

ARE SCHOOL COUNSELORS IMPACTING UNDERREPRESENTED STUDENTS' THINKING ABOUT POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION?

A NATIONALLY REPRESENTATIVE STUDY

Using the HSLs:09 data set and social capital theory as a framework, the authors examined which student and school characteristics predicted students' identification of their school counselor as the person who had the most influence in their thinking about postsecondary education (N = 3,239,560). Results indicated that African American, first-generation, and private school students were more likely to name their counselor as having had the greatest influence. The article discusses future research and implications for policy, practice and training.

From President Obama's challenge that every American pursue at least one year of vocational or college training by 2020 to the more recent Reach Higher initiative (The White House, 2014), there has been a national push to enhance the college and career readiness of high school students.

This momentum, spurred on by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) and the Education Trust, puts school counselors at the forefront of this conversation (ASCA, 2012a, 2012b; Hines, Lemons, & Crews, 2011). Moreover, as highlighted in research, school counselors play a critical role in assisting students with college and career readiness and postsecondary planning (Bryan, Holcomb-McCoy, Moore-Thomas, & Day-Vines, 2009; Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, & Holcomb-McCoy, 2011; Engberg & Gilbert, 2014; McDonough, 2005).

Some groups of students are still underrepresented in college enrollment, including first-generation, low-income, African American, and Hispanic students (Kena et al., 2015; McKillip, Rawls, & Barry, 2012; Pham & Keenan, 2011; Weinstein & Savitz-Romer, 2009). As of 2013, students from high-income families enrolled in college at a 31% higher rate than students from low-income families (Kena et al., 2015). Moreover, while 62% of undergraduates enrolled in public four-year institutions in 2013 were White, only 12% and 15% were African American and Hispanic, respectively (Kena et al., 2015). According to the National Center for Educa-

Blaire Cholewa, Ph.D., is an assistant professor at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, VA. E-mail: bec7b@virginia.edu **Christina K. Burkhardt** is a school counselor at Rockbridge County High School in Lexington, VA. **Michael F. Hull** is a doctoral candidate in Research, Statistics, and Evaluation at the University of Virginia.

DOI: 10.5330/1096-2409-19.1.144

tion Statistics (NCES), first-generation students are more likely to be African American or Hispanic and come from low-income families (Chen, 2005). These gaps may aid the perpetuation of societal inequalities, as those with at least a bachelor's degree are slated to earn 66% more income in their lifetime compared to those with only a high school degree (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2010).

Scholars often use social capital theory (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Coleman, 1988; Lin, 2001) to contextualize disparities in educational attainment among underrepresented groups. In a broad sense, Coleman (1988) described a facet of social capital as an informational channel, or “the potential for information that inheres in social relations” (p. 104). Therefore, students belonging to groups that are underrepresented in higher education may have differential access to the social capital related to the pursuit of postsecondary education within their social networks. Fortunately, an understanding of social capital theory also contextualizes ways in which school counselors can advocate for underrepresented students and work to close this college access gap (Bryan et al., 2011; Engberg & Gilbert, 2014; McDonough, 2005; McKillip et al., 2012).

SOCIAL CAPITAL THEORY AND THE ROLE OF SCHOOL COUNSELORS

Within the context of higher education, social capital refers to a student's access to knowledge and resources about postsecondary education relayed through relationships that comprise a student's social network (Coleman, 1988; Lin, 2001). The network, through which students learn about college and subsequently make decisions about postsecondary education, can consist of various influential

people in a student's life (e.g., family members, school counselors, teachers, friends, etc.). Each individual possesses varying amounts of college information to transmit to students (Bryan et al., 2011; Hill, Bregman & Andrade, 2015; McDonough, 2005; Weinstein & Savitz-Romer, 2009).

Family background (e.g., race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, educational attainment, etc.) may impact the amount of postsecondary social capital available to students in their sphere of influence (Bryan et al., 2011; Hill et al., 2015). Thus, students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds and/or whose parents have obtained a college education may have more social capital given their increased access to information about college and the admissions process. In comparison, although their parents may have postsecondary expectations for their child, students of lower socioeconomic backgrounds and/or who would be the first

STUDENTS WHO ACCESSED MORE COLLEGE INFORMATION AND POSTSECONDARY PLANNING ASSISTANCE FROM THEIR SCHOOL COUNSELOR WERE MORE LIKELY TO APPLY AND THEN ENROLL IN COLLEGE.

in their family to attend college may not have as much access to information about accessing and/or navigating the postsecondary educational system (Choy, Horn, Nunez & Chen, 2000; Pham & Keenan, 2011).

