

Professional Challenges in School Counseling: Organizational, Institutional and Political

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Abstract

The school counseling profession has struggled throughout history to secure a legitimate integral position in the educational mission of school. The profession is more likely to gain acceptance and be seen as a legitimate profession if we understand three theories that form the foundation of professional legitimacy: Organizational Theory, Institutional Theory, and Political Theory. This article briefly explains each theory, examines the profession through the lens of each theory, discusses how the ASCA National Standards and ASCA National Model were intended to address them, and suggests specific actions that school counseling professionals must take to ensure the profession grows and prospers.

Professional Challenges in School Counseling: Organizational, Institutional and Political

The school counseling profession has struggled throughout history to secure a legitimate and integral position in the school's educational mission. For decades, school counselors have complained that they have no time for "real counseling" because they "are expected to perform many functions unrelated to their professional training" (White, 1981, p. 5). Tension exists between administrators and counselors because each holds different expectations for the counselor's work (Bonebreak & Borgers, 1984; Kaplan, 1995; Knowles & Shertzr, 1968; Perusse, Goodnough, Donegan, & Jones, 2004). When administrators exclude school counselors from meaningful conversations with school leaders regarding school systems or their professional status within the organization, school counselors protest (Hatch, 2002). Whiston and Sexton (1998) suggest that counselors may be excluded from leadership role and assigned these non-school counseling duties (such as clerical responsibilities) because they fail to research or evaluate their programs, and thus are unable to prove that their current roles or services benefit students.

The quest for professional legitimacy is an attempt to accumulate the support necessary for the school counseling profession to obtain the resources, authority, rights, and responsibilities pertinent to a legitimate profession. Relative to other professions, school counseling is young; and while it continues to develop and grow, it is often misunderstood and underappreciated. School counseling originated in the vocational guidance movement over 100 years ago (Gysbers, 2001). Throughout the years, changes in the profession produced competing methodologies (Aubrey, 1982). Counselor education programs varied in their approaches to pre-service training as

some were rooted in education and others in mental health (Gysbers, 2001). What began in the early 1940's as dialectic between two antithetical views of human behavior and methods of modifying that behavior (directive and non-directive), resulted in a steady and constant fragmentation of anything resembling a united position (Aubrey, 1982). In the 1970's, an organizational structure began to emerge in response to a need to reorient counseling and guidance from a set of services delivered by an individual to a more coordinated comprehensive organizational program structure. A comprehensive, developmental program emerged to address career, personal-social and academic development (Gysbers, 2001).

Over the next few decades models emerged as dominant comprehensive school counseling programs (Gysbers & Moore, 1981; Gysbers & Henderson, 2000; Johnson & Johnson, 1991; Myrick, 1987). Additionally, many states designed their own models or frameworks, which varied significantly. All of these models were intended to unify the profession by bringing to it much needed technology and improved professional status.

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) sought to standardize the profession of school counseling by bringing together key leaders in the field to agree on premises that would lead to their publishing the ASCA National Standards and National Model (Campbell & Dahir, 1997; ASCA, 2005). ASCA asserted that the profession needed the model (or framework) as it suffered from a lack of consistent identify, basic philosophy and as a consequence, a lack of professional legitimacy (ASCA, 2005). The author of this article also asserts that while the standards and model were designed to improve professional legitimacy through unification, the school counseling profession is more likely to gain acceptance and be seen as a legitimate profession by others if

school counselors, when implementing the model, also understand three theories that form the foundation of professional legitimacy: Organizational Theory, Institutional Theory, and Political Theory (see Table 1). The author will first present each theory, then look at the profession of school counseling through the lens of each theory, discuss how the ASCA National Standards and ASCA National Model were intended to address them, and finally, suggest specific actions that school counseling professionals must take to ensure the profession grows and prospers.

Organizational Efficiency

“We have consistently been impressed with the dedication and hard work of virtually all of the individuals with whom we have been involved. And yet, we are concerned that a great deal of energy, enthusiasm and resources are being expended in ineffective ways” (Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis, n.d., p. 18).

