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The Relationships Between School Counselor Ratios And Student Outcomes In One Predominantly Hispanic Texas School District

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THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN SCHOOL COUNSELOR RATIOS AND STUDENT OUTCOMES IN ONE PREDOMINANTLY HISPANIC TEXAS SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. I am here because of your grace and I am grateful for every blessing you have provided me. Thank you for lighting my path, making this dream a reality.

This dissertation is dedicated to my family who has exercised extreme patience, allowing me to be somewhat absent from their lives for the last four years.

To my Mom, thank you for always being there,

Dad, I can hear you from heaven cheering me on,

Robert, my honey-bunny, you are everything,

Brittney, my little girl, you are my best friend,

Bobby, my boy, you're the love of my life,

Joel, my brother, I adore you,

Karen, you are a blessing to me,

Chris, you are the best addition to our family,

Christopher and Lynelle, my grandbabies, you make this life complete,

Stacie, my sister, and Stephan, I love you.

Thank you all, I love you so much!

Mommy is back!

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Abstract

Research has demonstrated that lower school counselor ratios are associated with better student outcomes: attendance, discipline and achievement. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) recommends a student-counselor ratio of 250:1 to best support and address the needs of students. However, student-counselor ratios are much higher, diminishing the effectiveness of school counselors.

The purpose of this study is to determine if school counselor ratios are related to campus attendance, campus State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) or End-of-Course (EOC) testing performance, and campus discipline for substance use or other reasons, while considering the ethnicity and gender of students in each grade level (elementary, Kindergarten through 8th grade, middle and high school) and the percentage of economically disadvantaged students at each campus. This quantitative study utilizes secondary institutional data and correlational analyses to identify the relationships between ratios and student outcomes in one predominantly Hispanic school district in Texas. The findings offered limited evidence of significant relationships between counselor ratios and student outcomes with a relatively small sample of school campuses. However, the results of the study add to the limited research available regarding school counselor ratios and student outcomes in Texas, especially in districts serving predominately Hispanic student populations. The work of counseling programs to implement the ASCA National Model in spite of high student-counselor ratios is discussed.

Keywords: school counselor ratios, student outcomes, Hispanic students

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Chapter 1: Introduction

School counselors deliver comprehensive school counseling programs to all students through classroom lessons, small group activities, and individual counseling services based on the needs of the school community. To determine which needs take priority, school counselors routinely make decisions based on the analysis and disaggregation of student outcome data in the areas of achievement, attendance, and discipline (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2019a). The focus is on developing the mindsets and behaviors of all students to promote achievement, attendance and discipline while intentionally working to close opportunity gaps for marginalized groups (ASCA, 2019a). School counselors are skilled professionals that provide useful interventions at the earliest stages for students experiencing problems in school (Wright, 2012).

Among the prominent challenges facing school counselors are high student-to-school counselor ratios. Some schools in the United States have ratios of nearly 900 students to one school counselor (ASCA, 2019a). Ratios this high dramatically decrease the effectiveness of school counselors and prevent school counselors from providing the services and support that all students need, and especially students that are identified at-risk (Carone et al., 1998). Regardless of school counselors adapting to larger ratios the importance of lower ratios cannot be overstated when considering the social and emotional development of students. Students of all grade levels routinely present with mental health conditions such as attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder, anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, non-suicidal self-injury, and more. With school counselors many times being the only mental health professional in our schools, students have never needed school counselors more than they do now. Lower ratios could only help to better

serve students in more intentional ways and give families an extra level of support in the school setting.

Manageable school counselor caseloads allow counselors to better support students in overcoming challenges by focusing on their academic, career, and social and emotional development. Low student-to-school counselor ratios are especially beneficial for supporting economically disadvantaged students to graduate from high school with their cohorts, and able to reach their post-secondary goals (Lapan et al., 2012).

The goal of this study is to investigate within one Texas school district the existing relationships between school counselor ratios, and Hispanic student outcomes: attendance, achievement, and discipline. Mexican American students report more emotional, behavioral and academic problems than other ethnicities (Bird et al., 2001; Grant et al., 2004), which could explain the degree of disciplinary actions received by Hispanic students. Hispanic students drop out of high school at higher rates than Black and White students (U.S. Department of Justice, 2017). Lower attendance rates have been reported to be a contributor to low achievement rates (Gottfried, 2009; Lehr et al., 2004).

Definition of Terms

For clarity of understanding before proceeding further, key terms are defined below.

Students at-risk of dropping out of school are defined by The Texas Education Code (TEC) Chapter 29 Subchapter C, Compensatory Education Programs (TEA, 2020) as students under the age of 26 years to whom one or more of the following apply: failed a grade level for one or two school years, failed a core subject in grades 7th through 12th grades, failed an assessment instrument, failed a readiness test in prekindergarten through third grade, is pregnant or is a parent, in an alternative education program, has been expelled, on parole, probation,

deferred prosecution or on conditional release, has dropped out of school, is limited English proficient, is in the custody of the Department of Family and Protective Services, is homeless, in at a residential placement facility, a detention facility, substance abuse treatment facility, emergency shelter, psychiatric hospital, halfway house, cottage home operation, specialized child-care home, incarcerated or has a parent or guardian who has been incarcerated.

High-needs students are at-risk of experiencing academic failure and need additional supports, including students who do not meet graduation requirements and may not graduate on time. High needs students include students who live in poverty, attend schools with large populations of minority students, are below grade level, drop-outs, are homeless, in foster care, are incarcerated, are disabled or are English Language Learners (U.S. Department of Education, n.d).

School counselors design and deliver school counseling programs that improve student outcomes in the areas of achievement, attendance, and discipline (ASCA, 2019a).

Student-to-counselor ratio is the number of students assigned to one school counselor. It is also referred to as a *caseload*.

American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model provides the framework from which school counselors develop and implement a comprehensive program that:

- Makes data-informed decisions through the analysis and disaggregation of achievement, attendance or discipline data;
- Is delivered to all students in a systematic way through classroom lessons, small group activities and individual counseling services;
- Provides a curriculum that is developmentally appropriate, developing the mindsets and behaviors of all students to ensure postsecondary readiness;

- Closes achievement and opportunity gaps for marginalized populations;
- Improves upon student achievement, attendance, and discipline (ASCA, 2019a).

Study Rationale

The population of Hispanic families in Texas has increased considerably in recent years. The Texas Migration Center reported that of the top ten most populated counties in Texas, two of them are border counties. Concurrently, there has been an increase in economically disadvantaged families (Texas Demographic Center, 2017). The Texas Education Agency Annual Report (TEA, 2017) indicated that the population of students from low socioeconomic levels grew by 11%.

A recent study (Khan & Slate, 2016) showed that 6th grade Black, Hispanic, and White students in economically disadvantaged settings experienced more disciplinary actions than students with higher socioeconomic status. Hispanics had the highest drop-out rate at 9.5%, while Black youth had a drop-out rate of 5.7% and White youth had a drop-out rate of 4.6% (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Research shows that poor attendance has negative implications for reading, math, and low-test performance (Edwards, 2006, as cited in Balfanz, & Byrnes, 2012; Gottfried, 2009).

This dissertation will add to the research demonstrating that lower student-to-counselor ratios are one real opportunity for Hispanic at-risk students to be college and career ready on a path of their choosing while building strong positive social/emotional relationships that allow them to become confident and productive citizens. School counselors are uniquely trained in mental health and are skilled in providing small-group and individual counseling to address student needs, helping to emotionally balance students, so they can return to the learning environment. High performing counseling programs collaborate with families, educators, and

community stakeholders to develop an environment that results in positive outcomes for all students (ASCA, 2019a). The American School Counselor Association's position statement on the role of the school counselor states that counselors focus their talents, time and efforts on direct and indirect services for students, at minimum 80% of their time (ASCA, 2019a). High performing counseling programs collaborate with families, educators, and community stakeholders to develop an environment that results in positive outcomes for all students (ASCA, 2019a). To reach maximum school counseling program effectiveness, ASCA (2019a), recommends school counselor ratios of 250:1.

Yet, high counselor ratios and counselor role confusion hinder school counselors from providing services to students and performing the very duties they were educated and trained to perform. Oftentimes school counselors are the only mental health professional in schools and although school counselors attempt to accommodate and address the needs of every child the need for lower ratios is a worthwhile effort in providing more efficient services but especially to at-risk populations. The American School Counselor Association provides specific recommendations within its position statement for school counselors regarding students who are identified as at-risk (ASCA, 2017b). ASCA's position statement on working with at-risk populations expects the school counselor to collaborate with stakeholders to implement a preventative, comprehensive school counseling program, which includes early warning systems for identifying students who may be engaging in harmful or risky behaviors and developing resilience and success in students. ASCA provides further guidance in its Ethical Standards for School Counselors (2016) by outlining that counselors have a responsibility, among many, to be concerned with students' academic, career, and social/emotional needs in that every student is encouraged to reach their maximum development. The ethical standards further direct school

counselors to collaborate with administration, faculty, and staff to create a culture of postsecondary readiness by providing opportunities for every student to develop the mindsets and behaviors necessary to adopt a positive attitude towards learning, a strong-work ethic, resilience, and perseverance.

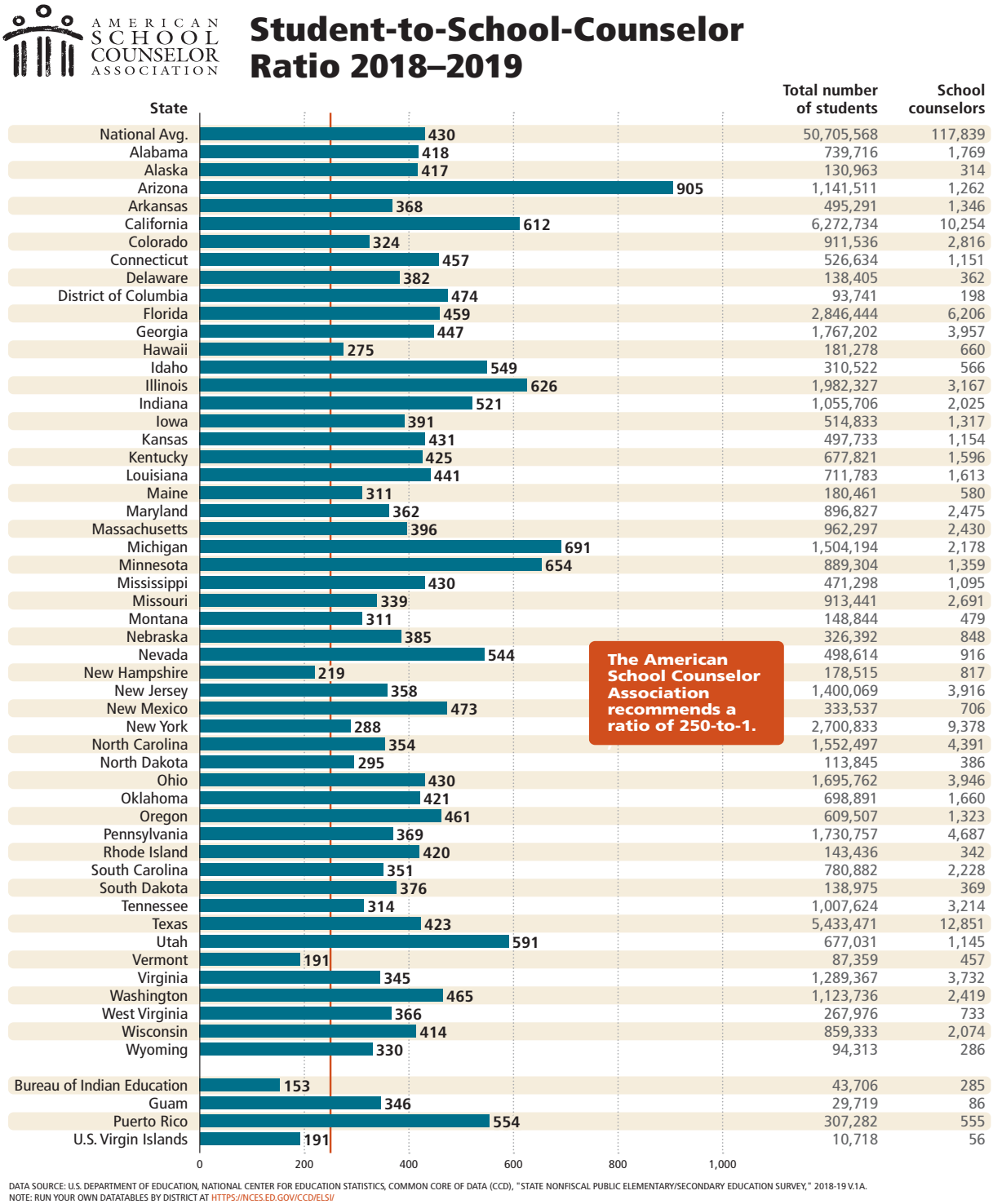
Statement of the Problem

In school districts across Texas, there are school counselors working towards providing students with classroom lessons on character education, problem-solving skills, decision-making skills and preparing for college and careers. School counselors aim to provide small group counseling for students who experience, grief, loss, anger, anxiety, and other issues. Individual counseling provides students who are in need of more intensive support an opportunity to express their distress to the point that they can attain emotional balance. Reaching emotional balance allows for learning to occur. However, high counselor ratios are seen all across the country, most are well over ASCA's recommendation of 250:1 and one state ratio is as high as 900:1. Fewer school counselors in schools equates to less support for vulnerable students with very high needs.