School counselors are called to promote equity and access for all students (ASCA, 2012a, 2012b), which includes promoting access to and planning for postsecondary education and advocating for underrepresented students. Because of their skill set and knowledge base, school counselors are uniquely positioned to supplement this information for students who may have less access to the necessary social capital (Bryan et al., 2011; MacAllum, Glover, Queen, & Riggs, 2007; McKillip et al., 2012). In fact, students who accessed more college information

and postsecondary planning assistance from their school counselor were more likely to apply and then enroll in college (Bryan et al., 2011; Engberg & Gilbert, 2014; McDonough, 2005; McKillip et al., 2012). Conversely, Bryan et al. (2011) found that students in the three lowest socioeconomic status quartiles who did not have school counselor contact had significantly lower odds of applying to two or more colleges.

SCHOOL COUNSELORS AND SCHOOL CONTEXTS

Given the implications of this research, it is important to examine the factors that may impact a school counselor's ability to provide services related to college access and attainment.

McKillip et al. (2012) asserted that two specific factors impact this: high student-to-school-counselor ratios and the minimal amount of time counselors have to focus on college preparation. In support, studies indicate a positive association between number of school counselors and four-year college going rates (Hurwitz & Howell, 2014) and the number of students applying to two or more colleges (Bryan et al., 2011). The type of school also seems to influence these findings. Research indicates that public school counselors had higher student-to-school-counselor ratios than their peers working in private schools (Clinedinst, 2015; National Office for School Counselor Advocacy [NOS-CA], 2012), and that private school counselors spend 28% more time on

postsecondary counseling than public school counselors (Clinedinst, 2015).

Bryan and colleagues (2009) assessed how student and school-level factors predicted the likelihood of a student meeting with their school counselor for college information. They found that African American and female students were more likely to see their counselor about college while students from larger schools with fewer counselors and schools with higher populations of students on free and reduced lunch were less likely to do so. Engberg and Wolniak (2014) found that high schools with more students of lower socioeconomic backgrounds had lower social capital, lower percentages of 4-year college enrollment,

close the college attainment gap for underrepresented students and the unique role that school counselors can play in doing so, opportunities exist to build upon the current body of literature. To date, the research on this topic has focused on exploring outcomes based upon caseload size or whether a student had contact with a school counselor for college information. However, this research does not contextualize the nature or quality of this contact with the school counselor. Further, one cannot determine the perceived impact that this contact had on the student from the student's point of view (McKillip et al., 2012), or whether student groups perceive this impact differently.

the likelihood of students identifying their school counselor as having the most influence on their thinking about postsecondary education?

METHOD

The researchers used data from the NCES's High School Longitudinal Study of 2009 (HSL:09), a nationally representative, longitudinal study focused on students' plans through high school, postsecondary education, and the workforce. NCES collected data in the fall of 2009 and in the spring of 2012 (Ingels et al., 2013).

Participants

Participants included 11th-grade students who participated in the follow-up round of data collection (2012) and had data from the student, parent, administrator, and counselor questionnaires, which resulted in an analytic sample of 16,520 students, the total number of students from whom actual data was collected. Each participant served as a representative of multiple students in the population that share the same demographic characteristics. NCES constructed student-level balanced repeated replicate (BRR) weights to account for HSL:09's complex survey design and allow for accurate target population estimates (Ingels et al., 2013). The weighting accounts for the fact that the students were randomly sampled and clustered within schools and makes adjustments for school and student nonresponse, thus minimizing nonresponse bias (Ingel et al., 2013). Applying the weights to the analytic sample of 16,520 dramatically increases the sample size to a nationally representative weighted sample of 3,239,560 students. This allows the findings to be generalized to all students who were ninth-graders in 2010. See Table 1 for the analytic sample's descriptive statistics. To conduct follow-up analyses regarding school-related variables, the authors used school-level BRR weights. Consequently, the follow-up analyses used a weighted analytic school sample of

APPROXIMATELY 92,000 STUDENTS . . . IDENTIFIED THEIR SCHOOL COUNSELOR AS THE PERSON THAT WAS MOST INFLUENTIAL IN THEIR THINKING ABOUT POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION.

and higher proportions of African American and Hispanic students. A recent study by NOSCA indicated that schools with higher numbers of students of color and higher numbers of students on free and reduced lunch also had higher student-to-school-counselor ratios (NOSCA, 2012). McDonough (1997, 2005) indicated that schools with higher proportions of low-income students or students of color were less able to provide college counseling because they were likely to have larger caseloads and additional responsibilities. Therefore, some research suggests that students attending public schools with higher student-to-school-counselor ratios and greater populations of underrepresented and low-income students may have less access to college counseling.

