



07.19.2023

## *Fostering continuity in college and career counseling K-12: Training and perceived confidence between K-8 and high school counselors*

By Melissa S. Ockerman, Eva Patrikakou and Alexandra Novakovic, DePaul University

**PURPOSE OF THE STUDY** The current study presents results of a quantitative analysis of K-12 school counselors' perceptions on and preparedness for college and career Readiness counseling (CCR) in a large urban school district serving a diverse, low-income student population. Differences between K-8 and high school counselors' perceptions related to preparedness, their pre-service and in-service training in CCR, and subsequent time allotted to these activities are explored.

**HOW THE RESEARCH ADVANCES THE PROFESSION** Not only high school counselors but also K-8 school counselors are interested in engaging in CCR counseling. This can be achieved through existing curricula, specifically social-emotional learning content, and through the systemic fostering of collaboration between elementary and high school counselors. Comprehensive K-12 school counseling programs, as described by the ASCA National Model, can be facilitated by connecting the SEL building blocks of elementary school with the CCR activities in high school. Additionally, this study highlights the need for further in-service and pre-service training to promote the continuity of CCR counseling between elementary and high school settings, with an emphasis on SEL skills serving as foundational. Targeted training for K-8 school counselors can build on SEL competencies and provide early career awareness and exploration based on ASCA's Student Success Standards (e.g., students' self-concept, interests, values, and skills) and maximize the effectiveness of CCR counseling starting in elementary grades. To further enhance the continuity of services offered to students, it is also important to develop district-wide programming to allow collaboration among elementary and high school counselors. Particularly, using comprehensive developmental school counseling programs could greatly increase the amount of CCR counseling and curriculum conducted in schools and build upon student learning at the elementary level.

**GUIDANCE FOR PRACTICING SCHOOL COUNSELORS** Collaborating with families as well as community partners remains an underutilized resource. Deliberately working with families can further help students build personal and social skills for career success. Additionally, school counselors can collaborate with teachers to involve families in early career development opportunities. Further enhancing collaboration amongst school personnel will also foster student college and career readiness through academic subject matter (Turner & Danridge, 2014). Teachers can be key allies to school counselors in integrating college and career readiness. For example, elementary school counselors can work with teachers to incorporate assignments such as Turner's Career Activity, in which students draw themselves "doing their future jobs and share with peers how they will use literacy practices (e.g., reading, writing, speaking, listening) for productive work" (Turner & Dandridge, 2014, p. 215). School counselors can collaborate with teachers to incorporate culturally normed, evidence-based curricula such as Student Success Skills (Webb et al., 2018) to promote the development of critical foundational SEL and CCR skills. Such joint efforts will help to create a school-wide focus on postsecondary readiness early in students' educational trajectories.

**EQUITY DIMENSIONS** This investigation focused on a large urban school district serving a diverse, low-income student population. In addition to the dearth of studies investigating specific CCR activities, any potential differences between K-8 and high school counseling practitioners, especially in those settings which serve high numbers of low-income and diverse students, had not been explored prior to this study.