High School Career Guidance: From The View Of A Street-Level Bureaucrat

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HIGH SCHOOL CAREER GUIDANCE: FROM THE
VIEW OF A STREET-LEVEL BUREAUCRAT

GEORGE C. THOMAS

Doctoral Program in Education Leadership and Administration

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DEDICATION

Theodore Roosevelt said, “Far better is it to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though checkered by failure than to rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy nor suffer much because they live in a gray twilight that knows not victory nor defeat.”

I dedicate the results of this journey to my parents. From the beginning and throughout, I witnessed hard work and determination. I learned that hard work does not always appear to reap tangible rewards, but it reaps intangibles such as love, comradery, fortitude, and teamwork, which were worth much more. I witnessed their dreams fade, but they held steadfast together as a team, raising their children with the confidence and determination to be successful and make a mark on their world. The experiences with which I have been blessed were born from their choices of the life of agricultural labor and Christian values. This upbringing has served me well and has instilled in me the notion of perseverance and the longing to serve people.

I also dedicate this accomplishment to my spouse of nearly thirty years, Hilda Thomas, who is my best friend and has supported my aspirations of excellence at work and through my pursuit of advanced education. She was the most nurturing mother to our two children and is holding true for our four grandchildren. She was always present for them when I was not able to be.
HIGH SCHOOL CAREER GUIDANCE: FROM THE VIEW OF A STREET-LEVEL BUREAUCRAT

by

GEORGE C. THOMAS, B.A., M.A.

DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

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Finally, a huge thank you to the high school counselors and administrators who took their most valuable time to participate in this research study. Their dedication to the profession of education shows in so many ways. Their voices are present in this dissertation, and I hope that their jobs may eventually become easier to perform through further research and political support.
ABSTRACT

High school counselors struggle to complete the tasks assigned to them. Often serving more than 500 students, counselors must address requirements specified by the American School Counselor Association’s national model. They must also perform duties required by state and local policy, as well as campus-designated priorities. Empirical studies of school counselors have focused on identifying the duties that counselors perform, the effectiveness of training that counselors have received, and issues that occur from the standpoint of local control of counselor duties. I found no study that identified how counselors prioritize what they do or the level of discretion that counselors have in prioritizing their daily tasks. I found a disconnect that often occurs between principal accountability and the school counselor’s prescribed responsibilities.

Lipsky’s street-level bureaucracy was used as a lens to view the phenomena of this study. Counselors are front-line workers who provide services directly to students. With a large caseload and a perceived unmanageable list of tasks to perform, they must make discretionary decisions on implementing their work assignments. As they use discretion, they create street-level policy. The alternative to individual discretion is introducing a local implementation policy that may eliminate discretion, but some tasks would be eliminated due to a lack of resources. The local entity or local educational agency has prioritized the counselor’s job duties. The use of discretion or local implementation policy may lead to issues with the distribution of services to the recipient, in this case the student.

Charmaz’s grounded theory methods were used to conduct this research study. Semistructured interviews were performed with high school counselors and with administrators who directly supervise counselors. The study was conducted in a school district in a southern border community during the COVID-19 pandemic.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>xii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>xiii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Study Overview</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Professional Background</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical Overview</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equitable School Funding</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on Academic Accountability</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of CTE Programs</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem of the Study</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background of the Problem</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Accountability</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Statement</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who Matriculates to College?</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stackable Credentials</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workforce Education Course Manual</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horizontal Stacking</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value-Added Stacking</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of Certifications</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Statement</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Summary</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselor Prevalence</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American School Counselor Association Model</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselor Job and Role Satisfaction</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street-Level Bureaucrat</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street-Level Bureaucrat Discretion</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal as Instructional Leader</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street-Level Bureaucracy Assumptions</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessing Administrators’ Commitment</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analytical Framework</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Summary</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grounded Theory Methodology</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grounded Theory Methods</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructivist Grounded Theory: Sampling</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructivist Grounded Theory: Data Collection</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructivist Grounded Theory: Rigor or Integrity</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructivist Grounded Theory: Research and Interview Questions</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bordertown Independent School District (Site)</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Counselor Choices and Counselor Control...............................................................116

Conclusion ..................................................................................................................118

5. DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION.................................120

Discussion ....................................................................................................................121

Themes Emerging From the Results.............................................................................121

Discretion ....................................................................................................................121

Prioritization of Duties ...............................................................................................123

Calendar of Duties ......................................................................................................123

Deadlines and Accountability ......................................................................................124

Outcires and Emergencies ..........................................................................................124

Administrative Hours .................................................................................................126

Dissemination of District Counselor Information .....................................................126

Street-Level Bureaucracy ...........................................................................................126

Counselor as an Agent ...............................................................................................127

Implementation Theory ..............................................................................................127

Policy ............................................................................................................................128

Preparation and Support ...........................................................................................129

Counselor Support ......................................................................................................129

Analytical Framework .................................................................................................130

Recommendations ......................................................................................................132

Future Research .........................................................................................................135

Summary .....................................................................................................................136
REFERENCES ...........................................................................................................................................138

APPENDIX A: QUESTIONS FOR PARTICIPANTS ..................................................................................164

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FOR INTERVIEW ......................................................................165

CURRICULUM VITA .................................................................................................................................168
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Core Duties of a Counselor

