Nature and Scope of Collaboration between School Counselors and Special Education Teachers in Working with Students with Disabilities

by

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Abstract

Building collaborative relationships between school counselors and special education teachers is critical to help school counselors effectively serve students with disabilities in closing the achievement gap and assisting them with career and college readiness. As such they often serve on 504 plans and Individualized Education Programs (IEP) teams for students with disabilities and coordinate and monitor Response to Intervention (RTI) programs in schools. Nevertheless, conflict rather than collaboration between these two professionals was documented. The purpose of this study is to investigate and explore the scope of collaborative relationship between school counselors and special education teachers as it relates to the extent of collaboration, roles of each parties, outcomes, challenges, and beliefs and attitudes towards collaboration in working with students with disabilities. The results of the study reveal strides in collaboration between school counselors and special education teachers in serving students with disabilities. However, yet some considerations remain. Providing content focused professional development, prioritizing time for collaboration between school counselors and special education teachers, and clarifying the role of the school counselor and special education teacher could work to further enhance the collaboration between school counselors and special education teachers in working with students with disabilities.

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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

Within the last decade accountability has placed a significant need for school counselors

to demonstrate effectiveness of school counseling programs and services. No Child Left Behind

Act of 2001 (NCLB) sanctioned by the President George W. Bush administration pressed for the

need of accountability of teachers and all school professionals. The NCLB Act required schools

to report adequate yearly progress (AYP) based on student performance, including exceptional

students, on annual assessments. The call for accountability intensified promotion of student

achievement among all educators in schools, which includes school counselors (U.S. Department

of Education, 2002).

In order to meet the pressing need for school counselor accountability for all students,

including students with disabilities, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2012)

supports the involvement of school counselors working with exceptional students. According to

ASCA position statement (2013) regarding the professional school counselor and students with

disabilities, professional school counselors are expected to know their strengths and limitations

in working with students with disabilities. Professional school counselors also are to be

cognizant of existing research and seek to use best practices in working with students with

disabilities.

Similarly, the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) Standards of Practice specify that

special education teachers should collaborate with "general education teachers as well as other

personnel serving individuals with exceptionalities to improve outcomes for individuals with

exceptionalities" (CEC, 2011, p.3). The role of special education teachers is described in an

integrative model (Idol & Baran, 1992). Special education teachers provide direct resource services through providing research-based instruction in the resource room or self-contained classroom. The goal is to have students return to the general education setting as soon as possible. Indirectly, special education teachers provide consultative services to classroom teachers. In addition, special education teachers receive ongoing training and updates of laws, policies, and practices as it relates to serving exceptional students. In the writing and the implementation of individualized education program (IEP) for students, special education teachers are abreast of changes in the law as well as theories and practices of working with exceptional students. To avoid liability on schools and districts and personal negligence, special education teachers and special education coordinators communicate effective law, policy, and procedures to parents, teachers and other stakeholders (Idol & Baran, 1992).

The expectation of collaboration is evident in the competencies and standards of practice for both school counselors and special education teachers. Thus, there is an increasing need for collaborative relationships between special education teachers and school counselors in serving exceptional students. In fact, historically school counselor's involvement in working with students with disabilities has begun long before the NCLB Act issued. In 1993, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 1993) issued a stance on school counselor's working with exceptional students. ASCA identified advocating, planning student transition, making referrals to specialists, working as part of the school multidisciplinary team, and serving as a consultant to parents and school staff as functions of the counselor's work with students with disabilities. Also, emphasized were counseling roles of modifying student behavior, teaching social skills, and improving student self-esteem through counseling activities for students and parents (Frye, 2005; ASCA, 1993). In ASCA's 2003 National Model, the role and function of school

counselors working with students with disabilities expanded from service-oriented for some students to program-based for all students (Frye, 2005; ASCA, 2003; ASCA, 2008). As an advocate, school counselors often participate in educational planning for exceptional students serving as Individualized Education Program (IEP) team members (Erford, House, & Martin, 2003).

More recently, the school counselor's role has expanded even greater with the introduction of Response to Intervention (RTI). ASCA (2008) suggests that the professional school counselor shares an active role in development and implementation of the Response to Intervention (RTI) process. Response to Intervention (RTI) is a multi-tiered approach to instruction and intervention to help students who are struggling academically or students who have behavior concerns. School counselor's role, in addition to providing all students with a standard-based guidance curriculum, includes analyzing academic and behavior data to identify struggling students; evaluating academic and behavioral progress after intervention; revising intervention as appropriate; referring to school and community service as appropriate; collaborating with administrators about RTI design and implementation; and advocating for equitable education for all students and working to remove systemic barriers (ASCA, 2008).

With the recent implementation of Common Core Standards (CCS), also known as College and Career Readiness Standards (CCRS), nationwide expectations of students and educators have enlarged yet again (Porter, McMaken, Hwang, & Yang, 2011). The shift for student academic, career, and personal/social competence of all students has elevated the accountability standards once more.

New responsibilities and standards for counselors have incorporated greater leadership and collaboration tasks (Ryan, Kaffenberger, & Carroll, 2011). In working with exceptional

students or identifying student academic and behavioral needs, school counselors in most schools head the Response to Intervention (RTI) teams. The recent instructional model, Response to intervention (RTI) help schools identify students at risk for poor learning outcomes, monitor student progress, provide evidence-based intervention and adjust the intensity and nature of those intervention depending on students' responsiveness, and identify students with learning disabilities or other disabilities (Ryan, Kaffenberger, & Carroll, 2011; Trolley, Haas, & Patti, 2009). Since school counselors are educators who believe that early intervention is an important part of school counseling programs, the rationale for school counselors' involvement with RTI seemed to be a likely match (Ryan, Kaffenberger, & Carroll, 2011). School counselors are important leadership personnel in the RTI process (RTI Action Network, 2015).

Significance of the Study

School counselors are knowledgeable of laws and statutes as well as professional code of ethics and standards of practices concerning their roles as school counselors. Special education teachers are essentially knowledgeable and aware of multitude of exceptionalities, characteristics of exceptionalities, assessing exceptionalities, understanding and interpreting assessment results, governing federal and state law concerning students with disabilities. In addition, special education teachers are aware of their professional practices and ethical code governing their profession as well as instructional and behavioral interventions and strategies for serving this population. Nevertheless, a collaborative relationship between the two distinct professional groups had been recognized as rather challenging for school counselors for many years (Dunn & Baker, 2002).

One area for creating the challenge is the limited knowledge that school counselors actually have when working with exceptional students (Dunn & Baker, 2002). In order to

advocate effectively, school counselors are expected to become more knowledgeable of various exceptionalities and their manifestation and best practices in establishing intervention plans. Understanding of legal ramifications involving special education students is critical. The law, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1975 (IDEA) and Section 504 the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (504) are the most influential laws established specifically for students with disabilities (Owens & Strong, 2011). Many of the services mandated by federal and state law were established through IDEA and 504 to ensure adequate support to students with disabilities. These services include receiving special education services in the student's least restrictive environment and inclusion. In order to meet the needs of these students, knowledge of IDEA and 504 is imperative and knowledge of effective inclusion models, strategies, and best practices for serving this population is essential (IDEA, 2004).

The second identified challenge is the change and expansion of the school counselor's role, expectations, and responsibilities concerning exceptional students. For example, school counselors, as human resource faculty, are typically designated by the principal with the task of coordinating services and resources for students, including students with disabilities. They are expected to facilitate special services and resources available to exceptional students, their parents, and faculty and staff. In this capacity, limitations may exist concerning school counselor's knowledge-base and realm of expertise when serving students with disabilities. Yet, these expectations and responsibilities are common for school counselors, and they are expected to gain the necessary knowledge and skills needed to facilitate these roles (Dunn & Baker, 2002).

Another challenge being identified is conflicts between school counselors and special education teachers and frustration caused by conflict (Idol & Baran, 1992). Conflicts were instigated when scrutinizing what the other is teaching and what the students are learning as a

result. They also occurred when school counselors and special education teachers competed for time with students (Idol & Baran, 1992; Parson & Meyer, 1984; Schmuck, Runkel, Arends, Arenda, 1977; West, Idol, & Connon, 1989). In addition, they fought for recognition and incentive for their efforts when performing a consultant role (Idol & Baran, 1992).

Considering the identified challenges, this study may help understand the nature of challenges that school counselors and special education teachers face in promoting collaboration. In addition, it will be able to add to the expansion of knowledge on scopes and strategies to be developed to enhance the collaboration.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to examine the nature and scope of collaboration between school counselors and special education teachers in working with students with disabilities. For this study, students with disabilities include special education students receiving special education services in the general education setting as well as special education students receiving education services in the special education resource classroom. These students also have individualized educational programs (IEP) or 504 plans as mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). These students are referred to as exceptional students and students with disabilities, and the terms are used interchangeably in this study.

The focus of the study is to explore the lived experiences and perceptions that school counselors and special education teachers have in building the collaborative relationship in working with students with disabilities. Is there a collaborative relationship between the professionals? What does this relationship entails? What are the roles? Who defines the roles? Is the collaboration effective? What are the challenges that each of the professionals face? What

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strategies can be developed to enhance the collaboration? The researcher used focus group interviews and survey questionnaire to capture the group consensuses of participating school counselors and special education teachers on the essential meaning of their lived experiences concerning the phenomenon.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study were as follows:

1. What are the attitudes and beliefs of school counselors and special education teachers toward necessity and importance of the collaborative relationship?

2. What is the nature and scope of collaboration between the school counselor and special education teacher in working with students with disabilities?

3. What are the perceived roles of the school counselor and the special education teacher in the collaborative relationship? How are roles defined?

4. What are the outcomes of the existing collaboration if there are any?

5. What are the challenges that each of the professionals face in collaboration?

6. What strategies may work to foster the collaborative relationship between school counselors and special education teachers?

Definition of Terms

American School Counselor Association (ASCA) is the professional organization for school counselors. ASCA is an affiliate of American Counseling Association (ACA). ASCA governs school counselors' ethical code, standards of practices, and it is the author of ASCA National Model framework for school counseling programs (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2015).

Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) is the professional organization for special education teachers. CEC governs special education professionals' code of ethics and standards of professional practice as well as keeps professionals abreast of current changes in the law concerning the rights and education of special education students also called exceptional children (Council for Exceptional Children [CEC], 2015).

Collaboration is the process whereby two individuals or groups work together for a common goal, a mutual benefit, or a desired outcome; it is based on trust, respect, openness, active listening, clear communication, and risk taking (Allen, 1994).

Disability, also called exceptionality, include the following identification outlined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): autism, deaf-blindness, deafness, emotional disturbance, intellectual disability, hearing impaired, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairment, other health impairment, specific learning disability, speech or language impairment, traumatic brain injury, visual impairments including blindness, and developmental delay (IDEA, 2004).

Exceptionality, also called a disability, refers to an identified disability outlined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The terms exceptionality and disability are used interchangeably throughout the text.

Exceptional students, also referred to as students with disabilities, special needs students, special education students, and exceptional learners, are students aged 3-21 who, because of an identified disability, requires specially designed instruction in order to receive a free, appropriate public education. The term is used interchangeably with students with disabilities throughout the text.

Students with Disabilities, also referred as exceptional students, special needs students, and exceptional learners ages 3-21, are identified with one or more disability category outlined with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) refers to the law ensuring services to children with disabilities throughout the nation. IDEA governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education and related services to more than 6.5 million eligible infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities (IDEA, 2004).

Inclusion is a term used to describe services that place students with disabilities in general education classrooms with appropriate support services. Students may receive instruction from both a general education teacher and a special education teacher (Hancock, 2009).

Least Restrictive Environment (**LRE)** is the placement of special needs students in a manner promoting the maximum possible interaction with the general school population. Placement options are offered on a continuum including regular classroom with no support services, regular classroom with support services, designated instruction services, special day classes and private special education programs (Hancock, 2009).

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) refers to the legislative act of congress that supports standard-based education reform. NCLB is based on four principals of school reform establishing and requiring stronger accountability results for all public schools. It set out to increase flexibility and local control, to upturn parent options, and to place emphasis on accountability, teacher qualification and methods (U.S. Department of Education, 2001).

Response to Intervention (RTI) is multi-tiered approach to help struggling learners. RTI is steered by student outcome data and can be used to make decisions about general, compensatory and special education (RTI Action Network, 2015).

Section 504 (504) of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is also referred to as the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 section 504. It is the civil rights law that protects the rights of students with disabilities and prohibits disability discrimination. A student qualifies as disabled under this section of ADA if he or she has a mental or physical impairment, a record of impairment, or is regarded as having such an impairment and if he or she is substantially limited in his or her major life activities that includes abilities, but not limited to self-care, breathing, walking, seeing, performing school wok, speaking and learning (Hancock, 2009). Children with normal academic and learning abilities but having mobility impairment or neurological disorder fall under 504. Also 504 covers children with normal learning abilities but having medical conditions such as epilepsy, cancer, AIDS, and other conditions. Section 504 also covers students with behavioral problems or psychological conditions such as depression (Hancock, 2009).

CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Enrollment numbers for public school account for nearly 49 million students in grades K-12. It is predicted that the public school population will increase to 51.2 million by 2015 (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2006; Clark & Breman, 2009). The evolution of the diverse school population reflects an increased numbers of students with disabilities. There has been a rise in the number of students identified with disabilities in the U.S. Over 6 million students in United State schools receive special education services, which accounts for more than 10% of the entire student population (NCES, 2006; Clark & Breman, 2009). In this chapter the following topics will be discussed: (a) children's disabilities identified by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, (b) least restrictive environment and inclusion of students with disabilities, (c) competencies for educators working with children with disabilities, (d) historical changes in the paradigm of the school counselor's role, (e) ASCA model definition of role of the school counselor, (f) special education in the state of Alabama, and (g) current status of collaborative relationship of school counselors and special education teachers working with students with disabilities.

Children's Disabilities Identified by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

The Individual with Disabilities Act (IDEA) is the United States federal law governing educational services for children with disabilities (IDEA. 2004). Initially, enacted in 1975 and later revised in 1994 and 2004, IDEA directs how states and public agencies offer special

education services to eligible students (IDEA, 2004). The main mission of IDEA is to ensure special education services include early intervention for children from birth to age three and provide continued services until twenty-one through IDEA Part B (IDEA, 2004).

The National Center for Education Statistics reported that 6.4 million students in the United States aged three to twenty-one received special education services during the 2011-2012 school year (Institute of Education Sciences [IES], 2014). This number accounted for about 13% of public school enrollment in the U.S. for the same school year (IES, 2014). The numbers reflect over 80 % increase of students served under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) since the law was first implemented in 1977. Students enrolled under IDEA are identified in one of the following disability categories: specific learning disability, speech or language impartment, mental retardation, emotional disturbance, hearing impairment, orthopedic impairments, other health impairments, visual impairments, multiple disabilities, deaf-blindness, autism, traumatic brain injury, and developmental delay. Among professionals who provide service for special education include: audiologists, speech-language pathologist, interpreters, psychologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, social workers, medical/nursing service staff, counselors and rehabilitation counselors, and orientation and mobility specialists (IES, 2014).

During the 2011-2012 school year, 36% of the students with disabilities were identified specific learning disability (SLD). Specific learning disabilities encompass disorders categorized by one or more psychological processes associated with understanding or using language, including written and spoken language. Signs of SLD may demonstrate a flawed capacity to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or solve mathematical problems (IDEA, 2004). Speech or

language impairment accounted for 21% (IES, 2014). Speech or language impairment is a communication disorder that adversely affects a student's education performance, which includes stuttering, impaired articulation, language impairment, or voice impairment (IDEA, 2004). Other health impairment accounted for 12% of students (IES, 2014). Other health impairment identifies students with limited strength, vitality, alertness, or heighted alertness due to a chronic or acute health problems such as asthma, attention deficit disorder (ADD) or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), diabetes, epilepsy, heart condition, hemophilia, lead poisoning, leukemia, nephritis, rheumatic fever, and sickle cell anemia, which adversely affect a student's educational performance (IDEA, 2004).

Autism and intellectual disability each accounted for 7% of the students served under IDEA during the 2011-2012 school year (IES, 2014). Autism is a developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age three (IDEA, 2004). Other manifestations of autism are repetitive activities, resistance to environmental changes or change to daily routine and unusual responses to sensory experiences (IDEA, 2004). Intellectual disability, also referred as mental retardation, is characterized below average intellectual functioning, existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior or manifested during the developmental period that adversely affect a student's educational performance (IDEA, 2004). Developmental delay and emotional disturbance each accounted for 6% of the student population. Developmental delay describes children from birth to age nine who have delay in one or more areas to include physical development, cognitive development, communication, social or emotional development, or adaptive/behavioral development, which adversely affect a child's educational performance (IDEA, 2004). Emotional disturbance is a condition exhibiting an inability to learn that cannot be

explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors (IDEA, 2004). Also, it is can be characterized

by an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and

teachers (IES, 2014). Emotional disturbance can manifest in inappropriate types of behavior or

feelings under normal circumstances, a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression,

and schizophrenia (IDEA, 2004).

Multiple disabilities are concomitant impairments such as mental retardation-blindness,

mental retardation-orthopedic impairment, and other impairments (IDEA, 2004). The term does

not include deaf-blindness (IDEA, 2004). Hearing impairments and orthopedic impairments each

accounted for 1% (IES, 2014). Hearing impairment include permanent and fluctuating hearing

impairments not included under the definition of deafness (IDEA, 2004). Orthopedic

impairment is characterized by severe orthopedic impairments caused by congenital abnormality

such as club foot and absent members (IDEA, 2004). Orthopedic impairments are also caused by

disease such as poliomyelitis, bone tuberculosis, and other causes such as cerebral palsy,

amputation, fractures, or burns that cause contractures (IDEA, 2004).

Least Restrictive Environment and Inclusion for Students with Disabilities

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 sanctioned that education

institutions offer a variety of placement alternatives for students with disabilities (Education for

All Handicapped Children Act, 1977). Exceptional students are provided the choice of receiving

educational services in general education classroom, special education classroom, hospital,

and/or other appropriate environments suitable for these students as determined by their

Individualized Education Program (IEP) (Smith, Polloway, Patton, & Dowdy, 1995). The federal

government initiated the merger of the general education and the special education and called it

the Regular Education Initiative (REI) in 1986. REI established the transformation of how special education services were delivered as well as reconfigured elementary and secondary general education (Katsiyannis, Conderman, & Franks, 1995). U.S. Department of Education (2013) reported that in 1990-1991 about 33% of students with disabilities spent most of their time at school in the general education classroom (USDE, 2013). During the 2011-12 school year, more than twenty years later, 60.5% of all students with disabilities spent 80% or more of their time in school inside the general education classroom (USDE, 2013). The number has nearly doubled since 1990-1991 school year. The Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1994 helped facilitate the merger of special education students in general education settings by requiring that all students regardless of their disability be educated in the least restricted environment. This education initiative is now referred to as inclusion.