STUDY RATIONALE

Although the aforementioned research studies highlight the need to

The American School Counselor Association and the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2012a, 2012b) charge school counselors to be systems change agents and to promote access to postsecondary educational opportunities to all students. As such, it is important to understand not only if school counselors are meeting the basic needs of students with regard to disseminating social capital for postsecondary education, but also if school counselors are serving as significant influencers toward a student's pursuit of postsecondary education. Consequently, the present study examined whether school counselors were serving as significant brokers of social capital for postsecondary education, and more specifically, which students and in what school contexts counselors' work was having the most impact from the students' point of view. The authors used a large-scale, nationally representative data set to answer the following: What student characteristics and school characteristics predict

TABLE 1

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF WEIGHTED SAMPLE INCLUDED IN LOGISTIC REGRESSION ANALYSIS

	School Counselor Primary Influence					
	No (N = 3,147,560)		Yes (N = 92,000)		Total Sample (N = 3,239,560)	
	%/M	SE	%/M	SE	%/M	SE
Student race						
Asian/Pacific Islander	4.10		5.65		4.14	
African American	11.93		21.22		12.19	
Hispanic	20.74		19.84		20.71	
More than one race	7.30		12.12		7.43	
White	55.94		41.17		55.52	
Student gender						
Male	50.54		45.00		50.39	
Female	49.46		55.00		49.61	
Student first-generation status						
Not first generation	38.44		19.81		37.91	
First generation	61.56		80.19		62.09	
School locale						
Suburban	27.88		30.67		27.96	
City	29.24		35.49		29.42	
Town	12.76		11.07		12.71	
Rural	30.11		22.77		29.90	
School type						
Public	93.00		91.25		92.95	
Private	7.00		8.75		7.05	
% of time college counseling						
10% or less	16.42		15.24		16.39	
11-20%	38.14		42.27		38.25	
21-50%	39.28		35.21		39.16	
More than 50%	6.17		7.28		0.06	
Average family income	4.36	0.06	3.65	0.21	4.34	0.06
Average counselor caseload	382.56	8.50	380.89	23.25	382.51	8.43
% Students on free/reduced lunch	41.46	1.17	44.88	3.00	41.56	1.16

Note. Average family income is an ordinal variable treated as continuous as it contains 13 levels. The means 4.34 and 4.71 represent an average family income between \$55,000 and \$75,000 and the mean 3.65 represents an average family income between \$35,000 and \$55,000. A total of 418 students that identified as “Native American” were excluded from analyses because the small sample size resulted in unacceptably small cell sizes.

20,634 schools and 20,225 schools, depending on the analysis and resultant missing data.

Variables

School counselor influence. The au-

thors derived the dependent variable in this research study from a survey item in which students were asked to identify the person that had the most influence in their thinking about postsecondary education among 12

categories (e.g., high school counselor, family, friends, etc.). See Table 2 for percentage breakdown of the responses. For the current study, the authors dichotomized the variable to denote that a student either picked the school

counselor as the most influential person or they did not.

Student characteristics. The variables measuring student characteristics included the students' self-identified race/ethnicity, gender, family income, and prospective first-generation status. Because of their limited representation in the data collection, American Indian/Alaska Native participants were excluded from the study. Although the authors recognize a difference, they combined Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander participants with Asian participants due to sample size. Family income was derived from the parent questionnaire in which the parent selected one of 13 income brackets. The authors created the prospective first-generation status variable using NCES's composite variable of the highest level of education completed by either parent. Adopting the definition of first-generation college students used by some of the U.S. Department of Education's federal TRIO programs (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.), the researchers dichotomized the variable to identify students with at least one parent who completed at least their bachelor's degree and students whose parents did not. For the purposes of the present regression analysis, White, male, and non-first-generation status served as reference categories.

AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS WERE 1.85 TIMES MORE LIKELY THAN WHITE STUDENTS TO SAY THAT THEIR SCHOOL COUNSELOR WAS THE MOST INFLUENTIAL.

School characteristics. The variables measuring the school-level characteristics in this study included the school setting, school type, percentage of students on free or reduced price lunch, and the counselor's caseload. School administrators classified their school's type as public, Catholic, or other private. The present analyses combined the categories of Catholic and other private to denote schools as public or private. NCES determined a school's locale as suburban, city, town,

TABLE 2 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF WHOM STUDENTS IDENTIFIED AS HAVING THE MOST INFLUENCE IN THEIR THINKING ABOUT EDUCATION AFTER HIGH SCHOOL. WEIGHTED N = 3,239,560

Person Identified as Having the Most Influence on the Student's Thinking about Education After High School	% of Sample
High school counselor	2.84
Counselor hired to help prepare for college admissions	0.22
Teacher	4.19
Parents	41.95
Another family member	6.42
Friends	3.83
Employer	0.17
Military recruiter	1.18
Coach or scout	1.60
Yourself	28.91
No one in particular	5.98
Don't know	2.69

Note. These numbers are derived from the sample that was included in the logistic regression

or rural based on data from NCES's 2011-2012 Common Core of Data and Private School Survey. Suburban and public schools served as the reference variables. School administrators provided the percentage of students in

and student characteristics predict whether a student identifies their school counselor as the most influential person in the student's thinking about postsecondary education. The dependent variable was dichotomous in that students either picked the school counselor as the most influential (1 = *yes*) or did not (0 = *no*).