The Texas Education Agency (TEA, 2019) offers a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) webpage that addresses appropriate student-to-school counselor ratio information for school counselors, administrators and school districts to base informed decisions upon regarding student-to-school counselor ratios. TEA defers to local school districts to determine ratios according to student and community needs. TEA confirms the importance of low ratios in meeting the needs of high priority students and communities; greater counselor ratios mean diminished amounts of individual attention for special populations of students whose needs are greater. Special populations include students who are educationally and economically

disadvantaged, physically and emotionally disabled or abused, highly mobile, dropouts and migrants (TEA, 2019). Special populations of students have magnified needs and require more intentional responsive services from school counselors and require lower ratios. TEA (2019) states the following organizations all recommend a student-to-school counselor ratio of 350:1: The Texas Counseling Association, Texas Association of Secondary Principals and The Texas Elementary Principals and Supervisors Association. ASCA's recommendation is 250:1. However, in Texas, the average is 423 students to every one counselor and the national average is 430:1 (ASCA, 2019b). In fact, Table 1, below from ASCA reports that only New Hampshire, Vermont, and the U.S. Virgin Islands in the United States meet the recommended student-to-school counselor ratio of 250:1 (ASCA, 2019b).

Table 1:1 *Student-to-School-Counselor Ratio 2018-2019*



State		Total number of students	School counselors
National Avg.	430	50,705,568	117,839
Alabama	418	739,716	1,769
Alaska	417	130,963	314
Arizona	905	1,141,511	1,262
Arkansas	368	495,291	1,346
California	612	6,272,734	10,254
Colorado	324	911,536	2,816
Connecticut	457	526,634	1,151
Delaware	382	138,405	362
District of Columbia	474	93,741	198
Florida	459	2,846,444	6,206
Georgia	447	1,767,202	3,957
Hawaii	275	181,278	660
Idaho	549	310,522	566
Illinois	626	1,982,327	3,167
Indiana	521	1,055,706	2,025
Iowa	391	514,833	1,317
Kansas	431	497,733	1,154
Kentucky	425	677,821	1,596
Louisiana	441	711,783	1,613
Maine	311	180,461	580
Maryland	362	896,827	2,475
Massachusetts	396	962,297	2,430
Michigan	691	1,504,194	2,178
Minnesota	654	889,304	1,359
Mississippi	430	471,298	1,095
Missouri	339	913,441	2,691
Montana	311	148,844	479
Nebraska	385	326,392	848
Nevada	544	498,614	916
New Hampshire	219	178,515	817
New Jersey	358	1,400,069	3,916
New Mexico	473	333,537	706
New York	288	2,700,833	9,378
North Carolina	354	1,552,497	4,391
North Dakota	295	113,845	386
Ohio	430	1,695,762	3,946
Oklahoma	421	698,891	1,660
Oregon	461	609,507	1,323
Pennsylvania	369	1,730,757	4,687
Rhode Island	420	143,436	342
South Carolina	351	780,882	2,228
South Dakota	376	138,975	369
Tennessee	314	1,007,624	3,214
Texas	423	5,433,471	12,851
Utah	591	677,031	1,145
Vermont	191	87,359	457
Virginia	345	1,289,367	3,732
Washington	465	1,123,736	2,419
West Virginia	366	267,976	733
Wisconsin	414	859,333	2,074
Wyoming	330	94,313	286
Bureau of Indian Education	153	43,706	285
Guam	346	29,719	86
Puerto Rico	554	307,282	555
U.S. Virgin Islands	191	10,718	56

DATA SOURCE: U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS, COMMON CORE OF DATA (CCD), "STATE NONFISCAL PUBLIC ELEMENTARY/SECONDARY EDUCATION SURVEY," 2018-19 V.1A.
NOTE: RUN YOUR OWN DATATABLES BY DISTRICT AT HTTPS://NCES.ED.GOV/CCD/ELSI/

Purpose of the Study

Although some studies have examined the relationship between student-to-school counselor ratios and discipline rates of youth in different parts of the country, there are few studies focused on these relationships in Texas. This study will look at one Texas school district within the context of a growing Hispanic population of elementary, K-8, middle, and high school students. The purpose of this study is to determine if school counselor ratios are related to campus attendance, campus State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) or End-of-Course (EOC) testing performance, and campus discipline for substance use or other reasons, while considering the ethnicity and gender of elementary, middle and high school students. STAAR and EOC exams are required by the Texas Education Agency through Texas Education Code, Chapter 39 (TEC, 2017). The researcher of this study has an understanding that school counselor ratios alone may not predict complex student outcomes such as achievement, discipline, and attendance. Thus, this study focuses on the extent to which school counselor ratios are an important factor in examining student outcomes within a school district on the Texas-Mexico border. This is a correlational study on the role of counselor ratios in relation to student outcomes for elementary, K-8, middle, and high school students in a predominantly Hispanic school district. This study adopts the premise of existing work establishing the need for lower school counselor ratios and the contributions of school counselors toward positive student and campus outcomes.

In BISD, school counselors provide lessons on the importance of being in attendance at school, performing at the highest academic levels, and developing resilience, a strong work-ethic, self-discipline and other social/emotional skills. Collaboration is a common practice for school counselors as counselors are frequently serving on attendance committees to develop

effective strategies to decrease student absences and communicate with their parents. BISD school counselors serve as members of academic team meetings with teachers, parents and students to convey the importance of meeting academic requirements needed for grade level promotion or graduation, oftentimes, developing small-group activities to promote academic excellence. Counselors regularly meet with students who have behavior concerns on accountability, self-awareness and self-responsibility. Counselors also conference with administration, teachers, and parents to develop plans for students with behavior concerns and discipline.

Context of the Study

As the School Counselor Coordinator for Border Independent School District (BISD), I assist the Director of School Counseling to oversee the 120 school counselors in the school district. The ASCA National Model is closely implemented district-wide and the district has received state and national recognitions. The BISD School Counseling department has one ASCA National School Counselor of the Year and three Top 5 ASCA National School Counselor of the Year Finalists. In Texas, 15 schools have received the Recognized ASCA Model Program (RAMP) Award which recognizes school counseling programs for excellence in serving students with data-driven programs designed to promote the academic, career, and social emotional development of all students through the implementation of the ASCA National Model. The RAMP application process generally takes a full year to prepare and requires counseling programs to submit multiple artifacts for each of the ten sections and multiple essays for each of the ten sections in the application. Notably, BISD has had 10 of the 15 RAMP winners in Texas despite having larger ratios than what is recommended by ASCA. BISD is also, “the first and only large district in the El Paso region to earn an “A” grade in the Texas Education Agency

latest accountability ratings. For two consecutive years, BISD is also the only district in the region and one of only three districts in a pool of the largest 50 in the state to earn the distinction for postsecondary readiness at the district level" (BISD, 2019a).

BISD is a unique district, considering its demographics and student population. The Texas Academic Performance Report (TAPR) published by TEA reported that in 2017-2018, BISD had a student population of 46,398 students including 71.4% economically disadvantaged students, 21.5% English Learners, and 46% at-risk students. In the 2018-2019 school year, BISD saw an increase in its student population for a total of 46,618, including 74% economically disadvantaged students, 24% English Learners and 49% at-risk students. With increases in high-needs students and the overall population, there comes a demand to determine how to best serve BISD students in terms of school counseling services.

Independent of recommended student-to-school counselor ratios described previously, BISD Administrative Regulation *EEB* defines class size instructional arrangements for all educators to include school counselors. Class sizes are determined by total student population for individual campuses. Elementary school counselors are assigned anywhere from 200 to 799 students to one school counselor per campus. A second school counselor is hired when the student population reaches 800 students. K-8 school counselors are assigned anywhere from 250-749 students; a second counselor is hired when the student population reaches 750 students. Middle school counselors are assigned anywhere from 250- 499 students; a second counselor is hired when the student population reaches anywhere from 500-749 students. High school counselors are assigned anywhere from 0-399 students and are assigned a head counselor position when the student population reaches 800 (BISD, 2019b). Providing services to all students and especially to at-risk and high-needs students remains the priority for BISD school

counselors, but BISD Administrative Regulation *EEB* challenges school counselors to provide those services efficiently. Although the challenge is greater at some BISD campuses with higher student-counselor ratios, the vision of the school counseling department is to provide our student body with the best services possible. This vision does not minimize the need for lower ratios. As society changes our world it changes the everyday lives of children and their needs have become greater. Lower ratios would assist counselors to reach all students by competently building school connectedness and improving upon student outcomes.

Research Question

The primary research question for this study is: To what extent are school counselor ratios related to student outcomes including attendance, discipline, and achievement for BISD elementary, K-8, middle, and high school students during the 2018-2019 school year? The three student outcomes (attendance, discipline, and achievement) will be examined by student gender and ethnicity for each campus level in BISD: elementary schools, K-8 (kindergarten through eighth grade) schools, middle schools, and high schools. Additionally, the relationship between economic disadvantage and student outcomes will be examined.

The findings from this study may aid educational leaders in making relevant decisions for staffing adequate numbers of school counselors. These types of decisions could lead to an increase in school counselor effectiveness, improvements in implementation of the ASCA National Model, and improvements of student outcomes: achievement, attendance, and discipline.

Methodological Approach

This quantitative study will utilize descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations with significance levels. An institutional data source, the OnDataSuite portal, will provide

achievement, attendance and discipline reports for boys, girls, Hispanic, and non-Hispanic White students at the elementary, K-8, middle, and high school levels. The unit of analysis will be individual school campuses from BISD: 23 elementary schools, 6 K-8 campuses, 9 traditional middle schools, and 6 comprehensive high schools for a total of 44 campuses.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Simon (2011) defines assumptions as those elements within your study that are out of your control. Assuming that the ASCA recommended counselor ratio of 250:1 is one that allows counselors to manage student needs effectively then the assumption is made that a range of 350-400 students is the starting point where ratios become problematic making counselors unable to manage student needs effectively. The researcher is assuming that school counselor ratios are high and preventing school counselors from performing with efficiency. It is assumed that the ASCA National Model is being fully implemented at each BISD school.

Simon (2011) defines limitations as potential weaknesses in the study that the researcher has no control over. Accordingly, the researcher recommends using caution in making generalizations from the findings of this study due to the relatively small sample size of 44 school sites. The researcher acknowledges the need for more campuses to fortify results. Another limitation is the lack of input from school counselors and principals, perhaps through a survey instrument or interviews. Opinions and perceptions from the student body are also lacking this study.

As per Simon (2011), delimitations are those distinctive pieces of a study that define the boundaries of the study and are within the control of the researcher. These include the choice of objectives, research questions, variables, and conceptual perspectives. A delimitation of this study is that it is bound to Hispanic students in Texas in a single school district. Another

delimitation is that causal conclusions cannot be determined from this study as there are many factors that contribute to student outcomes in achievement, attendance, and discipline.