Inclusion is the way of educating special education students and general education students together in the regular education classroom (Tarver-Behring, Spragna, & Sullivan, 1998). Inclusion does not presume that the learning abilities of special education students and general education students are identical or the learning goals of both groups are parallel (Stainback & Stainback, 1990). Initially, schools are expected to try inclusion with exceptional students before contemplating a restrictive environment for students (IDEA, 1990). In the inclusion classroom instructional services are based on the needs and abilities of students. Service delivery applies a variety of methods based on students' exceptionalities and learning needs. Appropriate instruction may incorporate expert personnel such as the speech and language pathologist, personal care aide, or physical therapist. Appropriate instructional and adaptive equipment may be required in the inclusion classroom setting as well. Snell and Eichner (1989) posited benefits of inclusion for students with disabilities. The amalgamation of general

education and special education give way to experiences that are presented in comprehensive programs that are not accessible in isolated and excluded learning settings (Snell & Eichner, 1989). The consolidation serves both populations according to Snell and Eichner in that it provides an exceptional student access to customary role models which leads to appropriate behavior for exceptional students. Also, the process of inclusion benefits general education students by fostering tolerance and diversity and providing opportunities for students to recognize, accept, and appreciate differences among one another.

However, the implementation of inclusion has mixed reviews. There continues to be an ongoing discussion regarding the way inclusion is being implemented in the general education classroom. The diverse nature of students' exceptionalities and abilities, number of students enrolled in the general education classroom, the skillfulness of determining the appropriate instructional strategies, and the availability of support personnel are only some of the indicators impacting the positive and negative attitudes toward inclusion from the general educator's perspective (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). Other concerns influencing the attitudes toward inclusion among teachers include planning time, meeting the needs of all students, and continuous professional development on best practices to address the assorted needs of students in the general education classroom (Horne & Timmons, 2009).

Nevertheless according to Kilanowski-Press, Foote, and Rinaldo (2010), inclusion is thriving. As a result of least restrictive environment (LRE) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the evolution of consultative models of delivery were evolved for students with disabilities placed in the general education classroom (Kilanowski-Press, Foote, & Rinaldo, 2010). The success of inclusion depends on the collaborative efforts of the special

education teacher and general education teacher (and school counselor) for purposeful and suitable program delivery (Sugai & Horner, 1994). Carpenter and Dyal (2007) suggested that quality inclusion practices consider the training and competence of the educators, the role of the special education teacher associated to content education, the professional development opportunities the educators have in understanding and implementing inclusive models, and the time allotment and availability for collaboration.

Competencies for Educators Working with Children with Disabilities

The Professional and Teacher Development Task Force (2004) suggested that educators working with children with diverse learning needs should have the following competencies: professional and ethical practices; collaboration skills; capacity to create a positive, safe, and nurturing learning environment; knowledge of 504, knowledge of IDEA, state operating standards; and skills necessary to assess and meet the needs of all students.

Professional and ethical practices are necessary for all educators. Professional practices must be guided by strong professional and ethical standards. These practices include recognizing their responsibilities to the students they serve, their families and community, schools and agencies they represent, as well as their professional organizations. Professional and ethical practices ensure that professionals have obtained the required training and credentialing needed to operate in their capacity. Educators guided by strong professional principles respect the rights of the individuals they serve and do not misuse, breach, or compromise trust. They treat students with respect and provide services necessary to promote success regardless of race, gender, socio economic status, cultural/ethnic background, and educational level. These educators are aware of any biases that may exist regarding individuals or groups and prohibit them from interfering with

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their professional roles, responsibilities and duties (Professional and Teacher Task Force, 2004; ASCA, 2010; CEC, 2010).

Collaboration skills were identified by the task force as a must to have for working with students of diverse learning needs. Professional educators should possess the ability to effectively participate as team members working to increase achievement outcomes for students. These professionals are willing to engage in problem solving, development, and implementation of programs, strategies, and interventions that promote student success. In addition, collaborators must be prepared to work with all stakeholders (i.e. students, parents, faculty and staff, community members) to facilitate progressive educational programs and success for all students. These educators must maintain innovative thinking and be resourceful to contribute positively to collaborative effort (Professional and Teacher Task Force, 2004; ECE, 2010, ASCA, 2012).

The capacity to create a positive, safe, and nurturing learning environment is an essential skill needed to working with students. Students should feel safe and secure inside a positive and nurturing learning environment. Professionals who protect the learning environment ensure that order is maintained and correction is never punitive. They seek opportunities to teach desirable conduct through correction. Time management is a priority. The learning setting encourages the strengths and talents of students. Trust, honesty, and respect are established and maintained between educator and students and are promoted among students (Professional and Teacher Task Force, 2004; ASCA, 2010; CEC, 2010).

Knowledge of Section 504, IDEA, and state operating standards are required for professional educators working with students with diverse learning needs. A working awareness of law, policies, and standards outlined by federal, state, and local entities are within the

professional standards of practice for educators working with all students, especially for students with disabilities. Educators should be aware of when appropriate referrals for evaluation for special education services are warranted or required. They must also know the process and have access to appropriate resources to gain knowledge of referral and evaluation procedures. These educators should foster inclusion of special education students in general education settings to ensure students' right of access to a free and appropriate education in their least restrictive environment (Professional and Teacher Task Force, 2004; ECE, 2010; ASCA, 2013).

Furthermore, educators should have skills necessary to assess and meet the needs of all students. Professionals working with students must make data driven decisions regarding student learning and instruction. Data should drive the actions and reaction of educators concerning positive student outcomes. Therefore, professionals must be competent in assessing students and prescribing corresponding instruction and intervention from the data results. This requires effective research-based methods and strategies for facilitating an environment where every child experiences success in learning and a sense of positive self-awareness (Professional and Teacher Task Force, 2004; ASCA, 2012; CEC, 2010).

For example, providing effective instruction for students with specific learning disabilities (SLD) requires knowledge of effective evidence-based instructional strategies. Evidence-based instructional strategies are research-based strategies encompassing approaches, methods, and programs that have validated effectiveness and its implementation has been endorsed. Guidelines regulating evidence-based research make certain that rigorous measures and logical procedures are applied to achieve applicable knowledge related to instruction (Virginia Department of Education, 2014). Teaching students with SLD using research-based

strategies in reading skills instruction should be explicit and systematic. Application in the areas of basic reading, reading fluency, and reading comprehension may be necessary for students with SLD. Educators may apply the various evidence-based scientific strategies for teaching reading and include the use of direct instruction, graphic organizers, text structures, finding the main idea, summarization, question-answer relationships strategies, self-questioning strategies, reciprocal teaching, and collaborative strategies reading (Virginia Department of Education, 2014).

Educating students with speech or language impairment (SLI) requires collaboration with the speech pathologist to integrate strategies to help students simplify skills mastered in speech therapy. These strategies include incorporating speech and language exercises and activities, giving immediate feedback, and applying corrective measures (Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities, 2013). For specific interventions and teaching strategies, collaboration is essential for general education teachers, special education teachers, and other educators including school counselors. It may also be necessary for other educators serving SLI students to become aware of the various assistive technology available for assisting this population of students (Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities, 2013).

Historical Changes in the Paradigm of the School Counselor's Role

Over the past century, the school counselor's role has changed to meet the needs of the students and communities they serve. At the turn of the 20th century, vocational counseling emerged in the United States as a result of the Industrial Revolution, World War I, and World War II. Vocational counselors, who were teachers at that time, focused on careers with high school students. The goal was to assist students with transition from high school to the world of

work (Gysbers & Henderson, 2001). Out of necessity, the school counseling profession

materialized from the vocational guidance movement in America (Gysbers, 2001). The influx of

immigrant students contributed to the growth of high schools during 1900's. Educating these

immigrant students and their families posed challenges during this time combined with the

demand for a proficient workforce by U.S. industry facilitated the emerging school counseling

profession. Beginning vocational guidance and counseling other following changes of focus in

school counseling are described below.

Vocational Guidance and Counseling

When recession happened before the turn of the century, essential industrial skills were

limited especially among youths. Gysbers (2001) posited that two ideas steered the identification,

role, and functions of school counselors in the 20th century. The movement of preparing students

for career tracks was embraced by business industry and trade unions during the early 20th

century. At that time, public school systems had established schools for the primary purpose to

prepare students for careers. First, the primary goal for these counselors was to contribute to

society by preparing students for a smooth transition from school to work through vocational

guidance. As a result, vocational guidance had a defining role in school counselors'

identification, job descriptions, and tasks they perform for students in school (Gysbers, 2001).

The school counselors' task involving vocational counseling and planning directed the services

that counselors provided in all-inclusive instructive institutions.

In 1917, President Woodrow-Wilson signed in to law funding to support vocational

guidance programs to employ school counselor through the Smith-Hughes National Vocational

Education Act (Wright, 2011). The concept supporting the law promoting vocational guidance

and hiring school counselors fostered academic excellence in the educational systems of the 20th century. Frank Parsons, known as the father of vocational guidance, was the first counselor interested in vocational guidance. He later created a Vocational Bureau and assisted the school system in Boston to create vocational guidance programs system-wide. As a counselor in a Boston settlement house, Parsons helped immigrant people to become employed and productive. As a result of implementation of vocational counseling within the Boston school system, Parsons helped to create 100 vocational guidance jobs within the Boston City School district by 1911 (Wright, 2011).

Mental Health Counseling

In addition to vocational guidance during this time, serving the mental health needs of at-risk youth remained a constant focus of school counselors and school counseling program (Keys, Bemak, & Lockhart, 1998). Schools were experiencing sizeable problems addressing the increasing population of students with mental health challenges at risk of failure. Social-emotional needs of these students and untreated mental health needs of students posed a barrier to learning. Unmet mental health issues of students eventually impacted student drop-out (Erford, Newsome, & Rock, 2007). With the rise in student numbers and limited community services, school counselors and school counseling programs were expected to answer the call (Lockhart & Key, 1998). These schools called upon school counselors to address these mental health needs; however, comprehensive school counseling programs were yet underprepared to respond to these needs (Keys, Bemak, & Lockhart, 1998).

School counselors target behaviors encompassing mental ability, morality, work habits and sexuality of students in the early 1900's. The conceptual structure of mental hygiene model

posited that adequate intervention during childhood mental illness would curtail mental illness in adulthood (Wright, 2011). In school settings, the shift to mental health focus, prompted by the personal, published account of Clifford Whittingham Beer, facilitated models for understanding and identifying behaviors and improper habits of students. Helping professionals practicing the mental hygiene approach were connected to state and municipal public health agencies. Post-secondary institutions purposed to instruct counselors in the discipline of mental hygiene. This had a benchmark influence on pre-school curriculum. A core focus of school counselors aimed to train parents in research-based approaches to parenting and to train parents in child development (Wright, 2011).

Since then Lockhart and Key (1998) postulated that school counselors needed to develop specific mental health counseling knowledge and skills. School counselors are exposed to the following areas through training programs: (a) knowledge and application of the DSM-IV; (b) working knowledge of managed care in order to make appropriate referrals; (c) assessment of students for services; (d) knowledge in using child and family welfare services and advising parents on the court system and system of juvenile services; (e) applicable mental health interventions and assessments for school settings; (f) individual and large group crisis interventions; program planning for clinically needy children and family systems; special education and new behavioral syndromes; (g) mediation techniques and education skills, (h) behavior management and alternative living styles; (i) model programs and staff mental health needs; (j) referral skills and multicultural counseling; and (k) short term intervention and collaborative consultation (Lockhart & Key, 1998).

Currently professional school counselors design and implement comprehensive school counseling programs that foster positive mental health growth to eradicate difficulties to student success (ASCA, 2005). ASCA (2009) position statement regarding professional school counselors and student mental health addressed the barriers of unmet mental health needs of students and its effect on student academic, career, and personal/social development. Also, ASCA (2009) recognized the impending impact placed on school safety as a result untreated mental health needs of students. Professional school counselors should respond to mental health needs of students in compliance with ASCA's Ethical Standards for School Counselors along with local and state legislation. Although professional school counselors do not provide long-term therapy for students, they are knowledgeable and skilled in working with struggling students with mental health issues. Professional school counselors are supported in addressing the barriers of mental health issues through education, prevention, crisis, and short-term interventions pending appropriate referral and/or placement being available for students (ASCA, 2009). In addition, ASCA (2013) contended that professional school counselors should prepare and deliver curriculum to promote mental health awareness, provide individual planning that address mental health needs, educate faculty and staff, parents, and community stakeholders about mental health difficulty affecting students, and collaborate with school and community stakeholders to advocate for the access of mental health services for students.

National Defense Education Act

The launch of Sputnik, first satellite in space launch by the Soviet Union in 1957, startled the United States. The nation was disjointed and realized its lapse in becoming the first country into space. Furthermore, America believed the launch of Sputnik proved that they were not

meeting the standards in math and sciences. As a result, the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) was initiated in the United States during the 1958. NDEA financially supported the training and development of school counselors and increased the number of school counselors in America. The goal was for school counselors to encourage students in the mathematics and sciences. NDEA financed additional testing for students in math and science (Bauman, Siegel, Falco, Szymanski, Davis, & Seabolt, 2003; Myrick, 2003). It also increased the number of students attending college through funding. The emergence of the academic development and components of the school counselor's role was impact by these events.

School Reform in the United States

In the 21st Century, school reform added to the continuously altering role of the school counselor. In 1983, *Nation at Risk,* a published document produced by the U. S. Department of Education National Commission on Excellence in Education initiated school reform as it is today. The document cited imperatives for education reform in the America. It recommended graduation requirements, higher measurable standards for academic performance, increase of instruction time for students, and high standards for the preparation and professional development of educators.

As school reform took shape, school counselor's role continued to evolve. GOALS 2000: Educate America Act of 1994 is credited as the most influential document conforming the school counseling profession to the rules of law (Bowers, Hatch, & Schwallie-Giddis, 2001). U.S. State Department of Education set out to "improve learning and teaching by providing a national framework for education reform" and "promote the development and adoption of a voluntary national system of skills standards and certifications" (U.S. Department of Education, 1994,

para. 1). In response to the Educate America Act 1994, ASCA National Standards for School

Counseling Programs were developed (Bowers, Hatch, & Schwallie-Giddis, 2001). This

legislative document provided a shared vision of competencies students should gain by having

worked with school counselor (Dahir & Stone, 2007). The school counseling profession was

validated and recognized as a discipline along with academic disciplines. The profession

provided a framework to better define the role of school counseling programs (Dahir & Stone,

2007). Also, the Education Trust Transforming School Counselor Initiative (TSCI) of 1997 goal

was to assist school counselors in helping students academically. The initiative confronted

school counselors and encourage them to obligate their efforts to work to closing achievement

gap (Dahir & Stone, 2007).

Transforming School Counseling to Meeting Needs of Students and Schools

An increasing amount of students at risk for failure posed a challenge for many schools at

the turn of the 21st century (Carlson, 1996; Dryfoos, 1990; Krirst, 1991). As cited in Wright

(2012), The National Institute of Medicine National Advisory Mental Health Council (1990)

stated that 15% to 22% of school age youth in the United States have mental health problems.

The children and adolescents were severe enough to warrant treatment. However, less than 20%

received mental health assistant (Costello, 1990; Tuma, 1989; Zill & Schoenborn, 1990). The

American Psychiatric Association (1992) projected that nearly 6 million children and adolescent

experience depression and are at high risk for suicides. The increasing amount of issues affecting

students produced setbacks for schools expecting to reach their educational goals (Keys, Bemak,

& Lockhart, 1998). There is a demand for innovative techniques and representation for

supporting students and their success and achievement in school. Addressing the critical needs of

at-risk students is a necessary mission for schools. School counselors are expected to help meet the needs of students at-risk of failure. However, the organization of school guidance and counseling programs are inadequate and ill prepared to help (Keys, Bemak, & Lockhart, 1998).

The focal point of school counseling has changed at different points in time. Economic, political, and social conditions have influenced school counseling in the U.S. (Paisley & Borders, 1995). School counselors in the twentieth century transitioned from vocational focus to promoting personal growth and individual development during the 1950's-1960's (Keys, Bemak, & Lockhart, 1998). It was not until the 1970's that what are now known as comprehensive school counseling programs were put into action in schools (Paisley & Borders, 1995; Wittmer, 1993). As the focus changed during the twentieth century, school counselor's role and functions were impelled to match (Keys, Bemak, & Lockhart, 1998).

The implementation of comprehensive developmental school counseling programs marked a significant transition for school counseling. The comprehensive developmental guidance and counseling model consistently maintains school counselors working to influence both the home and school, which is facilitated through consultation. School counselors mostly operated in response to crises and student issues after the fact before the shift. School counselors spent much of their time in intervention mode. The comprehensive development component allowed school counselors to focus on preventive measures. The school counseling program transformation included all students as a result of prevention with the focus on positive development and growth (Paisley & Borders, 1995; Wittmer, 1993).

The comprehensive developmental guidance and counseling model is not without deficiency (Keys, Bemak, & Lockhart, 1998). The wide-ranging mental health needs of at-risk

students and their families pose a deficit in the comprehensive model (Keys, Bemak, & Lockhart, 1998). The encompassing conceptual framework of the comprehensive model is extensive and far beyond realistic programs in meeting the multifaceted needs of at-risk youth (Keys, Bemak, & Lockhart, 1998).

The comprehensive developmental model emphasizes student acquisition of necessary life skills as tools of positive prevention methods (Hamburg, 1992; Little, 1993). School counselor's approaches used to facilitate successful acquisition of prevention skills presents shortfall (Keys, Bemak, & Lockhart, 1998). Classroom guidance approach as the principal vehicle for driving prevention programs have not made a lasting impact on at-risk students (Dryfoos, 1990; Webster, 1993; Weissberg, Caplan, & Harwood, 1991). To address shortcomings concerning at-risk youth in the comprehensive model will require change (Keys, Bemak, & Lockhart, 1998).

Accountability and No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)

At the turn of the century, No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was initiated in 2001 to require higher accountability standards for school districts and schools. President William J. Clinton began the shift in the focus for schools to create state-wide standards for learning during his administration. These statewide standards encompassed all grade levels from pre-kindergarten to twelfth grade; the standards were also coined as the K-12 standards. Adapted by the Bush administration in 2001, the initiative sanctioned schools statewide to standardized testing for K-12 students as a means to substantiate standard- based education. The drive of standard-based learning and mandated standardized testing generated an amplified focus on

meeting the needs of at-risk students. Response to Intervention (RTI) approach made possible for examining students at risk of failing and needing academic assistance (Wright, 2011).