School-level analyses. The authors conducted two follow-up analyses to explore the interactions between school type and average counselor caseload and between school type and percent of work hours school counselors spent assisting students with college counseling. The first follow-up analysis was a chi square test of independence between the percent of work hours school counselors spent on college counseling (10% or less, 11-20%, 21-50%, or more than 50%) and type of school (public or private). The Pearson's χ^2 was adjusted and reported as an F statistic to account for the complex sampling survey design (see Rao &

the school qualifying for free/reduced lunch. The most senior counselor reported the average counselor caseload and the percentage of work hours that counseling staff spent on college readiness, selection, and applications ("college counseling") in the previous school year.

Data Analysis

Student-level analysis. The authors used a logistic regression analysis to examine which school characteristics

TABLE 3 LOGISTIC REGRESSION PREDICTING STUDENT IDENTIFICATION OF SCHOOL COUNSELOR AS THE PERSON THAT WAS MOST INFLUENTIAL WHEN THINKING ABOUT POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION. WEIGHTED N = 3,239,560

Predictor Variables	OR	SE	p
Student race			
Asian/Pacific Islander	1.84	1.17	.339
African American**	1.85	0.45	.011
Hispanic	0.99	0.24	.962
More than one race	2.39	1.25	.247
Student gender			
Female	1.19	0.21	.318
Student first-generation status			
First generation***	2.48	0.42	< .001
School locale			
City	0.97	0.29	.922
Town	0.77	0.25	.411
Rural	0.69	0.20	.189
School type			
Private**	2.02	0.71	.046
% of time college counseling			
10% or less	0.90	0.37	.792
11-20%	1.04	0.39	.911
21-50%	0.88	0.31	.719
Average family income	0.96	0.03	.223
Average counselor caseload	1.00	< 0.01	.991
% Students on free/reduced lunch	1.00	0.01	.921

Note. Reference categories in order: White, Male, Non-first generation, Suburban locale, Public school, Counselor spent more than 50% of time on college counseling

** $p < .05$ *** $p < .001$

Scott, 1984; Rao & Thomas, 1989; Stata Corp, 2015). The significant independence test was followed up with one proportion z tests between public and private schools within levels of the percentage of work hours school counselors spent assisting students with college counseling variable. Population null proportion and standard errors were estimated from the proportions of private and public schools from the weighted data.

The authors applied the school-level BRR weights, resulting in a weighted sample of 20,225 schools with less than 3% missing data.

The second follow-up analysis was a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) comparing the average counselor caseload between public and private schools. Using the school-level BRR weights resulted in a weighted sample of 20,634 schools with less than 1% missing data.

RESULTS

Student-Level Analysis

Basic descriptive data (see Table 2) of the school counselor influence variable indicated that 41.95% of students identified their parents as the most influential in their thinking about postsecondary education, followed by the students themselves (28.91%). Of the sample, 2.84% of the students identified their school counselor as the person in their life who had the most influence in their thinking about postsecondary education.

Odds ratios, standard errors, and p values from the logistic regression are presented in Table 3. Most of the odds ratios reported in Table 3 are not statistically significant. However, after controlling for other predictors in the model, two student characteristics and one school characteristic significantly predicted whether a student identified the school counselor as most influential. First, the odds that an African American student reported that their school counselor had the most influence in their postsecondary thinking were significantly higher than the odds that a White student reported the same thing, $OR = 1.85$, $p = .011$. This indicates that African American students were 1.85 times more likely than white students to say that their school counselor was the most influential. Second, prospective first-generation students had a statistically significant higher odds, $OR = 2.48$, $p < .001$; indicating that they were almost two and a half times more likely than non-first-generation students to state that their school counselor was the most influential person in their thinking about post-secondary education. Third, private school students had significantly higher odds than public school students of reporting that their school counselor was the most influential in their postsecondary thinking, $OR = 2.02$, $p = .046$. This indicates that private school students were twice as likely as public school students to say that their counselor was the most influential.

School-Level Analyses

The authors conducted follow-up analyses to contextualize the findings related to private school students. First, the authors used a test of independence between the type of school (public and private) and the percentage of hours spent on college counseling (10% or less, 11-20%, 21-50%, and more than 50%). The results indicated a significant difference between the cells in the 2x4 matrix, $F(3, 590) = 4.80, p = .003$ with a medium effect size, $V = .15$. Follow-up one-proportion z tests indicated a significantly higher proportion of private schools in the 10% or less level ($z = 16.53, p < .001$) and the more than 50% level ($z = 24.24, p < .001$). However, there was a significantly higher proportion of public schools in the 11-20% level ($z = 21.87, p < .001$) and a higher but not statistically significant proportion of public schools in the 21-50% level ($z = 1.73, p = .083$). These results indicate that private schools were proportionately overrepresented, and public schools underrepresented, in the 10% or less and the more than 50% categories of time spent on college counseling than would be expected by chance; and public schools are disproportionately overrepresented, and private schools underrepresented, in the 11-20% category than would be expected by chance.