Conclusion

There is an urgent need for more research on the effect of student-to-school counselor ratios on outcomes for students. This study will look to Texas students and Hispanic students. This study will highlight the relationships among counselor ratios and achievement, attendance, and discipline for students in one Texas school district. The findings from this study will inform the issue of staffing school counselors for school districts with high populations of Hispanic students.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The goal of this literature review is to highlight pertinent research on student-to-school counselor ratios and trends in student outcomes within K-12 education in the United States. An outline was developed that identified key research ideas which became the keywords used in specific databases. The main keywords included the following but were not limited to *Hispanic at-risk/high-needs students, Hispanic discipline, student-to-school counselor ratios and student outcomes*. The ERIC, EBSCOHOST, PSYCHInfo, and Sage databases were utilized. Google Scholar was used as an additional search engine. Information included peer-reviewed journal articles, books, government statistical reports and dissertations. The sources found are listed in the references section of this dissertation and were identified as the most relevant work of researchers in the field and provide the foundation of this literature review. In this chapter, I describe the role of school counselors as well as the macro and micro contexts in which they work and the myriad challenges encountered and addressed. This discussion is organized into two parts: (a) the role and context of school counselors in the U.S., and (b) the primary student outcomes examined in this study, to include attendance, academic achievement, substance abuse, and discipline. The research reviewed include studies from across the U.S. but will also highlight those specific to Texas and Hispanic students. Finally, the conceptual framework utilized for this study is described.

The Role and Context of School Counselors in the United States

For school counselors there is much work to be done in supporting students in the academic, social/emotional, and college and career readiness domain. The ASCA National Model aims to reestablish school counselors as an invaluable component to the overall success of students. The goal for all school counselors is to support students in overcoming obstacles to

learning and to help prepare them for productive lives after graduation. School counselors are often the only educators who maintain a holistic approach and a holistic picture of students (ASCA, 2019a). School counselors hold a holistic picture of the students they work with because they are educated in counseling theory and techniques, making them the only educators that are uniquely qualified to provide counseling services on a school campus (Carone et al., 1998). According to the ASCA framework, school counselors work to provide student services through four components. The *Define* component contains the defining documents that set professional and student standards for the profession, including, *ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success: K-12 College and Career Readiness Standards for Every Student, ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors, and ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards & Competencies* (ASCA, 2019a, p. 1). The *Manage* component guides school counselors to design, target, structure, implement and assess their programs efficiently. The *Deliver* component describes the best methods used to provide activities and services to students. ASCA recommends spending 80% of a school counselors time in providing Direct Student Services and Indirect Student Services (ASCA, 2019a, p. 77). This includes individual counseling, small-group counseling and classroom lessons on character education, social/emotional learning, developing problem-solving, resiliency, coping skills, college and career awareness and many other topics that serve the needs of the student body. The *Assess* component assesses the school counseling program as a whole on a regular basis to achieve the best results for students and allows for improvements to program design and delivery. School counselors routinely collaborate with stakeholders to support student success and advocate for equity and access for all students.

State policies are not consistent across the United States to support school counseling models, making the goals of school counselors difficult to achieve. In a national study that analyzed state counseling models (Martin et al., 2009), researchers deemed the following characteristics as those that provided the most support for school counseling programs: a state model published on the department of education website; modern model features such as those aligned to the ASCA National Model; models endorsed by the commissioner of education and voted on by state association leadership; models focused on career education; a designated state leader with 50% of time that is devoted to school counseling within a career unit at the state department of education; legislation that supports 6-year career plans for students; school counselor licensure requirements to implement comprehensive programs; support by the state for model implementation at state association conferences; and, reports on results voluntarily provided by districts to the state department of education. The researchers (Martin et al., 2009) grouped states into three categories based on the presence of these characteristics. There were seventeen states identified as "Established" models, 24 states identified as "Progressing" models, and 10 states identified at the "Beginning" stages of model development. Texas was identified as progressing (Martin et al., 2009). Texas has a state model called *The Texas Model for Comprehensive School Counseling Programs* in its 5th edition. Texas school counseling programs and school counselor responsibilities are outlined in the Texas Education Code (TEC) Section 33.005-33.007. Incorporation of the ASCA National Model with the Texas Model has not occurred to date. School counselors are left to advocate for the importance of appropriate model implementation, counselor duties, and student-to-school counselor ratios to assure students' needs are met.

School counselor program model implementation can become quite challenging because the school community including administrative leaders, teachers, parents and students differing opinions and expectations of school counselor functions in schools (Perera-Diltz & Mason, 2008).

School Counselors and Principals

Principals, specifically, are unsure of the school counselor's role (Brown et al., 2006). The services provided by school counseling programs are mostly decided by school principals, including how much support they are prepared to give school counselors (Kaplan, 1995; O'Connor, 2002; Ponec & Brock, 2000). School leadership controls the roles school counselors play and if their programs can function within the ASCA National Model (Ripley et al., 2003). School principals are tasked with using their school-based staff in the most productive ways (Lieberman, 2004). Many times, administrators have school counselors performing administrative tasks and organizing services for schools (Amatea & Clark, 2005; Zalaquett, 2005). School counselors have found themselves engaged in school tasks that are unrelated to the appropriate tasks of a professional school counseling program (Foster et al., 2005). Another factor to attribute to this problem is that school leaders may not have been educated on the best ways to utilize a school counselor. Principals reported not learning any content in their principal preparation programs regarding the most effective ways to collaborate with school counselors (Lowery et al., 2017). Some principals claimed to have learned about the school counseling role from the school counselor working at their campus or from their personal experiences with their school counselor when they were students in school. Principals suggested that principal programs should include information regarding the role of the school counselor, instruction on skills for how to best collaborate with counselors, and education on the social-emotional needs of

children (Lowery et al., 2017). In another study, when principals were asked to select among 15 statements describing appropriate role statements for counselors combined with 5 inappropriate role statements, administrators were more likely to choose an inappropriate duty for school counselors (Kirchner & Setchfield, 2005).

Moyer (n.d.) states that one major reason school counselors are assigned inappropriate tasks is due to a failure to firmly establish the counseling role. One way to firmly establish the counselor role is by advocating for appropriate counselor activities that are aligned to the school counselor role. Advocating activities include developing goals that align with the school goals and initiatives, analyzing data and educating the school community on the roles and responsibilities of the school counselor (Moyer, n.d.). The educational landscape is in a state of constant change with initiatives and goals that touch all of the educational community. National trends, high-stakes accountability testing and high student-to-counselor ratios negatively affect the ability of school counselors to integrate a comprehensive program in their schools, leaving them to perform non-counseling duties that are not endorsed by ASCA (Dixon Rayle & Adams, 2007).

School Counselors and Student Outcomes

When school counselors are able to build school connectedness and focus on the work they were trained to perform, students benefit in a variety of positive ways. Roderick et al. (2008, as cited in McKillip et al., 2012) found that Latino/a high school students were more likely to apply to four-year institutions and follow through with their college planning when they experienced supportive relationships with school counselors and when counselors took an active role in helping students to do research, make post-secondary decisions, and fill out college applications. Students experiencing personalized counseling services are more likely to enroll in

college, receive financial aid and, scholarships, and are better prepared to make important college and career related decisions (Public Agenda, 2010).

Research has demonstrated the impact that school counselors have on student outcomes such as attendance and academic goal-setting. Edwards (2013) found that when school counselors provide incentives and individual counseling interventions, they prove to be an effective method to improving student attendance. Edwards examined school counselor interventions that included school-wide monitoring programs, incentive programs, and counseling interventions (small group and individual counseling). The focus was on the 26% of students who were absent 15 days or more at an urban middle school. The study found that individual and grade level rewards systems were a factor in decreasing the attendance rate from 26% attendance rate to 19% from the 2006 to the 2007 school year.

A qualitative study (Capizzi et al., 2017) on the benefits of the GEAR UP program's counseling component was conducted using an intensive counseling model, requiring its counselors to implement the ASCA National Model. The GEAR UP program was utilized with 3,000 students beginning in the 7th grade through their high school graduation. The services provided were: counseling, mentoring, college field trips, after school tutoring, Saturday and summer school, parent and financial aid education, and college admission coaching. The study was designed to increase the number of low-income students that were college ready and prepared to succeed in post-secondary education. The four key findings were: (a) attending GEAR UP program activities such as counseling and field trips inspired students to elevate and move passed their original educational goals; (b) individual counseling and mentoring activities had profound effects on students' personal, social, and academic relationships further developing their sense of connectedness to school and the desire to achieve; (c) GEAR UP counselors

improved student confidence levels, self-worth, and potential, motivating them to improve their academic and personal lives; (d) GEAR UP aided in the expansion of student world views by giving them educational experiences that were beyond their familiar educational settings.

School counselors, school psychologists and social services staff have the ability to aid in the early identification of youth with mental health concerns and can provide help for those students who face obstacles in receiving the treatment needed (Brener & Demissie, 2018). Additionally, family support is very powerful. Family interventions prove to be an important strategy in reducing mental health issues and academic problems for Mexican Americans (Gonzales et al., 2012). School counselors play an important role in collaborating with families to support the academic and mental health needs of children. Collaboratives can become strained when school counselors have too many students to manage.

A study (Bain et al., 2011) in South Texas found that the rural schools and districts of South Texas struggle to provide mental health services to students. There was an even greater need for more mental health awareness and mental health services focused on Hispanic students and their families. Some of the most pressing issues were emotional adjustment, social issues and substance abuse. School counselors reported that less than a quarter of their students were receiving the counseling services they needed and reported feeling frustration because they were trying to provide as much counseling as possible for students. This study suggests the need for improved mental health services for Hispanic communities in South Texas schools and emphasizes the need for more male school counselors (Bain et al., 2011).

Middle school is a critical time for early interventions and school counselors are skilled professionals at providing useful interventions for students who have become problematic in the classroom (Wright, 2012). Relationships between teachers and school counselors are some of the

most important relationships for students, especially those in middle school, in helping students feel connected to the school community and preventing drug use (McNeely & Falci, 2004, as cited in American Academy of Pediatrics, 2007). The importance of student-counselor relationships are just as important for Mexican American students. A study (Vela et al., 2016) in a south Texas high school surveyed 131 students on their perceptions of high school counselors supports regarding academic achievement. The researchers' findings suggest a positive relationship between Mexican American high school students who perceive their high school counselors have high expectations for them and the extent that students believe that school counselors are available predicted college-going self-efficacy, essentially boosting confidence in their abilities to attain a postsecondary education (Vela et al., 2016).

A nationally representative study of adolescents aged 13–18 years showed that approximately 50% have experienced at least one DSM-IV (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) mental disorder (including anxiety, mood, behavioral, substance use, and other disorders) during their lifetime and 22% of these adolescents had severe disorders (Merikangas & Burstein, 2010, as cited in Brener & Demissie, 2018). Green et al. (2013, as cited by Brener & Demissie, 2018) reported that more than half of students 13-17 years of age with a DSM-IV mental health disorder will receive services at their own school. One study (Brener & Demissie, 2018) suggests that school district staffing policies and regulations could increase the quantity and quality of counseling and psychological and social services, possibly improving mental and behavioral outcomes for adolescents because schools are in a unique position to meet the mental health needs of students.

Many adults diagnosed with a mental health disorder were labeled as "behavior problems" as youths in school and were thought to be uninterested in learning or making

academic advances (Emmons & Belangee, 2018). Dreikurs & Soltz (1964, as cited in Emmons & Belangee, 2018) state that children who experience feelings of discouragement in school question their acceptance and belonging at school. School counselors are key in early identification of such feelings and can help to reduce unwanted behaviors that may lead students into the juvenile justice system (Emmons & Belangee, 2018).

Student-to-School Counselor Ratios

Student-to-school counselor ratios vary from district to district and from state to state. Glander (2015) points out that although ASCA recommends a ratio of 250:1, the recommended ratios of individual states are much higher (as cited in Goodman-Scott et al., 2018). McCarthy et al. (2010) and Woods & Domina (2014) state that high counselor ratios often impede school counselors from meeting students' needs (as cited in Goodman-Scott et al., 2018). Some ratios are so high that believing that school counselors are in a position to provide satisfactory services to students is quite a far-fetched idea (Carone et al., 1998). It is worth noting that school counselor ratios have become much larger due to the recent economic recession between 2008 to 2010 (Wright, 2012). School systems were forced to make budget cuts eliminating teachers, librarians and school counselors. This caused an increase in class sizes and in some cases increased counselor ratios.

The journal*, Professional School Counseling* (2018) published a series of state-wide quantitative studies focused on student-to-counselor ratios, comprehensive program implementation and student academic and behavioral outcomes. The six studies were conducted on a variety of contexts yet yielded similar findings. Findings from states including Connecticut, Missouri, Utah, Nebraska, and Rhode Island indicated that there are important relationships

among student educational outcomes, school counseling program organization, school counselor ratios, use of counselor time, and specific counseling activities.