The Bush administration advanced the standard-based learning initiative by transferring it in to law, No Child Left Behind Act. The legislation specified required testing in reading and mathematics for students in grades 3-8 and grades 10-11. An increased concentration of reading and mathematics along with achievement benchmarks were defined in the law. The law established an overall benchmark for every student that they will acquire proficiency in reading and mathematics by the 2014 school year. Accountability for subgroups was also a component in the legislation. Identified goals included all schools to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) each year using a formula that accounted for all required grade bands, subgroups, and other school demographical indicators.

In addition, NCLB required educators be highly qualified (HQ) in their content areas of specialization. The accountability of all school personnel became significant in schools. Accountability of school counseling programs in meeting student achievement needs of all students evolved through school reform. The emergence of evidence-based counseling prompted school counselors to link counseling services to student achievement for all students (Dahir & Stone, 2004).

President Barack Obama institution of his Blueprint for Reform did much to progress accountability measures in U. S. schools. President Barack Obama introduced the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Reauthorization: Blueprint for Reform in March 2010. This action did more to increase accountability of student achievement, standard-based learning, and education accountability (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). The Obama

administration's Race to the Top endorses the mandate for high stakes testing without penalty

but support in meeting state standards. The support was in the form of funding and grants

endowed to schools that set the bar high for academic and achievement programs. Race to the

Top grants recognize states and schools that have demonstrated educational improvements. The

initiative places high standards of accountability on educators and the students they teach

(Wright, 2011). In urban settings, Race to the Top Initiative has the potential to influence the

preparation of school counselors, the accountability of school counselors and school counseling

programs, and the aid in expanding opportunities for urban students (Holcomb-McCoy, Young,

& Gonzalez, 2011).

Closing the Achievement Gap

Closing the achievement gap was the number one priority of NCLB legislation. The focus

addressed the achievement disparity between students from low socio-economic backgrounds

and diverse ethnic groups and students with more affluent and high socio-economic

backgrounds. Goals of mandated testing implemented in NCLB intended to facilitate the process

of closing the achievement gap. The goal of NCLB has made few gains toward closing the

achievement gap in reading and math proficiency among students (Educational Trust, 2010). The

breakdown of the objective of NCLB lies with the excellence of public school systems. Majority

of the issues identified in low performing schools and school systems are those with student

populations of low socio-economic statuses of whom many live below the poverty level. These

systems use inferior teaching practices with inexperienced teachers to educate students. High

absenteeism among the disenfranchised student populations and minimal parental involvement

characterize these systems. Teacher turnover and absenteeism add to the dysfunction within

failing schools and systems (Camilli & Monfils, 2004; National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2004; Wright, 2011).

According to the U.S. Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics (2008) the U.S. leads other nations in the world in student being retained. Minority students are among the leading students who are being retained in U.S. schools (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2005; Florida Associate of School Psychologist, 2005). The U.S. Department of Education (2006) shows retention among African American students is greater than the retention of their Caucasian counterparts. English Language Learners (ELL), especially Hispanic students, rank high in being retained as well (Hauser, Pager, Solon, & Simmons, 2008; Wright, 2011). Since instructional leaders, teachers, and school personnel are responsible for the "comprehensive structure" of the school, all are expected to contribute to the accountability and to influence student achievement and student outcomes (Dahir & Stone, 2004). Therefore, school counselors are compelled to show how comprehensive counseling programs influence student achievement and the success of the comprehensive school program (Dahir & Stone, 2004). Furthermore, school counselors should be purposeful and methodical in their understanding of effective learning strategies and frameworks and knowledgeable about using data to determine needs and outcomes for students and for making informed decisions to assist in closing the achievement gap (Trusty, Mellin, & Herbert, 2008).

Common Core State Standards

The Common Core is a body of superior academic standards in mathematics and English language arts and literacy. Common Core Standard goals delineate skills and abilities students should obtain by the end of each grade. The standards were developed with the goal of all

students will graduate from high school prepared with the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to do well in college or post-secondary institution, career field, and life. The Common Core was systematically formed in order to produce same effect in spite of state in which students live or public school they attend (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2014).

Student academic achievement has been a concern in the United States. Compared to international students, America pupils are trailing their foreign counterparts in core content areas (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2014). U. S. students are entering post-secondary institutions ill-prepared to meet the rigor of college level content. The same students lack the qualifications and job related skills wanted by employers. In addition, these students struggle in their daily lives and personal affairs (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2014). The primary source of the collapse in student academic achievement is the disproportionate and unequal academic standards that are different from state to state. The hodgepodge of academic standards from state to state serves as a huge barrier for student college and career readiness (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2014).

In 2009, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) formed a taskforce to address the disproportionate of the learning standards from state to state. The taskforce reacted to the call for nationwide continuity of learning goals and collaboratively worked to create Common Core State Standards. The framework was established by expert educators, educational leaders, teachers for educators. The model of Common Core State Standards is intended to provide educators a concise set of standards, knowledge-base, and skills set students should acquire upon exiting each grade level and graduate having obtained the necessary college and career preparedness

across states (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2014). According to the CCSSO, the Common Core Standards are "research and evidence-based; clear, understandable and consistent; aligned with college and career expectations; based on rigorous content and application of knowledge through higher-order thinking skills; built upon the strengths and lessons of current state standards; informed by other top performing countries in order to prepare all students for success in our global economy and society (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2014, para. 2.)."

According to the Alabama State Department of Education (2013), the Alabama College and Career Standards (CCRS, Alabama state version of the Common Core State Standards) promise to provide a reliable, concise understanding of what students are to learn so that teachers and parents are aware of what they need to do to support them. The standards also provide suitable benchmarks for students so that students make proper advancement each year and graduate from high school prepared. Alabama College and Career Readiness Standards promote real world learning and experiences which establish the need for modifications in instructional strategies and practices (ASDE, 2013).

Educational Trust

Philanthropist groups including The MetLife Trust served as benefactors in providing money for the National Center of Transforming School Counseling in 2003 (Education Trust, 2009).The gatekeeper role of school counselors which heavily focused on reacting to immediate student concerns in the 1980's and 1990's came under transformation by the turn of the century. The National Center of Transforming School Counseling advocated for a model that was accessible to all students (Wright, 2011). The American School Counselor Association created a

comprehensive framework for school counselors. The framework encompassed ethical norms

and standards to guide school counseling programs. The publication of The ASCA (2003)

National Model: Framework for School Counseling Program established a concrete professional

model for school counselors, linking school counseling programs with "standard-based reform"

(Dahir & Stone, 2004) and confirms the school counselor's role to increase students achievement

(Perusse & Colbert, 2007).

New Responsibilities of School Counselors

The new responsibilities of school counselors have incorporated leadership tasks with

emphasis on collaboration with other educators to impact student achievement. According to

ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2012), school counselors are called to be leaders. In addition to

providing leadership for the development of a comprehensive school counseling program to

solve school and community problems and promote student achievement, there is also a call for

school counselors to promote professional identity and overcome challenges of role

inconsistency. First and foremost responsibility in leadership of the school counselor is the

implementation of the comprehensive school guidance and counseling program. The assertion of

advocacy, collaboration and systemic change causes school counselors to be leaders in their role.

Mason and McMahon (2009) suggested that leadership may be the foundation of the other

essential skills needed for program implementation.

As a collaborative member of the school leadership team, school counselors are expected

to contribute to the complete academic and school program. School counselors contribute to the

IEP team in planning individualized educational programs for special education students. In this

capacity, school counselors recognize their strengths and limitations in applying their expertise

in working with student with disabilities (ASCA, 2013). Professional school counselors provide short-term individual counseling and small group counseling when needed. The school counselor urges parents to become involved in the education of their children in this process. Also, the school counselor collaborates and consults with other educators and families to gain awareness of exceptionalities of special needs students and grasp the adaptation and modification required to assist students. Finally, school counselors advocate for exceptional students through various community and school opportunities. In addition to the IEP team, the school counselor operates in similar capacity for the school 504 team (ASCA, 2013).

Most recently, school counselors have been tasked with the primary role in the development and implementation of the Response to Intervention (RTI) process (ASCA, 2008). Response to Intervention (RTI) is a multi-tiered strategy to facilitate poorly performing students in academics and behavior (RIT Action Network, 2008). The RTI approach applies student-centered assessment models that use problem-solving and research-based methods to identify and address barriers in student learning (Johnson, Mellard, Fush, & McKnight, 2006). Essential components of RTI require high-quality classroom instruction, universal screening, and ongoing progress monitoring, and research-based interventions (Berkeley, Bender, Gregg Peaster, & Saunders, 2009). According to ASCA (2008) professional school counselors use the implementation of the comprehensive school counseling program to parallel the RTI process to improve student achievement and behavior. Professional school counselors use data to establish comprehensive school counseling programs that address the needs of struggling students before, during, and after implementation. They have an active role in analyzing academic and behavior data to pinpoint students experiencing difficulties. In addition, the school counselor is tasked with identifying and collaborating with other professional in selecting appropriate research-based

strategies for struggling students. Then school counselors help in assessing and revising

academic and behavior interventions after implementation if necessary. When RTI results

warrant student referral to special education or outside agency, school counselors collaborate to

make appropriate referrals. School counselors work in partnership with administrators about RTI

design and implementation. In many schools, school counselors facilitate the RTI team in the

RTI process.

ASCA National Model Definition of Role of the School Counselor

As defined by ASCA, the professional school counselor minimum credentialing require a

master's degree in school counseling. The professional school counselor must meet the minimum

state stipulated certification or licensure standards. School counselors are expected to adhere to

ethical and professional standards while promoting the development of the school counseling

program. ASCA National Model (2012) outlines foundation, management, delivery, and

accountability as four strategic capacities for which the counselor operates.

School counselors are responsible for creating comprehensive school counseling

programs. The foundation domain of the comprehensive school counseling model includes its

beliefs, vision, and mission statements as well as school counselor professional competencies

and student competencies. These elements of the program focus are critical in that they seek to

synchronize the school's comprehensive counseling program with the beliefs, vision, and

mission of the school district. The mission statement communicates a clear, concise intent of the

counseling program and how it supports the total school mission. The professional competencies

charter the school counselor's knowledge, attitudes, and skills that maintain his/her capacity to

meet the rigorous demands of the profession. The competencies are centered on high ethical and

professional standards ingrained in integrity, leadership, and professionalism. Student

proficiencies include three domains: academic, career, and personal/social development.

Application in the three domains intends to improve the education development for all students

(ASCA, 2012). These foundation components of the framework establishes the groundwork for

which the remaining three components are assembled (ASCA, 2012).

School counselors are expected to possess the knowledge and ability to plan, implement

and evaluate the comprehensive school counseling program. School counselors are expected to

use various needs assessments to reflect the diverse needs of the school. They also use tools to

evaluate school counselor competency and school counseling program effectiveness. Use of

time, annual agreements, advisory councils, use of data, curriculum for closing the achievement

gap, and annual and weekly calendars all fall within management area (ASCA, 2012).

School counselors are obligated to provide services to students, parents, school staff, and

community members. These delivery tasks are divided into two categories: direct services with

students and indirect services for students. Direct services outline school counseling core

curriculum, individual student planning, and responsive services. Counseling core curriculum

encompasses planned programs and lessons intended to assist students to achieve desired

competencies. The school counselor facilitates the implementation of K-12 curriculum in

collaboration with other professionals. Individual student planning incorporates ongoing

activities intended to help students launch personal goals and develop future plans. Responsive

services are planned to meet students' direct needs. These services encompass individual

counseling, small group counseling, and crisis response and crisis intervention. Indirect services

detail services provided on behalf of students. Referrals to outside agencies, and consultation and

collaboration with parents, teachers, and community organizations are features of indirect services (ASCA, 2012).

School counselors are responsible for the effectiveness of school counseling programs through the accountability component of the model. Accountability establishes the effectiveness of school counseling services through the use of data. School counselors demonstrate accountability through the impact of the school counseling program on students. Indicators such as improved student achievement, attendance, and behavior are linked to school counseling services. The performance of the school counselor is appraised on standards of practice outlined by American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2012).

In contrast to ASCA Model definition of role of the school counselor, many school counselors are responsible to several non-counseling related duties (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). Some school counselors operate as the building test coordinator. As designated by the district or school administration, school counselors have the primary role and responsibility of the organization, arrangement, and administration of the standardized testing program for their schools. Non-counseling duties such as coordinating standardized tests can consume some of school counselors' time (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). School counselors serving in several leadership and other capacities as designated by the school or district administration (House & Hayes, 2002) are not particularly aligned with the role of school counselors (ASCA, 2014). Some contend these roles hinder school counselors from operating in their respective roles and providing counseling services for students (Brown, Galassi, & Akos, 2004). Considering multiple roles, school counselors are expected to serve by American School Counselor Association's (2012) recommended 250 to one student to school counselor ratio.

Conversely, according to the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Student-to-School- Counselor Ratio 2010-2011(ASCA, 2010-2011) report, the student-to-school counselor ratio was 471 students to one school counselor during the 2011-2012 school year. Despite the high student-to- school counselor ratio, school counselors are also expected to serve special education students, who are included with the general education population due to their least restricted environment.

ASCA Stance on Serving Students with Disabilities

ASCA position statement regarding students with disabilities upholds professional school counselor meeting the academic, career, and personal/social development for all students including students with special needs. According to ASCA, professional school counselors are devoted to promotion of all students flourishing to their full potential regardless of existing barriers from disabilities or other special needs. In order to promote the equitable treatment of all students (ASCA, 2013), school counselors must stay abreast of emerging research and practices for working with students with disabilities (ASCA, 2013). Professional school counselors must "seek to implement best practices in working with students presenting any disability category (ASCA, 2013, p. 1). School counselors are expected to implement effective skills for working with students with disabilities. In addition, awareness of federal law governing the education of students with disabilities and changes in the law is an additional competence necessary for school counselors (Owens, Thomas, & Strong, 2001). The essence of the comprehensive counseling and guidance programs in schools involves the counselor's ability to provide a safe, supportive, and nurturing environment for all students to learn and development competencies outlined by district, state, and national standards as well as by ASCA. Therefore, maintaining

awareness of federal law governing the education of students with disabilities and changes in the law is an additional competence necessary for school counselors is crucial for school counselors serving students with disabilities (Owens, Thomas, & Strong, 2001).

Special Education in the State of Alabama

Alabama State Department of Education (2013) reported 141,667 children received special education services in the state for the 2013-2014 school year. Preschool children in Alabama receiving special education services accounted for 3,731 students. The top three identified exceptionalities for pre-school students were Speech or Language Impairments, 1,871; Developmental Delay, 1,318; and Autism, 255. Those identified as school aged, 5-18 years old, totaled 136, 522 students in kindergarten to 12th grade, including both disabilities and gifted students.

Specific learning disabilities (SLD) accounted for the largest disabilities exceptionality for Alabama's special education students totaling 31,643 for the 2013-2014 school year. Specific learning disabilities (SLD) embody a diverse set of neurobiological disorders that include difficulties in several academic and social domains (Virginia Department of Education, 2014). Most common types of SLD include dyslexia, dysgraphia/aphraphia, dyscalculia, and developmental aphasia. Perception poses a problem for students with SLD. Students with SLD experience perceptual problems or difficulties identifying, contrasting, and understanding sensations, particularly visual and auditory stimuli (Virginia State Department of Education, 2014). Attention is another problem for students with SLD. They may display trouble deciding on and concentrating on the appropriate stimuli. Focusing on the proper stimuli is an essential component for learning. When a student is unable to center his attention, hindrances and

distractions will negatively shape the student's learning. Many students with SLD find difficulty applying this skill during the learning process. Working memory poses difficulties for student with SLD. SLD students experience gaps in memory, most commonly working memory. Working memory is the capacity to momentarily set aside information for recall to perform daily cognitive tasks. Working memory deficit has been linked to reading (Virginia Department of Education, 2014). Disparities in working memory are also associated with written language disorders. In addition, mathematics is affected by working memory. Working memory faculty is a dependable indicator of a student's aptitude to recall information. The capacity to retrieve information is the essential to successful learning (Virginia Department of Education, 2014).

Processing speed is another trait of students with SLD. Processing information effectively and efficiently is a necessary skill for learning. Some students with SLD are unable to perform this learning task. Information processing speed sets apart students with SLD and general education students. Students with SLD experience challenges when processing visual and auditory information as well as speed (Virginia Department of Education, 2014). Naming speed adversely impacts students in dyslexia. In the same way, naming speed hinders mathematical fluency in students with SLD (Virginia Department of Education, 2014).

Metacognition is another issue for a student with SLD. Metacognition is the ability to change behavioral and environmental operations in reaction to varying learning demands. Metacognition is an individual's awareness of his or her process of acquiring knowledge and thought process. Metacognition is thinking about thinking. It also considers knowledge of the association between a task and strategy. Metacognition accounts for an individual's capacity and understanding of how to apply the strategy, where to apply the strategy, when to apply the

strategy, and why to apply the strategy (Virginia Department of Education, 2014). Students with SLD exhibit inadequacies in their thought processes and metacognitive awareness. These exceptional students are less prone to apply appropriate metacognitive strategies. Educators working with SLD students should consider using teaching strategies that promote the use of metacognitive learning. These strategies include a methodical practice of steps or mindful blend among strategies to complete a task. They are used to observe and assess progress during task implementation. Metacognition is essential piece to academic success of SLD learners (Virginia Department of Education, 2014).

Students with SLD also experience language discrepancies. Some SLD students demonstrate problems identified as language delay and inappropriate use of language. Language disparities for SLD students include phonology (sound), semantics (vocabulary), syntax (grammar), morphology (prefixes and suffixes), and pragmatics (social language). These language difficulties can have a negative effect in academic areas (Virginia Department of Education, 2014). Some students with SLD struggle with social competencies and experience difficulty applying appropriate social skills. Social skill challenges for SLD students manifest in a variety of ways. Students may misinterpret social cues. They may neither be able to understand the feelings of others nor grasp the impact of their behavior on others. Both academic achievement and successful social development are impacted by social competence in SLD students. Lack of social competence may boost the likeliness of school dropout (Virginia Department of Education, 2014). Not all students with SLD experience these characteristics. It is imperative to be aware that several disorders may be co-morbid or associated conditions that tend to occur together with SLD and should be considered. These conditions include attention

deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), emotional disabilities, and speech and language impairments (Virginia State Department of Education, 2014).