PROSPECTIVE FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS . . . WERE ALMOST TWO AND A HALF TIMES MORE LIKELY TO STATE THAT THEIR SCHOOL COUNSELOR WAS THE MOST INFLUENTIAL PERSON.

The final analysis, a one-way ANOVA, compared counselor caseload among public and private schools. The result indicated that the mean caseload of private school counselors ($M = 138.89$) was significantly less than the caseload of public school counselors ($M = 337.49$), Wald Test $F(1, 199) = 120.54, p < .001$. This indicates that, on average, counselors

in private schools had significantly smaller caseloads than their public school counterparts.

DISCUSSION

Through the lens of social capital theory, the current study examined both student and school characteristics to predict the likelihood of students identifying their school counselor as the person who had the most influence on their thinking about education after high school. Although previous research suggested that school counselors can play a vital role in the transmission of social capital regarding postsecondary education (Bryan et al., 2011; Engberg & Gilbert, 2014; McDonough, 2005), the current findings indicate that school counselors are not only providing information through basic contact, but are able to serve as significant influencers in underrepresented students' thinking about postsecondary education. Although this is understood by many school counselors, these findings from a nationally representative data set provide critical empirical support to further substantiate the impact of school counselors among stakeholders and policy makers. Moreover, the findings support the mission of the school counseling profession as outlined in

the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2012a).

Prior to discussing the analytic results, it is important to discuss the descriptive data. Approximately 2.84% of the 11th-grade students surveyed selected their school counselor as the most influential person in their thinking about postsecondary education. Although this number appears small,

with the weighted sample this equates to approximately 92,000 students in the United States who identified their school counselor as the person that was *most influential* in their thinking about postsecondary education. In examining this number, understanding the context of the question is essential. Given that the students were to select the most influential person, the fact that 92,000 chose the school counselor, surpassing parents, friends, and even the individual students themselves, is important. The majority of students' identifying their parents as the most influential is not surprising given the significant role that parents can play in students' postsecondary choices and decision-making processes (MacAllum et al., 2007).

School counselors served as the most significant influencer for specific groups of students. The logistical regression analysis with a weighted sample of 3,239,560 students indicated that African American students were significantly more likely than their White peers to identify the school counselor as the person who had the most influence on their thinking about postsecondary education. In contrast, the result for Hispanic students was not significant. This suggests that Hispanic students and African American students may differ in their experiences of school counselors, which corresponds with previous research related to Hispanic students' perceptions of school counselors (Vela, Zamarripa, Balkin, Johnson, & Smith, 2013).

In the current study, prospective first-generation students were significantly more likely to identify their school counselor as most influential compared to their non-first-generation peers. As noted by Pham and Keenan (2011), college-educated parents can transmit crucial college knowledge to their children regarding the pursuit of higher education whereas first-generation students may need to seek out and/or receive this information elsewhere. One might assume that similar results would have been found among low-income students; however, the lack of significant findings related

to family income may be partially attributed to the overlap between low-income and first-generation status (Chen, 2005). Nonetheless, the findings add to the existing literature by further stressing the critical role that school counselors play in promoting equity (ASCA, 2012a) through the provision of social capital for postsecondary education to those who may have less access.

School counselor caseload and the percentage of time the school counseling department spent on college counseling did not significantly predict whether a student identified the school counselor as having the most influence in thinking about their postsecondary education. However, students attending private schools were significantly more likely than their public school peers to have identified the school counselor as the most influential person. To further understand these findings, follow-up analyses indicated that private school counselors had significantly smaller caseloads than public school counselors, which may account for the private school finding in the initial logistic regression. The present findings parallel previous research, which found that private school counselors had significantly smaller caseloads than public school counselors (Clinedinst, 2015; NOSCA, 2012).

Follow-up analyses comparing the percentage of time school counselors spent on college counseling and whether the school was private or public indicated some significant differences. The overrepresentation of private schools and underrepresentation of public schools in the 10% or less category of counselor time spent on college counseling may be due to private school students having, in general, greater access to supports other than school counselors to assist them. The finding of overrepresentation of private schools and underrepresentation of public schools in the more than 50% category may be partially explained by the finding of significantly higher average caseloads for public school counselors. The average

caseload for public school counselors is more than twice the size of the average caseload for private school counselors. The higher caseload of public school counselors suggests that these counselors spend more time on counseling responsibilities other than college counseling.