Table 2 Criteria for College, Career, and Military Readiness

Table 3 Texas State Universities: First-Time Degree-Seeking Undergraduates, Two

    Cohorts: Six-Year Baccalaureate Graduation Rates

Table 4 High School Seniors Who Graduated in the School Years 2018 and 2019 Prior to

    Entering Higher Education in the Fall Semester

Table 5 Educational Experience of Participant High School Administrators

Table 6 Experience of Participant High School Counselors

Table 7 Historical School Counseling Paradigms
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1</td>
<td>Analytical Framework School Counselor: Global</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2</td>
<td>Analytical Framework School Counselor: Local</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3</td>
<td>Constructing Grounded Theory</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4</td>
<td>Interviewing in Grounded Theory Studies</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5</td>
<td>Integrity in Qualitative Research</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6</td>
<td>High School Counselors’ Responsibilities</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7</td>
<td>Analytical Framework School Counselor: Local</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I present my research study overview. I then briefly discuss my personal and professional background and its relation to the research study. I then discuss the historical overview of education funding and accountability. Then I describe the background of counselors’ struggle to perform a wide variety of duties prescribed through a multitude of layers of policy and mandates. Finally, I present the purpose of this research study and list the research questions.

The school counselor position in today’s American schools was developed in the early 19th century. This position was intended to provide students with vocational guidance at the dawn of the Industrial Revolution (Aubrey, 1977). Currently, society’s increasing needs and expectations place ever-increasing demands on an overtaxed educational system. Texas state policy mandates that children begin to prepare for college and begin to explore careers of interest while in elementary and middle school (Justice, 2020; Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2018). School counselors are expected to handle social issues while being bombarded with instantaneous feedback through social media. Schools are expected to support students’ academic, social-emotional, and college and career needs along with a multitude of other requirements (Randick et al., 2018).

School counselors are practitioners who have spent time in the classroom as teachers and have sought specialized training so that they may serve the needs of their assigned students. When functioning as school counselors, they are charged with an average workload of more than 500 students (Lapan, Gysbers, et al., 2012). Along with many other duties and responsibilities, the school counselor should maintain a holistic view of students’ academic plans and monitor
their progress in achieving their goals (TEA, 2018). A comprehensive counseling plan should aim to achieve equity by ensuring that all students receive guidance and counseling.

Texas has many statutory requirements for school counselors. These policies and regulations outline the importance of the many roles that counselors play in the school system. Since the 1989-90 school year, Texas has outlined the Comprehensive Model for School Counselors that has provided uniform state guidance for more than 1,200 school districts across the state of Texas (TEA, 2018).

Qualitative research methods encourage researchers to understand their biases when conducting research. Creswell (2003) stressed that qualitative researchers identify their personal values, assumptions, preferences, and biases when they initiate their study. This position was implied by Charmaz (2014), indicating that the assumptions of the researcher and research participant cannot be separated from the phenomena being studied.

Lipsky (1980), through his street-level bureaucracy framework, identified the act of discretion that a public servant has over the distribution of resources provided to the public to create ground-level policy. Through the act of discrete distribution of goods and/or services, school guidance counselors are public servants who work at the ground level to provide services to a specific public population. The attitudes and biases that the street-level bureaucrat holds toward the public largely influence what resources clients will receive. Although there is much research on school counselors and their prescribed duties, as well as much research on street-level bureaucracy, there is very limited to no evidence of research that explores school counselors’ discretion while performing their duties. I did not discover any empirical studies that identified specific priorities that counselors create to complete their variety of daily tasks on campus.
**Research Study Overview**

This research study was initiated to identify why there is little to no career counseling occurring within high schools. Research has identified that the high school counselor comes in third as a person who provides high school students with career information. Additional research has identified that high school counselors often do not feel comfortable providing career guidance. Counselor preparation programs often do not provide training that supports career guidance. Also, there are numerous research studies that have been conducted that determined that counselors often perform duties that are not appropriate for counselors to perform. As an individual with rich experience in Career and Technical Education as a former student, teacher, and school administrator, I understand the value of career guidance and career education. I chose to research further what high school counselors do, identify what takes priority, and understand the level of discretion counselors have in performing their duties.

Although the interest of the research study is to identify why there is limited career counseling that occurs, the research was intended to determine what counselors do and how priorities are identified. The level of discretion that a counselor is provided would mean that their individual priorities would take precedence.

Through this research, I was able to identify the level of preparation that counselors thought they received through their training program. I was able to identify how priorities are set at the campus level and what level of autonomy counselors felt that they are granted. Finally, the dynamics of the counseling team were analyzed. The processes used by campus administration to provide counselors with their student population and their respective duties have a direct impact on the autonomy and discretion that they have to perform their job.
**Personal Professional Background**

My personal and professional background provides the meaning behind this dissertation study. My interest in the advancement of career and technical education (CTE) to support the future of youth is paramount. Guidance counselors who are provided training and opportunities to guide students are essential to many youths’ future livelihood. Although CTE is the reason and the passion, career counseling and counselors are the focus of this study. Counselors’ ability to perform their duties and policy implementation structure will provide insight into their priorities and the tasks that counselors ultimately perform.

Through my career in education and my close (often not-so-close) guidance from counselors, I am left to wonder how the educational systems could restructure a school counselor’s position when the resources to do so are extremely limited. With the wide variety of counselor duties, how can school systems support the success of their multidimensional mission? The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) developed a model for counselors that supports the planning and delivery of their national counselor program model. Texas has adopted the ASCA model as a framework for the Texas Model for Comprehensive School Counseling (TEA, 2018). Still, research indicates that counselors are assigned duties that are not within their realm and that they are ill prepared to perform some of the functions listed in the ASCA model and the Texas plan.