Defining Organizational Theory

Organizational theory concerns itself with how effective and *efficient* an organization is in accomplishing its goals and achieving the results (outcomes) the organization intends to produce. According to Scott (1992), organizations are defined as “collectivities oriented to the pursuit of relatively specific goals and exhibiting relatively highly formalized social structures” (p. 23). Formal structures develop in organizations, and contribute to the internal efficiency with which organizational goals are pursued. Formal structures are instruments of goal attainment which can be changed or modified to improve employee performance; thereby ensuring participants behave in predictable ways to achieve the desired effectiveness (objective) within a centrally controlled

Table 1

Professional Challenges of School Counseling: Organizational, Institutional and Political

Theoretical Construct	Professional Challenge Facing the School Counseling Profession	How is the Challenge Manifested?	How can the Challenge be Addressed?	Desired Outcome
Organizational	Effectiveness (predictive, desired and intended goals and outcomes are met)	Do not measure impact of activities and do not know whether they work or not	Evaluate the Program	Measure results Know what works, and what does not work
	Internal Efficiency (greatest output for least energy and resource)	Status Quo Inefficiency Random acts of guidance	Program Improvement	Do more of what works, less of what does not Program refinement Time efficiency
Institutional	Operational Legitimacy	No structural elements institutionalized (rules, norms and routines, policies, procedures etc.) Unaware of standards or model	Reporting Program Results Social and Cultural Pressure Educate on standards and model programs	Indispensability Influence policy actors to create institutionalization of structural elements , laws, policies, handbooks, routines, and procedures reflecting appropriate role of school counselor
	Social Legitimacy	Not involved in site leadership No legitimate voice in programs, or policies	Becoming Involved in Decision Making Systems Change Student Advocacy	Becoming a policy actor Influencing policy actors by contributing to the cultural pressure that lead to the creation of structures Partner with school leadership for systems change
Political	Value versus Resource Social Capital Political Clout	Reduction in force Undervaluing profession Increase in non-school counseling responsibility	Reporting Program Results Marketing	Seen as integral Valued Performing school counseling activities

hierarchically structured and rationally managed bureaucracy (Ogawa, 1992; Taylor, 1911; Weber, 1947).

Since the introduction of scientific management, theorists have believed it possible to scientifically analyze an individual's performance within the organization in order to discover what processes and procedures produced the greatest output for the least amount of energies and resources (Taylor, 1911). Through the years, much has been written on ways to improve efficiency, including rationalizing an organization with precise sets of instructions and time-motion studies that would lead to increased effectiveness (i.e., productivity and profitability; Scott, 1992).

Organizational Theory and the School Counseling Profession

Historically, school counseling programs have not been perceived as having fixed divisions of labor, and sets of rules that have been proven to govern the behavior of the worker (school counselor). Few guidance programs operate with clear formal structures, program definitions or clear priorities (Gysbers, 2001; Hart & Jacobi, 1992; Olsen, 1979). In the profession of school counseling, a lack of planning, accountability, or evaluation has led to fragmented and inconsistent programs (Olsen, 1979). School counselors, who did not have access to a common or approved list of programs, services, or curriculum, and who had no unified structure by which to evaluate the school counseling program's efficiency, often perform what is sometimes referred to as "random acts of guidance."

Today, school counseling programs still vary from site to site and district to district such that there is little consistency or predictability in programs and services. Thus, the organizational goals of effectiveness and internal efficiency (obtaining the

greatest outcome for the least amount of energy or resource) are often not observable. Students receive very different guidance curriculum from the school counseling department in one district as compared to another, or from one school counselor to another within the same school. Goals and objectives may or may not exist, and when they do, they are often not linked to data driven needs or they evaluated for effectiveness (Hatch, 2002; Perusse, Goodnough, Donegan, & Jones, 2004). School counselors have also been perceived to have little to no internal efficiency. Creating internal efficiency within the organization means school counselors utilize their time effectively and measure the impact of their work to ensure that students are getting the best possible services.

Rowan and Miskel (1999) theorized that organizational efficiency is often the main determinant to organizational survival. Programs that are perceived as efficient survive and often grow, whereas programs that are perceived as inefficient are often eliminated or reorganized. When applying the organizational theory to school counseling programs, organizational efficiency also means ensuring that school counselors are effective (e.g., perform activities in such a way that desired educational objectives are achieved -- this has been a particular challenge). School counseling programs often lack the breadth and depth of empirical data needed to prove that functioning in one way is more productive or produces better results than another (Brown & Trusty, 2005; Carey, Dimmit, Hatch, Lapan, & Whiston, 2008; Sexton, Schofield, & Whiston, 1997; Whiston & Sexton, 1998). School counseling programs as a whole can be difficult to measure (Brown & Trusty, 2005), but measuring performance both for efficiency and effectiveness is required for the profession's survival.

