Anstrom, Sanchez, & Sardi, 2004). This recommendation is suitable

given that the education of professional counselors does not end with the completion of their graduate degrees. Upon obtaining certification or licensure, school counselors are expected to acquire additional education and training in the form of continuing education or professional development. However, it is unclear to what extent school counselors continue to pursue professional development in multicultural counseling after obtaining state certification or licensure. Additionally, whether or not state licensing agencies require professional development in multicultural issues is unknown. Since there is limited information in the counseling literature that explores the professional development requirements of school counselors in multicultural counseling, the purpose of this article is to discuss the state credentialing and continuing professional development requirements of school counselors. Implications for future research on professional development in multicultural counseling also will be presented.

State Credentialing Requirements

Currently, school counselors in every state and the District of Columbia are required to have a credential, such as a license, endorsement, or certificate, to work in public schools. In attaining this credential, school counselors must meet certain requirements and qualifications. Although these prerequisites may vary by state, school counselors seeking a state credential are reviewed based upon their education, experience, examination and criminal background checks (Lum, 2003).

Education

Regarding educational requirements, all state credentialing boards request school counselors to complete graduate education in guidance, counseling, or a related field (Lum, 2003). Forty two states and the District of Columbia have stipulations that

school counselor credential applicants have a master's degree, while eighteen states set a criterion for a minimum number of graduate credit hours completed in counseling. Lum (2003) reveals that twelve states require credentialing applicants to have education or training in other subject areas. For example, six states (Connecticut, Georgia, Iowa, Missouri, Nebraska and Nevada) mandate that applicants seeking a school counselor credential must have training in the education of children with disabilities. Other states like Nevada and Oregon have a prerequisite that applicants obtain training in substance abuse counseling and technology before a credential is issued. The credentialing boards of Washington and New York make sure that the school counselor applicants in those states obtain training in identifying and reporting child abuse (Lum, 2003).

Even though the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) encourage most states to use CACREP standards as a guide for state credentialing (Lum, 2003) there are several states that set their own criteria. For example, the internship requirements for most state school counseling credentials do not coincide with CACREP standards. Lum (2003) notes that only twenty-seven states and the District of Columbia require the completion of a practicum and/or supervised school-based internship for the state school counseling credential. Furthermore, the internship requirements not only vary by state, but also range from 200 to 700 clock hours (Lum, 2003). The internship requirement for CACREP accredited programs is 600 clock hours (CACREP, 2001).

While some state school counseling credentialing agencies do not conform to CACREP standards, there are some that do comply. For example, five states (Arkansas, Louisiana, Nebraska, Nevada and Oregon) specifically have training in

multicultural issues as a condition for receiving a school counseling credential (Lum, 2003). This requirement complies with the social and cultural foundation of the CACREP core curriculum.

Experience

Another area used to determine eligibility for a state issued school counselor credential is work experience. Twenty four states and the District of Columbia require applicants to have previous work experience in order to acquire an entry level credential (Lum, 2003). Moreover, several states request previous employment in teaching. Other states like Connecticut, Delaware, Indiana and Wisconsin allow school-based internships to satisfy the work experience requirement. Maine is the only state that permits applicants to have work experience in any area.

Examination and Criminal Background Checks

The two remaining areas used to qualify applicants for a state issued school counseling credential are examination and criminal background checks. Nearly every state requires a criminal background check. However, Nebraska is the only state that requires a criminal background check for only non-residents. In regards to the examination, eight states only use a state-administered test. Twenty-three states use one or more standardized examinations (Lum, 2003). The most common national teacher examination (NTE) used are the Praxis I Pre-Professionals Skills Test (PPST) which measures basic skills in reading, writing and math, the Praxis II Specialty Area Exam which measures general and specific subject teaching or guidance knowledge, and the Praxis II: Principles of Learning & Teaching which evaluate professional knowledge of teaching and learning (Educational Testing Service, 2007; Lum, 2003).