As a 50-year-old, I have witnessed technology evolve and reshape the classroom. Textbooks have given way to electronic print. Pencils and pens have yielded to computers with processing and graphic design software. Discussions have occurred over the importance of keeping books available due to the value of feeling, smelling, and turning pages (Rehman, 2017).
But schools have been reluctant to change and embrace the assets of progress and to support the curiosity of children to support learning.

The position of the school counselor has changed from vocational counselor to comprehensive counselor. The school counselor supports students’ personal-social skills development, academic achievement, and college and career development. As society changes, so must the schools and the professionals so that they are able to support the needs of the current and emerging generations. When I was a student in a rural community school, the school provided little to no college or career guidance outside of what my teachers provided. Small communities often suffer economically. These small communities suffer from geographic isolation, weak community infrastructure, and outward migration (Budge, 2006). A study published by the Carsey School of Public Policy found that rural school districts are less likely than urban or suburban districts to employ school counselors (Gagnon & Mattingly, 2016). Griffin et al., (2011) found that youth in rural communities faced challenges that may have limited their career exploration and development opportunities. These challenges affect not only their careers but also their academic aspirations. Like the rural school that I attended, the school must share resources with other schools. In my situation, the K–12 school shared a counselor with a neighboring school district. Although I knew what he looked like, I never officially visited the office. High school juniors and seniors applying to college seemed to fill the counselor’s time.

I found my interest in the vocational programs in Agriculture, Industrial Arts, and Home Economics. These were the programs outside of Fine Arts that were available as elective classes. These courses provided experiences and were chosen by circling the registration form provided in a core course. There was no guidance from parents, teachers, or school counselors. Although
the elective courses that I had chosen were skills based and work related, they guided me to achieve a bachelor’s degree in Industrial Technology education. Although I had not taken any college prerequisite courses, I had known that I intended to enroll in college. With the daily toils that go with growing up on a grain and dairy farm, I had discovered early in my life that farming would not be one of my future career choices. I would have to enlist in the Iowa Army National Guard and attend a split training program as a junior in high school to ensure that I could afford to attend college. My older sister was attending college and my older brother had joined the Army due to the scarce resources and my family’s inability to fund two children’s aspirations to attend college. As the third child, I understood that in our home, our parents could not afford additional college bills, so the Army National Guard was my answer to paying for the privilege of attending college.

**Historical Overview**

**Equitable School Funding**

The school funding plight in Texas that would shape my future and livelihood had occurred only a few years prior to my arrival in Bordertown. In 1989, in *Edgewood Independent School District v. Kirby*, the Texas Supreme Court determined that the Texas state finance system was unconstitutional (Gittell, 1998). In *Edgewood*, the judge ruled that children who were living in property-poor school districts should have the same access to resources as those living in property-rich districts (Swaby & Ura, 2018). The equalization of funding would allow all students access to similar educational opportunities. Based on the ruling, it was determined that new school funding plans should be developed, presented, and approved through legislation. In 1995, the state legislature devised a plan that would provide equity in funding Texas schools. This funding ultimately affected the quality of educational programs offered to Texas students.
In 1993, Texas lawmakers passed Chapter 41 of the Texas Education Code into law. The new law that reshaped the Texas funding plan was called the Robin Hood plan (Texas School Coalition, 2018). It took state officials 2 years to present a plan that the Texas courts would accept. The result was that communities would be taxed at a similar rate statewide. Property-rich districts would keep the state-approved maximum allotment, and the state would recapture the remainder of the funding. Property-poor school districts would tax their property at the state minimum rate. The government would guarantee the state minimum funding to all school districts using captured funds to offset each district’s funding deficit. Communities could choose to tax at a higher rate, and the state would ensure a minimum yield in funding for every additional penny taxed. Property-rich districts would keep all of the additional revenue gained through additional property taxation. Although the Robin Hood plan was unpopular, it would profoundly improve school experiences for students across Texas. School funding would affect the district’s resources to support the size and scope of school programs offered to students. It would also affect the teacher-to-student ratio, the available technology, and the number of counselors available to support student needs.

**Focus on Academic Accountability**

A development in the Texas educational system that had occurred just 1 year prior to the completion of my undergraduate degree also affected students who enrolled in elective courses. In 1990, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) was implemented in Texas public schools. TAAS replaced the Texas Assessment of Basic Skills (TABS), which had been used to determine student academic progress since 1979 (Gittell, 1998).

The TAAS increased the rigor level required by a national push for better-prepared students. Texas students were accountable for passing the tests during high school in order to
graduate. Texas public schools and school districts worked to retool their curriculum and instruction to ensure that the instruction was aligned to the new test. During the years of academic instructional retooling, students were required to enroll in test preparation programs, taking away from their high school elective opportunities, which in turn affected the number of elective courses offered by schools.

Through the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, states were ordered to develop rigorous academic standards and measure students’ attainment of the determined standards by specified demographic subgroups (Malin et al., 2017). Through these established performance measures, states were held accountable for students’ academic performance (Datnow & Park, 2009). NCLB was implemented to establish a uniform and rigorous academic standard for schools across the nation but did not address the element of preparation for college or career readiness (Malin et al., 2017). With the accountability measures based solely on academic performance, academic remediation would be imperative for school systems to adhere to the standards set forth in NCLB.