Otwell and Mullis (1997) claim that “as counselors recognize legitimate challenges from the public at large for accountability in schools, they must find ways to demonstrate that counseling programs are essential elements of the educational process and contribute to improved academic achievement” (p. 343). School counselors, therefore, must also show how their programs contribute to the school’s organizational efficiency.

Organizational Theory and ASCA

To address this lack of consistency in the profession, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) as a professional organization, supported the creation of ASCA National Standards and the ASCA National Model. The National Model was strategically developed to improve the organizational efficiency of the profession by focusing on the creation of a consistent structure, methodology and “framework” for designing a school program and collecting the results of the school counseling activities within the program (ASCA, 2005). Building on prior work to create comprehensive developmental school counseling programs, the National Model calls for programs to create goals and objectives, and includes recommended time percentages for task performance and specific instructions for setting measurable student outcomes. The National Model also makes program evaluation a central component within school counseling programs (ASCA, 2005).

Program evaluation derives its questions and concerns from the school’s policies and programs; it is the process of drawing conclusions about the value of an activity or program (Weiss, 1988). Program evaluation is linked to organizational theory as it measures and reports whether an organization is accomplishing the goals the

organization intends to produce. It answers the question: "Was this activity effective?" Further, it may also suggest ways to improve efficiency. For example, when considering a guidance lesson, it may at first appear to be more efficient to deliver the lesson to several classes of students at a time. However, if an evaluation reveals that students did not gain the knowledge, attitudes or skills at the same rate as when the lesson was taught in individual classrooms, the lack of effectiveness defeats the purpose of the effort to improve efficiency. If, however, students can demonstrate knowledge of graduation requirements, for example, after receiving the information in a classroom setting with similar results as when they are provided in a one-on-one setting, then it might be equally effective but much more efficient to teach the classroom lesson.

Organizationally, school counselors create internal efficiency when they evaluate their activities, measure what works and what does not, and then use this data to determine how activities within their programs will be effectively conducted. A comprehensive school counseling program that includes program evaluation of written goals and objectives contributes directly to resolving the professions' organizational challenge by improving the program's effectiveness and internal efficiency.

Institutional Legitimacy

"In one sense, the entire history of public school guidance and counseling is a chronicle of individuals and movements attempting to gain acceptance by the gatekeepers of the existing educational order" (Aubrey, 1986, p. 7).

Defining Institutional Theory

Institutional Theory focuses on an organization's effort to institutionalize structural elements and processes that establish rules, policies, and procedures.

Institutional Theory will be referred to in two ways: *operationally* and *socially*.

Operational legitimacy exists when structural elements, such as standards, policies and procedures are in places that specifically delineate norms and routines. Social legitimacy exists when organizational members are contributing to the cultural pressures that lead to the creation of structural elements such as job descriptions or evaluation tools. When members are involved in decision-making and are part of influencing the policy-making team, they are considered socially legitimate.

Modern societies have many institutionalized rules that are used in the creation and expansion of formal organizations. Many of these rules are rationalized myths that originate and are sustained through public opinion, the educational system, laws, and various media. These rules or structures are adopted with the goal of mirroring other institutions in an attempt to secure social legitimacy rather than to enhance efficiency (Ogawa, 1994). For example, a district might adopt new graduation requirements, institute site-based management or change hiring policies to match that of a “successful” district nearby. Mimetic adoption is an attempt to copy a structure previously adopted by another organization that is perceived to be successful (Ogawa, 1992). “By adopting structures that embody widely shared beliefs, organizations can gain a measure of legitimacy with stakeholders in their external environments” (Ogawa, 1992, p. 16). As a result, many of the environmental forces on organizations are based on social and cultural pressures to conform to given structural elements (Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