Professional Development Requirements

Although school counselors must meet several requirements in order to obtain a state license, certificate or endorsement, there are not as many obligations in the process of renewing a school counseling credential. Once a state issued credential is granted, most state credential boards have an established length of time in which the school counselor can work under the scope of the credential. This length of time is known as a validation period and it varies by state. For example, seventeen states have a five year validation period. Two states (North Carolina and West Virginia) have a three year validation period. Indiana and Tennessee have the longest validation periods. Both are for ten years.

After the validation period, the credential must be renewed. One primary criterion for renewal is continuing education. State licensing and certification boards and professional associations typically require counselors to maintain proficiency in the field by participating in continuing education (Corey, Corey & Callanan, 2003). Nevertheless, there are five state credentialing boards (Illinois, Hawaii, New Jersey, New York and Louisiana) that do not have continuing education as a requirement for school counselors who hold a credential. In Louisiana, continuing education is mandatory only if there has been a five-year lapse in professional experience as a school counselor (ASCA, 2005).

Other state credentialing boards mandate continuing education for counselors (Sattem, 1997). Mandatory continuing education can take on many forms. In reviewing information on the continuing education requirements of all fifty states compiled by the American School Counseling Association (ASCA), it appears that most state credential

boards have three forms of mandatory continuing education which are: 1) completing a minimum number of college credit hours, 2) participating in activities for a number of “clock hours”, and 3) acquiring points for involvement in continuing education (ASCA, 2005). Fourteen state credentialing boards require school counselors to complete six college credit hours in order to renew a license or certification, but, only three states (Alabama, Florida and Mississippi) require three college credit hours (ASCA, 2005). Nine states (Washington, California, Arizona, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Wyoming, Ohio and Texas) have clock hour requirements that range from 5 to 200 for credential renewal. Only two states Tennessee and Utah have continuing education renewal based upon points. There was no information provided by ASCA about the continuing education requirements for the following states: Nevada, Nebraska, the District of Columbia and Arkansas.

Additionally, only three states (Michigan, Iowa, and Pennsylvania) require that the agency providing the continuing education must be state approved or accredited (ASCA, 2005).

Although many state credentialing boards mandate school counselors to pursue continuing education, few make specifications on the continuing education topic or subject matter required for renewing a credential. There are only five state credentialing boards that spell out such requirements. For example, the state credentialing board of New Hampshire requires school counselors to obtain 30 hours of continuing education in activities which meet the needs of school districts, school goals, and school improvement. The state credential board of North Dakota requires that school counselors obtain continuing education specifically in counseling. Both Ohio and Utah

require school counselors to develop an individualized plan of continuing education activity that includes teaching in the classroom and improving the education experience for students, respectively. Texas is the only state credentialing board that allows a wide range of continuing education activity. Some activities permitted for renewing a credential include distance learning, curriculum development, publication, self-study, teaching and presentations.

Implications and Discussion

After reviewing the state credentialing and professional development requirements for school counselors, there appears to be a missing link between obtaining a credential or license for school counseling and continuing education requirements in the area of multicultural counseling. With the exception of five states, multicultural counseling is not a requirement to qualify for a school counseling credential in the majority of states. However, if the school counseling program is accredited by CACREP, school counselors would complete the social and cultural foundations requirement. Nevertheless, virtually no state credentialing board mandates continuing education in multicultural counseling, even though five state boards require continuing education activities in other areas that relate specifically to the school environment.

Since the projected demographic changes of multicultural students in public schools provide the impetus for training school counselors at the pre-service level on how to work with diverse children and families, this fact is also important to consider when deciding upon the continuing education needs of school counselors. Professional associations, like the American Counseling Association and American School Counselor Association highly encourage counselors to be actively engage in activities

which promote the understanding of diverse cultural backgrounds. This endorsement stems from the belief that becoming multiculturally competent is conceptualized as a lifelong developmental process that requires continual education and training (Sue, 1996). Therefore, greater attention should be given to the post-service activity and education of school counselors in multicultural counseling. Since the continuing education of school counselors was first examined several decades ago (Dilley & Wolleatt, 1979; Dilley, 1978), current research specifically as it relates to the continuing education of school counselors in multicultural counseling is warranted.

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