Identified within an accountability study conducted by the U.S. Department of Education, “States reported challenges associated with meeting the needs of increased numbers of schools identified for improvement and identifying interventions that have been proven to improve the performance of non-proficient students” (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service, 2010, para. 20). Identified in the study were poor-performing schools that were primarily designated as Title I schools or schools with predominantly students from low-income families. Most of these schools were concentrated in slightly over more than 1% of the nation’s Title I districts.
During the 2006-2007 school year, nearly all schools reported making multiple improvements to support student learning, including improving curriculum and instruction using assessment results for planning purposes. They prescribed an increase in the amount of instruction in reading and mathematics for low-performing students.

Dee and Jacob (2010) found evidence that NCLB accountability caused a shift in the allocation of instructional time for mathematics and reading, which were the targeted subjects. By increasing the amount of instruction in the core academic areas for poor-performing students, these students would be offered fewer electives. In schools with many poor-performing students, elective teachers would need to be replaced with teachers to remediate core, Tier 1 instruction. When initial instruction produces poor outcomes, additional core teachers are required to address the remediation required to assist students in passing standardized tests. College and career readiness is “often overshadowed by an instructional focus on decontextualized content and facts necessary to pass exit examinations” (Conley, 2010, p. 32) to the extent that a robust curriculum is often marginalized.

In a national study conducted by the U.S. Department of Education, it was found that students who received special education services were less likely to be enrolled in career and technology education (CTE) programs than those who did not receive services (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Students who participated in dual language programs were much less likely to participate as a concentrator in CTE programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). A concentrator earns at least two credits by taking CTE courses. Students who are served in bilingual and special education programs typically struggle to pass state-mandated standardized tests and often require additional support to pass.
Within an environment of minimal resources, the number of core teachers increased to support academic remediation and preparation, and the number of elective teachers decreased as fewer choice electives were available to students. Many high school principals dedicated their school as a college preparatory institution and removed all electives that were not in the arts and were not required for graduation. The college preparatory designation would remove much opposition to the removal of career programs. Since principals who served in larger urban districts had the autonomy to develop their instructional programs, many career programs were removed during the 1990s.

In searching for data regarding what I witnessed as a CTE teacher in the 1990s, it was discovered that these data were not effectively reported nationally. In a report released by the U.S. Department of Education, Levesque et al. (2008) described the deficiency of reported data through the national School and Staffing Survey (SASS).

It was determined when preparing for the five-year report that during the preparation of this report that the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), which is a primary source of national data on K–12 teachers and schools, undercounted area CTE schools serving high school students. (Levesque et al., 2008, p. 7)

Also identified in the report were the New Basics core academic standards, which included in the graduation plan 4 years of English and 3 years each of mathematics, science, and social studies (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Student college preparation in high school consisted of attaining four or more credits in English Language Arts; three or more credits in mathematics at the Algebra I or higher level; two or more credits in biology, chemistry, or physics; two or more credits in social studies, with at least one credit in U.S. or world history; and two or more credits in a single foreign language. These proposed
graduation criteria were based on a review of entrance requirements at public 4-year postsecondary institutions (Flanagan, 1992) and were initially used by Levesque et al. (2000). Later, in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), there was an outline of what is referred to as the 4x4: 4 years of English, mathematics, science, and social studies, with a requirement of Algebra I and a recommendation of Algebra II. The 4x4 with Algebra II would almost ensure that students enter college ready to succeed. However, when student attendance affected these designated college-preparatory public schools, the principals integrated career education once again (TEA, 2020a).

Not only are high schools predisposed to supporting the 4-year degree; national rhetoric has continued to focus on 4-year degree attainment through publishing statistics that compare a 4-year college degree to a high school diploma. In a 2015 fact sheet posted by the U.S. Department of Education titled “Fact Sheet: Focusing Higher Education on Student Success,” the Secretary of Education laid out a vision for America’s higher education system. The key facts identified the importance of attaining a college credential. Two of the three points specifically compared the attainment of a high school diploma to that of achieving a baccalaureate degree. The third point indicated the need for postsecondary education or training. At the TXHigherEdData.org site (2020), there are data for public 4-year and 2-year institutions and data for 4-year private institutions, but data for 2-year private and certificate programs are omitted. The Texas 60x30 plan (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2015) calculates for college certificate completion but omits this information. This omission appears to be typical, which would mean that these omissions are either due to limited data for these credentials or are deemed less desirable.
Loss of CTE Programs

In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) published a report titled “A Nation at Risk” was published. This report changed the educational landscape by ushering a new era of academic rigor and accountability into the American school system. Over the next three decades, the nation witnessed an increase in the academic credits earned by students (Malkus, 2019). The number of credits achieved within career and technical education declined throughout the same period. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Every Student Succeed Act (ESSA) continued to fight to improve students' academics within the American school system (Niebling and Lovell, 2015; Swanson, 2003; and Prather, 2010). These pieces of legislation increased the number and rigor level of academic courses and reduced the number of student elective courses.

