

Using a Cohort Model to Support School Counselors Applying for RAMP

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Using a case study approach, researchers examined a two-year, state-supported school counseling cohort led by local school counselor educators. This cohort included school counselors within a given district who completed a two-year training cohort to prepare them to apply for the ASCA Recognized ASCA Model Program designation. Researchers identified six themes: (a) the push and pull of deciding to participate, (b) collaborative support, (c) appreciating facilitating the RAMP cohorts, (d) considering how to share the cohort process with others, (e) overcoming a lack of training and knowledge, and (f) advocating to overcome systemic barriers. Researchers recommend the following implications as a result of this study: (a) develop future school counseling training cohorts with the aim of improving programming and practice, rather than RAMP achievement; (b) provide similar cohort models to schools that have limited access to resources and opportunities; and (c) ensure future cohorts consider continuing with a peer cohort structure with instructors, meeting regularly over an extended period of time, and when possible, include building and district administrators.

Researchers

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Research Articles

Goodman-Scott, E., Taylor, J. V., & Walsh, R. (2022). Applying for RAMP using a cohort model: Results of a multi-level case study. *Professional School Counseling*.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/2156759X221076846>

Taylor, J. V., Goodman-Scott, E., & Walsh, R. (2022). Applying for RAMP using a cohort model: Overcoming challenges. *Professional School Counseling*. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2156759X221076844>

Research Question

What are the processes related to school counselors using a cohort model to prepare to apply for the RAMP designation?

Methodology

Using a case study approach (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2014), researchers gathered data from school counselors ($n = 18$), district-level coordinator ($n = 1$), facilitators who provided the RAMP training in their region ($n = 4$) and representatives from the state DOE ($n = 2$). Researchers received a grant from ASCA to conduct this case study, gleaning a multi-level perspective of the RAMP cohort process. Given the large amount of data produced, the results are presented across two papers: (a) Goodman-Scott, Taylor and Walsh (2022) and (b) Taylor, Goodman-Scott and Walsh (2022).

Summary of Findings

The present study identified several themes:

- 1. “The Reasons Why:” The Push and Pull of Deciding to Participate.** When considering beginning the RAMP cohort, participants described the decisional *push and pull*, or factors that were both motivating and intimidating. Subthemes included (a) prestige, (b) expanding implementation, (c) meeting needs and (d) intimidated by workload.
- 2. Collaborative Support: “You’re Not in it Alone.”** When discussing the RAMP cohort, participants often valued collaboration. Subthemes: (a) appreciating the cohort’s structure, (b) cohort collaboration, and (c) systemic collaboration.
- 3. Facilitating the RAMP Cohorts: “Solid Partnerships” with “A Lot of Heavy Lifting.”** The facilitators (often counselor educators) were an integral dimension of the RAMP cohort process, often responsible for scheduling cohort meetings and presenting the content. Thus, the related subthemes included: (a) staying connected to the field, (b) building a community of facilitators, (c) benefits to being external to school district, (d) extra work that goes unappreciated and (e) ambiguous role.
- 4. Next Steps: Considering How to “Share This [Cohort] with Others.”** When examining the RAMP cohort process, participants reflected on the process, and wanted to continue this model in the future. Thus, the related subthemes were, (a) excited and proud, (b) the hard work pays off and (c) suggestions for the future.
- 5. Overcoming a Lack of Training and Knowledge of School Counseling Programs.** Overall, participants perceived that school counselors may have a lack of training, and therefore a lack of knowledge of comprehensive school counseling programs, including the RAMP designation. However, participants found that participating in the RAMP cohort helped them overcome this obstacle. Specific subthemes included the following obstacle: (a) lack of training, as well as subthemes related to overcoming this obstacle: (b) increased understanding, (c) greater confidence, (d) opportunities for practical application and (e) conducting more purposeful work.

6. Advocating to Overcome Systemic Barriers. Throughout the interviews, participants described the systemic barriers that hindered school counselors from performing roles aligned with a school counseling program. At the same time, many also relayed that participating in the RAMP cohort assisted school counselors to better advocate and thus lessen these systemic barriers. Hence, corresponding subthemes included the obstacles of (a) lack of control and (b) lack of stakeholder understanding, as well as describing school counselors overcoming these obstacles through (c) their burgeoning enthusiasm for advocacy, (d) educating administrators and (e) educating a range of additional stakeholders.

Implications of the Research

1. Largely, the goal of the cohort shifted during the process. Initially participants focused primarily on *achieving RAMP*, but over time shifted to prioritize *strengthening their school counseling program* and to become better school counselors. In the future, school counseling leaders can acknowledge different degrees of school counseling program implementation. For example, Loudoun County Public Schools (VA) uses a four-star recognition program to acknowledge degrees of school counseling programs (e.g., emerging, moderate and full implementation).
2. Social justice themes were interwoven throughout this study, including the need to acknowledge that RAMP achievement and training can vary according to resources, access and equity. Thus, schools, districts, as well as state and national associations, should create systemic supports to ensure RAMP training is accessible to all schools, especially those that may be overlooked (e.g., urban and rural settings; communities in economic poverty).
3. According to this study, the RAMP cohort resulted in several reported benefits: school counselors' stronger understanding of and confidence in implementing comprehensive programs; a greater feeling of purpose; and overcoming barriers to implementing school counseling programs. Future cohorts can replicate this two-year model, including components noted specifically: training over time, a cohort model with peer and instructor supports, and at times, building and district administrator involvement.

About the ASCA Research Grants

The American School Counselor Association awards research grants for projects examining the effectiveness of comprehensive school counseling programs, particularly the ASCA National Model, in improving student outcomes; projects investigating the optimal school-counselor-to-student ratio(s); and other projects that advance school counseling practice.

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