

GUIDANCE COUNSELORS OR SCHOOL COUNSELORS: HOW THE NAME OF THE PROFESSION INFLUENCES PERCEPTIONS OF COMPETENCE



FOUNDATION OF THE RESEARCH

IN 1990, ASCA issued an official statement calling on the profession to change the title to “school counselor” rather than the previous title of “guidance counselor.”

WHY THE TITLE CHANGE?

The title “guidance counselor” no longer encompassed the broad scope of work that was done by the professionals in the school.

RESEARCH PROCEDURE

Researchers sought to determine if there were significant differences on a measure of perceived competence of school counselors based on job title. About half the participants completed a version of a research survey that used the term “guidance counselor” and half completed a version of a research survey that used the term “school counselor.”



WHAT ARE THE FINDINGS?

Participants who completed the surveys that used the term “guidance counselor” were statistically significantly less likely to believe individuals with that job title were able to perform the 25 tasks on the survey. The results of this study show the following:

THE TITLE MATTERS:

- Using “guidance counselor” versus “school counselor” has an impact on the perceived competence of school counselors.
- School counselors who received the survey using the term “guidance counselor” were statistically significantly more likely to assign lower scores on the survey than their peers who received the version with the term “school counselor.”
- School counselors who saw the term “guidance counselor” used to describe school counselors’ standards and competencies were less likely to believe school counselors were able to perform the tasks of a data-informed comprehensive school counseling program.
- School counselors perceived that guidance counselors are less competent to complete the job roles and tasks

described within the ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards & Competencies and CACREP standards.

- School counselors with every level of experience were equally affected by the survey terminology. The years of experience of the school counselor did not affect the perceptions of competence.

Because titles are used to describe the nature of the work of the profession, when the terms “guidance counselor” and “school counselor” are used interchangeably, *when in fact they are not interchangeable*, this results in confusion around the nature of the work completed by school counselors.

When school counselors use “guidance counselor” to describe the work they do, it significantly influences their own perception of the competence of members of their profession in a negative way.



WHAT CAN WE LEARN?

- 1** Advocate to ensure the use of the title “school counselor” in all areas of your work by all educational stakeholders.
- 2** Use your title as a form of social capital to advance the recognition and legitimacy of the profession and to ensure all students receive data-informed comprehensive school counseling programming.
- 3** Adopt the title “school counselor” on all communication media, including business cards, door plaques, and digital communication such as email signatures, social media and websites.



SOURCE: “Guidance Counselors or School Counselors: How the Name of the Profession Influences Perceptions of Competence” (*Professional School Counseling*, Vol. 22, Issue 1). Authors: Brett Zyromski, Ph.D., Tyler D. Hudson, M.A., Emily Baker, M.A., and Darcy Haag Granello, Ph.D. The Ohio State University. This study used a sample of 276 school counselors who were recruited for participation at a 2018 state counseling association conference in Ohio.