As a vocational instructor, I witnessed four programs at the first high school where I served that were removed from the campus within 3 years, mine being one of them. After 3 years of teaching at my first campus, I was notified that my program was being closed. Plans had already been made to convert one of my shops to a counseling suite, and the other large production lab would be the new book room. The office education program had been taken over the year earlier to make way for the administration and counseling team to work during the construction of the new medical magnet school that was being built on the school grounds. Eventually, the remaining trades and industry programs were removed from the campus.

I moved to another high school campus, where a veteran principal had held the vacant Industrial Technology program for a year and a half without a teacher so that he could keep the program to support students once an appropriate teacher was found. Within a year of my arrival, this principal was moved to another campus, which typically happened every so many years, as I
realized during the time that I was employed there. The new principal kept all programs in place for the first year. The following year’s staffing yielded a cut of two career programs, which meant that the program I had been building for 2 years was removed from the campus. At that point, I was hired by a middle school principal to implement a Technology Education program at a campus in central Bordertown. The school had recently been reconstituted. I taught at this campus for 2 years and was then hired as an assistant principal.

**Problem of the Study**

**Background of the Problem**

The state of Texas has created a guide to the development of school counseling programs and the development of Texas counselors. This document is referred to as the Texas Model for Comprehensive School Counseling (TEA, 2018), herein referred to as the Texas Model. The model was created in 2004; the fifth edition was released in 2018. The latest revision was updated in collaboration between the Texas Counseling Association (TCA) and the TEA. The intent of the Texas Model is to provide guidance to school counselors, administrators, board members, and all community stakeholders so that they may create, validate, and improve their local counseling programs (Texas Model, 2018). The model uses the framework from the ASCA model with the outline of core duties of a school counselor: to support (a) student academics, (b) social and emotional skills development, and (c) career and college planning (ASCA, 2012, 2016). Within the conceptual model of the Texas Plan, there are four areas of concern, with four subcategories, as shown in Table 1.

Although ASCA has provided a framework for effective counseling, counselors must work through many tasks throughout their day. Identified in the Texas plan are tasks with state code requirements for which there is no accountability. State policy that guides school
counseling is passed down to the districts through the Texas Model for Comprehensive School Counseling. Each school district uses this plan to guide them to develop their local counseling plan.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Core Duties of a Counselor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Area of concern</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counseling domains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service delivery components</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Student competency areas</td>
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<tr>
<td>Development stages</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 83rd Texas Legislature passed House Bill 5, which provided a structure for school districts to implement graduation endorsements based on five career-based designations (TASB, 2013). The bill prescribed coursework consisting of four credits based on a structured sequence of courses students could take in high school. The four credits would constitute a state-approved endorsement that would yield a level of achievement when a student graduated from high school. The student would designate their endorsement intent before starting their ninth-grade year. The choices could be updated or endorsement designation could be changed until the beginning of the junior year of high school (TEA, 2014). When students finish their senior year, each
endorsement that a senior earns is uploaded to the state through the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) portal and would appear on the high school transcript. PEIMS is the system and processes that the state of Texas uses to retrieve student and school district data. This structure imposed another set of duties for counselors to ensure that school districts complied with the state administrative code. Reviewing transcripts and ensuring that students graduated with the required credits designated by state code and school district policy added a dimension to counselors’ duties.

State Accountability

During the 85th Texas Legislature session held in 2017, House Bill 22, the A-F school accountability rating system, was adopted. Through the A-F system, accountability was measured through three domains: Student Achievement, School Progress, and Closing the Gaps (TEA, 2020a). Through the A-F system, under Student Accountability, high school accountability is calculated through three data areas: State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) assessments at 40%, College Career and Military Readiness (CCMR) at 40%, and Graduation Rate at 20%. Within the CCMR, points can be calculated for each student who earns one of the criteria in any of the identified CCMR areas (Table 2). Campuses and school districts can earn only one CCMR point per student. A student may earn multiple points in the College area, a point in the Career area, and a point in the Military area, but only one point can be yielded per student with the institution under the accountability system.

Although this system provides school districts opportunities to receive credit for fostering student achievement within the CCMR areas, it opens the door for tracking students. Principals may identify students whom they predict would struggle with college readiness and have them placed in a career pathway so they will generate a CCMR point toward campus state
accountability. Students who have proven academically that they can achieve college readiness may be asked only to take advanced courses and may not be provided an opportunity to receive employment skills.

Table 2: Criteria for College, Career, and Military Readiness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Requirements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>College readiness</td>
<td>Meet criteria of 3 on the AP exam, or four or IB examination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meet TSIA criteria (SAT/ACT/TSIA/College Prep courses) in reading and mathematics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Earn an Associate degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Complete an OnRamps course in any subject and earn college credit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career readiness</td>
<td>Earn an industry-based certification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CTE coherent sequence coursework completion and credit approved industry-based certification (one-half point credit)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Graduate with completed IEP and workforce readiness (Graduation type codes 04, 05, 54, or 55) and be identified as a student currently being served through special education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Earn a Level I or Level II college certificate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Graduate under an advanced degree plan and be identified as a student being served through special education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military readiness</td>
<td>Enlist in the United States Armed Forces</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Through House Bill 5, students entering high school must have selected a 4-year graduation plan, classified as an endorsement. Most endorsements are aligned through CTE programs and linked to the nationally recognized 16 career clusters (Advance CTE, 2021). Other endorsements that are identified are achieved through other programs that may be offered at the campus. The STEM endorsement is completed when five course credits are taken in mathematics or science. Students can earn an endorsement in Arts and Humanities by completing four courses in a sequence or four credits with two courses taken within two separate programs. Students who complete a 4-year sequence in the Naval Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (NJROTC) will
receive an endorsement in the Human Services area. Students who take additional courses in the core course area or through languages other than English may receive an endorsement. The state allows all students who complete a 4x4 to earn a college readiness endorsement. A 4x4 consists of a student taking four of each of the four core courses: mathematics, English, science, and social studies. The endorsement system is one way that the state, through regulation, ensures that school districts provide students a minimum number of structured educational options.