Connecticut. The journal's study on Connecticut (Lapan, Whitcomb, & Aleman, 2018) examined the relationship between counseling program implementation efforts and student success at the high school level. This study found that lower student-to-counselor ratios in Connecticut high schools have significantly lower percentages of disciplinary incidents and suspensions. Counselors reported lower suspension rates and disciplinary incidents when they provided more responsive services, tending to the challenges that students face and college and career lessons. When principals reported an increase in college and career counseling services, an improvement was noted in student attendance and graduation rates were higher. Low student-to-school counselor ratios accounted for a 9% variance in suspension rates, showing a significant relationship between the two. There are clear benefits for students when school counselors are able to spend their time as recommended by ASCA and when low ratios are utilized (Lapan, Whitcomb, & Aleman, 2018).

Missouri. The journal's study on Missouri (Lapan, Gysbers, Stanley, & Pierce, 2018) examined 481 schools in urban, suburban and rural regions to evaluate the relationship between student-to-school counselor ratios and specific markers of student success. Researchers found that schools with low student-to-school counselor ratios had more high school graduates, better attendance rates and lower disciplinary incidents. Schools using the recommended 250:1 ratio saw improved graduation rates from 86% to 91%, higher attendance rates from 92% to 94% and lower disciplinary actions from 4.03 to 2.17. Schools with higher percentages of low socioeconomic student populations performed better academically when the student-to-school counselor ratio was at the recommended 250:1 (Lapan, Gysbers, Stanley, & Pierce, 2018).

Utah. The journal's study on Utah (Carey, Harrington, Martin, & Stevenson, 2018) found that comprehensive school counseling programs that were implemented for longer periods of time were significantly related to better attendance rates and lower suspensions. Better student-to-school counselor ratios were associated with significantly higher attendance rates and lower discipline rates. Students had higher ACT scores and a higher number of students took the ACT test, in schools where counseling programs were closely implemented and aligned to the ASCA National Model. Additionally, the Utah State Office of Education (USOE) maintains an active role in improving school counseling programs in rural and urban areas of the state. This is a unique model, considering most school counseling programs are locally controlled by school districts and do not have representation at the state level. Gysbers (2006, as cited in Carey, Harrington, Martin, & Stevenson, 2018) maintains that strong leadership and advocacy at the state-level is crucial for the development of effective school counseling programs. The Utah State Office of Education updated and aligned its current state model with the ASCA National Model and required all middle and high school counseling programs to meet state program standards in order to receive state funding.

Nebraska. In Nebraska, school counseling programs are locally controlled by school districts, but they are mandated through state education administrative rules and are required in order to meet the school accreditation process (Carey, Harrington, Martin, & Hoffman, 2018). A state school counseling specialist ensures maximum compliance and aims to improve the quality of school counseling programs. Similar to Utah, Nebraska's state counseling model was updated to adopt the ASCA National Model along with its state model. The ability of school counseling programs to deliver services that are focused on differentiated development of students was found to decrease suspension rates, decrease discipline rates, increase attendance, and increase

math and reading proficiency rates on state assessments. Favorable student-to-school counselor ratios were associated with improved attendance, improved technical proficiency in career and technical education, and improved program completion for career and technical programs (Carey, Harrington, Martin, & Hoffman, 2018).

Rhode Island. Rhode Island adopted a state model comprehensive counseling program in 2004 with implementation for the entire state managed by the Coordinator of the Rhode Island School Counseling Project (Dimmitt & Wilkerson, 2018). Dimmitt and Wilkerson (2018) used several different survey instruments to examine how comprehensive school counseling programs in Rhode Island were delivered to students, focusing on the relationships between counseling activities and student outcomes. When counselors focused on improving academic standing, students had better attendance, fewer suspensions, less conflicts with others, better school connectedness and fewer incidents of teasing or bullying. When counselors focused on college and careers, students had significantly lower suspension rates, better sense of connectedness, fewer incidents of teasing or bullying, better attendance, and parents felt the school was responsive. When school counselors focused on students' personal and social needs, students reported feeling more connected to school, had fewer difficulties with teachers, and parents reported that school counselors were more attentive to their needs (Dimmitt & Wilkerson, 2018).

A series of articles from Indiana, Connecticut, and New York (Parzych et al., 2019) highlights the positive impacts of low school counselor ratios. Indiana found that low school counselors ratios produced a significant correlation with improved attendance, SAT math, verbal and writing scores. Connecticut provided preliminary findings suggesting that lower school counselor ratios demonstrated higher graduation rates, college entrance, and persistence rates. Connecticut also showed improved chronic absenteeism and a decrease in disciplinary

suspensions. Jointly, the ability of a school counselor to adequately deliver their school counseling programs is impacted by socioeconomic status and the resources available to the school community.

Another article (Lapan, et al., 2012) found a relationship between lower school counselor ratios and improved graduation rates, lower disciplinary incidents for students receiving free or reduced lunch. High poverty schools that met the recommended ASCA ratios found to have improved graduation, attendance rates, and lowered disciplinary incidents.

A study by Goodman-Scott et al. (2018) used the 2009 High School Longitudinal Study from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) that explored student outcomes, and postsecondary plans. There was a two-step process where in the first stage schools were random sampled and then students were randomly sampled from the schools. Data was collected from students when they were freshman and then again when they were juniors. This study focused on both Title I and non-Title I schools. Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2018) provides funding to schools and school districts with high percentages of students from low-socioeconomic families to ensure that all students meet state academic standards. The researchers found that non-Title I schools with low student-to-counselor ratios had significantly higher GPA's accounting for 3.7% of the variance. They also found a positive relationship among student-to-counselor ratios, GPA and Title I schools. The amount of time counselors spent with students developing their personal/social skills, and non-counseling activities were found to be significant predictors for GPA's. Students attending schools with low student-to-school counselor ratios were 1.85 times more likely to graduate from high school than students attending schools with high student-to-school counselor ratios. Ratios

were significantly related to high school graduation, but not significantly related to postsecondary coursework (Goodman-Scott et al., 2018).

Lapan (2012) found that when highly trained counselors deliver a comprehensive ASCA program with fidelity, students show marked benefits, especially students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Effective implementation of either a state counseling model or the ASCA National Model and low student-to-counselor ratios increase personalized relationships and connectedness with students. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC, 2009) reported that school connectedness, the belief by students that adults and peers in the school care about their learning as well as about them, was found to be the second strongest protective factor for young people against drug use, absenteeism, and other risky behaviors. The strongest protective factor was family connectedness. School connectedness proved to have strong relationships with attendance and achievement (CDC, 2009).

Primary Student Outcomes and Demographic Factors

School counselors in the U.S. are charged with supporting students in overcoming a wide variety of challenges. School counselors are geared towards providing counseling services to meet student needs through comprehensive counseling programs that benefit from principal support and low student-to-counselor ratios. As the research reviewed thus far has demonstrated, school counselor ratios are associated with a variety of student outcomes, from mental health and social-emotional skills to outcomes such as attendance, discipline, and achievement. A study (Bemack et al., 2018) identified the four critical domains of accountability for school counselors that demonstrate the effectiveness of school counselors in helping to improve student outcomes. The four domains of accountability for school counselors are achievement, attendance,

discipline, and suspension. Thus, it is worthwhile to examine the relationship between counselor ratios and student outcomes in a predominantly Hispanic school district in Texas.

In terms of attendance, researchers Balfanz & Byrnes (2012) found in a six-state study on absenteeism that the most fruitful means for closing achievement gaps are efforts put towards ensuring that economically disadvantaged students attend school regularly from PK-12th grades. A study (Stripling, 2019) in a Southern California elementary school describes how a school counselor's efforts were put towards chronic absenteeism in her school. Chronic absenteeism was defined as 10% or more school days absent. Absenteeism had become problematic, and the school had little success in reducing chronic absenteeism in their school. Truancy notices and parent meetings with administrators and teachers did little to improve their concerns. In collaboration with faculty and administrators, the school counselor adapted the Behavior Education Program (BEP) to address attendance concerns. The BEP program focused and emphasized positive student-adult interactions. The school counselor included daily Attendance Check-In Check-Out activities, daily monitoring, and incentives in her approach to improve attendance. Although findings did not indicate significance in improved average daily attendance for the whole group, the Attendance Check-In Check-Out intervention did show promise on decreasing individual student absences (Stripling, 2019). In another study (Akos et al., 2019), the differences between school counseling programs earning the RAMP distinction and non-RAMP schools were measured against achievement and attendance outcomes. Those schools that earned the RAMP distinction at the middle school level saw significant results in improved attendance rates in comparison to non-RAMP middle schools (Akos et al., 2019).

School counselors may be an especially important influence on students who are at-risk of underperforming or dropping out of school. According to the ASCA Position Statement on the School Counselor and Academic Development (2017a), school counselors play an important role in ensuring for a safe environment where students have the appropriate mindsets and behaviors that promote academic achievement. National data shows that Hispanic students drop out of high school at higher rates than Black or White high school students, and male students drop out at higher rates than females (U.S. Department of Justice, 2017). In terms of graduating on time with one's cohort, 77% of White males, 43% of African American males and 48% of Hispanic males graduate within the four-year time span (Hirschfield, 2009). Perry (2017) reports that in order for school counselors to help in the promotion of academic achievement school counselors need to identify who needs academic interventions and why. Through collaboration with the school community, especially principals, school counselors can provide academic supports at the high school level for school-wide, classroom, small-group, or individual counseling services through the implementation of the ASCA Model (Perry, 2017).

Substance use by Hispanic adolescents is of particular interest because the literature reveals significant drug and alcohol use among this population. Hispanic youth relative to black youth have 1.6 higher odds of cigarette and alcohol use (Cha et al., 2017). Gateway drugs are used prominently by female students and students aged 14-17 in Hispanic families with high residential mobility (Lee, 2007). Hispanic adolescents are at the highest risk of engaging in heavy episodic drinking and reported easy access to alcohol and feeling that drinking is a harmless act (King & Vidourek, 2010). Hispanic teens who have a lower level of commitment to school are more likely to engage in drinking alcohol and binge drinking than those students with higher school commitment (Eitle & Eitle, 2007).

A recent study in Texas (Khan & Slate, 2016) investigated the degree to which inequities were found regarding school disciplinary assignments for students in 6th grade who were living in poverty and either Black, Hispanic or White. Findings showed that 33,233 Hispanic students experienced in-school suspensions compared to 13,899 Black students and 14,902 white students. There were 47,841 low-socioeconomic status students who received in-school suspensions. For those students experiencing out-of-school suspensions, 14,377 were Hispanic, 8,458 were Black, and 3,658 were White students. For those students who received disciplinary alternative educational program placements, 3,501 were Hispanic, 1,578 were Black and 1,025 were White students.

In a collaboration with the Council of State Governments Justice Center and the Public Policy Research Institute, at Texas A&M University, Fabelo et al. (2011) conducted an extensive study in Texas to determine how school discipline affects student academic success and if the disciplinary consequences that students receive initiates a relationship or introduces students to the Juvenile Justice System. Fabelo et al. (2011) found that one in seven adolescents had contact with the Juvenile Justice System during middle and high school. Suspended or expelled student were likely to have contact with the Juvenile Justice System (JJS) especially if they incurred multiple disciplinary actions. A bivariate analysis was conducted and found that 23% of students with disciplinary involvement had contact with the JJS. One in five African American students, one in six Hispanic students and one in ten White students had contact with the Juvenile Justice System. Special education students with an emotional disturbance (48%) had the most contact with JJS in comparison to students with learning disabilities (24%), physical disability (18%), other disability (5%), and no disability (13%). The study (Fabelo et al., 2011) found that among students in seventh through twelfth grades, 54% experienced in-school suspension, and 31%

experienced out-of-school suspension. Students averaged eight suspensions and/or expulsions during middle or high school. African American male students received 83% of the discretionary violations or violations of the student code of conduct that could result in consequences such as, in-school or out-of-school suspensions. Hispanic male students received 74% of the discretionary disciplinary actions and White male students received 59% of the discretionary disciplinary actions.

Also, research shows that Mexican American students report more emotional, behavioral and academic problems than other ethnicities (Bird et al., 2001; Grant et al., 2004), which could explain the degree of disciplinary actions received by Hispanic students. Furthermore, research in Texas showed that DAEP placements were almost six times higher for children with low socioeconomic status than for children with high socioeconomic status (Khan & Slate, 2016).