IMPLICATIONS

The collective findings from a large-scale, nationally representative data set indicate a number of implications regarding school counselor policy, practice and training. School counselors must be allotted the time and resources to provide underrepresented

STUDENTS ATTENDING PRIVATE SCHOOLS WERE SIGNIFICANTLY MORE LIKELY THAN THEIR PUBLIC SCHOOL PEERS TO HAVE IDENTIFIED THE SCHOOL COUNSELOR AS THE MOST INFLUENTIAL PERSON.

students and their families with an equitable opportunity to access the social capital necessary to make informed postsecondary decisions, especially in environments with large populations of underrepresented students. By doing so, school counselors may have the potential to increase the number of underrepresented students attending two-year and four-year institutions or postsecondary certification programs. As such, school counselors working in schools with high numbers of African American and/or prospective first-generation college students can use the ASCA National Model's Data Analysis Profile to inform their advocacy efforts and its Use of Time Assessment to track their advocacy efforts (ASCA, 2012a). Both tools can serve as evidence for the need for lower caseloads and/or increased time spent on college- and career-focused program components. Counselors also can use this data and the Annual Agreement (ASCA, 2012a) to discuss tasks assigned to the counseling department

with their school administration as a means to advocate for a reduction of noncounseling responsibilities.

The findings indicate that school counselors have a profound impact on the postsecondary thinking of prospective first-generation students. Therefore, school counselors' recognition of the unique needs and strengths among this population is essential. All students deserve college counseling, but study results indicate that targeting first-generation students could be especially influential to these particular students who may have less access to social capital. Identifying which students on school counselors' caseloads are prospective first-generation is critical. First-generation students can come

from all backgrounds and their first-generation status may not be readily recognizable in the school setting. As such, it is essential that school counselors first take specific measures (e.g. surveys) to identify their prospective first-generation students as early as possible. They must then proactively target these students to build trusting relationships that build on students' strengths (Holland, 2015) and provide additional support, services, and resources. This active pursuit of underrepresented students is crucial given the research suggesting that these students may not seek out counselors in the same way as their more advantaged peers (Holland, 2015).

Given the findings that African American students were significantly more likely than their White peers to identify the school counselor as the most influential and the fact that first-generation students are more likely to be students of color (Chen, 2005), preservice and in-service school counselors should constantly enhance

their multicultural competencies. Part of this is the recognition both of the lived experiences of African American students and other students of color and of the challenges faced by low-income students and how systemic barriers may impede access to postsecondary opportunities. Moreover, ASCA (2012a) charges school counselors to advocate against school policies that may put underrepresented students at a disadvantage, such as any gatekeeping policies or practices that disproportionately track particular students to a more rigorous college-ready curriculum while excluding other students.

Although school counselors' outreach to underrepresented students is essential, the descriptive statistics of

may demystify the college planning and financial planning processes and encourage parental involvement with postsecondary planning (Fitzpatrick & Costantini, 2011). Also crucial is making parent-counselor contact accessible for all families. This can include holding evening office hours, offering information sessions at multiple dates and times, including the weekend, and pairing with community organizations to host events (Gonzalez, Borders, Hines, Villalba, & Henderson, 2013; Holcomb-McCoy, 2010). Translators should be available for non-English speaking families (Gonzalez et al., 2013) and informational sessions can be recorded and posted to the counseling department's website for those unable to attend.

collaborate with teachers to further disseminate information, promote aspirations and help students navigate postsecondary education processes. This could entail providing teachers with professional development related to current college processes (e.g., Common Application, college course requirements, FAFSA, scholarships) to further equip teachers to work with students in this area. This collaboration may be especially helpful for counselors with large caseloads because it increases the avenues through which students may receive this critical information and social support.

Last, this study's results suggest that school counselors are making an impact with underrepresented populations, yet continued growth is still warranted so that all current and future school counselors are increasingly equipped to promote access and equity in postsecondary education. In recognition of the social capital that school counselors have to offer, school counseling programs must provide training in college counseling and focus on equipping school counselors to relationally engage students' families and the community such that social capital can be transmitted to parents and other influential stakeholders.

THE HIGHER CASELOAD OF PUBLIC SCHOOL COUNSELORS SUGGESTS THAT THESE COUNSELORS SPEND MORE TIME ON COUNSELING RESPONSIBILITIES OTHER THAN COLLEGE COUNSELING.

the current study support the idea that this advocacy should also be extended to students' families. Parents play such a crucial role in postsecondary decisions (MacAllum et al., 2007) and the ASCA Ethical Standards (2010) calls for counselors to build strong, collaborative relationships with families and caregivers in support of the students they serve. Therefore, including parents in conversations about postsecondary education is essential as a means to both respect their involvement and provide further encouragement, information, and support to underrepresented students through their parents/caregivers. By doing so, school counselors can create a school-family partnership to further support postsecondary education, bolstering another channel through which students receive this information.

Partnerships with families and students about postsecondary education are best started early in the high school career (e.g., 9th grade); this

Although it cannot replace critical personal contact, school counselors can capitalize on the technological advances of social media, websites, and e-mail to maintain contact with caregivers and provide valuable information. This must be presented strategically and not at an excessive or overwhelming level. For example, Fitzpatrick and Costantini (2011) recommended creating a comprehensive handbook that guides families through the entire college application process specific to procedures implemented at their high school.