The Texas graduation endorsement system mimics the school district requirement of offering CTE courses in a coherent sequence required through the reauthorization of the Federal Carl Perkins Act IV (CPA). The CPA was initiated in 2006 and the federal funding was reauthorized in 2007. Through the CPA, participating school districts were required to offer students CTE programs or coherent sequences of courses. The coherent sequences had to consist of two or more CTE courses for three or more credits. School districts were required to offer a minimum of three of these sequences for their students. The problem with the requirements for Carl Perkins Grant is that of verification of implementation or compliance with the mandate. The proof that exists is that of a Perkins Effectiveness Report (PER) submitted by the school district grant executor.

As explained earlier, the PBMAS (TEA, 2022a) was a state accountability system imposed on federally funded programs by which accountability was placed on school districts and no accountability was placed on the campuses that contributed to the performance factors. Other than internal checks and balances by the directors who supported the federally funded programs, there was very little concern by others in the school district, including campus principals, who owned the data and were not accountable for the data through the district PBMAS accountability system. The student data identified through PBMAS were crucial for
understanding the cracks in the system, but these data points were not identified on the school’s Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) system.

Most small school districts have a teacher or a coordinator who monitors CTE program implementation and compliance. These individuals have very little power to influence compliance or to implement change in their school systems. By passing House Bill 5, Texas lawmakers not only provided accountability measures but also increased course requirements from three credits (the Carl Perkins designated coherent sequences) to four credits for students to earn endorsements. Endorsements are not the only accountability pieces in the A-F rating system. Other measures that counted and were listed previously are the End of Course (EOC) exams, dual-credit class completion, Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB) course completion, Level One Certificate program completion, Associate degree completion, and Industry Recognized Certification completion. This would require counselors and a solid counseling plan for students to create their graduation plans. Students would have to register for chosen sequence courses, which would require support from a counselor.

The Texas Administrative Code (TAC) or Texas regulation requires that a school district hire counselors for elementary schools but provides minimal funding for counselors at all grade levels. However, the state legislature has passed many measures in the Administrative Code that require specific duties that only a counselor can perform. The state ascribes to the ASCA model for school counselors, which is the framework for the Texas Model for Comprehensive School Counseling (TEA, 2018). This model has three rungs: Academic, Personal Social, and Career (ASCA, 2016). The Career rung encompasses both the college and career components. Research indicates that counselors enter the realm of counseling to make a difference in students’ lives (ASCA, 1999; Rayle, 2006). They enter the field for the social-emotional aspect of counseling.
Studies by Morgan et al. (2014) and Bridgeland and Bruce (2014) have shown that counselors agree that their preparation programs have not provided the skills to prepare them to perform career counseling tasks. Those studies have indicated that counselors are overburdened with too many students to perform the tasks required of them (Lapan, Gysbers, et al., 2012).

Within the same study of students in Connecticut, it was found that a lower student-to-school counselor ratios and implementation of a comprehensive college and career counseling component reduced suspension rates and disciplinary incidents. Additional benefits of the program were better attendance and increased graduation rates.

The Texas State Model promotes a student-to-school counselor ratio of 250:1 for the counselor to be effective, but the document publishes a state average ratio of close to 450:1. This would indicate that counselors are assigned twice the number of students than is recommended (ASCA, 2016). Since the model has three elements, it would be understandable that counselors prioritize their duties to ensure the student body’s safety and security first and to divide their remaining time for other priorities. I found limited research focusing on high school counselors’ identification of prioritized duties.

Considering the research findings on counselor job duties, it would be understandable that career guidance would fall at or near the bottom of counselors’ list of priorities. In a study of counselors’ perceptions of career counseling, it was discovered that counselors did not agree that they received adequate training and preparation to assist students with career development (Morgan et al., 2014). Participants in the study indicated that they had received valuable information about career development but no guidance on how to use it with students. They relied heavily on software that assisted with career searches and surveys if they had the resources to use such software. In the same study, rural and suburban districts were found to be less likely
than urban districts to have online resources to provide career guidance. On the other hand, having navigated the pathway through a minimum of 6 years of college, most counselors identified that they were adequately prepared to guide their students toward the path to college.

Table 3 shows the 35 Texas state universities and their respective 6-year graduation rates for two graduating cohorts. The data were taken from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) website. This chart shows data for high school students who enrolled in college in fall 2013 and graduated in spring 2019. The second cohort enrolled in fall 2014 and graduated with a bachelor’s degree in spring 2020. The figures show the 6-year graduation rate for each of the 35 Texas public universities.

**Problem Statement**

Some counselor duties or responsibilities can be audited easily, which would hold the school counselor directly accountable for prescribed outcomes. I suggest that many tasks that require direct interaction with students are challenging to audit and therefore may be dismissed when time and resources are scarce. This may occur with the career education duties if they are to be placed as a lower priority on the counselor’s or administrator’s duty list. The following sections provide an understanding of the importance of career guidance and how a good portion of the students who graduate would benefit. College matriculation rates and graduation rates spell the need for students to leave high school prepared for both the work force and college.