Speech or language impairments (SLI) represented the identified exceptionality of 17,143 children in Alabama schools for the 2013-2014 (Alabama State Department of Education [ALSDE], 2014). Students with speech impairments are characterized by having articulation disorder, fluency disorder, or voice disorder. Articulation disorder is manifested by errors in the forming of speech sounds that can be associated to anatomical or physiological limitations in the skeletal, muscular, or neuromuscular support for speech production (Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities, 2013). Omission, substitution, distortions represent impairment disorder in articulation (Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities, 2013). Fluency disorders are deficits involving rhythm and timing of speech. Hesitation, repetitions, or prolongation of sound, syllables, words, or phrases demonstrated in stuttering and cluttering are characteristics identified with SLI students with fluency disorder (Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities, 2013). Students exhibiting voice disorders have problems with the quality or application of their voice associated with larynx dysfunction (Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities, 2013). Abnormal production of sound, absence of vocal quality, pitch, loudness, resonance, and duration are traits of voice disorders (Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities, 2013).

Language Impairments include five primary areas: phonological disorders, morphological disorders, semantic disorders, syntactical insufficiencies, and pragmatic difficulties. Students showing phonological disorders are difficult to understand; they may not pronounce sounds accurately. These students may find it difficult speaking when they want to speak. They are

challenged by the application of appropriate motor movements when planning what to say also known as Apraxia of speech. SLI students with morphological disorders have difficulties with inflections. Students struggle with usage indicators that demonstrate different kinds of meanings of words. Semantic disorders include poor vocabulary acquisition, improper utilization of word meanings, and poor understanding of word meanings. These SLI students show limitations in their ability to apply appropriate word meaning and experience challenges with words with multiple meanings. Students with semantic disorders use nonspecific expressions and indefinite references when trying to communicate. Difficulties acquiring appropriate grammar usage are most common in students with syntactic deficits. Students showing syntactic shortages produce simple sentences which are limited in explanation. Pragmatic difficulties are prevalent in students who lack the capacity to appropriately use language in diverse social situations. These students are limited in their ability to use non-verbal communication including eye contact and personal space. They also have difficulties asserting and introducing topics (Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities, 2013).

A total of 9,633 students are categorized as other health impairments (OHI) Alabama (Alabama State Department of Education [ALSDE], 2014). According to IDEA, students identified with OHI are diagnosed as having an acute to chronic condition that limits their strength, energy or awareness to include amplified alertness to environmental stimuli that interfere with their abilities to appropriately function in educational settings. Students having OHI have health conditions such as attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, asthma, diabetes, heart condition, epilepsy, leukemia, sickle cell anemia, as well as other health and behavioral conditions (National Association of Special Education Teachers, 2007). Children suffering from OHI experience common problems including fatigue, inability

for concentrate for extend periods of time, mobility concerns, attention limitations, coordination inabilities, and stamina and muscle weakness. As a result students with OHI tend to have chronic absenteeism and tardiness to school (Starbright Foundation, 2003; National Association of Special Education Teachers, 2007).

Intellectual disability ranked fourth overall as an exceptionality for 6,106 Alabama students for the 2013-2014 school year (Alabama State Department of Education [ALSDE], 2014). Autism rounded out the top five total disabilities exceptionality slot for Alabama special education pupils with the sum of some 5,917 identified in the 2013-2014 school year (Alabama State Department of Education [ALSDE], 2014).

In Alabama, the number of school counselors was a reported 1,802 and 755,552 students in 2010-2011 school year (ASCA, 2011). Student to school counselor ratio was 419 students to 1 school counselor, which well over the recommended 250 students to 1 school counselor (ASCA, 2011). Of the 746,204 students enrolled in Alabama schools in 2013-2014, 80,803 are identified special education students aged 3-18, accounting for over 10% of the entire student population (Alabama State Department of Education [ALSDE], 2014). Considering the large number of exceptional students, it is critical for school counselors, particularly in Alabama, to become knowledgeable of essential skills needed to effectively serve their exceptional students.

Current Collaboration Status between School Counselors and Special Educators

The current status of the collaborative relationship of school counselors and special education teachers working with students with disabilities is understudied. There are significant gaps in the literature that discuss an in-depth study of the collaborative relationship between

school counselors and special education teachers. Several studies (e.g., Galassi & Akos, 2007; Geltner & Leibforth, 2008) focusing on school counselors serving students with disabilities expose the school counselor collaboration with school personnel, which include special education teachers. However, few studies examine the collaborative relationship of the school counselor and special education teachers.

Working with students with disabilities requires specialized training. Required knowledge includes: (a) knowledge of exceptionalities and manifestations of exceptionalities, (b) knowledge of best practices in working with identified exceptionalities, (c) knowledge of laws governing special education and students with disabilities, (d) knowledge of updates and changes to special education law to avoid liability, and (e) knowledge of the individual children and families of children with disabilities (Owens, Thomas, & Strong, 2011). In addition, School counselors must have the applied knowledge of best practices, skills and strategies in working with students with disabilities. Working with students with disabilities obliges educators to appropriately accommodate exceptional student instruction to ensure they have the same chance as general education students in acquiring knowledge and skills (Owens, Thomas, & Strong, 2011). Special education teachers are traditionally trained in the aforementioned; however, school counselors' training does not comprehensively encompass all these areas. The discrepancy warrant the need for active collaboration between the two professionals in schools.

Nevertheless currently, school counselors primarily collaborate with special education teachers as part of collaborative teams. School counselors have an active role as an Individualized Education Program (IEP) team member for students with disabilities that promote strength-based school counseling (Galassi & Akos, 2007). Often school counselors collaborate

and consult with special education teachers and other school professionals in advocating for students with disabilities during IEP meetings. As a member of IEP team, school counselors identify and promote strengths-based approach for students with disabilities (Geltner & Leibforth, 2008). In addition, school counselors serve collaboratively with special education teachers and others school professionals as consultants on school leadership and school improvement teams. Serving as part of school leadership team helps school counselors apply strength-based school counseling, and bring optimism for positive changes in schools for all students. These teams include but are not limited to RTI and 504 teams (Geltner & Leibforth, 2008). The school counselors address the needs of all students through implementation of the comprehensive school counseling program. Through the use of data and collaboration, school counselors identify struggling students and contribute appropriate intervention strategies during the RTI process as a member of RTI team (RTI Action Network, 2015). School counselors contribute to the 504 team through collaborative efforts in addition to the implementation of the comprehensive school counseling program service. Collaborating with outside agencies such as school psychologists, social workers, occupational therapist, as well as other specialists to ensures that these students' specific needs are being met by school personnel and third parties.

Idol and Baran (1992) described "pitfalls" that existed between the two school professionals concerning the collaborative and consulting dynamics of school counselors and special education teachers. Possible origins of conflict included differentiation of functions, role conflicts, and power struggles. Ambiguity in roles and responsibilities in serving students with disabilities was among the drawbacks in the collaborative relationship of school counselors and special education teachers (Idol & Baran, 1992).

Summary

The expanding population of students with disabilities entering school has made infinite changes in schools. With over 6 million exceptional students enrolled in the nation's schools, along with school counselors' roles, responsibilities, and duties evolved to meet the growing demands of school reform and accountability, school counselors are expected to work to meet the needs of students with disabilities as well as other students. This chapter reviewed school enrollment, special education in U. S. schools, special education population, the progress of school counseling in the United States, the transformation of the school counselor's role in schools, school counselor-to-student ratio, and the competencies necessary for professionals working with students with disabilities in order to establish the need for collaboration between school counselors and special education teachers in working with students with disabilities. Also, the chapter reviewed related topics to establish the professionals' roles in collaboration and existing status of collaboration between the professionals. Currently collaboration between the two parties was limited to working on teams such as IEP, 504, and RTI.

CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, an outline of the research design and methods used to conduct the study is presented. First, the purpose of the study statement followed by the problem statement are presented. Next, research design, participants, data collection, instrumentation, and analysis processes are presented. Lastly, the chapter concludes with the actions used to establish credibility of the data.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of the study was to examine the nature and scope of collaboration between school counselors and special education teachers in working with students with disabilities. Participants' lived experiences and perceptions were considered through Moustaka's qualitative theoretical framework phenomenology to capture the shared experiences of participants with the phenomenon in order to reach the real meaning of the experience (Creswell, 2007).

Statement of the Problem

The impact of school accountability over the past decade has generated a considerable amount of research on the effectiveness of school counseling programs and services on student achievement. Nonetheless, with increasing amount of students with disabilities in schools, little information exist focusing specifically on school counselors working with students with disabilities and on the effectiveness of school counseling programs and services for special needs students as well as on the collaborative relationship of school counselors and special education teachers in working with students with disabilities. Consequently, this study articulates the nature

and scope of the collaborative relationship between school counselors and special education teachers in working with students with disabilities. The study conveys the participants' attitudes and beliefs toward the necessity of the collaborative relationship, nature and scope of collaboration between school counselors and special education teachers, the perceived roles of these professionals in collaboration, the outcomes of existing collaboration, the challenges each face in collaboration, and the strategies that may work to enhance collaboration between school counselors and special education teachers.

Research Questions

Research questions used for this study were as follows:

1. What are the attitudes and beliefs of school counselors and special education teachers toward necessity and importance of the collaborative relationship?

2. What is the nature and scope of collaboration between the school counselor and special education teacher in working with students with disabilities?

3. What are the perceived roles of the school counselor and the special education teacher in the collaborative relationship? How are roles defined?

4. What are the outcomes of the existing collaboration if there are any?

5. What are the challenges that each of the professionals face in collaboration?

6. What strategies may work to foster the collaborative relationship between school counselors and special education teachers?

Research Design

The phenomenological study was adopted for this study. Qualitative inquiry using focus groups was a primary research method and a survey questionnaire was used to supplement the data collected through focus groups. Due to the limited studies involving the collaborative

relationship of school counselors and special education teachers, a phenomenological study focused on understanding the lived experiences of the professionals in collaboration in working with students with disabilities was conducted. As described by Creswell (2007) a phenomenological study conveys the meaning for individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon. In this qualitative method the researcher focused on detailing the collective experience of each subject related to the phenomenon. The purpose of the phenomenological design is to capture the collective quintessence of participants. The phenomenologist identifies the common phenomenon than collects data from individuals who have shared experiences with the phenomenon and expands a complied explanation of the real meaning of the experience for all the individuals (Creswell, 2007).

Rooted in the philosophical writing of Edmund Husserl, German mathematician, phenomenology approach is widely accepted in the social and health science, sociology, psychology, nursing and health science and education (Creswell, 2007). The Moustaka's phenomenological research approach was applied in this study. Moustaka's high regard for phenomenology considers it as a pillar of human science and the foundation of all knowledge (Moustaka, 1994). Moustaka's approach expressed logical procedures in data collection and analysis and plan for consolidating the textual and structural descriptions (Creswell, 2007).

The fundamental of Moustaka's process in designing qualitative study with phenomenology approach include the followings. Initially, the researcher should discern whether or not the phenomenological approach is well matched to the research problem. Phenomenology is best used with research problem that involves understanding the shared experiences with a common phenomenon of several individuals. The all-inclusive understanding of these experiences is essential to growth and development of a practice of policy or in order to gain an

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in-depth conceptual framework of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). The researcher must "bracket out" previous experience or details of any broad rational assumption he or she may have with the phenomenon. He or she must not bring his or her experience to the process. Data are collected through multiple, exhaustive interviews from people who have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). Data collection for phenomenological studies consists of gathering data from 5 to 25 participants through in-depth interviews, multiple interviews, observations, journal, and forms of art. Interview questions range from broad to general open-ended questions for the purpose of drawing out rich purposeful descriptive texts.

The focus group is a qualitative research strategy used to collect data through engaging small groups of individuals in an informal conversation centered on a specific topic of interest of all parties (Wilkinson, 2004). Focus groups were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. A focus group is, according to Lederman cited in Thomas et al., (1995) a procedure encompassing the use of thorough group interviews in which contributors are selected because they are a purposive, although not necessarily representative, sampling of a specific population, this group being "focused" on a given topic. Participants in this type of research are, therefore, selected on the criteria that they would have something to say on the topic and would be comfortable talking to the interviewer and each other (Richardson & Rabiee, 2001). This approach to selection related to the concept of "Applicability," in which subjects are selected because of their knowledge of the study area (Burrows & Kendall, 1997). One of the distinct features of focus-group interviews is its group dynamics; hence the type and range of data generated through the social interaction of the group are often deeper and richer than those obtained from one-on-one interview (see Thomas et al., 1995).

Focus groups have been used for over 80 years. Focus groups take various roles in research. The focus group can be used in primary and exploratory stages in research. Researchers can use focus groups before or after the research as assessment strategy. Focus groups can be used to spawn new ideas and topics of interest from current or previously studied topics, which provide researchers opportunities for follow-up studies (Gibb, 1997). Researchers can apply the focus group method as an independent method of research or collaboratively with other research strategies in various stages of the research process. For example, focus groups can be used to establish validity within a research study. Also it can be used as a tool of triangulation, to create hypotheses, to formulate research questions and survey questionnaires, and interview guides in qualitative research (Gibb, 1997). For this study, the researcher used focus groups as the primary mode of data collections.

Focus groups are uniquely different from interviews and surveys in that they do not simply rely on questions and answers. Focus groups require reflection and exchange as they relate to the lived experiences of the participants. Phenomenologists conducting focus groups for data collections not only collects themes, but also conversations shared within the groups. The researcher also account for nonverbal communications of participants (Gibb, 1997).

The essential concept of focus group procedure is to ignite dialogue on preselected theme of concern especially to the researcher among small-targeted group with a specific population. The method draws on the attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences, and relations in a way that is different from conducting one-on-one interviews and administration of questionnaires (Gibb, 1997). In a focus group, the small group setting facilitates influence among members. Participants can in some ways be influenced by the ideas, thoughts, opinions, and attitudes of other participants engaged in the topic of discussion. The exchange of ideas, attitudes, and

experiences can provide an accumulation of information in a short amount of time from experienced people in the field concerning the area of study (Gibb, 1997).

Researchers and participants benefit from use of focus groups in several ways. Researchers give way to the saliency of a topic by eliciting relevant and new information from multiple perspectives on the topic. Participants engage in advocacy, problem-solving, and work to impact change in their respective areas of specialization. Participants act as experts and professionals in a given field, representing a voice for others in the field and while cultivating a need for increased attention, collaboration, or change in the field (Gibb, 1997). The productivity of the participants of the group and the diverse data to be collected during the process of the focus group help a researcher discover implications for further study within the profession and suggested areas of professional development for professionals (Gibb, 1997).The researcher can benefit from this exchange because it can shed insight to the issue in ways the researcher have not considered. In addition, the researcher can gather additional information by observing how the participant relate to one another during the conversation, accounting of their interpersonal relations, interaction, body language, and facial expressions that can be used to make inferences and reporting (Gibb, 1997).

Data analysis procedures construct on data from data collection stage. Important statements, quotes, words, and expressions are highlighted to provide insight for the researcher. The highlighted items are examined to understand meaning of the experience to the phenomenon. These steps are referred to as horizonalization and clusters of meaning. The significant statements and themes are used to compose textual descriptions, imaginative variations, and structural descriptions. Lastly the researcher takes the descriptions and produces the essential, uniform structure of the quintessence of the common experience (Creswell, 2007).

Participants

Twenty-two participants were included in this phenomenological, qualitative study. Participants consisted of eleven school counselors and eleven special education teachers who were currently working as a school counselor or a special education teacher in the south central river-region of the state. All 22 participants completed the online survey questionnaire. Participants for the two focus groups included a total of nine professionals employed in K-12 schools: five special education teachers and four school counselors.

Procedures

Participants were recruited through email within in South East region of the United States. The study was approved by the researcher's university Institutional Review Board. Participants were solicited from five school districts within the River-Region area of the state. Fifty school counselors and special education teachers within the school districts were invited to take part in this study. Participants were asked to complete the online survey questionnaire via Survey Monkey and contact the researcher via email if they wanted to participate in the focus group interview session. Email access was obtained through the State Department of Education and school district websites. The initial email was sent to possible participants. A second email was sent as a reminder two weeks after the first email. Two weeks later a third email was sent with the focus group information highlighted. Once 12 participants expressed their willingness to participate in the focus group interview sessions, two focus groups, one for school counselors and the other for special education teachers were scheduled and conducted at a local university. Only nine participated in the focus group interviews at the end.

For this study, participants were invited, if they met the following criteria: (a) school counselor or special education teacher who has worked or is currently working with students

with disabilities, (b) school counselors or special education teachers who has worked or is currently working in a school district within the south central River-Region of the state, (c) school counselor or special education teacher who has one or more years working with students with disabilities, and (d) school counselor or special education teacher who was or is currently licensed and/or certified in his or her respective content area.

Purposive sampling was used to select focus group participants for this study. According to Creswell (2007) "purposeful sampling permits the researcher to select individuals and site for the research study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study" (p. 125). According to Teddlie and Yu (2007), there are three broad categories of purposive sampling techniques: (a) sampling to achieve representativeness and comparability (b) sampling special or unique cases, and (c) sequential sampling. Sampling to achieve representativeness or comparability outlines techniques for a researcher who wants to closely choose a purposive sample that represent a broader group of cases or who chooses to organize comparisons among different type of cases (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). Sampling special or unique cases is used when the major focus of the research centers on the case or cases itself rather than the problem and thus this sampling method was used for this study.

This methodological practice of qualitative research data collection involves several specific procedures. Selecting the participants for the focus groups is among the important steps of the process (Gibb, 1997). Consideration of the focus group size is crucial in the productivity and efficiency of the process. Whether the focus group is homogeneous or heterogeneous can impact the dynamics, discussion, and productivity of the group. The location of the venue and the number of session with participants takes careful deliberation (Gibb, 1997).

Two focus group interview sessions were conducted for this study. Focus groups were organized according to the participant's professional position, school counselor or special education teacher. One session consisted of school counselors, and the other session consisted of special education teachers. Focus group sessions were arranged at a local university located within the River-Region of the state. Each session lasted approximately 90 minutes. It was intended for five school counselors and five special education teachers to participate in the focus group interview sessions. The underlying principle for this range of focus group size stems from the aim of recruiting and engaging an adequate amount of participants for the focus group to yield variety in experience and information shared, yet not recruiting and engaging too many participants that makes for a non-conducive focus group environment in which participants feel reluctant to share thoughts, opinions, beliefs and experiences openly (Onwuegbuzie et al, 2009). Five special education teachers participated in the first focus group session. Five school counselors were recruited for the second focus group session. However at the scheduled time of focus group, four school counselors participated in the focus group session due to unknown cancelation of one school counselor participant. The focus group interviews were facilitated by the researcher as the moderator and audio-recorded for transcription purposes.