Institutional Theory and the School Counseling Profession

Rationalized myths exist in the school counseling profession (i.e., what is believed to be important and necessary in terms of programs and activities). In one school, counselors might hold multiple evening events for parents on college preparation, while none might be offered at a nearby school. In one school, counselors might teach violence prevention guidance lessons, while at another school they train conflict managers and schedule group counseling for students with anger issues, while at a third school counselors might provide one-on-one counseling after the student is disciplined. School counselors often rely on current internal and external cultural norms and pressures when making decisions regarding services and program content rather than using the data to inform them of student needs or researching what programs have been found to be effective. For instance, rather than looking at youth survey data for specific areas of concern and selecting an evidence-based program to address it, counselors might implement a program because a neighboring school has found success with it (Dimmit, Carey & Hatch, 2007). “We do it this way because we always have done it this way” might also be a prevailing belief. School traditions can have a strong influence on what is believed to be the right way to do things. Examples might be the school counselors’ role in testing, or how school counselors divide their student caseload, or in the way counselors provide information to students on graduation and college entrance requirements (individually, in groups, or in classrooms). Over time, these traditions become part of the school culture which then transform into the structural elements within schools.

Nationwide, the school counseling profession suffers from *operational legitimacy* issues or the lack of institutionalized structural elements. Policies outlining the counselor's proper role in schools would provide operational legitimacy. School counselors were overlooked in *Goals 2000* and *No Child Left Behind*, and in many states, school counseling positions are not required by law, nor do they have state guidelines (American Counseling Association, 2006; ASCA, 2005; Hatch, 2002; McGannon, Carey, & Dimmitt, 2005). Many school districts lack job descriptions for school counselors, appropriate evaluation tools, policies and procedures manuals, and/or language specifying specific ratios in budget documents. This lack of structural inclusion in district policies is an example of profession's need for additional *social legitimacy* from an institutional theory perspective. Social legitimacy is present when school counselors are an indispensable part of the policy making team responsible for the decision-making process of creating these structures. If school counselors are seen as indispensable to the organization it will be evident by their inclusion in the important conversations and in the structural elements mentioned above. Thus, social legitimacy will lead to operational legitimacy.

Institutional Theory and ASCA

Institutional legitimacy is garnered by conforming to the relevant values, norms, and technical lore (the way we do things) institutionalized within society (Rowan & Miskel, 1999). This conforming often occurs through the alignment with or mimicking of other legitimate or widely accepted structures such as forms, policies, procedures. For instance, an institution may take a successful way of doing things and "morph" it into a new way with the intent to gain acceptance. ASCA sought to gain legitimacy through

isomorphism with the standards movement. They created a standards document that was similar in form and design to others in education –e.g. math standards and science standards. ASCA, in creating its own standards, admittedly mimicked the successful prestigious organizations within the field that had produced standards and created their own school counseling “standards” for students (Dahir, 1997).

Most importantly, the publication was designed to connect to the current school reform agenda... This common language can be readily understood by colleagues in schools who are involved in school reform and the implementation of standards across other disciplines (Dahir, 2001, p. 11).

This was followed by the establishment of the National Model as the framework for creating school counseling programs (ASCA, 2005). This mimetic isomorphism produced a National Standards document and a National Model with the intention to structurally homogenize school counseling programs components nationwide. Institutional theorists might suggest that following the model’s release, local schools would look to adopt these policy documents as useful additions to local school operations. This would then spur a period of diffusion, in which many schools and districts would adopt the newly institutionalized school counseling standards and model programs. As the adoptions became widespread, the rate of diffusion would slow, and stabilization would begin within the profession, followed by the formal institutionalization of operational roles, standards and structures, and policies (Rowan, 1982).

Institutional theory also explains that entrepreneurs work as “policy actors” to institutionalize the structural elements, which organizations may adopt to gain social legitimacy rather than to enhance technical efficiency (Ogawa, 1994). Policy actors may

adopt socially acceptable over what may be technically effective practices because it is the way things have always been done. According to Ogawa (1994), schools often use “policy actors” to wage coordinated campaigns to shape and promote these structural elements (policies, job descriptions, evaluation tools, etc.). The authors of the ASCA National Standards, Campbell and Dahir (1997), were entrepreneurs acting as agents of the professional organization when they set out to promote structural elements that would better serve the interests of the school counseling profession. ASCA built on the National Standards and created the ASCA National Model (Bowers & Hatch, 2001; Hatch & Bowers, 2002).