Disciplinary actions have reciprocal effects and lasting consequences on student academic achievement. Disciplinary referrals take students out of the learning environment leaving them academically disadvantaged, and subject them to academic retention where students are held back in the current grade level to repeat it. Researchers describe three primary factors that influence students to drop out of school: being retained at any grade level, failing an end-of-course exam and long-term suspensions from school (Sparks et al., 2010, as cited by Bornsheuer et al., 2011). Oftentimes, students who struggle academically mask their deficits with disruptive behaviors that lead them to disciplinary consequences in which the student is removed from the classroom or the campus (Lekrone & Griffith, 2006, as cited by Bornsheuer et al., 2011). Marchbanks et al. (2014) found that students between 7th and 12th grades that experienced one in-school suspension or worse were 24% more likely to drop out of high school.

In light of the need that Hispanic students and particularly those at-risk have for counseling services, efforts to strengthen school counseling programs require attention. A qualitative study (Echenrod-Green &, Culbreth, 2008) researched the perceptions of Latino students and their school counselors. This study took place in a traditional public high school in the southeast. With a total student population of 1,169 students, 45.3% qualified for free and reduced lunch, and Hispanic students comprised of 10.98% of the total population. Hispanic high school students reported that counselors who relate to kids and try to help them with problems, and who are understanding, patient, trustworthy, and friendly are important characteristics for a school counselor to possess in building quality relationships with students. Building quality relationships helped students feel more at ease in seeking counseling services. Some issues that prevented students from seeking counseling services were not being able to get out of class, the location of the school counseling office in relation to their classes and students feeling that school counselors were too busy to see students. Students felt that counselors had very limited amounts of time to see students. Students shared the need for more Hispanic school counselors or counselors that could speak Spanish. Students felt disadvantaged in communicating their needs and helping their parents understand the American school system, and they expressed concern for Asian students who didn't have access to any translators to help them transition into American schools. Students reported that they did not have a clear understanding of what services were available to them from the counseling department. Students recommended improvements in publicizing and educating students on the roles and services provided by school counseling programs (Eckenrod-Green & Culbreth, 2008).

Conceptual Framework

This study examines the relationships between school counselor ratios and student attendance, disciplinary referrals for drug/alcohol use and for other behavior, and achievement across elementary, K-8, middle and high schools in one Texas public school district. The conceptual framework utilized for this research is positioned in the American School Counselor Association National Model (ASCA): A Framework for School Counseling Programs, Fourth Edition. This study refers to the model as it outlines the school counselor's role in supporting student outcomes: attendance, discipline, and achievement. The Texas Education Agency defers recommending any one ratio to school districts but lists the recommended ratios from ASCA and from The Texas Counseling Association (TCA), The Texas Association of Secondary School Principals (TASSP), and the Texas Elementary Principals and Supervisors Association (TEPSA) which all hold a recommended ratio of 350:1.

The ASCA National model provides a blueprint for school counselors in designing and delivering a program to improve student outcomes with data-informed decisions that close achievement or opportunity gaps and result in improved achievement, attendance, and discipline (ASCA 2019a, p. xii). Importantly, the research reviewed in this chapter highlights findings that support the importance of the ASCA Model approach for serving public school students, and especially those who are at-risk. In Texas, public school districts are not required to adopt the ASCA National Model or adhere to ASCA's recommended student-counselor ratios. Yet, the ASCA National Model is closely implemented in the Texas school district that is the context of this study, as described in Chapter 1. BISD has received state and national recognitions from ASCA for the quality of its comprehensive counseling programs. The strong focus on ASCA in BISD is the reason for adopting the ASCA Framework as the conceptual framework guiding this

study. The findings for student outcomes in BISD will be interpreted through the lens of ASCA's prescriptions for school counseling programs and to what extent the data aligns or does not align with those prescriptions. Furthermore, the findings will be held up against ASCA's recommended student-counselor ratios to reflect on the implications of the counselor ratios in BISD for student outcomes.

Conclusion

School counselors in the U.S. are charged with supporting at-risk students in overcoming a wide variety of challenges. School counselors are geared towards providing counseling services to meet student needs through comprehensive counseling programs that benefit from principal support and low student-to-counselor ratios.

Chapter 1 introduced the research focus for this study by providing the problem, purpose, and the relevance of the problem that will help guide the analysis of this study. Chapter 2 contained a review of the literature pertinent to the problem. Looking forward, Chapter 3 will introduce the research methodology, the research design, data sources and procedures for this study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this study is to better understand the relationship of school counselor ratios to achievement, attendance, and behavior outcomes for Hispanic students in one Texas school district. As described in the previous chapter, a six-state study of the role of school counselor ratios on student outcomes found clear benefits for students when school counselors were able to spend their time according to the recommended percentages by ASCA in combination with low ratios (Lapan et al., 2012). For instance, academic performance improved for economically disadvantaged student populations when the school counselor ratios were at the recommended 250:1 (Lapan et al., 2012). However, there is a lack of studies investigating these same issues in Texas. This study focuses on one public school district in Texas, examining a large and growing Hispanic student population across elementary, K-8, middle, and high school campuses. The student outcomes considered in this study include campus attendance, standardized test performance, and campus discipline for substance use or other reasons. As the research reviewed indicates, particular groups of students are at risk of underperformance, disengagement from school, and behavior resulting in disciplinary actions. Therefore, this research included data on student outcomes by ethnicity and gender and the percentage of economically disadvantaged students at each campus.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical procedures were followed to conduct this study, including contacting the BISD Director of Research and Evaluations to determine the need for school district institutional review board (IRB) approval. The director determined that a school district IRB review would not be necessary considering the use of secondary data as the data source and the absence of any

human interactions for this study. University IRB approval was obtained for this dissertation research study.

Confidentiality and anonymity is maintained for the study by using the pseudonym BISD to protect the identity of the school district. Additionally, the names of individual campuses are not used in this study to protect their identities. Only campus-level data was included in the dataset, so the identity of individual students was not a relevant factor in this study.

Research Design

This quantitative study examines the relationships between student-to-school counselor ratios and student outcomes (achievement, attendance and discipline) in one Texas school district with a predominately Hispanic student population. The secondary dataset utilized for this study pertains to the 2018-2019 school year, being that it was prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The 2018-2019 school year offers more reliable data for attendance and discipline than current data during the pandemic given that the district student body was physically in school. Institutional data was accessed from OnDataSuite, a data storage retrieval platform from BISD that houses assessment, attendance, and discipline data reports. Given the limited focus of the study on one school district with a limited number of campuses and variables in the institutional dataset, this research study used a correlational approach.

Population and Sample

The sample for this study consisted of BISD campuses at the elementary, K-8, middle, and high school levels from the 2018-2019 school year. The unit of analysis for this study was individual school campuses in BISD. Of the 50 schools in BISD, 44 were included in this analysis. Elementary level campuses ($N = 23$) are comprised of kindergarten through 5th grade. K-8 campuses ($N = 6$) consist of kindergarten through 8th grade. Middle school campuses ($N = 9$)

include 6th through 8th grade. Finally, high school campuses ($N = 6$) include 9th through 12th grades.

There were six campuses eliminated from the sample for various reasons. A short description of each of the six eliminated schools follows.

- Two disciplinary alternative schools (one elementary and one high school) were omitted from analyses because of the high mobility of the student population. Students are assigned to those schools for certain types of disciplinary referrals.
- One early childhood center was not included due to the young age (4-year-olds) and lack of assessment data.
- A new elementary school was not included in the sample because it did not exist in 2018-2019.
- One non-traditional high school was not included because of its incompatibility with the comprehensive high schools in this study. It is a school that offers a different setting for students who cannot find success at a comprehensive high school due to pregnancy, profound family issues, or high degrees of anxiety or similar mental health concerns. The student population is relatively small (under 200 students) and students graduate throughout the school year.
- One stand-alone early college high school was eliminated from the sample because its setting is inconsistent with the comprehensive high school setting of the other high schools in this sample.

Data Source and Variables

The data for this study consisted of institutional data from BISD including student-to-counselor ratios, percentage of economically disadvantaged students, and student outcomes in

the areas of achievement, attendance, and discipline. Data for these variables were retrieved from detailed reports generated by OnDataSuite. Then, data was imported into SPSS for statistical analysis. Data was grouped by four campus levels: elementary, K-8, middle, and high school. Student-to-school counselor ratio data were derived from data for the total student population at each BISD school during the 2018-2019 school year and from the number of full-time school counselor employees assigned to each school. Data on the percentage of students classified as economically disadvantaged at each school were available across all four campus levels. Economic disadvantage was determined by student eligibility for free or reduced-price meals according to the National School Lunch and Child Nutrition Program (TEA, 2008).

Attendance and discipline data were available for all campus levels. Two types of discipline data were used: one for drug/alcohol-related offenses and the second for all other discipline. Achievement data varied according to campus level. Under the Texas Student Success Initiative (SSI), 5th and 8th grade students must pass all coursework and successfully pass Reading and Math STAAR in order to receive grade level promotion. SSI was enacted by the 76th Texas Legislature in 1999 and later modified by the 81st Texas Legislature in 2009. Achievement data at the elementary level came from 5th grade Reading and Math STAAR scores and data for middle schools came from 8th grade Reading and Math STAAR scores. K-8 campuses have both 5th and 8th grades, so achievement data from those campuses had Reading and Math STAAR scores from both grade levels.

High school students under SSI are required to pass all coursework and pass English I, English II, Biology, Algebra I, and U.S. History End-of-Course (EOC) exams in order to graduate. For high schools in the sample, achievement data consisted of English I EOC exam scores. The high school English EOC exam is considered a parallel measure to the Reading

STAAR for lower grade levels. The high school Algebra I EOC exam is considered parallel to the Math STAAR. Due to technical reasons not under the control of the researcher, Algebra I EOC exam scores were not available in the BISD dataset for inclusion in the study.

In consideration of the student demographic groups at-risk and more inclined to benefit from the attention of school counselors, student outcome data were disaggregated by gender and ethnicity. Variables were analyzed for the attendance rates and achievement scores of boys and girls as well as Hispanic and non-White Hispanic students. Ethnicity was categorized as only two groups due to low numbers of students of other ethnicities, yet it should be noted that the numbers of non-Hispanic White students at school campuses in the sample were generally low, making up 0% to 11% of the student population across campuses, with only one campus at 66%. Discipline data could not be disaggregated by gender and ethnicity because of the low numbers of disciplinary referrals especially for elementary and K-8 campuses.

Chapter 4: Results

The central research question for this study was: To what extent are school counselor ratios related to student outcomes including attendance, discipline, and achievement for BISD elementary, middle, and high school students during the 2018-2019 school year? Attendance and achievement outcomes were examined by student gender and ethnicity for each campus level (elementary, K-8, middle, and high schools) in BISD. As mentioned in the previous chapter, discipline outcomes were not disaggregated by gender and ethnicity, but are reported for each campus level. Additionally, the relationship between economic disadvantage and student outcomes was examined.

First, descriptive statistics will be described below for each campus level in the sample. Second, descriptive statistics on counselor ratios by campus level will be presented. Then, findings will be presented for the three student outcomes: attendance, discipline, and achievement. Within the section on each outcome, findings are described for each of the four campus levels. Outcomes are reported by student gender and ethnicity, except for discipline. Additionally, findings are reported for economic disadvantage. In each section, results are provided for descriptive statistics followed by the results for correlational analyses.

Descriptive Statistics for Campus Levels

The following tables summarize the characteristics of each campus level (elementary, K8, middle, and high school) including the number of students, number of counselors, and the percentage of economically disadvantaged students. Using SPSS, descriptive statistical analysis was performed. Each table provides information on the mean, standard deviation, and minimum and maximum values.

Table 4.1 below describes the characteristics of 23 elementary schools in BISD. The mean student population at the elementary level was approximately 770 students. The minimum number of students was 509 and the maximum was 1,096. The mean number of counselors at the elementary level was 1.35, where the minimum was 1 and the maximum number of counselors was 2. The mean percentage of economically disadvantaged students in BISD elementary schools was 77% where 59% was the minimum and 92% was the maximum.

Table 4.1 *Descriptive Statistics for Elementary Campus Level*

	M	*SD*	*Min*	*Max*
Number of Students	769.74	193.09	509	1096
Number of School Counselors	1.35	.49	1	2
Economically Disadvantaged	77.02%	9.47%	59.21%	91.76%

Note: N=23

Table 4.2 below features the characteristics of the six K-8 campuses in the sample, including the mean number of students and counselors, and the percentage of economically disadvantaged students.

Table 4.2 *Descriptive Statistics for K-8 Campus Level*

	M	*SD*	*Min*	*Max*
Number of Students	970.33	171.79	681	1166
Number of School Counselors	2.50	.84	1	3
Economically Disadvantaged	78.98%	12.36%	57.55%	90.01%

Note: *N*=6

Table 4.3 below shows the characteristics of the nine traditional middle schools in the sample.