Instruments

Instruments used in data collection for this study were focus groups interview questions and survey questionnaire.

Focus Groups Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Focus group semi-structured interview questions were used to collect data from the participants for this study. Each section of open-ended questions within the semi-structured interview protocol were developed around the six research questions. The semi-structured format

helped the researcher gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences in collaboration. The open-ended questions promoted a focused discussion that helped to uncover participants' perceptions, attitudes, and points of view on the topic during focus group sessions (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Patton, 2002). The focus group sessions started with personal introductions and leading question before engaging in the interview to fulfil the research questions. Some focus group semi-structured protocol questions are presented below. The complete protocol is found in Appendix A.

What specific training or professional development, in addition to your graduate studies coursework, have you had in collaborating to meet the needs of students with disabilities? Research Question 1: What are the attitudes and beliefs of the school counselor and the special education teacher towards necessity and importance of the collaborative relationship?

- How do you define collaboration? What is your idea of collaboration? What should it look like?

- What are your attitudes and feelings about the collaborative relationship between the school counselor and special education teachers in meeting the needs of exceptional students?

Research Question 2: What is the nature and scope of collaboration between the school counselor and the special education teacher in working with students with disabilities?

- How do you work with students with special needs?

- What has been (share) your experience with collaboration in meeting the needs of students with disabilities?

- Share the process you use to collaborate with school counselors or special education teachers when working with exceptional students?

- How often do you meet or plan for collaboration to meet the needs of students with disabilities?

- What are specific expectations, tasks, and duties from the school counselor/special education teachers in collaborative relationship?

Survey Questionnaire

Survey questionnaire was used as a supplementary data collection instrument in this study. A 15 item survey questionnaire, initially designed, piloted, and approved during a research course, was used for this research study. Survey questions were designed with dual purpose to collect data from school counselors and special education teachers, which is to collect demographic information and to collect responses to satisfy the research questions. Items 1 through 8 were specifically created to collect demographic information about the participants as well as professional status of the participants. The survey questionnaire gathered descriptive information about the participants including gender, race/ethnicity, years of experience as a school counselor or special education teacher, years of experience working with students with disabilities, age range, and level of education. Items 9 through 15 were designed to collect information about participants' experiences in collaboration between school counselors and special education teachers in working with students with disabilities. This portion of the survey questionnaire consisted of open-ended and closed-ended questions regarding the collaboration between school counselors and special education teachers in

working with special needs students. Initially, the survey questionnaire was designed during a research design course, and it was piloted during a qualitative research design course. Example questions for the survey questionnaire are listed below. The complete survey questionnaire can be found in Appendix B.

- Item 1 Question: What is you gender?

- Item 9 Question: On an average, weekly, how much time do you spend collaborating with the school counselor or special education teachers to meet the needs of students with disabilities?

- Item 13 Question: What are the challenges in collaboration between school counselors and special education teachers?

Data Analysis Methods

Krueger's (1994) approach for data analysis was applied in this study. The approach best suits the level of experience of the researcher. The benefit of Krueger's (1994) approach is that it provides concise steps for the novice researcher to following and it is appropriate for organizing immense quantities of data generated through qualitative research and data collection.

Initially, the researcher for this study listened to the audio recordings of the focus groups interviews repetitively. In addition, the researcher read reflection journals recorded after each focus group interview session as well. Focus group interviews were transcribed, producing a sizable amount of data. Therefore, the next tasks of analysis was to reduce the data (Robson, 1993). Transcripts were carefully read line by line in order to become familiar with the data. Next, pertinent and reoccurring topics, ideas, phrases, and words, were highlighted and coded for each research question area. A huge number of codes were produced during this stage. Research questions guided the analysis process (Krueger & Casey, 2000), and codes were reviewed and

grouped to create categories. During this process, some codes were eliminated. Therefore, categories were assembled by codes to show relationship and connection among responses. The process of qualitative analysis seeks to uncover meaning in circumstances rather than searching for truth (Rabiee, 2004). The most significant categories associated with the goals of the study were later transformed into to themes based on the research questions.

Likewise, survey questionnaire responses generated an ample size of data as well. Survey questionnaire responses were compiled item by item using a spreadsheet in a combined group of all participants. Then, responses were separated in to two groups: school counselor group and special education teacher group. Related and reoccurring topics, ideas, phrases, and words, were highlighted and coded. Codes were grouped in to categories and unrelated codes were eliminated. Categories were arranged using the research questions. Responses from categories were cross analyzed with focus group transcripts.

Credibility

Credibility of this study was established through multiple ways. The use of purposive sampling of participants in the study was one way. Participants of this study were solicited and selected based on criteria associated with the focus of the study. In addition, member checking was used to establish credibility of the study. The researcher asked six of the participants to review the transcripts to validate exchanges within focus group sessions and provided their feedback through brief individual interviews. The researcher corroborated the meanings of what was shared during the focus group interviews throughout the interview sessions. Triangulation of data was exercised to increase credibility of the study as well. Cross-analysis to compare key concepts and perceptions between two data collection methods was used for this study. Survey

questionnaire responses and focus group transcript were compared for similarities and differences.

The researcher described participants' experiences with the phenomenon without including her experiences with the phenomenon. Bracketing was applied to ensure the researcher's experiences did not emerge during the process (Creswell, 2007). The researcher was aware any bias, beliefs, and ideas she held relating to the phenomenon and how it could influence the research study. Therefore, reflection journals were used to note the researcher's processes, observations, and thoughts during the process. Transferability of this study is based on the reader's interpretation of the compatibleness of this study to similar studies.

Summary

This chapter described the qualitative research method applied in this study to uncover the meaning of the shared experiences of school counselors and special education teachers as it relates to the collaborative relationship in working with students with disabilities. Participants consisted of 11 school counselors and 11 special education teachers from the river-region of the state. Data was collected through focus groups interviews and online survey questionnaire. Two focus group interview sessions with school counselors and special education teachers were conducted to gather the experiences of participants in collaboration. The survey questionnaire was used to collect demographic and descriptive information about the participants, as well as address some focused areas of the study. The qualitative data was analyzed using Krueger (1994) framework analysis that involves: familiarization, identifying theatrical framework, indexing, charting, comparing and contrasting, and interpretation of data. Purposive sampling was used to establish the credibility of the study. Triangulation was used to strengthen credibility. Member

checking, cross-analysis, and reflection journal notes of the researcher's observations, processes, thoughts, biases, and judgements were used in triangulation process.

CHAPTER IV. RESULTS

In this chapter, a results report of the data collected through focus group interviews and survey questionnaire is presented. There are two major components of the chapter. The first component consists of participants' demographical information, professional status, and time spent collaborating weekly. The second component encompasses the results reported from the focus group interviews and results reported from survey questionnaire. To establish coherency and organization of the data collected from the survey questionnaire and focus group interviews, six major themes were presented by answering six research questions.

Demographical Information and Professional Status

Twenty-two participants participated in this research study, 11 school counselors and 11 special education teachers. Of the 22 participants, 21 (95.45%) were female, 1 (4.55%) was male, and 0 (0%) other.
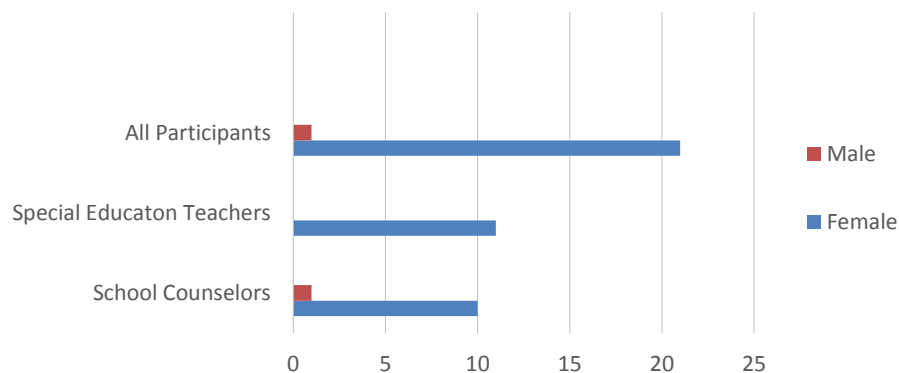
Figure 1. Gender. This figure illustrates the gender of participants in this study.

The race and ethnicity of the 22 participant in the research study were either Black/ African-American (68.18%) or White/Caucasian (31.82%).
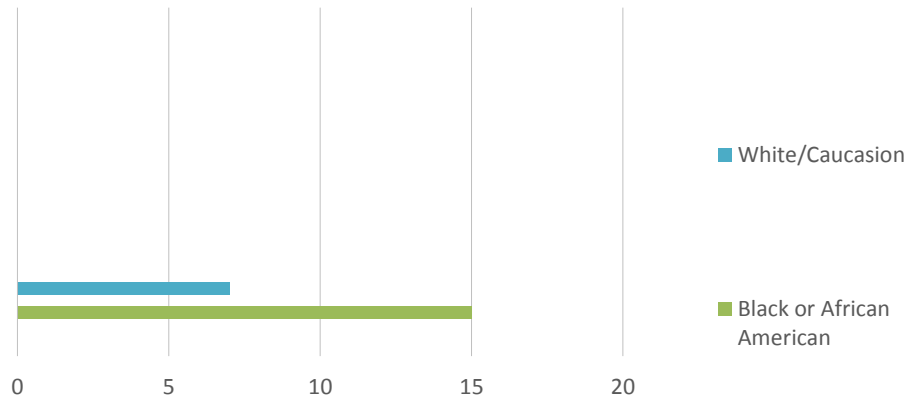
Figure 2. Race/ Ethnicity of Participants. This figure illustrates the race/ethnicity of participants.

The age range of the participants in this study ranged from 33 to 60 years of age with 11 participants being in 40's.
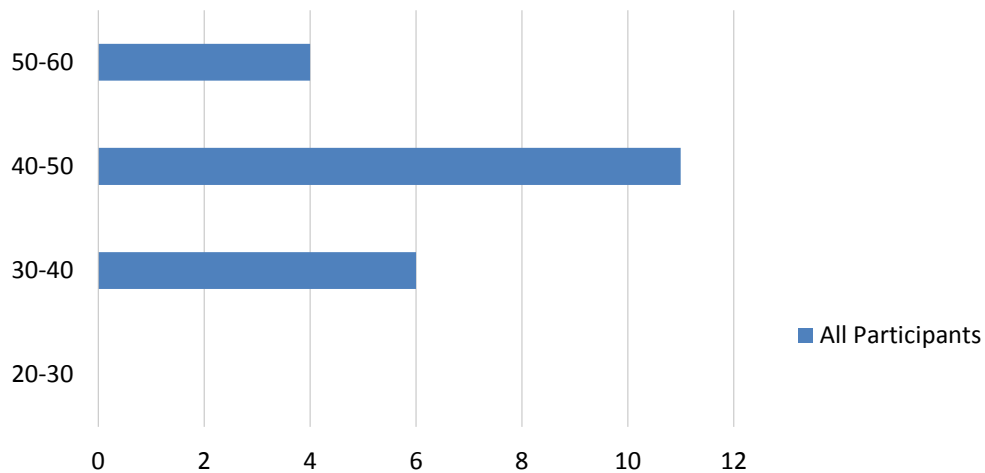
Figure 3. Age Range of Participants. This figure illustrates the age range of participants.

Educational setting of participants within this study included 12 elementary (K-6, 54.54%), 5 Middle/Jr. High (6-8, 22.73%), and 3 High School (9-12, 13.64%), and 2 other (K-12, 9.10%). Among school counselors five were in elementary, four in middle school, and two in high school. Among special education teachers seven in elementary, one in middle school, and

one in high school. Two special educator participants in this study represented K-12: one speech language pathologist and the other special education coordinator.
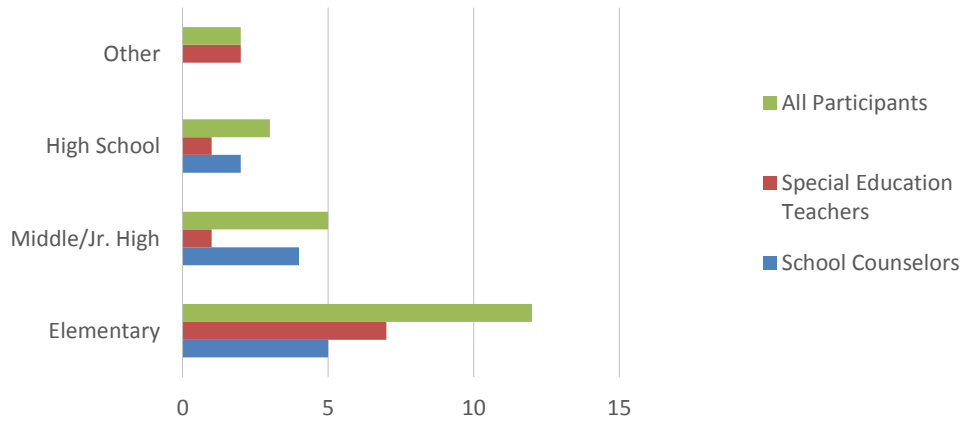
Figure 4. Educational Work Settings of Participants. This figure illustrates the educational work settings of participants in this study.

Highest degree level in the field of education of participants included 3 (13.64%) Bachelor's degree, 9 (40.91%) Master's degree, 9 (40.91%) Education Specialist degree, and 1 (4.55%) Doctorate degree.
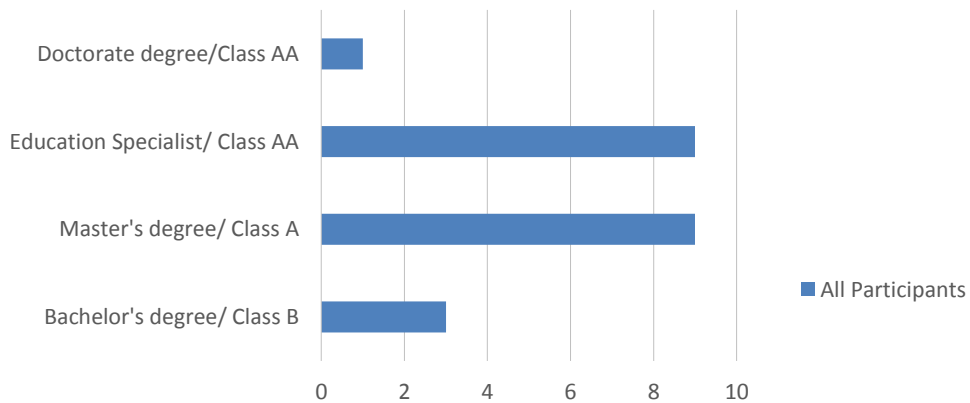
Figure 5. Degree/Level of Certification of Participants. This figure illustrates the degrees held by participants and/or the levels of education certification held by participants.

Years of professional experience as a school counselor or special education teacher range from 1-25 years of professional experience. Nineteen participants (86%) had 6-20 years of professional experience.
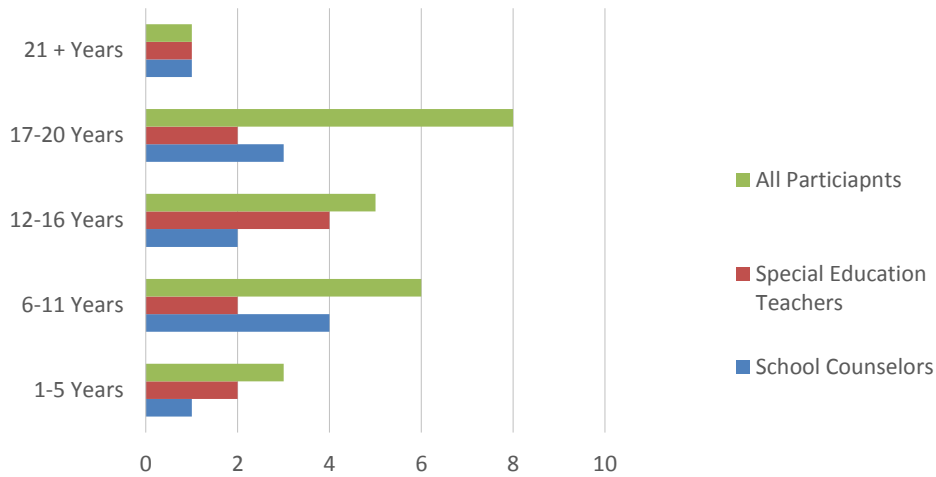
Figure 6. Years of Experience of Participants Working as a School Counselor or Special Education Teacher. This figure illustrates the years of professional education experience as a school counselor or special education teacher.

Time spent collaborating with school counselors or special education teachers range from less than one hour to more than 20 hours per week. Fourteen participants (64%) reported 1-5 hours.
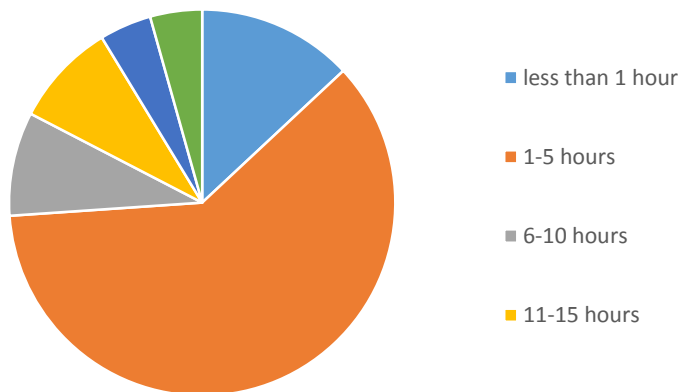
Figure 7. Time Spent Collaborating Weekly. This figure illustrates the average time spent in collaboration by participants during the course of a week.

<div align="center">**Description of Focus Group Participants**</div>

Out of 22 survey questionnaire participants, nine participated in the focus group interviews, four school counselors and five special education teachers. Participants' characteristics are described below.

School Counselors

SC1: African-American female, age range 50-60, school counselor in middle school setting, class AA certification /Educational Specialist Degree, over 32 years of experience in education with 6 years as a school counselor.

SC2: African-American female, age range 50-60, school counselor in middle school setting, previous experience as school counselor in high school setting, Educational Specialist Degree (Ed.S.), 23 years of experience as a school counselor, over 25 years of experience in education.

SC3: African-American female, age range 40-50, school counselor in elementary school setting, Educational Specialist Degree (Ed.S), 16 years as a school counselor, 23 total years in education.

SC4: African-American female, age range 40-50, school counselor in elementary school setting, Educational Specialist Degree (Ed.S)/class AA certification, 9 years of school counselor experience, total of 16 years in education.