ASCA sought improved social legitimacy for school counselors by obtaining support from various educational professional organizations for their standards (whose quotes of support appear on the back of the standards document). Innovations, like the National Standards and National Model gain legitimacy and acceptance based on social evaluations such as endorsements of legislators or professional agencies. School systems are sensitive to these endorsements and tend to value and align with them.

In education, many innovations emerge but not all stabilize. It will be important to determine what, if any, effects the ASCA National Standards and ASCA National Model have had on the local structure of school counseling programs. Rowan (1982) offers two generalized hypotheses: organizations will either move toward a balance and harmony where structures are adopted, or into crisis and away from balance such that structures are neither adopted nor retained. Although the ASCA National Model has sold over 43,000 copies and the ASCA 2007 national conference program reflects the majority of

presentations as aligned with the National Model, the direction school counseling profession will take over time remains to be seen. More research is needed in this area.

Institutional Legitimacy ~ A Call to Action

School counselors can contribute to improving institutional legitimacy in the profession by contributing to the social and cultural pressures that lead to and from the creation of structural operational elements in schools. By sharing that the profession has National Standards (just like other curricular areas) and a National Model, school counselors gain legitimacy. From an institutional theory perspective, sharing results of counseling programs enhances that legitimacy, because when school counselors share results with “policy actors” within the school, the policy actors come to understand the school counselors’ vital role as contributors to student learning.

School counselors can become “policy actors” themselves and advocate for system change in order to create the programs and policies needed to improve services for students and their professional practice. Once school counselors earn *social legitimacy* as policy actors, they are more likely to be included in the process of decision-making. Subsequently, school counselors can contribute to the *operational institutionalization* of the structural elements and processes of establishing new policies and procedures that support the appropriate role of the school counselor. As policy actors, school counselors can use data and results to demonstrate their accountability, helping shape public and staff opinion to believe that school counselors do what all other vital and indispensable members of the educational system do. This way, they, too, become indispensable and contribute (socially) to the cultural pressure that leads to

structural (operational) changes in policies and procedures, thereby improving their institutional legitimacy.

When visiting a school site where school counselors have institutional legitimacy, one would find artifacts such as brochures, pamphlets, school handbooks, accreditation reports, and other similar material that illustrate the important role of the professional school counselor and their vital role in the educational system on display for parents and other interested community members. Statewide laws and education codes and policies would also reflect the essential role and appropriate ratios for school counselors.

Political Clout

“They listen to speeches and read articles by guidance leaders and are inspired by the high-level nature of the work counselors should be doing. Then the cold reality of the tasks their administrator assigns them and the comparison is quite traumatic” (Stewart, 1965, p.17).

Defining Political Theory

Politics, as defined by Wirt and Kirst (2001) is a “form of social conflict rooted in group differences over values about the use of public resources to meet private needs” (p.4). Political decisions often hinge on two important weighted components: value versus resources. When a program is highly valued it is said to have earned “social capital,” and resources are more likely to be allocated to fund it year to year. However, when a program is not valued, it can easily be listed to be cut from the budget during a tough fiscal year. Each year, school districts must determine which programs to fund and which ones to eliminate. These decisions are made by school administrators who

believe their actions are well-reasoned. Successful programs must learn to operate within the school system by anticipating and responding to the “various demands from school constituencies that have been organized to seek their share of values allocation from the school system” (Wirt & Kirst, 1997, p. 59). Programs that earn social capital invest in value allocation and are thus, less likely mentioned when budget cuts arise.

The essence of any political act is the struggle of private groups to secure the authoritative support of government for their values (Wirt & Kirst, 1997). The quest for improved social capital is an attempt to leverage the support necessary to obtain resources, authority, rights, and responsibilities as a legitimate profession. This is a typical political move for groups or individuals who see themselves as separate entities within the school organization.

Political Theory and the School Counseling Profession

School counselors have struggled to gain social capital within the educational system. Politically, their lack of ability to show that the value of the programs is worth their resource has resulted in loss of positions, role definition, and programs. School counselors have felt marginalized, isolated, and ancillary for many years. They have referred to themselves as outsiders in school leadership and governance, and are often directed by administrators to perform tasks that they view as outside of their responsibility (Stewart, 1965). They have complained they have no time for “actual” counseling because they “are expected to perform many functions unrelated to their professional training” (White, 1981, p.5). Over forty years ago, Stewart’s (1965) research noted comments from school counselors about being frustrated that they had no time to perform individual counseling due to clerical responsibilities and other duties.