Morgan et al. (2014) and Bridgeland and Bruce (2014) indicated that counselors are enthusiastic about supporting college and career readiness initiatives but do not think that they have the support and resources to promote student postsecondary goals and achievement. Although these issues prevent counselors from completing their duties, another phenomenon has not been addressed in research and deserves inquiry: the closed educational system of
professionals. This closed system assumes that most of the professionals in a school system have never worked outside of education and that all hold a 4-year degree or higher. Counselors are charged with guiding students through the pathway to their future careers. Most counselors have had academic success throughout their careers, which has propelled them to achieve a master’s degree. Many have not worked outside of the field of education. Considering that less than 2.2% of the US population works in K–12 education, approximately 98% work elsewhere. A majority of the American school system has been experiencing a silent crisis (Barton, 2005; Bridgeland et al., 2005; Prather, 2010). The crisis that has gained the most attention over the past 30 years has been the staggering number of students dropping out of secondary school. A study commissioned by the Gates Foundation (Bridgeland et al., 2005) examined dropouts ages 16 to 25 in 25 locations in the United States. The intent was to determine why students dropped out of school. Nearly half of those who interviewed said that their classes were not interesting and 69% said that they were not motivated to work hard. One third indicated that they had personal reasons for dropping out, and many other reasons were offered. The authors suggested that the curriculum should be relevant and engaging and should connect school and work.

Building a welcoming climate with fewer students ensures that each student has a strong relationship with a teacher. Another suggestion was to have diverse schools to appeal to students’ diverse interests. Burrus and Roberts (2012) painted the prospect of high school dropouts earning on average $9,200 less per year than high school graduates. The income gap continues to widen. The researchers documented that high school dropouts were 3 times more likely to be unemployed than their counterparts who had graduated.

The issues that arise with high school dropouts are well documented. Through NCLB and ESSA, accountability measures such as graduation rate have helped local education agencies
throughout the nation to improve the ways in which they educate youth. There is an issue that has not received as much attention as the dropout rate and that may affect a high school graduate’s ability to earn a living wage. Many students graduate from high school and may appear to be highly successful as they are prepared to enter college. But they leave without skills to enter the workforce making more than minimum wage. There was an estimation that at the turn of the century that 3.8 million youth between the ages of 16 to 24 were neither employed nor participating in school (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2004; Prather, 2010). In 2012, nearly 6.5 million U.S. teens and young adults were neither in school nor participating in the workforce (Chong, 2012). These young adults are underemployed as adults and are failing to gain the skills that employers need in the 21st century.

According to Niebling and Lovell (2015), Swanson (2003), and Prather (2010), nearly one third of high school students fail to graduate. The NCLB and ESSA represent the most complex federal legislation imposed on states to ensure continued support for student achievement. Preparing all students to qualify to enroll in college after leaving high school is a significant endeavor for K–12 institutions, considering this silent crisis. Accomplishing this for all students is nearly impossible, but is not the end of the duties of a K–12 institution.

Research has demonstrated that counselors play a crucial role in preparing students for both college and technical careers (Lapan, Whitcomb, et al., 2012). Numerous middle-skill careers are accessible to graduating seniors. Many of these careers go unfilled due to the lack of potential workers who possess the skills needed to enter successful employment. Due to the inability to secure properly trained skilled workers, industry loses billions of dollars yearly and is expected to lose more as industry continues to see a skilled worker shortage. Wellener et al., (2021) described a mismatch between job demands and skills programs. They stated that skilled
worker shortages would continue until apprenticeships and skills development programs draw more potential workers. The following are reasons for the worker shortage. Potential workers have different expectations for jobs and careers. There is a lack of interest in industry by students and parents. Baby Boomers are retiring and leaving many skilled worker vacancies. There are not enough people interested in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) work. There is a shortage of effective job training programs to support industry needs.

Locally, in Border County (pseudonym), approximately 57% of graduating seniors enroll directly into college, university, or technical school in the fall after graduating from high school (THECB, 2020). The THECB was developed by the Texas legislature to provide guidance and support to Texas public higher education institutions. This percentage has been consistent for the past 5 years. These data points may not consider local private technical schools, as the numbers of graduates from these schools are not counted in the state reports (THECB, 2020). The reason for the omission of these numbers is based on how the tallies are secured, which encompasses all campuses within one count if the college or technical school has more than one campus. The student counts are submitted through the main campus, which may be in a different region from the branches where students are enrolled (THECB, 2015).

What happens to students who did not enroll in a 2-year or 4-year college after graduating from high school? Some may have attained a credential while in high school that allowed them to attain an entry-level skilled job. Some join the military. However, many do not gain employment or develop job skills that will help them to secure above-minimum wage employment. Many students struggle to obtain employment that will generate close to a living wage (Glasmeier, 2020).
Who Matriculates to College?

The graduation rate of the 2004 college cohort who attended one of the 32 public universities was dismal (Table 3). The THECB (n.d.) published 6-year graduation rate for students receiving a Baccalaureate degree was only 57.4% for the cohort that enrolled in 2012. The 6-year average university graduation rate for students enrolled in 2014 was 29.8% (THECB, 2015). If college readiness is the primary goal and all other outcomes are secondary, students will ultimately suffer financial hardship due to the high cost of college that will not yield the dividends to pay for it.