Special Education Teachers

SET1: White female, age range 40-50, speech language pathologist in elementary and secondary education settings, class B certification, over 19 years of special education experience as speech and language pathologist.

SET2: African-American female, age range 30-40, special education resource teacher in elementary school setting, 5 years previous experience as a special education teacher in high school setting, Educational Specialist Degree (Ed. S)/class AA certification in School Counseling, 13 years of experience as a special education teacher.

SET3: African-America female, age range 40-50, special education resource teacher in elementary school setting, Master's Degree/class A certification, 16 years of experience as a special education teacher

SET4: African-American female, age range 30-40, special education resource teacher in elementary school setting, Education Specialist Degree (Ed. S)/class AA certification, 14 years of experience as a special education teacher

SET5: White female, age range 30-40, special education self-contained unit, works with severe special education students in elementary setting, Master Degree/class A certification, special education collaborative K-6, total of 10 years teaching experience, 7 as special education teacher, 3 year as general education teacher previously

Table 1 below depicts the six research questions and summary of the findings for each group of school counselors and special education teachers. Sub-domains were used to organize the summary of the findings when appropriate. The findings are the results of the participants' responses drawn from both focus groups interview sessions and survey questionnaire.

Table 1

Summary of Results

Research Questions	School Counselor Response	Special Education Teacher Responses
What are the attitudes and beliefs of school counselors and special education teachers toward the necessity and importance of the collaborative relationship?	Collaboration is important and beneficial to students and the professionals.	Positive aspects of collaboration existed in working together for student success. The relationship is beneficial.
What is the nature and scope of collaboration between the school counselor and special education teacher working with students with disabilities?	Nature of collaboration is multifaceted.	Nature of collaboration is complex.
What is are the perceived roles of the school counselor and special education teacher in the collaborative relationship? How are roles defined?	School counselors have multiple roles in collaboration; some roles are assumed and some are designated. These roles include: Lead Education Agency (LEA) representative and IEP meeting facilitator, consultant, behavior specialist, parent liaison, human resource person, state assessment specialist, learner, outside referral liaison.	Special education teacher roles are multidimensional. Roles are based on expertise and professional needs. Roles include: consultant, supervisor of referral process, special education expert, IEP implementation specialist and trainer, and leader in instruction for students with disabilities.
What are the outcomes of the existing collaboration if there are any?	Student outcomes are increased students' achievement, decrease	Student outcomes are students have access to the services they need, students feel better about themselves, and

	student behavior, and closing the achievement gap.

Professional outcomes are increased knowledge base and teamwork and less litigation and liability. | students' misbehaviors are decreased. Strengthened relationships with parents.

Professional outcomes are more ideas and successful strategies to be used with diverse students are gained and the maintenance of high expectations for all students are sustained by professionals. |
| What are the challenges that each of the professionals face in collaboration? | School counselors reported challenges include time constraints and opportunity to collaborate, conflicting schedules, clashes in professional approach in working together and agreeing on best practices. | Special education teachers reported time and time management, schedule conflicts and limitations, multiple tasks and responsibilities as a special education teacher, school counselor's limited knowledge in special education, and limited support for collaboration from administrators. |
| What strategies may work to foster the collaborative relationship between school counselors and special education teachers? | School counselors reported the need for training in multiple disabilities and effects of disabilities on | Special education teachers reported need for training in mental health issues |

| | student academic, emotional, and mental health development, more training in legal issues, special education protocol, laws, special education process, and inclusion intervention and strategies. School counselor education programs increase focus on preparing school counselors for (a) working with students with disabilities, (b) collaboration, and (c) understanding school counselor's role in special education. | associated with student behavior, first hand observation of collaboration in action, training in implementing CCRS, and continuous professional development in updates on laws and guidelines in special education. |

Research Questions

Research Question 1: What are your attitudes and beliefs of school counselors and special education teachers toward the importance of the collaborative relationship?

School counselors and special education teachers reported that the collaborative relationship is important and beneficial. Twenty participants (90.00%) reported "Yes" on a survey questionnaire when asked if the collaborative relationship between school counselors and special education teachers is beneficial. In the focus group interview sessions, both school counselors and special education teachers commented that collaborative relationship of the school counselor and special education teachers is important and beneficial. The special education teachers' comments in the focus group are presented below.

> SET2: I think it's a good relationship especially when you have students with behavior problems. Because oftentimes we try to incorporate counselors into our IEP and

implementation of the IEP …counseling services or behavior interventions, plans, conflict resolution interventions. Things of that nature.

SET3: I think it is important for that counselor to know everything the special education teacher knows about students with special needs because the counselor also has to go into the classroom and have counseling sessions with the students and it's just good for her to know who the students are. And also, be familiar with their IEP.

SET1: For me it's important because of the carryover of settings. I appreciate the relationships, the report between all parties, to co-teach for one purpose for that particular child. It's really important for me on a weekly bases to make sure we are co-teaching to make sure all parties aware what we are working on in speech therapy, as well as parents.

SET4: …collaboration aspect is important because we have to have a counselor in the process. The counselor is an intricate part just as the special education teacher, parent, and the student. It's a more cohesive process.

In the school counselors' focus group interview session, the school counselor responses

are as follows.

SC1: It is positive. I think you have to work collaboratively with the special education teacher in order to achieve the goal of the special education student…

SC2: I agree, positive and beneficial. I believe as far as collaborating with special education teachers, the goals and the needs of those students can be met. The relationship makes that possible….

SC4: I believe that the school counselor is only able to meet the needs of special education students through the collaborative relationship with special education teachers. So I have a positive view of the relationship.

Research Question 2: What is the nature and scope of collaboration between the school

counselor and special education teachers?

Focus group participants characterized the nature and scope of collaboration as

multifaceted in nature. The scope of collaboration was described as limited due to time

constraints, schedule conflicts, and workload as described by participants in the study. Common

themes among the school counselor focus group distinguish the nature and scope as multifaceted

in nature as it relates to facilitating meetings, contacting parents, obtaining and making records

accessible, consulting and advising special education teachers in state assessment regulations and

accommodations, and arranging referrals with outside agencies.

> SC3: I've served on the IEP team as a facilitator for the IEP meetings.

> SC2: I too serve on the IEP committee. I am the LEA representative and RTI facilitator. We have professional development in our school district to help with collaboration with special education teachers and general education teachers. I work with the SEF (Special Education Facilitator) person. We work together in order to iron out differences to help special education students within the regular education classes or their pull out classes.

> SC2: Most of the time in meetings with them (special education teachers) are during the summer months. I am responsible for their special education students' schedule. The special education teacher and the Special Education Facilitator (SEF) and I get together and try to plan students' schedules and the plan they (special education students) will follow for the next school year. The next time we meet is during the school year. I will check in from time to time…

Special education teachers view the nature and scope of collaboration as multifaceted as

did school counselors. It relates to planning and engaging in IEP meetings, accessing records,

answering questions and providing specific information about special education rules and

regulations, and law regarding special education and about a specific student's IEP.

> ST1: Well for me, plays large part of the meetings. The counselor is a team member, help make decisions, add suggestions, as well as, help me with demographic information, and state testing questions.

> SET3: Then also, if a student has been absent a lot, I would come to the counselor to help me contact that parent to find out why that student has been absent.

> ST2: Not just that, as a case manager, I am responsible to academic needs of my students. I spoke with my counselor earlier this week because I have a students who has failing grades. But it was due to his home environment interfering with his grades and school performance. Together the counselor and I discovered this information. So all aspect of the student's life is our responsibility as a team…

Research Question 3: What are the perceived roles of school counselors and special education teachers in the collaborative relationship? How are roles defined?

School counselors who participated in focus group reported the following roles for school counselors in collaboration with special education teachers: consultant, Local Education Agency (LEA) representative for Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings, behavior consultant and interventionist, social skills consultant, resource for obtaining students school records and other records, parent liaison, resource for outside referrals, consultant for state assessments as it relates testing accommodations and regulations.

> SC3: I've served on the IEP team as a facilitator for the IEP meetings.

> SC2: I too serve on the IEP committee. I am the LEA representative and RTI facilitator. We have professional development in our school district to help with collaboration with special education teachers and general education teachers.

> SC2: I think the special education teacher and school counselor jointly define the roles, rules, and expectations of the relationship. We work together with the roles in collaborating together to meet the needs of these students. I work closely with the SEF (Special Education Facilitator). We work together with special education teachers, general education teachers to benefit special education students at my school.

Special education teachers who participated in the focus group identified the following perceived roles. The consensus among special education teachers regarding the roles in collaboration was to help students succeed. In addition, participants said school counselor's role was to provide behavior intervention, to collect data on the students and make student data accessible to special education teachers, to be a liaison between parents and outside agencies.

> SET3: Our roles in collaboration is to make sure special education students succeed.

> SET2: Going back to student behavior, the counselor's role is to provide behavior interventions and strategies that we or general education teachers can use in the classroom with special education students.

SET5: Our role in collaboration as special education teachers is to inform the counselor when we have needs or our students have needs. When we have issues with student behavior and academics or with something personal going on with the child, the counselor should be made aware of them. Whether its questions about state testing or requirements for the child as well, the school counselor will be able to assist us. However, the special education teacher would have to let the counselor know what they the needs are in order for them to assist.

SET3: The counselor and I also speak with that students… If the child is involved with mental health issues, the teacher can speak with the school counselor, and the counselor could speak with the counselor at mental health pertaining to that student. Once the school counselor consults with the mental health counselor; she can brief the special education teachers of relevant information about the student to make teachers aware of any and issues that may affect his/her behavior or academic performance at school.

Survey questionnaire responses to item Q10, what is your role in collaboration?, are

listed below. These responses are consistent with the focus group responses.

SC: Consultant, LEA, facilitator

SC: Assessment and Behavior Purposes

SC: LEA

SC: Consultant

SC: Lead and recipient

SC: Behavior consultant, social skills help, academic guidance

SC: LEA

SC: I serve as the LEA for IEP meetings. I work closely with teachers to contact parents if there are behavior issues that need to be addressed.

SC: Consultant

SC: My role is the learner in the collaborative relationship.

SC: Student records, outside referrals, state assessments, parental guidance, attendance, and parent meetings.

SET: Bring any skills, resources, training, etc. that are applicable to situation

SET: Discussing meetings, special education issues, and strategies for the general education teacher to use with special needs students

SET: Supervisor of the referral process

SET: Consultant

SET: Make sure general education teachers are aware of the students' IEP and make sure they are providing appropriate services

SET: Brainstorm about ways to help our students educationally and behaviorally

SET: Collaborate to create meaningful and appropriate experiences for the children, we also combine efforts to attend to behaviors the best that we can

SET: Listen, list standards for each grade level 1 through 6; remind co-teachers of laws; accommodations; modification if necessary; inform teachers of responsibilities of IEP, etc.

SET: My role in collaboration with general education teachers, special education teachers and counselors is to consult with them to make sure my students are receiving the services that they need in order to be successful in the general education environment. I also consult with them to make certain that their general education teachers are correctly using the curriculum guides to write lesson plans to address special education students' individual needs.

Research Question 4: What are the outcomes of the existing collaboration if there are any?

In the focus group interview sessions, school counselor participants reported the outcomes were: (a) less litigation, (b) increased students' achievement, (c) closing the achievement gap, (d) increased knowledge-base and (e) teamwork. Outcomes that special education teachers reported included (a) students get the services they need, (b) students feel better about themselves, and (c) students' misbehaviors are decreased.

SC3: Sometimes the counselor can be a cushion for special education students when they have need for an outlet. Sometimes they need to express how they are really feeling. The classroom is not always an inviting place for this to happen. We allow these students to

express themselves in our sessions while they learn skills. I believe this helps their behavior and help them to achieve academically and socially in the classroom.

SET5: Students are more likely to have access to the services they need and the help that they need when we collaborate with the school counselor. Because if the teacher has more information, the strategies and ways to help the children succeed, then they (student) are going to succeed. If the school counselor has an open door and is willing to collaborate and help the teachers, then whatever needs the child has is going to be met. So if the child has all of his/her needs met, whether it be emotional, physical, or academic they are going to more willing to or more likely to succeed.

Responses to survey questionnaire item Q14, what are the outcomes of existing collaboration?, are offered below. Responses below encompass both student outcomes and professional outcomes. School counselors identified student's academic, psychological, emotional, behavioral and social improvement as positive student outcomes of the collaboration while identifying school counselor's increased knowledge about students with special needs, less litigation and liability, and increased positive communications between professionals as professional outcomes. Special education teachers identified students benefit academically, students receive more assistance and services, students' behavior decrease as student outcomes. They cited professional outcomes as having access to more ideas and successful strategies to be used with diverse students and the maintenance of high expectations for all students is sustained by professionals.

SC: Less litigation and closing the achievement gaps

SC: Usually the outcomes is that we, as counselors, are aware of the symptoms of students with disabilities.

SC: N/A

SC: Students' increased academic and social achievement

SC: Students benefit from communication between all professionals.

SC: Students feel better about themselves, after talking with special education teachers and counselor.

SC: Most of the time when working with students and special education teachers, the outcomes are always positive. The behavior is corrected. The professional relationship between the special education teachers and myself are always positive. We work together to resolve problems or to create plans that will benefit the student the most.

SC: Professional outcomes- I grow in knowledge of working with exceptional students. I learn more about the rules and resources governing special education. Student outcomes are positive and result in academic and behavior progress.

SC: Many times the outcomes are successful and sometimes they are not.

SET: Students can benefit academically from team planning. Sharing ideas with one another builds teamwork and increases knowledge base.

SET: More assistance for special needs students, and more interaction between teachers, counselors, and special education teachers.

SET: Students are not given adequate services in school counseling.

SET: Student's behavior has decreased.

SET: When collaborating with other special education teachers, it allows for better outcomes for students, more teaching ideas, more ideas for ways to help our students that we may not think of, or identify possible antecedents to behavior we may be blind to.

SET: Collaborating with others special education teachers help us provide successful strategies for our diverse students.

SET: Students benefit from the collaboration of teachers, counselors and administrator to maintain high expectation for all students.

Research Question 5: What are the challenges that each of the professionals face in collaboration?

The major challenge in collaboration is time, time management, and schedule conflicts as reported by most participants in both focus group interviews and survey questionnaire. Others identified limited knowledge of school counselors concerning special education, law, policies, and strategies for working with special education students, limited knowledge and skills of school counselor in understanding exceptionalities, and indicators of exceptionalities.

For Survey questionnaire item Q13, what are the challenges in collaboration between school counselors and special education teachers?, participant responses are listed below. School counselors identify limited time and time conflicts and lack of flexibility as major challenges. Special education teachers identified limited time, time management, and getting the support of administrators as key challenges in collaboration.

SC: Adult learning styles and approaches to problem-solving and helping special education students. Differences of opinion or differences in approach to working with the special education students. Accepting and respecting differing opinions and approaches. Changing the mindset from fixed to open.

SC: There is not enough time to collaborate

SC: Time can be the biggest challenge because our schedules do not allow a large amount of time for collaboration with the special education department.

SC: Busy schedules

SC: Time and conflicting schedules

SC: Finding enough time during the day to collaborate

SC: Time, complexity of understanding the multiple exceptionalities, rules and laws, and skills application are most challenging for me.

SC: Getting outside agencies for psychological and mental health referral is a challenge.

SET: Scheduling meetings and testing students

SET: Counselors are overwhelmed with a multitude of other duties that are not related to counseling (assessment, substituting, etc.)

SET: Time management

SET: Time is a challenge in collaboration between school counselors and special education teachers.

SET: I really haven't experienced much collaboration with the counselor, only during testing season if I have a student testing with accommodations.

SET: Getting support of co-teachers and administration

SET: In my opinion, the biggest challenge is time. Teachers have only 30 minutes to plan. Therefore, there is not really enough time to meet and plan for students. Teachers are required to complete so many tasks.

Research Question 6: What needs must be addressed to enhance collaboration between school counselors and special education teachers?

Focus group participants in both sessions were asked if they could change one thing about the collaborative relationship, what would it be and why. They were also asked, how you would advise a new school counselor or new special education teacher about establishing and maintaining their collaborative role in working with students with disabilities. Finally, participants were asked about training they would recommend for themselves to better prepare them for collaborating with school counselors or special education teachers in working with student with disabilities.

School counselors reported the need for training in multiple disabilities and the effects of disabilities on student academic, emotional, and mental health development, more training in legal issues, special education protocol, law, and process, inclusion intervention and strategies. Special education teachers reported the need for training in mental health issues associated with student behavior. They also commented the need for first hand observation of collaboration in action, training in implementing CCRS, and continuous professional development in updating on laws and guidelines in special education.

SC1: Well I am in agreement with the time and schedules. When I think about my previous school I worked for several years, special education teachers would shut down every Wednesday. Their schedules were modified every Wednesday to satisfied whatever needs or priorities that need attention. This practice could be beneficial for school counselor and special education teacher collaboration. Perhaps these professionals can shut down for two hours twice a month to collaborate with one another. After IEPs are written, this is what we have to do. When IEPs are amended or revised school counselors

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may not always be aware of the specific changes. Set aside time for collaboration twice per month would help both parties and students' progress.

SC2: I would advise a new counselor to shadow a special education teacher, or get together with a special education teacher and become more knowledgeable of special education laws and whatever is needed to help her work with students with disabilities or to help a specific special education child achieve.

For survey questionnaire item Q15, what training do you think you need to better prepare you for collaborating with school counselors and special education teachers in working with students with disabilities?, participants' responses are shown below. School counselors identified knowledge on different disabilities and law, intervention strategies, and role definition as areas for training while special education teachers suggested the latest trend in professional development- PD 360, site visits to other schools where collaboration is cultivated successfully, training in mental health issues associated with students with disabilities, training in composing behavior plans, and training implementing CCRS with students with disabilities as training topics to prepare professionals for collaboration.

SC: Training is needed on different disabilities and how the disabilities could affect the students academically, emotionally, and mentally.

SC: More information on legal issues.

SC: Understanding new laws, record keeping, reports, and strategies that overlap and have been met with success

SC: Tier II and III interventions

SET: The latest professional development trends including PD 360, visiting other schools within and outside of the state for innovative and effective professional development, trends, strategies and interventions for school counselors working with students with disabilities. In addition, training in knowledge of standards, policies, law, etc. mandated by state and federal bodies concerning special education and serving students.

SET: Training related to the mental health issues that are often associated with the behavior of students with disabilities

SET: How to collaborate on writing behavior intervention plans

SET: For special education teachers, really first hand observations of collaboration happening at its best would be the best way to train.