In addition to highlighting school counselors' and parents' influential roles, the descriptive statistics also indicated that teachers represent a strong category of influence in student's thinking about postsecondary education. Teachers can serve as powerful partners in the provision of postsecondary social capital and the development of college-going culture. Consequently, counselors must actively

Limitations and Future Research

When interpreting these findings, one must take into account the limitations of the current study. The study was limited to the questions posed by NCES in the HSLS surveys. As such, ascertaining how students may have interpreted "thinking about education after high school" is difficult. Furthermore, by solely asking the student to identify the person who has had the *most* influence on their thinking about education after high school, one cannot determine the effects that school counselors are having on students who chose another individual as most influential. School counselors may still be having profound effects on these students, but this is not captured within the data. Furthermore, the present data cannot establish the impact that an elementary or middle

school counselor also may have had on the student, nor does it identify the specific practices that led the student to be so strongly influenced by their counselor.

These limitations point to opportunities for future research. First, researchers should specifically examine the perceived effects of school counselors' impact from the students' perspective through numerous multifaceted questions. These questions should encompass not only influence, but quality of the interaction, interventions utilized, and the means through which the school counselors supplemented students' access to social capital regarding postsecondary education. Moreover, this study suggests that counselors are influencing the postsecondary thinking of students, particularly among African American and prospective first-generation students. As such, future research should examine the specific practices of counseling programs with high postsecondary enrollment rates among underrepresented students. Doing so may provide counselors with additional strategies to employ in their current practice. Future research also should focus on exploring school counselor's postsecondary influence among Hispanic students, low-income students, and those attending rural schools, given their relation to social capital and the lack of significant findings in the current study. Last, scholars should extend the current findings to examine the postsecondary trajectory of those students identifying the school counselor as most influential so as to provide outcome data to further substantiate the impact of school counselors.

The aforementioned findings support the notion that school counselors are able to serve as transmitters of social capital with regard to postsecondary education, particularly for students who may have less access to this social capital from their own social networks. The authors hope that the nationally representative findings can be used to support school counselors in their professional advocacy toward smaller caseloads and decreased

noncounseling duties, especially for those working with high populations of underrepresented students. The authors also hope the present findings can serve as a means to continue to energize school counselors in their efforts to promote equity in their schools. ■

REFERENCES

- American School Counselor Association. (2010). *Ethical standards for school counselors*. Retrieved from <https://www.schoolcounselor.org/asca/media/asca/home/EthicalStandards2010.pdf>
- American School Counselor Association. (2012a). *ASCA National Model: A framework for school counseling programs* (3rd ed.). Alexandria, VA: Author.
- American School Counselor Association. (2012b). *Equity for all students: ASCA position statement*. Retrieved from <https://www.schoolcounselor.org/school-counselors-members/about-asca-%281%29/position-statements>
- Baum, S., Ma, J., & Payea, K. (2010). *Education pays: The benefits of higher education for individuals and society*. New York, NY: The College Board.
- Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J. C. (1977). *Reproduction in education, society, and culture*. London, UK: Sage.
- Bryan, J., Holcomb-McCoy, C., Moore-Thomas, C., & Day-Vines, N. L. (2009). Who sees the school counselor for college information? A national study. *Professional School Counseling, 12*, 280-291. doi:10.5330/PSC.n.2010-12.280
- Bryan, J., Moore-Thomas, C., Day-Vines, N. L., & Holcomb-McCoy, C. (2011). School counselors as social capital: The effects of high school college counseling on college application rates. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 89*, 190-199. doi:10.1002/j.1556-6678.2011.tb00077.x
- Chen, X. (2005). *First-generation students in postsecondary education: A look at their college transcripts* (NCES 2005-171). U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/das/epubs/pdf/2005171_es.pdf
- Choy, S. P., Horn, L. J., Nunez, A., & Chen, X. (2000). Transition to college: What helps at-risk students and students whose parents did not attend college. *New Directions for Institutional Research, 107*, 45-63. doi:10.1002/ir.10704
- Clinedinst, M. (2015). *2014 State of college admission report*. Arlington, VA: National Association for College Admission Counseling. Retrieved from <http://www.nacacnet.org/research/PublicationsResources/Marketplace/research/Pages/StateofCollegeAdmission.aspx>
- Coleman, J. S. (1988). Social capital in the creation of human capital. *American Journal of Sociology, 94*, 95-120. doi:10.1086/228943
- Engberg, M. E., & Gilbert, A. J. (2014) The counseling opportunity structure: Examining correlates of four-year college-going rates. *Research in Higher Education, 55*, 219-244. doi:10.1007/s11162-013-9309-4
- Engberg, M. E., & Wolniak, G. C. (2014). An examination of the moderation effects of the high school socioeconomic context on college enrollment. *High School Journal, 97*, 240-263. doi:10.1353/hsj.2014.0004
- Fitzpatrick, C., & Costantini, K. (2011). *Counseling 21st century students for optimal college and career readiness: A 9th-12th grade curriculum*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Gonzalez, L. M., Borders, L. D., Hines, E. M., Villalba, J. A., & Henderson, A. (2013). Parental involvement in children's education: considerations for school counselors working with Latino immigrant families. *Professional School Counseling, 16*, 185-193. doi:10.5330/psc.n.2013-16.183
- Hill, L. D., Bregman, A., & Andrade, F. (2015). Social capital for college: Network composition and access to selective institutions among urban high school students. *Urban Education, 50*, 316-345. doi:10.1177/0042085913514590
- Hines, P. L., Lemons, R. W., & Crews, K. D. (2011). *Poised to lead: How school counselors can drive college and career readiness*. Washington, DC: Education Trust. Retrieved from <https://edtrust.org/resource/poised-to-lead/>
- Holcomb-McCoy, C. (2010). Involving low-income parents and parents of color in college readiness activities: An exploratory study. *Professional School Counseling, 14*, 115-124. doi:10.5330/prsc.14.1.e3044v7567570t04
- Holland, M. M. (2015). Trusting each other: Student-counselor relationships in diverse high schools. *Sociology of Education, 88*, 244-262. doi:10.1177/0038040715591347
- Hurwitz, M., & Howell, J. (2014). Estimating causal impacts of school counselors with regression discontinuity designs. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 92*, 316-327. doi:10.1002/j.1556-6676.2014.00159.x