During a discussion at a meeting for secondary counselors, Stewart noted the following comments: “I have never had such a frustrating job in my life. I have no time to do real counseling.” “I’m primarily a clerical worker.” “At times I feel like I am wasting the taxpayers’ money. I am paid for counseling but I do little of it.” (p. 17).

Unfortunately, little has changed for many school counselors; administratively assigned non-counseling activities are still a concern of many school counselors (Perusse, Goodnough, Donegan, & Jones, 2004). In a nationwide school counselor survey asking how the national school counseling standards have impacted their work, one counselor responded: “By far my greatest concern is with administration. Despite attempts to educate my administrators, I still get stuck in non-counseling duties” (Hatch, 2002).

Political Theory and ASCA

Garnering social capital leads to acquisition of political clout and plays an important role in determining the funding level and the role and function of school counselors. Many stakeholders in education are vying for a limited allocation of resources. Thus, it is critical for school counselors and school counselor leaders to operate within the system much like a politician operates – by anticipating and nullifying the “competing demands from school constituencies that have been organized to seek their share of valued allocations from the school system” (Wirt & Kirst, 1997, p. 59).

Four levels of political clout are needed for the school counseling profession to flourish: site level, district level, state level, and national level. At the school site, school counselors must be valued by the administration to protect the sovereignty of their programs and prevent the addition of quasi-administrative responsibilities to their

workload when limited school resources are distributed. At the district level, school counseling social capital is necessary to ensure that the governing board views the program as essential. At the state level, the political clout of school counseling programs will protect and engage their continuing existence when state representatives receive pressure from various actions groups attempting to initiate school reform and increase student achievement programs at the expense of counseling programs. At the national level, political clout ensure school counselors' voices are sought and heard through our primary professional associations, such as ASCA, in relation to such important legislation as the redesign of *No Child Left Behind* and funding related to it such as the *Elementary and Secondary School Counseling Act*.

Garnering Political Clout ~ A Call to Action

The ASCA National Model calls for school counselors to design, implement, evaluate, and report results of their programs (ASCA, 2005). In order to obtain and maintain political clout, school counseling professionals must demonstrate the value of the work they do, or they may suffer a worse fate than being asked to perform non-school counseling duties – cutbacks or even elimination of positions may result. If school counselors create and share their program results strategically, they can leverage the steady flow of support necessary to substantiate that their value is worth their resource. This approach requires developing a marketing strategy – one that ensures school counselors are not only collecting and reporting results, but also communicating them in a manner that improves their social capital.

Recommendations

“All results - good or bad – are ultimately good, because they provide us feedback that can guide us, telling us what to do next and how to do it better” (Schmoker, 1996, p.3)

Evaluate Your Activities and Report Your Results

The professional challenges in school counseling are the consequence of organizational inefficiency, institutional illegitimacy, and subsequent political devaluing. One highly effective way to combat the problem of others' not knowing what school counselors do is to use data (Otwell & Mullis, 1997). Invariably, when school counselors are asked to begin implementing a comprehensive program that outlines intended goals and measures results, a frustrated school counselor will say: “Why do I have to do all this to justify my work? Every year I get a pink slip and I have to sell myself to the school board and beg and plead for my position. It is not fair!” Indeed, the school counselor has raised an important point: school counselors often find themselves fighting for their positions or for their professional responsibilities while others are not. Increasingly all school faculty including administrators are held accountable for results, however, in many states, position justification is necessary for school counselors because unlike others roles in schools, they are not legally required, and as such they are programmatically optional.

Professional school counselors are perfectly positioned to address the inadequacies within the profession when they act in ways that show that their work makes a difference and contributes in a meaningful way to the overall academic purpose of schools. When school counselors evaluate their activities, they are working to address and counteract the organizational effectiveness problems that have plagued

the school counseling profession for years. Evaluating the impact of activities will help school counselors know what works, what does not and prepare them to market, improve and legitimize their program.