SET: I need more training on how to use the curriculum guides in conjunction with Alabama Course of Study (College and Career Readiness Standards).

SET: Continuous professional development training with special education to be updated on laws and guidelines pertaining to special education. Workshops set up by the State Department of Education and even Webinars could be helpful.

Summary

This chapter reported the data collected from participating school counselors and special education teachers for this study through focus group interviews and survey questionnaire. Two major components were presented in this chapter. The first component presented was participants' demographical information, professional status, and weekly time spent in collaboration, which were displayed in Figures 1-7. In addition, Table 1 was presented to establish coherency and organization of the collected data from focus group interviews and survey questionnaire resulting in six themes to answer the research questions. The second component presented in this chapter were the participants' responses to open-ended questions from the focus group interview sessions and open-ended items for the survey questionnaire.

CHAPTER V. DISCUSSION

This chapter starts with a restatement of the purpose of the study and a review of the methodology, participants and research questions for this study. A presentation of the findings and their connection to the research questions is listed next. Implications and recommendations are presented for school counselors, counselor education programs, and administrators that may facilitate collaboration between school counselors and special education teachers and enhance school counselors working with students with disabilities. Suggestions for future research are presented in conclusion.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine the nature and scope of collaboration between school counselors and special education teachers in working with students with disabilities. To satisfy this purpose, the phenomenological qualitative study was implemented for this research study using focus group interviews and survey questionnaire as instruments for collecting data. Twenty-two participants, eleven school counselors and eleven special education teachers, who have had school counselor/special education teacher collaboration experiences, participated in a survey questionnaire. Nine of the twenty-two participants took part in two audio-recorded focus group interviews. In the school counselor session four school counselors participated, and in the special education teacher session, five special education teachers participated. The focus group interview protocol and survey questionnaire used for data collection were designed using the six research questions developed for this study. This study was conducted in the south central, river-region area of a southern east coast state.

Research Questions

Research questions for this study were as follows:

1. What are the attitudes and beliefs of school counselors and special education teachers toward necessity and importance of the collaborative relationship?

2. What is the nature and scope of collaboration between the school counselor and special education teacher in working with students with disabilities?

3. What are the perceived roles of the school counselor and special education teacher in the collaborative relationship? How are roles defined?

4. What are the outcomes of the existing collaboration if there are any?

5. What are the challenges that each of the professionals face in collaboration?

6. What strategies may work to foster the collaborative relationship between school counselors and special education teachers?

Findings

The five key findings derived from this study. These findings are listed below.

Finding 1: Collaboration exists between school counselors and special education teachers.

Finding 2: The nature and scope of collaboration is multifaceted and complex.

Finding 3: Roles in collaboration are multidimensional, roles are based on the needs and the expertise of professionals. Some roles are designated by the school or school district and some are assumed roles.

Finding 4: Positive student outcomes and professional outcomes result from school counselor and special education teacher collaboration.

Finding 5: Challenges faced in collaboration between school counselors and special education teachers include time constraints, conflicting schedules, limited knowledge and awareness of school counselors in how to work with students with disabilities, student exceptionalities, special education law, policies, and interventions, and inadequate support for collaboration between the two professionals.

Finding 6: Strategies for enhancing collaboration include: (a) professional development and training for school counselors focused on special education laws, policies, procedures and practices, exceptionalities, collaboration, and inclusion practices; and (b) providing more time for collaboration

Implications and Discussion of the Findings

Beliefs and Attitudes

Finding 1: Collaboration exist between school counselors and special education teachers.

Majority of the participants in this study expressed encouraging views and attitudes regarding the collaborative relationship between school counselors and special education teachers in working with students with disabilities. Professionals working with students with disabilities have a duty to be committed to engaging with other professionals in promoting student success (Professional and Teacher Task Force, 2004). This idea is congruent with the participants' responses in this study. Both school counselors and special education teachers viewed the relationship as beneficial and suggested that collaboration between the professionals is an important aspect in meeting the needs of students with disabilities. During the focus group interview sessions, school counselors and special education teachers spoke with genuineness about the significance of the collaborative relationship. Special education teachers communicated about how the relationship eased some aspects involved in the work they do as

special educators. Providing resources, making arrangements, contacting third parties, investigating issues involving students, responding to requests concerning students' behavior and cumulative school records, and being a resource were among the topics discussed during the special education teacher focus group interview. Whenever possible, these professionals said that they collaborated with school counselors to complete both routine tasks as well as unusual matters if they arise. During the school counselor focus group interview session, vulnerabilities were uncovered in the discussion as it relates serving students with disabilities. Therefore, school counselors in the focus group viewed the collaborative relationship as an essential need for them in working with students with disabilities. These school counselors viewed the special education teachers as the guru for working with students with disabilities. Thus, collaboration was imperative for school counselors in meeting exceptional students' needs. The participants in the groups communicated a willingness to partner. Both groups described the collaborative relationship as a mutual necessity and an advantage in their professional duties.

Nature and Scope of Collaboration

Finding 2: The nature and scope of collaboration is multifaceted and complex.

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 1993) provided a position on school counselors working with exceptional students. ASCA recognized advocating, planning student transition, making referrals to specialists, functioning as part of the school multidisciplinary team, and serving as a consultant to parents and school staff as functions of the counselor's work with students with disabilities (Frye, 2005; ASCA, 1993). School counselors and special education teachers in this study viewed the nature and scope of the collaborative relationship as multifaceted and sometime complicated. It is possible that the nature and scope of collaboration is branded in such terms because the expectations and the realities are not evenly

matched in collaboration between these professionals. According to participants, school counselors and special education teachers are expected to collaborate and they do on some level. Moreover, participants insist that opportunities to collaborate are not always possible. As articulated by participants in this study, school counselors are currently operating the capacities identified by ASCA as it relates to school counselors serving students with disabilities. However, as revealed in the school counselor focus group session, the school's mission and academic program oftentimes influence the nature and scope of the collaborative relationship between these professionals. This confines the prospect to expand the scope of collaboration. School counselor participants contend that sometimes working to meet school's goals take precedence over all others, therefore placing less importance on the needs of other programs.

Perceived Roles

Finding 3: Roles in collaboration are multidimensional, roles are based on the needs and the expertise of professionals. Some roles are designated by the school or school district and some are assumed roles.

School counselors typically facilitated IEP meetings as part of the school leadership team according to participants. School counselors also help in planning, assessing and revising academic and behavior interventions as well. When RTI results warrant student referral to special education or outside agency, school counselors collaborate to make appropriate referrals (ASCA, 2008). Special education teachers are routinely described as the consultant for "all things special education" for school counselors and other professionals in the school. The expertise of the professional and the needs of the professional is are taken into account in determining the roles in collaboration. Similarly, the school counselors were identified as the behavior specialists and points of contact information for special education referrals resulting

from RTI, mental health referrals, and liaison for parents, teachers, and outside agencies among the sample population in this study. ASCA (1993) suggested counseling roles of transforming student behavior, teaching social skills, and improving student self-esteem through counseling activities for students and parents (Frye, 2005; ASCA, 1993). School counselors often participate in educational planning for exceptional students serving as Individualized education program (IEP) team members (Erford, House, & Martin, 2003). Findings from this study correlate with the aforementioned of all roles. School counselor participants identified their roles primarily included facilitator of IEP meetings as the LEA. Some reported that role of the school counselor associated with students' behavior and behavior intervention and assessment.

Special education teacher participants primarily defined their role as consultant as it relates to informing or educating teachers about students' IEPs, behavior issues of students, and barriers that may exist in the students' home. Also, special education teachers and school counselors both identify the special education teachers as consultant to school counselors concerning special education laws, policies, rules, and regulations. In addition to consulting regarding policies, special education teachers were identified as consultant to understanding students' exceptionalities and characteristics of exceptionalities of students including medical and mental health ramifications of various exceptionalities. The role of the special education teacher is quite instrumental in helping school counselors in their work with students with disabilities. School counselors in this study shared their reliance on this aspect of the collaborative relationship. The results of this study indicated that these roles are defined based on the professionals' needs and expertise. Also, some roles and duties are often determined by the building administrator and programs coordinator within the school districts.

Outcomes of Existing Collaboration

Finding 4: Positive student outcomes and professional outcomes result from school counselor and special education teacher collaboration.

School counselor and special education teacher participants in this study shared parallel perspectives regarding the existing outcomes for students and professionals as a result of existing collaboration. According to Professional Teacher Task Force (2004) professional educators must have the capacity to efficiently take part as team members to increase achievement outcomes for students with disabilities. Professionals in this study reported having a sense of team work and comradery among educators when collaborating to ensure students flourish. Special education teachers reported progressive student outcomes when they were served by collaborative efforts of school counselors and themselves. The students with disabilities showed improvement in academic, emotional and physical domains and some were able to dismiss from special education services. Likewise, school counselors in the focus group articulated positivity in student and professional outcomes as a result of the partnership between them and special education teachers. Less litigation and liability complaints and students' academic and behavior achievement results in collaboration between the professionals. Participants in this study spoke enthusiastically when sharing outcomes and potential outcomes of the collaborative relationship. Some professionals shared examples through specific stories of students during the focus group sessions. Participants spoke with a sense of accomplishment in helping students succeed and how it reinforces the confidence parents have with school professionals as well.

Challenges in Collaboration

Finding 5: Challenges faced in collaboration between school counselors and special education teachers include time constraints, conflicting schedules, limited knowledge and

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awareness of school counselors in how to work with students with disabilities, student

exceptionalities, special education law, policies, and interventions, and inadequate support for

collaboration between the two professionals.

In contrast to the existing outcomes of collaboration between school counselors and

special education teachers in working with students with disabilities, professionals in this study

revealed that there are many remaining challenges faced in collaboration. Time to collaborate

and plan for students and conflicting schedules of school counselors and special education

teachers were the most frequent responses regarding challenges faced in collaboration rendered

by participants in this study. Time allotment and availability of collaboration are valuable to

quality inclusion practices (Carpenter & Dyal, 2007). School counselors are compelled to show

how comprehensive school counseling programs influence student achievement and the success

of the comprehensive school program (Dahir & Stone, 2004). This expectation requires sufficient

time for collaboration. Both school counselors and special education teachers expressed how

overwhelmed they were with multiple responsibilities and duties entailed in their professional

roles. Many times these role requirements impedes the collaboration between the two.

Sometimes is interrupts the existing collaborative efforts. One school counselor expressed during

the focus group session that her principal reassigned her role in working with special education

teachers to another faculty member. However, the school counselor's responsibilities in working

with students remained an expectation of special education teachers, parents, and administrator.

Special education teachers shared their common dilemma of not having ample time to

collaborate due tasks involving writing student IEPs, evaluating IEPs, amending IEPs, holding

IEP meetings, responding to requests of faculty and staff working with their students, meeting

program demands and deadlines, and engaging in professional development activities just to

name a few. This makes the case for an increased focus on time management for professionals to collaborate and plan to fulfill program expectations. And thus allotting more time for collaboration must be recognized as a priority and supported by school administrators in addressing this challenge.

Limited knowledge. School counselors' limited knowledge of special education and details involved with working with students with disabilities hampers the collaborative efforts between professionals according to participants in this study. This was attributed with the expansion of the school counselor's role in schools. Special education teachers identified obstacles in collaboration due to school counselor's limited knowledge and ability to assist them in providing appropriate behavior interventions used in behavior planning compatible with students' exceptionalities.

Conversely, school counselors in this study comments suggested barriers to their knowledge and skills in assisting in behavioral planning and intervention strategies suited to students' disabilities as well. School counselors mentioned that they could benefit from training in understanding student exceptionalities and behaviors associated with exceptionalities to better assist special education teachers in behavior planning and intervention strategies for special education students. In addition, the participants' comments put forward that they have limited knowledge of the mental health needs of students with disabilities. Also, they are uninformed of the complexity of exceptionalities of students with disabilities and the associated mental health issues that are characterized with students' disabilities. School counselors in this study acknowledged that they could benefit from training and additional support in providing mental health services and collaborating with outside agencies to coordinate programs and services for students.

In addition limited knowledge of how to work with special education students in the general education environment as well as how to work with students with serve disabilities in self-contained unit also obstructed collaboration with special education teachers. When asked how they work with students with disabilities in the classroom guidance sessions, two school said that they work with these students the same as with the general education students. Both school counselors said that in classroom guidance sessions everyone was included; however, the school counselors did not explicitly mention any inclusion practices they used or acknowledged their use of the students' IEPs to guide their practices in instruction of exceptional students. This instance make evident the present gaps in school counselors' knowledge of inclusion practices necessary for working with special education students. Furthermore, this assumption establishes a case for the need for school counselor responsiveness of inclusion strategies that will address the diverse learning styles of this growing population of students in the general education setting.

Public school populace is projected to escalation from 49 million students to 51.2 million students by 2015 school year (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2006; Clark & Breman, 2009). Currently, the number of students with disabilities is well beyond 6 million students, which exceeds the trajectory 10% of the entire public school population. By the 2015 school year, these students are expected to increase in numbers as well (NCES, 2006; Clark & Breman, 2009). This upsurge of students with diverse learning needs and disabilities will populate the general education classroom as well (USDE, 2013). Educators working with exceptional students should foster inclusion of special education students in general education settings to ensure students' right of access to a free and appropriate education in their least restrictive environment (Professional and Teacher Task Force, 2004; ECE, 2010; ASCA, 2013). School counselors deliver classroom guidance sessions in the general education setting. The

diverse instructional and personal requirements of students' exceptionalities and the skillfulness of determining the appropriate instructional strategies influence the positive and negative attitudes toward inclusion from the general educator's perspective (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). For the purpose of this dilemma, school counselors would be considered the general educator during classroom guidance sessions. Self-efficacy as it relates to inclusion practices and application is just as confusing to school counselors as it may be to general education classroom teachers, as indicated by participants in this study. Better understanding for inclusion, inclusion practices, and inclusion applications in school counseling could enhance counselors' self-efficacy in working with students with disabilities and collaborating with special education teachers.

Lack of understanding of the school counselors in working with students with severe exceptionalities in the self-contained unit is also a hindrance in collaboration between school counselors and special education teachers. In the focus group interview with special education teachers, special education teacher five, who is a teacher of exceptional students with severe needs in the self-contained or multi-unit classroom, expressed the need for the collaborative efforts to focus on interventions associated the school counselor's knowledge and experience in working with students with serve needs and understanding their role in working with these students. Thus, the success of inclusion depends on the collaborative efforts of the special education teacher and general education teacher for purposeful and suitable program delivery (Sugai & Honer, 1994). This includes school counselors. Conflict between school counselors and special education teachers interfered with collaboration between the two in the past (Idol & Baran, 1992). Participants in this study shared experiences involving clashes between special education teachers and school counselors in collaboration. School counselors and special

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education teachers in this study experiences involved incongruities between the professionals mainly due to the professionals' minimal knowledge and skillfulness of collaboration and meeting the needs of serve students. It was concluded that professionals were unaware of collaborative models to facilitate the process.

Finally, other barriers in collaboration between school counselors and special education teachers is the limited knowledge of school counselors related to various aspects of special education including but not limited to IDEA, Section 504, state regulatory standards and guidelines concerning special education, interventions and strategies used with students with disabilities, and when and how to make appropriate referrals to special education. According to professional organizations governing school counselors and special education teachers and other advocates for professionals working with students with disabilities, professional educators must have knowledge of Section 504, IDEA, and state operating standards required for working with students with diverse learning needs (Professional and Teacher Task Force, 2004; ECE, 2010; ASCA, 2013). This includes school counselors. School counselor are expected to have a working awareness of laws, policies, and standards outlined by federal, state, and local entities in professional standards of practice for educators working with students with disabilities. Participants in this study believe that they need increased development in the aforementioned to build their professional competencies in working with students with disabilities.

Strategies to Enhance Collaboration

Finding 6: Strategies for enhancing collaboration include: (a) professional development and training for school counselors focused on special education laws, policies, procedures and practices, exceptionalities, collaboration, and inclusion practices; and (b) providing more time for collaboration

Continuous professional development on best practices to address the assorted needs of students in the general education classroom and planning time are key concerns which influence attitudes toward inclusion (Horne & Timmons, 2009). Special education teachers and school counselors both need preparation concerning inclusion practices and strategies as revealed by the participants in this study. Moreover, school counselors and special education teachers may benefit from specific professional development and training in collaboration as well. Participants in this study recommended professional development in special education law and policies, exceptionalities, and mental health and behavior issues associated with special needs students in order to enhance collaboration. In addition, having the time and opportunity to facilitative effective collaboration between school counselors and special education teachers were suggested. It also suggested that in an effort to enhance the collaboration between pre-service school counselors and special education teacher trainee's knowledge should be cultivated during their training programs.

One conjecture can be made as a result of this study is that school counselor education programs must continue to recognize the needs of schools and the needs of the diverse learning population of students therewith in. And so, school counselor education programs must essentially have a heightened attentiveness to the skills and awareness school counselors need to prepare them for working with students with disabilities and collaborating with other professionals. Perhaps more interdisciplinary experiences working with pre-service special education teachers or special education faculty through coursework, practicum, internship, or clinical experiences could better prepare school counselors for the challenges that await them in schools.

Various agents of school reform have significantly influenced the accountability of school counselors and the effectiveness of comprehensive school counseling programs in schools. The increasing enrollment of students with disabilities in schools has added complexity to the school counselors' accountability to meeting the needs of all students. This fact augments the necessity of collaboration between school counselors and special education teachers in effectively working with students with disabilities. However, some modifications are essential to existing collaborative efforts for progressive ensue. Adequate time for collaboration between school counselors and special education teachers must become a priority to enhance the work of school counselors in serving students with disabilities. Professional development and training that focus on collaboration, inclusion practices, special education issues and professional roles should be provided to school counselors and special education teachers to provide a foundation for practices. In additions, school counseling programs could incorporate more collaborative exchanges for pre-service school counselors to better prepare them in collaboration and serving the population of students with disabilities. These programs should also help to establish role clarification for school counselors regarding their work with special education. This is necessary to better direct the professional development and time management efforts.

Limitations of the Study

A key limitation of the study was the time the study was conducted. The study was conducted during the spring of the school year. This time is considered the busiest time of the school year to include standardized state assessments and end of the school year procedures such as graduation, promotional activities, awards programs, and student grades. When this study was conducted, many school counselors were heavily involved in the aforementioned activities.

Otherwise, more school counselors may have participated in the study. At the same time, special education teachers were engaged in the end of the school year tasks as well, which included writing IEPs, conducting IEP meetings, reevaluating students, and finalizing student special education records. This fact may have limited in the number of special education participants and the availability of both groups of participates for the study.