- Ingels, S. J., Pratt, D. J., Herget, D. R., Dever, J. A., Fritch, L. B., Ottem, R., ... Leinwand, S. (2013). *High School Longitudinal Study of 2009 (HSL:09) Base year to first follow-up data file documentation* (NCES 2014-361). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education.
- Kena, G., Musu-Gillette, L., Robinson, J., Wang, X., Rathbun, A., Zhang, J., ... Dunlop Velez, E. (2015). *The condition of education 2015* (NCES 2015-144). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2015/2015144.pdf>
- Lin, N. (2001). *Social capital: A theory of social structure and action*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9780511815447
- MacAllum, K., Glover, D. M., Queen, B., & Riggs, A. (2007). *Deciding on post-secondary education: Final report* (NPEC 2008-850). Washington, DC: The National Postsecondary Education Cooperative (NPEC). Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2008/2008850.pdf>
- McDonough, P. M. (1997). *Choosing colleges: How social class and schools structure opportunity*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- McDonough, P. M. (2005). *Counseling and college counseling in America's high schools*. Alexandria, VA: National Association for College Admissions Counseling (NACAC).
- McKillip, M. E. M., Rawls, A., & Barry, C. (2012). Improving college access: A review of research on the role of high school counselors. *Professional School Counseling, 16*, 49-58. doi:10.5330/PSC.n.2012-16.49
- National Office for School Counselor Advocacy. (2012). *The College Board 2012 National Survey of School Counselors and Administrators: Report on survey findings: Barriers and supports to school counselor success*. Retrieved from http://media.collegeboard.com/digitalServices/pdf/nosca/Barriers-Supports_TechReport_Final.pdf
- Pham, C., & Keenan, T. (2011). Counseling and college matriculation: Does the availability of counseling affect college-going decisions among highly qualified first-generation college-bound high school graduates? *Journal of Applied Economics and Business Research, 1*, 12-24.
- Rao, J. N. K., & Scott, A. J. (1984). On chi-squared tests for multiway contingency tables with cell proportions estimated from survey data. *Annals of Statistics, 12*, 46-60. doi:10.1214/aos/1176346391
- Rao, J. N. K., & Thomas, D. R. (1989). Chi-squared tests for contingency tables. In C. J. Skinner, D. Holt, & T. M. F. Smith (Eds.), *Analysis of complex surveys* (pp. 89-114). New York, NY: Wiley.
- StatCorp. (2015). svy: tabulate twoway. *Stata survey data reference manual*. College Station, TX: Stata Press. Retrieved from: <http://www.stata.com/manuals14/svysvytabulatetwoway.pdf>
- The White House Office. (2014). *Remarks by the First Lady to the American School Counselor Association Annual Conference – Orlando, FL*. Retrieved from: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/07/01/remarks-first-lady-american-school-counselor-association-annual-conference>
- U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.). *Legislation for TRIO programs*. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/trio/statute-trio-gu.pdf>
- Vela, J. C., Zamarripa, M. X., Balkin, R. S., Johnson, M. B., & Smith, R. L. (2013). Understanding Latina/o students' perceptions of high school counselors and acculturation as predictors of enrollment in AP courses. *Professional School Counseling, 17*, 142-152.
- Weinstein, L. A., & Savitz-Romer, M. (2009). Planning for opportunity: Applying organizational and social capital theories to promote college-going cultures. *Educational Planning, 18*, 1-11.

Earn CEUs for reading this article. Visit www.schoolcounselor.org and click on Professional Development to learn how.