Table 4.3 *Descriptive Statistics for Middle School Campus Level*

	M	*SD*	*Min*	*Max*
Number of Students	865.67	182.38	641	1103
Number of School Counselors	2.22	.44	2	3
Economically Disadvantaged	73.93%	10.28%	60.06%	93.45%

Note: N=9

Table 4.4 below summarizes the characteristics of the six comprehensive high schools in the sample.

Table 4.4 *Descriptive Statistics for High School Campus Level*

	M	*SD*	*Min*	*Max*
Number of Students	2412.67	230.52	2062	2722
Number of School Counselors	6.17	1.17	4	7
Economically Disadvantaged	70.55%	8.30%	60.58%	84.51%

Note: N=6

Descriptive Statistics for Counselor Ratios

School counselor ratios were calculated by dividing the number of school counselors by the total student population at a campus. The ratios ranged from .10 to .32 where higher values indicated fewer students per school counselor and, thus, preferable ratios. Table 4.5 below summarizes the mean school counselor ratios by elementary, K-8, middle, and high school levels. In preparation for using the ratio variable in correlational analysis, its skewness and kurtosis were evaluated as measures of the deviation from normality. Ratios for each campus level indicated acceptable normality, where values of skewness and kurtosis ranged from -2.10 to

.05, only with the exception of the high school ratio with a kurtosis value of 4.66. Histograms plotted against the normal curve also indicated acceptable normality.

Table 4.5 *School Counselor Ratios by Campus Level*

	N	*M*	*SD*
Elementary School	23	.18	.04
K-8	6	.25	.06
Middle School	9	.26	.04
High School	6	.26	.05
Total	44	.21	.06

Although not central to the research question, an analysis was conducted to observe whether student-counselor ratios differed by campus level: elementary (ES), K-8, middle (MS), and high school (HS). A one-way ANOVA showed a statistically significant difference at the $p < .05$ level among the four campus levels, $F(3, 40) = 11.72$, $p < .001$. Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that ratios for the elementary level differed significantly from ratios for each of the other campus levels: ES versus K-8 campuses, $p = .004$; ES versus MS, $p < .001$; and, ES versus HS, $p = .002$. This showed that the ratio for elementary schools is significantly different from the ratios of other campus levels. However, the ratios for those other campus levels (K-8, MS, HS) do not differ significantly from each other. In BISD the student population must go beyond a determined number defined by Administrative Regulation EEB before additional counselors are hired. For example, elementary school counselors are assigned up to 799 students for every one school counselor. Upon the enrollment of the 800th student, the school must maintain 800 students or more for approximately six weeks before the second school

counselor is hired at the elementary level. The threshold differs by campus level, which explains these findings.

This analysis implies that it may be reasonable to conduct additional analyses of school counselor ratios that combine K-8, middle school, and high school levels, while separating elementary schools. Therefore, in addition to reporting results for each campus level, results will be reported for analyses that combine non-elementary school campuses.

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Student Outcomes

To address the research question of whether student-counselor ratios are related to student outcomes, descriptive statistics and correlational analyses are presented below for attendance, discipline, and achievement outcomes. To look further at the demographics of students in BISD, findings are reported by student gender and ethnicity for attendance and achievement outcomes. Correlational analyses were also conducted for the variable measuring the percentage of students coded as economically disadvantaged at a campus. The economic disadvantage variable demonstrated acceptable normality across campus levels as the values for skewness and kurtosis ranged from -1.28 to .95.

Attendance

Attendance was measured by the percentage of students in attendance on average over the 2018-2019 school year at a given school campus. In preparation for Pearson correlation analyses, assumptions of linearity and normality were checked for attendance outcomes for each student group (gender: boys and girls; ethnicity: Hispanic and non-Hispanic White students) by campus level (ES, K-8, MS, HS). Attendance outcomes for all student groups indicated acceptable normality, where values of skewness and kurtosis ranged from -1.0 to 4.78. Scatterplots for counselor ratios and attendance outcomes were generated to observe linearity

and check for outliers. Although the scatterplots reflected the small sample sizes, no major issues were identified.

Elementary Findings

At the elementary level, mean attendance rates were similar across student groups: male students (M = 97%, SD = .43), female students (M = 98%, SD = .49), Hispanic students (M = 98%, SD = .41), and non-Hispanic White students was (M = 97%, SD = 1.60).

There were no significant correlations found between student-counselor ratios and attendance outcomes for boys, girls, Hispanic students, or non-Hispanic White students (ps > .05). No significant correlations were found between any of the attendance outcomes and the percentage of economically disadvantaged students.

K-8 Findings

At the K-8 level, mean attendance rates were also similar across student groups: male students (M = 98%, SD = .39), female students (M = 98%, SD = .35), Hispanic students (M = 98%, SD = .35), and non-Hispanic White students was (M = 98%, SD = .85).

No significant correlations were found between student-counselor ratios and attendance for boys, girls, or Hispanic students (ps > .05). A significant positive correlation between ratio and attendance for non-Hispanic White students emerged, $r(6) = .83$, $p = .04$. This shows that better ratios at K-8 campuses were associated with higher attendance rates for non-Hispanic White students. Also, a significant negative correlation was found between the percentage of economically disadvantaged students and girls' attendance, $r(6) = -.87$, $p = .02$. This shows that higher rates of disadvantage were related to lower attendance rates for girls at K-8 campuses.

Middle School Findings

At the middle school level, the mean attendance rate was 96% for boys, girls, Hispanic students, and White non-Hispanic students (SDs = .50, .52, .51, 1.04, respectively). No significant correlations were found between student-counselor ratios for middle school campuses and attendance outcomes for boys, girls, Hispanic students, or non-Hispanic White students (*p*s > .05). No significant correlations were found between any of the attendance outcomes and the percentage of economically disadvantaged students.

High School Findings

At the high school level, the mean attendance rate was 94% for boys, girls, and Hispanic students (SDs = .42, .52, .45, respectively). The mean attendance rate for non-Hispanic White students was 93% (*SD* = 0.85). No significant correlations were found between student-counselor ratios for high school campuses and attendance outcomes for boys, girls, Hispanic students, or non-Hispanic White students (*p*s > .05). No significant correlations were found between any of the attendance outcomes and the percentage of economically disadvantaged students.

K-8 – HS Findings

As described earlier, an additional analysis was conducted combining K-8, MS, and HS levels (*N* = 21), but no significant correlations between ratio and attendance outcomes were found (*p*s > .05), nor were any significant correlations found between attendance outcomes and economic disadvantage.

Discipline

Discipline was measured by the number of discipline referrals during the 2018-2019 school year at a given school campus. There are two separate measures of discipline: drug-related or non-drug related. Findings are presented for each of these variables. While discipline

reports were available by gender and ethnicity, the counts of discipline were generally low across school campuses with values of 0 for many cases. Therefore, discipline was not analyzed by gender or ethnicity.

Assumptions of linearity and normality were checked for discipline outcomes, both drug-related and non-drug-related, by campus level (ES, K-8, MS, HS). Scatterplots for ratios and discipline outcomes were generated to observe linearity and check for outliers. Discipline outcomes indicated acceptable normality (skewness and kurtosis ranged from -.32 to 1.89), except for drug discipline at the elementary level because the low frequencies reflected deviation from normality (skewness = 4.80, kurtosis = 23.00).

Elementary Findings

At the elementary school level, the mean number of drug-related discipline referrals was near 0 (M = .09, SD = .42) with a range from 0 to 2. The mean number of non-drug-related discipline referrals was 18.43 (SD = 11.63) with a range from 3 to 42. There were no significant correlations found between student-counselor ratios and discipline outcomes, neither for drug-related nor non-drug-related discipline (ps > .05). No significant correlations were found between economic disadvantage and either of the discipline outcomes.

K-8 Findings

At the K-8 school level, the mean number of drug-related discipline referrals was 13.67 (SD = 13.95) with a range from 1 to 38. The mean number of non-drug-related discipline referrals was 197.33 (SD = 95.43) with a range from 78 to 285. No significant correlations were found between student-counselor ratios for K-8 campuses and discipline outcomes, neither for drug-related nor non-drug-related discipline (ps > .05). Also, no significant correlations were found between economic disadvantage and either of the discipline outcomes.

Middle School Findings

At the middle school level, the mean number of drug-related discipline referrals was 29.67 (*SD* = 19.08) with a range from 8 to 63. The mean number of non-drug-related discipline referrals was 327.22 (*SD* = 132.95) with a range from 114 to 505. No significant correlations were found between student-counselor ratios for middle school campuses and discipline outcomes, neither for drug-related nor non-drug-related discipline (*p*s > .05). Also, no significant correlations were found between economic disadvantage and either of the discipline outcomes.

High School Findings

At the high school level, the mean number of drug-related discipline referrals was 129.17 (*SD* = 40.20) with a range from 58 to 167. The mean number of non-drug-related discipline referrals was 599.33 (*SD* = 203.35) with a range from 248 to 779.

A significant positive correlation emerged between ratio and drug-related discipline, $r(6) = .90$, $p = .02$. In other words, better student-counselor ratios at high school campuses were related to higher instances of drug-related discipline. However, there was not a significant relationship between ratio and non-drug-related discipline ($p = .69$). No significant correlations were found between economic disadvantage and either of the discipline outcomes.

K-8 – HS Findings

As described earlier, an additional analysis combining K8, MS, and HS levels ($N = 21$) was performed, but no significant correlations between ratio and discipline outcomes were discovered (*p*s >.05). No significant correlations were found between economic disadvantage and discipline outcomes (*p*s >.05).

Achievement

Achievement at the elementary, K-8, and middle school levels was operationalized as student performance on the Reading and Math STAAR administered in the 2018-2019 school year at each school campus. Achievement data was available as a mean scale score, as well as the percentage of students who passed the exam at each of three levels of performance, listed in order of increasing achievement: (1) *approaches grade level performance* ("approaches"), (2) *meets grade level performance* ("meets"), and (3) *masters grade level performance* ("masters"). Achievement data was further disaggregated by gender and ethnicity, resulting in a total of 32 achievement variables for each campus.

Achievement at the high school level was operationalized as student performance on the English I EOC exam administered in 2018-2019. Data was available for the English I EOC exam scale scores as well as the percentages of students at the approaches, meets, and masters performance levels of the exam. English I EOC exam data was disaggregated by gender and ethnicity for a total of 16 achievement variables for each high school campus.

Achievement variables were checked for assumptions of linearity and normality by campus level. Scatterplots for ratios and achievement outcomes were generated to observe linearity and check for outliers. Values of skewness and kurtosis ranged from -3.48 to 13.58 with the most extreme values for the achievement variables of non-Hispanic White students, perhaps due in part to their low numbers in campuses across the sample.

Elementary School Findings - Reading

The following results describe the range of means for the Reading STAAR assessment for the scale, approaches, meets, and masters variables.

The means for the scale scores were observed for male students (M = 1569.78, SD = 28.72), female students (M = 1598.87, SD = 36.59), Hispanic students (M = 1581.65, SD = 29.71), and non-Hispanic White students (M = 1622.00, SD = 65.30).

The mean percentage of students at the approaches level were observed for male students (M = 78.30, SD = 9.51), female students (M = 84.26, SD = 8.57), Hispanic students (M = 80.83, SD = 8.57), and non-Hispanic White students (M = 90.33, SD = 22.67).

The mean percentage of students at the meets level were observed for male students (M = 48.87, SD = 10.49), female students (M = 55.30, SD = 11.41), Hispanic students (M = 51.48, SD = 9.93), and non-Hispanic White students (M = 62.05, SD = 33.14).

The mean percentage of students at the masters level were observed for male students (M = 23.74, SD = 6.96), female students (M = 33.52, SD = 10.43), Hispanic students (M = 27.78, SD = 6.88), and non-Hispanic White students (M = 39.95, SD = 31.25).

Elementary School Findings - Math

The following results describe the range of means for the Math STAAR assessment for the scale, approaches, meets, and masters variables.

The means for the scale scores were observed for male students (M = 1666.39, SD = 39.22), female students (M = 1670.61, SD = 39.09), Hispanic students (M = 1667.22, SD = 38.66), and non-Hispanic White students (M = 1681.95, SD = 113.72).

The mean percentage of students at the approaches level were observed for male students (M = 88.91, SD = 6.90), female students (M = 91.17, SD = 7.09), Hispanic students (M = 90.26, SD = 6.76), and non-Hispanic White students (M = 84.95, SD = 29.93).