Knowledge produced might not generalize to other people or other settings (i.e. findings might be unique to the relatively few people included in the research study). Only nine educators participated in the focus group interview sessions and 22 educators participated in the survey questionnaire. They were recruited from narrow defined geographical areas. The results are more easily influenced by the researcher's personal biases and idiosyncrasies although the researcher tried to avoid subjectivity by adopting multiple mechanisms such as bracketing, data triangulation, and member check.

Furthermore, the limited experience of the researcher in qualitative study could also be considered a limitation of the study.

Conclusions

This study attempted to explore and journal the experiences of eleven school counselors and eleven special education teachers in collaboration to meet the needs of students with disabilities. The participants expressed that existing collaboration between school counselors and special education teachers is optimistic, yet limited. Challenges in the standing collaboration have been noted to include inadequate time for collaboration and limited knowledge and skills among collaborators. The results of this study suggest that alliance between school counselors and special education teachers is necessary. To conclude, the results indicated need for key augmentations to improve collaboration between school counselors and special education

teachers in working with students with disabilities. The hope of the researcher is the improved

collaboration between these professionals helps to better demonstrate the influence of school

counseling services with students with disabilities. Also, the researcher anticipate that school

counselors can better realize their role in working with students with disabilities.

Recommendations for Future Research

The results of this study creates a launch pad for future research on school counselors

working with students with disabilities, school counselors' roles in collaboration, inclusion

practices for school counselors, and reinforces school counseling services' contributions to

student achievement. The school counselor participants in this study shared similar experiences

in collaboration with special education teachers. Perhaps, a broader sample may reveal more

diverse experiences to explore within the sample. In addition, an examination or evaluation of

how school counseling programs prepare school counselors for collaboration and for working

with students with disabilities as well as understanding the school counselor's role in special

education could provide insight for improved practices.

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Appendix A

FOCUS GROUP SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVEIW PROTOCOL

School Counselor & Special Education Teacher Collaboration Study

Focus Group Semi-structured Interview Protocol

Good afternoon. Thank you for participating in this discussion today. I am _____, the moderator for the discussion. Through your shared experiences, the researcher hopes to gain from the session an understanding of the nature and scope of collaboration between school counselors and special education teachers in working with students with disabilities. To help make the focus group discussion productive, please adhere to the following ground rules:

- Speak loudly and clearly for accurate record; your voice should audible for optimal recording.

- Speak one at a time to ensure that everyone is heard.

- Use only first names to maintain confidentiality; no reports will be associated to your name. In addition, the researcher asks participants not repeat the responses of others after leaving the group.

During the session, I will ask the questions, listen to your responses, and facilitate the group. I will not participate in the discussion. It is important that everyone shares and takes an active role in the discussion. When everyone is ready, I will turn on the recorder and we will start.

[After Recorder is turned on]

This school counselor/special education focus group is being conduct for research dissertation for Starrah Huffman on [date] by _____, moderator.

Tape ID#_____

Start time_____

I. *Introduction: Let's start with introductions*

- *Please state your first name, your role, and indicate the grade (s) you currently work with.*

- *Now that we have been introduced, let's reflect on our previous training.*

- *Q: What specific training or professional development, in addition to your graduate studies coursework, have you had in collaborating to meet the needs of students with disabilities?*

II.   Research Question 1: Attitudes and Beliefs

- *Q: How do you define collaboration? What is your idea collaboration? What should it look like?*

- *Q: What are your attitudes and feelings about the collaborative relationship between the school counselor and special education teacher in meeting the needs of exceptional students?*

- *Q: What are the pros and cons of collaborating with the school counselor or special education teacher?*

III.   Research Question 2: Nature and Scope of Collaboration

- *Q: How do you work with students with disabilities?*

- *Q: What has been (share) your experience with collaboration in meeting the needs students with disabilities?*

- *Q: Share the process you use to collaborate with school counselors or special education teachers when working with exceptional students?*

- *Q: How often do you meet or plan for collaboration to meet the needs of exceptional students?*

IV.   Research Question 3: Perceived Roles

- *Q: Who is responsible for the educational needs of students with disabilities?*

- *Q: How were roles defined in the collaborative relationship?*

- *Q: What are specific expectations, tasks, and duties of the school counselor/special education teacher in the collaborative relationship?*

V.   ***Research Question 4: Outcomes of Existing Collaboration***

- *Q: What are the outcomes gained by students as a result of the collaborative relationship?*

- *Q: How did your collaboration help achieve the outcomes?*

VI.   ***Research Question 5: Challenges in Collaboration***

- *Q: What are the challenges that you have faced in collaboration?*

VII.   ***Research Question 6: Strategies to Enhance Collaboration***

- *Q: If you could change one thing about the collaborative relationship, what would it be and why?*

- *Q: How would you advise a new school counselor or new special education teacher about establishing and maintaining the collaborative role they have in working with students with disabilities?*

VIII.   ***Closing: Final Comments***

- *Q: Do you have any other comments or ideas you would like to add to the discussion before we end? Are there any additional comments? Did we leave out anything?*

Thank you again for your participation in this discussion*.*

End Time:_____

Appendix B

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Research Study: Nature and Scope of Collaboration between School Counselors and Special Education Teachers in Working with Students with Disabilities

You are invited to participate in a research study to explore the nature and scope of collaboration between school counselors and special education teachers in working with students with disabilities. Starrah Huffman, Ed.S, graduate student at Auburn University, is conducting the study under the direction of Dr. Suhyun Suh in Auburn University Department of Special Education, Rehabilitation, and Counseling. You were selected as a possible participant because you are age 19 or older and are presently working as a school counselor or special education teacher within the River Region.

Your participation is completely voluntary. If you decide to participate in this research study, you will be asked to complete a survey questionnaire. Your total time to complete the survey questionnaire will be less than 20 minutes. If you choose to, you are also asked to participate in an audio-recorded focus group interview, which will require documentation of your written consent. Focus group interviews will be recorded for transcription purposes only. For participation, please contact Starrah Huffman at sgh0011@tigermail.auburn.edu. Your commitment for the focus group discussion, if you choose to participate, will be approximately 90 minutes.

The risks associated with participating in this study are minimal. Breach of Confidentiality is a risk. Therefore, no identifiable information will be collected from you on either the survey questionnaire or focus group interview. However, participating in the focus group interview may involve breach of confidentiality due to the nature of group work. Focus group participants will be asked not to disclose any identifiable information from the group interview.

There are no immediate benefits to participating in this study. However, the information you provide will add to the understanding of the nature and scope of collaboration between school counselors and special education teachers in working with students with disabilities. No financial compensation will be provided.

If you change your mind about participating, you can withdraw at any time by discontinuing the online survey questionnaire by closing the browser. The data collected through survey questionnaire and focus group interview will not be identifiable to protect your identity. Information collected through your participation will be used to fulfill an educational requirement and may be published in a professional journal or part of a professional presentation.

Your decision about whether or not to participate or stop participating will not jeopardize your future relations with Auburn University or the Department of Special Education, Rehabilitation, and Counseling.

If you have questions about this study, please contact Starrah Huffman at sgh0011@tigermail.auburn.edu or her graduate advisor, Dr. Suhyun Suh at suhsuhy@auburn.edu.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Auburn

University Office of Human Subjects Research or the Institution Review Board by phone (334) 844-5966 or email hsubje@auburn.edu.

Starrah Huffman, Investigator   Date: 2/27/15

The Auburn University Institution Review Board has approved this document for use from February 22, 2015 to February 21, 2016. Protocol# 15-072 EP 1502.

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION ABOVE, YOU MUST DECIDE IF YOU WANT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT. IF YOU DECIDE TO PARTICIPATE, PLEASE CLICK NEXT BELOW.

1. **Gender.** What is your gender?

○ Female

○ Male

○ Other (please specify)

[   ]

2. **Race.** Which race/ethnicity best describes you? (Please choose only one.)

○ American Indian or Alaskan Native

○ Asian / Pacific Islander

○ Black or African American

○ Hispanic American

○ White / Caucasian

Multiple ethnicity / Other (please specify)

[   ]

3. **Age.** What is your age?

[   ]

Professional Status

4. **Position:** Which position best describes you?

○ School Counselor

○ Special Education Teacher/ Special Educator

5. **Educational setting.** What level best describes your educational work setting?

○ Elementary (P-6)

○ Middle/Jr. High (6-8)

○ High School (9-12)

○ Other (please specify)

[   ]

6. **Degree.** Which of the following best describes your highest degree level in the field of Education?

○ Bachelor's degree

○ Master's degree

○ Education Specialist degree

○ Doctorate degree

7. **Certification.** Which of the following best describes your highest level of Alabama Professional Educator certification?

○ Class B

○ Class A

○ Class AA

○ Alternative B

○ Emergency Certification

○ No Certification

8. **Experience.** Indicate your years of employment experience as a school counselor or special education teacher.

[   ]

9. On an average, WEEKLY, how much time do you spend collaborating with school counselors or special education teachers to meet the needs of students with disabilities?

[   ]

Collaboration

10. What is your role in collaboration?

[   ]

11. What aspect of your training, per-service and in- service, do you think prepared you for collaborating with school counselors or special education teachers in working with students with disabilities?

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12. Is the collaborative relationship between school counselors and special education teachers beneficial?

○ Yes

○ No

13. What are the challenges in collaboration between school counselors and special education teachers?

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14. What are the outcomes (student outcomes, professional outcomes, etc.) ?

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15. What training do you think you need to better prepare for collaborating with school counselors or special education teachers in working with students with disabilities?

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Thank you for completing this survey. If you would like to participate in the focus group interview, please contact Starrah Huffman at sgh0011@tigermail.auburn.edu.

Appendix C

Approved IRB Information Letter & Informed Consent

AUBURN
UNIVERSITY

DEPARTMENT OF
SPECIAL EDUCATION,
REHABILITATION, AND COUNSELING

INFORMATION LETTER
for Research Study entitled
*"Nature and Scope of Collaboration between School Counselors and Special Education
Teachers in Working with Students with Disabilities"*

You are invited to participate in a research study to explore the nature and scope of
collaboration between school counselors and special education teachers in working with
students with disabilities. Starrah Huffman, Ed.S, graduate student at Auburn University, is
conducting the study under the direction of Dr. Suhyun Suh in Auburn University Department
of Special Education, Rehabilitation, and Counseling. You were selected as a possible
participant because you are age 19 or older and are presently working as a school counselor or
special education teacher within the River Region.

Your participation is completely voluntary. If you decide to participate in this research study,
you will be asked to complete a survey questionnaire. Your total time to complete the survey
questionnaire will be less than 20 minutes. If you choose to, you are also asked to participate in
an audio-recorded focus group interview, which will require documentation of your written
consent. Focus group interviews will be recorded for transcription purposes only. For
participation, please contact Starrah Huffman at sgh0011@tigermail.auburn.edu. Your
commitment for the focus group discussion, if you choose to participate, will be approximately
90 minutes.

The risks associated with participating in this study are minimal. Breach of Confidentiality is
a risk. Therefore, no identifiable information will be collected from you on either the survey
questionnaire or focus group interview. However, participating in the focus group interview
may involve breach of confidentiality due to the nature of group work. Focus group
participants will be asked not to disclose any identifiable information from the group interview.

There are no immediate benefits to participating in this study. However, the information you
provide will add to the understanding of the nature and scope of collaboration between school
counselors and special education teachers in working with students with disabilities. No
financial compensation will be provided.

If you change your mind about participating, you can withdraw at any time by discontinuing
the online survey questionnaire by closing the browser. The data collected through survey
questionnaire and focus group interview will not be identifiable to protect your identity.
Information collected through your participation will be used to fulfill an educational
requirement and may be published in a professional journal or part of a professional
presentation.

Your decision about whether or not to participate or stop participating will not jeopardize
your future relations with Auburn University or the Department of Special Education,
Rehabilitation, and Counseling.

Page 1 of 2

If you have questions about this **study**, please contact Starrah Huffman at sgh0011@tigermail.auburn.edu or her graduate advisor, Dr. Suhyun Suh at suhsuhy@auburn.edu.

If you have questions about your rights **as a research participant**, you may contact the Auburn University Office of Human Subjects Research or the Institution Review Board by phone (334) 844-5966 or email hsubje@auburn.edu.

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION ABOVE, YOU MUST DECIDE IF YOU WANT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT. IF YOU DECIDE TO PARTICIPATE, PLEASE CLICK ON THE LINK BELOW.

YOU MAY PRINT A COPY OF THIS LETTER TO KEEP

Starrah Huffman   _2/27/15_
Investigator   Date

The Auburn University Institution Review Board has approved this document for use from **February 22, 2015** *to* **February 21, 2016***. Protocol#* **15-072 EP 1502**.

(LINK)
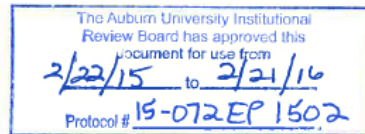
The Auburn University Institutional
Review Board has approved this
document for use from
2/22/15 to 2/21/16
Protocol # 15-072 EP 1502

Page 2 of 2

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AUBURN
UNIVERSITY

DEPARTMENT OF
SPECIAL EDUCATION,
REHABILITATION, AND COUNSELING

(NOTE: DO NOT SIGN THIS DOCUMENT UNLESS AN IRB APPROVAL STAMP WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN APPLIED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

Informed Consent

for Research Study entitled

"Nature and Scope of Collaboration between School Counselors and Special Education Teachers in Working with Students with Disabilities"

Focus Group Interview

Invitation to participate

Starrah Huffman, Ed.S, a graduate student at Auburn University in the Department of Special Education, Rehabilitation and Counseling, invites you to be part of a dissertation research study that she will conduct in order to complete requirements for a doctoral degree. Dr. Suhyun Suh, Ed.D, will supervise Starrah. The purpose of the study is to explore the nature and scope of collaboration between school counselors and special education teachers in working with students with disabilities. You are selected as a possible participant because you are a school counselor or a special education teacher within the River Region.

Description of your involvement

If you agree to be part of this research study, you will be asked to participate in one audio recorded focus group interview session in room 317 in Ralph Abernathy Building, on the campus of Alabama State University. The researcher will invite 5-7 school counselors and 5-7 special education teachers to discuss their experiences collaborating with school counselors and special education teachers working with students with disabilities. The discussion topics will include their attitudes and beliefs about the collaborative relationship, the nature and scope of collaboration, perceived roles of each professional, outcomes of existing collaboration, challenges in collaboration, and strategies to enhance collaboration. The researcher will guide the discussion. To protect your privacy, the researcher will not ask any identifiable questions about you or your school. The focus group interview will last approximately 90 minutes, and it will be audio recorded for transcription purposes only, which will require documentation of your written consent. You must agree to be audio recorded to participate in the focus group interview.

Benefits

There are not immediate benefits in participating in this study. However, information you provide will add to the understanding of the nature and scope of collaboration between school counselors and special education teachers. The researcher hopes that this study will contribute to the expansion of the collaborative relationship between the professionals. No financial compensation will be provided.

Participant's initials _____   Page 1 of 2

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Risks and discomforts

The risks associated with participating in this study are minimal. Breach of Confidentiality is a risk. There is a chance that another participant of the focus group could reveal something about you or your experience that they learned in the focus group discussion. All focus group participants are asked to respect the privacy of other participants in the group. Participants may tell others that they participated in a focus group and general topic of the discussion, but actual names and stories of other participants should not be repeated.

Confidentiality

The researcher plans to publish the results of this study in a research dissertation as part of a requirement for a doctoral degree, but will not include any information that would identify you or your school. To keep your information safe, the audio recordings from focus group interview sessions will not display any visible identifying information on them. Recordings will be heard or accessed by only the researcher and advisor for research purposes. Audio recordings will be placed in a locked file cabinet until a transcribed copy of the discussion has been created. Recordings will be erased after they are transcribed or coded and upon final dissertation approval. The researcher will enter study data on a computer that is password-protected and use special coding to protect the information. To protect confidentiality, your real name and any identifiable information will not be used in the written copy of the discussion.

Voluntary nature of the study

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. Even if you decide to participate now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. You may choose not to answer a focus group question for any reason.

Your privacy will be protected. Any information obtained in connection with this study will remain anonymous and confidential. Information obtained through your participation may be used as part of a presentation at any relevant conferences.

If you have questions about this study, *please ask them now or* contact Starrah Huffman at sgh0011@tigermail.auburn.edu or Dr. Suhyun Suh at suhsuhy@auburn.edu. A copy of this document will be given to you to keep.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Auburn University Office of Research Compliance or the Institutional Review Board by phone (334)-844-5966 or e-mail at IRBadmin@auburn.edu or IRBChair@auburn.edu.

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED, YOU MUST DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT YOU WISH TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY. YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES YOUR WILLINGNESS TO PARTICIPATE.

Participant's signature	Date	Investigator obtaining consent	Date

Printed Name	Printed Name

Page 2 of 2
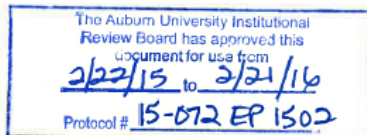
Appendix D

Email Invitation

Email Invitation

Dear Potential Study Participant;

I am Starrah Huffman, a graduate student in the Department of Special Education, Rehabilitation and Counseling at Auburn University. I would like to invite you to participate in my dissertation research study to explore the nature and scope of collaboration between school counselors and special education teachers in working with students with disabilities. You may participate if you are a school counselor or special education teacher working in the River-Region of the state.

If you choose to participate in this research study, you will complete a survey questionnaire by accessing the link below. The estimated time for the survey is less than 20 minutes. Also, if you choose to, you will participant in a focus groups discussion interview. Focus group interviews are audio recorded for transcription purposes only, which will require documentation of your written consent. The estimated time for the focus group interview is approximately 90 minutes. There are minimal risks associated in participating in this study. For further information about this study, please read the attached information letter. Also attached is the informed consent letter for focus group interviews. If you choose to participate in the audio-recorded focus group session, please contact the researcher, Starrah Huffman, by email using the contact information below.

If you decide to participate after reading the attached information letter, click the link provided below to complete the survey. By clicking the link, you are agreeing to voluntarily participant in this study. If you have any questions, please contact Starrah Huffman at sgh0011@tigermail.auburn.edu or my adviser, Dr. Suhyun Suh at suhsuhy@auburn.edu.

Thank you for your consideration.
Starrah Huffman

https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/56QBHJW

Survey Questionnaire

Research Study: Nature and Scope of Collaboration between School Counselors and Special Education Teachers in Working with Students with Disabilities You are invited to participate in a research study to explore the nature and scope of collaboration between school counselors and special education teachers in working with students with disabilities. Starrah Huffman, Ed.
Read more...