Market Your Program

Most school counselors did not enter the profession because they intended to be experts in sales and marketing. However, school district governing board members who are allocating funds appropriately and with limited budgets want to know that counselors are assisting in the effort to improve the academic success of students in schools (Otwell & Mullis, 1997). As schools move more toward a market economy where cost-benefit analyses affect programs and services, decisions are made regarding non-mandated programs. Results achieved on activities within school counseling programs can be shared effectively with school site staff through the creation of Flashlight PowerPoint presentations of results such as those on-line at www.cescal.org, by announcing results on websites (Hatch, 2007), or in newsletters or on tools such as the Support Personnel Accountability Report Cards (SPARC) (Los Angeles County Office of Education, 2005). Results presentations impact the profession both politically and institutionally. School counselors earn tremendous social capital by making presentations to school boards that share the outcomes-based contributions of their activities as integral to student achievement. As they are increasingly valued, they are less likely to receive a reduction in force and less likely to be asked to perform non-school counseling activities. Reporting results can also earn school counselors legitimacy as they promote their indispensability and leverage their social legitimacy.

Becoming policy actors, advocating for students and systems change can also have a tremendous impact.

When creating and sharing a marketing tool like a PowerPoint presentation, a word of caution is necessary before making claims regarding how much the school counseling intervention contributed to the results. It is important to remember that the results data collected often do not indicate exactly what the causal variable was in the data shift. With research and data collection, we know that “correlation does not equal causation.” School counselors are contributing in a meaningful way to the overall academic achievement of students, but they cannot take all the credit. In fact, crediting success to a collaborative effort among many staff members could assist in garnering much needed faculty support. Although it is expected that school counselors will begin to research their interventions sufficiently rigorously to take ownership for producing change in student behavior, attendance, or achievement, it is important to remember that many of the school counseling contributions are indeed that—contributing factors to this change.

Improve Your Program

Program improvement resolves the professional challenge of lack of organizational efficiency. When measuring what works and determining how to improve activities, school counseling programs can become more internally efficient. Creating internal efficiency means school counselors utilize their time effectively and measure the impact of their work to ensure that students are getting the best possible services. For example, if pre-test and post-test assessments indicate that classroom guidance lessons are an effective way to teach 4th grade students study skills and can be

accomplished in a shorter amount of time than in one-on-one sessions, then making this programmatic change will save time that can be spent on other services to students. However, after collecting results, school counselors may find the activity was ineffective. By revising the activity to obtain better results (or eliminating it altogether) the school counselors will improve the internal efficiency of the program.

Summary

The American School Counselor Association asserts that it created the ASCA National Standards and National Model to align with the educational reform movement and to link the work of school counselors with academic mission of schools (Campbell & Dahir, 1997; Bowers & Hatch, 2001; Hatch & Bowers, 2002; ASCA, 2005). This article asserts that the ASCA Model was also created to begin the process of addressing the theoretical issues that plague the profession of school counseling and that it is time for the professional school counselor to respond. This will require a concerted effort on the part of school counselors to address the professional challenges within the three theoretical constructs presented in this article.

Organizationally, ASCA has pushed for National Standards and has created a National Model to assist schools in the creation and evaluation of comprehensive school counseling program. School counseling programs and services must now adopt and implement the components of the ASCA National Model to become more internally efficient. The results collected by school counselors must be used for program improvement.

Institutionally, ASCA has created position statements, role descriptions, and evaluation tools that all reflect the new ASCA National Model. ASCA uses its motto of

“One Vision, One Voice” as a national policy actor in leadership. Now is the time for schools, districts, states, and the federal government to create policies, procedures and laws that legitimize school counseling programs as necessary and integral to the institution of school. This legitimization will be reflected in job descriptions, evaluations, budget reports, school accreditation reports, consolidated applications, federal grant funding, and education codes and policies. School counselors need to be indispensable policy actors in the decision-making processes in schools and looked to as leaders in data analysis, intervention, and reporting.

Politically, school counselors must be leaders at school sites, within school districts, in their regions, in their state, and in our nation. School counselors need to increase their social capital by increasing their value such that is it worth their resource. As school counselors and programs demonstrate their efficiency, their increased value will spur greater legitimacy and will result in positive changes in the school counseling profession. Research is recommended to determine the extent to which these assertions are validated in districts where school counselors are implementing the ASCA National Model.

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