The mean percentage of students at the meets level were observed for male students (M = 61.87, SD = 11.62), female students (M = 64.65, SD = 11.39), Hispanic students (M = 62.87, SD = 11.34), and non-Hispanic White students (M = 73.90, SD = 28.57).

The mean percentage of students at the masters level were observed for male students (M = 37.09, SD = 11.51), female students (M = 40.48, SD = 11.67), Hispanic students (M = 38.35, SD = 10.38), and non-Hispanic White students (M = 53.19, SD = 29.32).

Correlational analysis of all 32 achievement variables was conducted to determine their relationship with student-counselor ratio, but no significant correlations emerged (ps > .05). However, significant negative correlations were found between economic disadvantage and 17 of the reading and math achievement variables for boys, girls, and Hispanic students. These correlations suggest that higher rates of economic disadvantage were associated with lower exam scores and lower percentages of students at the approaches, meets, and master's level for specific variables shown in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6 *Achievement Correlations with Economic Disadvantage at the Elementary Level*

	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Reading - boys - approaches	-.52*	.01
Reading - boys - meets	-.55**	.007
Reading – girls - approaches	-.48*	.02
Reading - girls - meets	-.58**	.003
Reading - Hisp. - approaches	-.52*	.01
Reading - Hisp. - meets	-.58**	.004
Math - boys - meets	-.53**	.009
Math - boys - masters	-.40*	.02

Math - girls - meets	-.43*	.04
Math - Hispanic - meets	-.50*	.02
Math - Hispanic - masters	-.43*	.04
Reading - boys - scale	-.54**	.007
Reading - girls - scale	-.49*	.02
Reading - Hisp. - scale	-.53**	.01
Math - boys - scale	-.51*	.01
Math - girls - scale	-.44*	.04
Math - Hispanic - scale	-.47*	.03

K-8 Findings - Reading

The following results describe the range of means for the Reading STAAR assessment for the scale, approaches, meets, and masters variables.

The means for the scale scores were observed for male students (M = 1626.50, SD = 25.01), female students (M = 1705.00, SD = 13.24), Hispanic students (M = 1641.92, SD = 23.42), and non-Hispanic White students (M = 1416.92, SD = 416.31).

The mean percentage of students at the approaches level were observed for male students (M = 75.25, SD = 5.56), female students (M = 87.42, SD = 4.27), Hispanic students (M = 80.67, SD = 4.62), and non-Hispanic White students (M = 95.83, SD = 6.93).

The mean percentage of students at the meets level were observed for male students (M = 48.87, SD = 10.49), female students (M = 55.30, SD = 11.41), Hispanic students (M = 51.48, SD = 9.93), and non-Hispanic White students (M = 62.05, SD = 33.14).

The mean percentage of students at the masters level were observed for male students (M = 48.67, SD = 6.52), female students (M = 61.00, SD = 10.98), Hispanic students (M = 54.25, SD = 8.22), and non-Hispanic White students (M = 77.33, SD = 25.35).

K-8 Findings – Math

The means for the scale scores were observed for male students (M = 1697.58, SD = 27.70), female students (M = 1705.00, SD = 13.24), Hispanic students (M = 1699.75, SD = 17.77), and non-Hispanic White students (M = 1772.58, SD = 88.86).

The mean percentage of students at the approaches level were observed for male students (M = 86.75, SD = 5.09), female students (M = 90.67, SD = 2.21), Hispanic students (M = 80.67, SD = 4.62), and non-Hispanic White students (M = 94.42, SD = 10.10).

The mean percentage of students at the meets level were observed for male students (M = 61.17, SD = 8.39), female students (M = 67.17, SD = 5.38), Hispanic students (M = 54.25, SD = 8.22), and non-Hispanic White students (M = 84.25, SD = 22.21).

The mean percentage of students at the masters level were observed for male students (M = 28.67, SD = 7.90), female students (M = 24.08, SD = 3.48), Hispanic students (M = 27.75, SD = 5.97), and non-Hispanic White students (M = 38.75, SD = 35.50).

No significant correlations emerged between ratio and any of the 32 achievement variables (ps > .05). Significant negative correlations were found between economic disadvantage and 11 of the reading and math achievement variables. Higher rates of disadvantage were associated with lower reading exam scores for Hispanic students. Higher rates of disadvantage were correlated with lower percentages of Hispanic students at the approaches, meets, and masters levels of both the reading and math exams. Greater disadvantage was also correlated with lower percentages of boys at the meets level of the reading assessment and of

girls at the approaches, meets, and masters levels of the reading assessment. See Table 4.7 below.

Table 4.7 *Achievement Correlations with Economic Disadvantage at the K-8 Level*

	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Reading - boys - meets	-.85*	.03
Reading – girls - approaches	-.92**	.009
Reading - girls - meets	-.82*	.048
Reading - girls - masters	-.93**	.007
Reading - Hisp. - approaches	-.94**	.006
Reading - Hisp. - meets	-.90*	.02
Reading - Hisp. - masters	-.88*	.02
Math - Hispanic - approaches	-.94**	.006
Math - Hispanic - meets	-.90*	.02
Math - Hispanic - masters	-.88*	.02
Reading - Hisp. - scale	-.93**	.007

Middle School Findings - Reading

The following results describe the range of means for the Reading STAAR assessment for the scale, approaches, meets, and masters variables.

The means for the scale scores were observed for male students (M = 1683.22, SD = 28.68), female students (M = 1712.22, SD = 24.11), Hispanic students (M = 1696.00, SD = 25.11), and non-Hispanic White students (M = 1684.00, SD = 104.44).

The mean percentage of students at the approaches level were observed for male students (M = 78.78, SD = 7.03), female students (M = 85.44, SD = 5.88), Hispanic students (M = 82.11, SD = 6.19), and non-Hispanic White students (M = 85.00, SD = 12.17).

The mean percentage of students at the meets level were observed for male students (M = 51.44, SD = 9.88), female students (M = 59.56, SD = 10.51), Hispanic students (M = 54.89, SD = 9.52), and non-Hispanic White students (M = 60.00, SD = 20.58).

The mean percentage of students at the masters level were observed for male students (M = 23.78, SD = 5.97), female students (M = 28.89, SD = 6.11), Hispanic students (M = 25.67, SD = 5.15), and non-Hispanic White students (M = 40.88, SD = 7.62).

Middle School Findings – Math

The following results describe the range of means for the Math STAAR assessment for the scale, approaches, meets, and masters variables.

The means for the scale scores were observed for male students (M = 1676.22, SD = 47.95), female students (M = 1694.22, SD = 39.05), Hispanic students (M = 1683.33, SD = 43.94), and non-Hispanic White students (M = 1719.67, SD = 45.20).

The mean percentage of students at the approaches level were observed for male students (M = 77.33, SD = 11.94), female students (M = 84.11, SD = 7.99), Hispanic students (M = 80.22, SD = 10.02), and non-Hispanic White students (M = 92.56, SD = 10.35).

The mean percentage of students at the meets level were observed for male students (M = 45.33, SD = 17.84), female students (M = 52.33, SD = 16.32), Hispanic students (M = 47.56, SD = 16.90), and non-Hispanic White students (M = 70.11, SD = 19.74).

The mean percentage of students at the masters level were observed for male students (*M* = 5.78, *SD* = 5.47), female students (*M* = 7.22, *SD* = 7.82), Hispanic students (*M* = 6.33, *SD* = 6.25), and non-Hispanic White students (*M* = 12.13, *SD* = 13.97).

Correlational analyses of student-counselor ratios and the 32 achievement variables (*p*s > .05) revealed several significant findings. Ratios were negatively correlated with the approaches level of performance on the math assessment for girls, r(9) = -.74, p = .02 and Hispanic students, r(9) = -.67, p = .047, meaning that better ratios were associated with lower rates of achievement at the approaches level for these two groups. Ratio was positively correlated with non-Hispanic White students' achievement at the approaches level for the math assessment, r(9) = .88, p = .002, such that better ratios were associated with higher rates of math achievement at the approaches level for White students. Significant negative correlations were found between economic disadvantage and 17 of the reading and math achievement variables. Higher rates of disadvantage were associated with lower reading and math achievement for boys, girls, Hispanic, and White students as measured by the specific variables listed in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8 *Achievement Correlations with Economic Disadvantage at the Middle School Level*

	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Reading - boys - approaches	-.76*	.02
Reading - boys - meets	-.83**	.006
Reading - boys - masters	-.84**	.005
Reading - Hisp. - approaches	-.72*	.03
Reading - Hisp. - meets	-.75*	.02
Reading - Hisp. - masters	-.67*	.047
Reading - White - masters	-.72*	.046

Math - boys - approaches	-.69*	.04
Math - boys - meets	-.73*	.03
Math - girls - approaches	-.70*	.04
Math - Hispanic - approaches	-.72*	.03
Math - Hispanic - meets	-.69*	.04
Reading - boys - scale	-.79*	.01
Reading - Hisp. - scale	-.68*	.045
Math - boys - scale	-.67*	.05
Math - girls - scale	-.67*	.049
Math - Hispanic - scale	-.69*	.04

High School Findings – English I

Math achievement data for high schools was not available from BISD, so only English I EOC exam scores were analyzed for high school campuses. The following results describe the range of means for the scale, approaches, meets, and masters variables. It should be noted that the scale for EOC exam differs from the scale for the STAAR assessments.

The means for the scale scores were observed for male students (M = 4014.50, SD = 76.08), female students (M = 4219.33, SD = 51.93), Hispanic students (M = 4109.67, SD = 62.29), and non-Hispanic White students (M = 4137.17, SD = 118.86).

The mean percentage of students at the approaches level were observed for male students (M = 72.50, SD = 5.54), female students (M = 85.00, SD = 3.22), Hispanic students (M = 78.17, SD = 4.26), and non-Hispanic White students (M = 81.67, SD = 5.05).

The mean percentage of students at the meets level were observed for male students (M = 56.67, SD = 6.31), female students (M = 72.00, SD = 3.52), Hispanic students (M = 63.67, SD = 4.46), and non-Hispanic White students (M = 63.17, SD = 9.68).

The mean percentage of students at the masters level were observed for male students (M = 9.17, SD = 2.71), female students (M = 17.17, SD = 2.23), Hispanic students (M = 12.83, SD = 1.94), and non-Hispanic White students (M = 25.50, SD = 24.81).

No significant correlations emerged between ratio and any of the 16 English I EOC exam variables (ps > .05). Significant negative correlations were found between economic disadvantage and 8 of the English I achievement variables, such that higher rates of economic disadvantage were related to lower reading achievement for male, Hispanic, and non-Hispanic White students, as measured by the variables in Table 4.9

Table 4.9 *Achievement Correlations with Economic Disadvantage at the High School Level*

	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Boys - approaches	-.90*	.01
Boys - meets	-.91*	.01
Boys - masters	-.87*	.02
Hispanic - approaches	-.86*	.03
Hispanic - masters	-.86*	.03
White - meets	-.96**	.003
Boys - scale	-.96**	.003
Hispanic - scale	-.90*	.02

K-8 – HS

Although additional analyses combining K-8, MS, and HS levels ($N = 21$) were conducted for attendance and discipline outcomes, a similar analysis was not conducted for achievement. This was due to the differences between the types of exams for K-8 and middle school levels (Reading and Math STAAR) compared to the high school level (English I EOC).

Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this quantitative study was to better understand the relationship of school counselor ratios to student outcomes (achievement, attendance, discipline) in one Texas school district with predominantly Hispanic student population. In examining the student outcomes, attention was given to student gender and ethnicity, as well as the percentage of students designated as economically disadvantaged at each campus, given previous research that has demonstrated the role of these demographic factors on student outcomes. The major findings of this study are summarized in three sections: attendance, discipline, and achievement in relation to the literature on school counselor ratios. Also, the limitations and strengths of the study are discussed. Finally, recommendations for practice and future research are presented.

Attendance Discussion

In terms of the role that school counselor ratios play in student attendance, this study found no significant correlations between ratios and attendance rates at the elementary, middle or high school levels. There was one significant finding at the K-8 level, showing that school counselor ratios were positively correlated with attendance rates for non-Hispanic White students. This means that higher attendance for non-Hispanic White students was associated with better student-counselor ratios. The non-Hispanic White population in BISD is very small, in some elementary campuses the population is zero. Perhaps this finding suggests that this population of students benefits from lower ratios because they have more dedicated time with school counselors to address attendance issues or these students are experiencing a sense of school connectedness with their school counselors. This assumption would coincide with previously mentioned studies reporting the benefits to student outcomes when students experience school connectedness (CDC, 2009; Dimmit & Wilkerson, 2009; Roderick et al.,

2008, as cited in McKillip et al., 2012). Although at this point, this is speculation without further studies that could confirm this finding and interpretation.

There was also a significant negative correlation between economic disadvantage and attendance for girls, meaning that at campuses with greater economically disadvantaged populations, girls were attending school at lower rates at the K-8 level. This implies that the female student populations in our K-8 campuses need more directed attention from school counselors to come to school and stay in school. Collaborations with teachers, the administrative team, and parents would benefit girls from economically disadvantaged families. More importantly, counselors at the K-8 level will see the benefits from closing-the-gap goal-setting and action plans to target female students at the K-8 level.

It does not appear that BISD school counselor ratios are related to attendance rates at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. There was only one significant correlation between ratios and attendance, which was for non-Hispanic White students at the K-8 level. The attendance findings from this study do not replicate the research in Missouri (Lapan et al., 2018) showing that low student-counselor ratios were associated with better attendance rates and schools using the recommended 250:1 ratio saw attendance rates increase from 92% to 94%.

Discipline Discussion

In terms of the relationship of school counselor ratios with student discipline, this study found no significant correlations between ratios and discipline rates (drug-related or other discipline) at the elementary, K-8, or middle school levels. There was one significant positive correlation between ratios and drug-related discipline at the high school level. Better student-counselor ratios were associated with more instances of drug-related discipline in BISD high schools. This finding is contrary to previous research where a study in Connecticut (Lapan et al.

2018) found that lower student-to-counselor ratios in high schools were significantly related to lower percentages of disciplinary incidents and suspensions. Low student-to-counselor ratios accounted for a 9% variance in suspension rates, showing a significant relationship between the two. School counselors routinely analyze campus data (attendance, discipline, achievement) but many times school counselors receive requests from the school community to focus their energy into specific areas. For example, it is not unusual to receive a concern from administration on bullying/harassment on social media or to consider concerns from teachers on grades and misbehavior. Parents may request attention on more personal family matters such as divorce, job-loss, or death of a family member. Students may also at any time request assistance with relationship problems, sexual identity, and suicidal thoughts or non-suicidal self-injury. Concerns come from different directions and can take school counselors down many avenues; the challenge is prioritizing them, because all are urgently important. Although more reasonable ratios are seen in BISD high schools, perhaps this unexpected finding suggests that BISD high school students are in need of more drug-prevention.

It may have been unlikely to observe a relationship between BISD school counselor ratio and discipline incidents at the elementary, K-8, and middle school levels because the counts of discipline at these lower grades were minimal to none, especially for drug-related cases.

Achievement Discussion

In terms of the role that school counselor ratios play in student achievement, this study found no significant correlations between ratios and achievement variables at the elementary level, K-8, or high school levels. At the middle school level, a significant negative correlation was found between student-counselor ratios and female and Hispanic student achievement on the Math STAAR, suggesting that better ratios were associated with lower percentages of girls and

Hispanic students at the approaches level for math. However, also at the middle school level, a significant positive correlation was found between counselor ratios and the approaches performance level on the Math STAAR for non-Hispanic White students. In other words, better student-counselor ratios are connected to higher rates of math achievement at the approaches level for White middle school students. This may suggest--similar to the significant positive correlation between ratios and attendance for White students in K-8--that because BISD non-Hispanic White populations are small, this group of students benefited from more targeted attention in the area of achievement from school counselors. BISD K-8 school counselors spend a lot of time providing lessons on the importance of postsecondary education. They are introduced to eight advanced academy opportunities, seven early college high schools, multiple Career and Technology Education programs, and advanced placement and dual credit course opportunities at the high school level. Conceivably, this education contributed to the significant positive correlation.

Across campus levels, achievement was negatively correlated with the percentage of economically disadvantaged students. This suggests that higher rates of economic disadvantage at campuses are connected to lower scores and lower percentages of approaches, meets, and masters performance levels on the Reading and Math STAAR and English I EOC assessments. For elementary school, K-8, and middle school campus levels, out of the 32 achievement variables representing students' gender and ethnicity, exam subject (Reading/Math), and scale score or performance category (approaches, meets, masters), many variables were correlated with economic disadvantage: 17 at the elementary school level, 11 at the K-8 level, and 17 at the middle school level. For high school campuses, 8 of the 16 achievement variables were correlated with economic disadvantage. In the 2018-2019 school year, BISD's student

population was 74% disadvantaged. As identified in earlier studies, higher rates of disadvantage result in lower achievement for students at all grade levels. Lapan (2012) reported that achievement scores improved for disadvantaged students when student-counselor ratios were close to 250:1 as recommended by ASCA. In like manner, Belfanz & Byrnes (2012) found that closing the gap efforts could be realized by ensuring that disadvantaged students were attending school regularly in all grade levels. Findings from this study show that this population of students have great academic needs.

Descriptive statistics for the achievement data showed some interesting patterns. At the elementary level, non-Hispanic White students consistently had the highest Reading achievement means at the approaches, meets, and masters levels, while male students scored on the low end of the range for Reading. A similar but slightly less consistent trend emerged for Math achievement.

At the K-8 level non-Hispanic White students and girls had the highest achievement levels in Reading, while boys scores lowest among the demographic groups. K-8 Math achievement followed a similar pattern in that non-Hispanic White students were on the high end of the range.

At the middle school level, non-Hispanic White students and girls again were the demographic groups that tended to have higher means in Reading and Math achievement, while boys tended to have lower means.

At the high school level, girls tended to have the highest means for English I EOC exam performance, while boys consistently had the lowest means. Data was not available for the Algebra I EOC exam at the high school level, so high school math achievement could not be evaluated.

Limitations and Strengths of The Study

The results of this study showed relationships between school counselor ratios and student outcomes to a limited extent. There were few significant correlations between ratios and attendance, discipline, and achievement outcomes: better counselor ratios at K-8 campuses were associated with higher attendance rates for non-Hispanic White students; at the high school level, better ratios were related to higher instances of drug-related discipline; in middle schools, better ratios were associated with higher rates of math achievement at the performance level for non-Hispanic White students; also at the middle school level, better ratios were related to lower rates of achievement at the approaches level for girls and Hispanic students. These results appear to suggest that there were some positive outcomes related to better counselor ratios for non-Hispanic White students, along with unanticipated relationships between ratios and drug-related discipline and girls' and Hispanic students' math achievement.

Generally, the findings of the study did not adhere to research literature on student-counselor ratios, including the study by Lapan et al. (2012) which found a relationship between lower school counselor ratios and improved graduation rates. High poverty schools that the recommended ASCA ratios were found to have improved graduation rates, attendance rates, and lowered disciplinary incidents. Research by Goodman-Scott et al. (2018) found that students attending schools with low counselor ratios were 1.85 times more likely to graduate from high school than students attending school with high counselor ratios.

The primary limitation of this study is identified as the small sample size. This was an in-depth study of one public school district with a specific student population as the focus. As mentioned before, the review of literature provided several examples of similar studies that were performed state-wide and that made the difference. Thus, the results of this study should be

interpreted with caution. Future research should consider a state-wide study of Texas schools to investigate the relationships between ratios and student outcomes to see if Texas has similar results to the findings of other studies. Future research should consider adding student, counselor, and principal perception surveys to gather additional important data.

An important consideration of this study is that it is correlational, which means that there is not a causal relationship between variables. Even if school counselor ratios were related to certain student outcomes, this does not mean that the counselor ratios were the cause of the outcomes.

As mentioned in earlier chapters, it is understood that counselors are only one factor among many that contribute to positive student outcomes. While school counselors can be instrumental to enhancing a campus, factors that can have more direct and greater impact on student outcomes include economic disadvantage (as shown in this study). Other factors include family, as the CDC (2009) reported, the strongest protective factor for students at any grade level was family connectedness. Family connectedness demonstrated strong relationships with educational outcomes including better attendance and higher grades. Additionally, speaking from experience in the field, changes in physical development, changes in emotional development, mental health concerns, and different life experiences also seem to be a factor for some students in attendance, discipline, and achievement outcomes.

A strength of this study is its close look at student outcomes in one Texas school district from an "insider's" perspective of the district's school counseling department as a whole. As an employee of BISD for nearly 20 years, I am aware that the ASCA National Model has always been taught by previous counseling department directors. The implementation of the model has been an expectation and is perceived as a best practice for our student body. As the current

School Counselor Coordinator for BISD, this message is being sent to school counselors with the same expectations of implementation. The BISD School Counseling Department had the first ASCA National School Counselor of the Year (SCOY), three ASCA SCOY Top-5 National Finalists and of the 15 school counseling programs that are designated as RAMP winners by ASCA in the state of Texas, 10 of them are from BISD. The possibility that the ASCA National Model is at work in BISD, even with larger student-counselor ratios than recommended, may help explain the results of this study in terms of why counselor ratios were not strongly related to student outcomes. It is conceivable that implementation of the ASCA National Model is a more important factor than counselor ratios as far as BISD is concerned.

While counseling programs can strive to provide quality services to students in spite of high ratios, it is important to acknowledge what is at stake if ratios are not addressed. The cost of coping with high student-counselor ratios is the social, emotional, and mental health and development of children. When counselors are scratching the surface of student needs, students lose. Students benefit from a number of positive adult relationships and many times the school counselor is one of those positive relationships, contributing to student development.

Recommendations for Practice and for Future Research

Recommendations for practice in the school counseling profession are to continue the education and implementation of the ASCA National Model. It is important for school counselors to remain vigilant about perfecting and developing their school counseling programs utilizing the most current best practices. Advocating for better ratios can only be accomplished by having meaningful collaborations with the school community, especially principals and by obtaining membership with state counselor associations as well as national membership with

ASCA. Allowing data-driven results to speak for counseling programs can be a powerful tool in the slow process of advocacy.

Another recommendation is the importance of some degree of education and training in principal leadership programs. Through no fault of their own, many principals enter the leadership world without any knowledge of how to best utilize school counselors. Many move forward solely based on their own personal experiences with school counselors instead of based on the statutory descriptions of Texas school counseling programs and school counselor responsibilities as outlined in Texas Education Code, Sections 33.005-33.007. Furthermore, principals would benefit from learning about how to best utilize school counselors from the ASCA National Model Framework which contains the requirements of the Texas Model.

Recommendations for future research include replicating this study state-wide as opposed to the single district approach taken in this study. The literature review provided examples of varied state-wide studies, but none in Texas. The incorporation of student, school counselor, and principal surveys provide insight from these perspectives and would enrich knowledge about school counseling in Texas public school districts, particularly those with large populations of Hispanic students.

This study has contributed to the research literature on school counselor ratios and its relationship to student outcomes in a specific setting, one Texas school district near the U.S.-Mexico border. Further work is needed to determine if findings from larger studies from other states generalize to contexts like the one in this study. Research, as a whole, has provided compelling evidence that lower ratios are related to improved attendance rates, lower discipline rates and higher achievement scores and this study does not diminish the findings from those studies.

Taking a more practical view, campus counselor intervention efforts that seek to improves student outcomes should be focused on engaging students through dynamic classroom lessons and activities, powerful small-group activities, and purposeful individual counseling services. Intentional collaborations with teachers and parents can improve circumstances for students. Campus counselors are encouraged to connect with state counselor associations to stay abreast of legislation affecting school counselor ratios and are strongly encouraged to learn and implement the ASCA National Model. Hopefully, more research will be generated in Texas to highlight the uniqueness of Texas public school campuses and the incredible work that school counselors do every day for Texas students.

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Vita

Myra Ortega was born and raised in El Paso, Texas. She graduated from the University of Texas at El Paso with a Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies degree and worked as an elementary teacher for three years. Myra felt a calling to become a school counselor and returned to the University of Texas at El Paso where she earned her Master of Education in School Counseling degree. She worked as an elementary and middle school counselor and eventually became the School Counselor Coordinator at the district level. She has presented at the Texas School Counselor Association, the Lone Star State School Counselor Association, and the American School Counselor Association conferences. She currently serves as the Lone Star State School Counselor Association, Lone Star Awards Committee Chairperson overseeing school counselor program awards. Myra was also a college instructor for three years teaching a school counselor course at the University of Texas at El Paso.

Myra began her Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership and Administration in 2017. Myra plans to continue her work in developing school counselors and school counseling programs to better serve student populations.