The call to action must be heard that all students should leave high school with both the skills to enter the workforce and preparation to enter a postsecondary institution. To accomplish both goals or joint goals, those who make decisions and have access to students must understand the importance of career counseling and appreciate the importance of skills-based employment. Texas education accountability points were provided to school districts for each student who was identified as either college ready, career ready, or enlisted in the military, through passage of Texas House Bill 5 by the Texas Legislature in 2013. This bill provided validity to high school graduation outcomes beyond the well-established college readiness benchmark.

Table 4 shows graduating high school seniors who enrolled in college in Texas during the 2018 and 2019 school years. The number of students identified as not found reflects those who most likely did not enroll directly in college. The “not found” students graduated from high school and were presumed not to have enrolled in college in the following fall. Would one suppose that the 45% not found in 2018 and 46% not found in 2019 all fall within the bottom 50% of their graduating class?
Table 3: Texas State Universities: First-Time Degree-Seeking Undergraduates, Two Cohorts: Six-Year Baccalaureate Graduation Rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State university</th>
<th>F 2012—FY 2018 (%)</th>
<th>F 2014—FY 2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angelo State University</td>
<td>44.0</td>
<td>34.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lamar University</td>
<td>33.8</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midwestern State University</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prairie View A&amp;M University</td>
<td>34.2</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam Houston State University</td>
<td>57.9</td>
<td>36.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephen F. Austin State University</td>
<td>57.0</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sul Ross State University</td>
<td>28.5</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tarleton State University</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas A&amp;M International University</td>
<td>46.0</td>
<td>18.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas A&amp;M University at Galveston</td>
<td>59.2</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas A&amp;M University-Corpus Christi</td>
<td>50.3</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas A&amp;M University-Kingsville</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas A&amp;M University</td>
<td>83.6</td>
<td>7.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas A&amp;M University-Commerce</td>
<td>44.8</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas Southern University</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas State University-San Marcos</td>
<td>64.4</td>
<td>47.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas Tech University</td>
<td>72.8</td>
<td>43.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas Women’s University</td>
<td>54.5</td>
<td>38.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Houston-Clear Lake</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Houston-Downtown</td>
<td>38.1</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Texas at Arlington</td>
<td>50.7</td>
<td>27.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Texas at Austin</td>
<td>82.9</td>
<td>61.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Texas at Brownsville</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Texas at Dallas</td>
<td>70.7</td>
<td>45.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Texas at El Paso</td>
<td>37.4</td>
<td>19.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Texas at San Antonio</td>
<td>44.0</td>
<td>31.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Texas at Tyler</td>
<td>49.6</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Texas-Pan American</td>
<td>38.9</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Texas-Permian Basin</td>
<td>44.6</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Houston</td>
<td>53.1</td>
<td>26.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of North Texas</td>
<td>57.4</td>
<td>38.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Texas A&amp;M University</td>
<td>45.6</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>57.4</td>
<td>29.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: High School Seniors Who Graduated in the School Years 2018 and 2019 Prior to Entering Higher Education in the Fall Semester

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semester and destination</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>African American</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Pacific Islander</th>
<th>Native American/ Multi-racial</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fall 2018</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public 4-year institution</td>
<td>75,813</td>
<td>21.79</td>
<td>26,685</td>
<td>9,450</td>
<td>29,916</td>
<td>7,943</td>
<td>1,818</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public 2-year institution</td>
<td>82,531</td>
<td>23.72</td>
<td>23,989</td>
<td>8,720</td>
<td>44,852</td>
<td>3,310</td>
<td>1,660</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent institution</td>
<td>11,671</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>5,048</td>
<td>1,783</td>
<td>3,899</td>
<td>605</td>
<td>336</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not trackable</td>
<td>18,381</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>2,408</td>
<td>1,108</td>
<td>13,626</td>
<td>978</td>
<td>261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not found</td>
<td>159,497</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>48,921</td>
<td>22,441</td>
<td>80,979</td>
<td>3,281</td>
<td>3,875</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>347,893</td>
<td></td>
<td>107,052</td>
<td>43,502</td>
<td>173,272</td>
<td>16,117</td>
<td>7,950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fall 2019</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public 4-year institution</td>
<td>75,228</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>25,543</td>
<td>9,039</td>
<td>30,465</td>
<td>8,334</td>
<td>1,847</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public 2-year institution</td>
<td>86,312</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>23,612</td>
<td>9,119</td>
<td>48,342</td>
<td>3,437</td>
<td>1,802</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>43,953</td>
<td>180,673</td>
<td>17,101</td>
<td>8,311</td>
</tr>
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</table>

*Note.* Source: High School Graduates Enrolled in Higher Education,” by Texas Higher Education Data, n.d, http://www.txhighereddata.org/index.cfm?objectId=77D62E90-D970-11E8-BB650050560100A9. *Pacific Islanders have always been included in Asian. The new multi-racial category was combine with Native America beginning in FY2010. *b*The percentage is the total enrolled divided by the total number of high school graduates minus the nontrackable. *c*Not trackable graduates have nonstandard ID numbers that will not find a match at Texas higher education institutions.
Texas outlined the methods for the determination for each of the college, career, and military readiness indicators (TEA, 2020a). Through this either-or process developed by the state for accountability, Texas may now be back to the dreaded student tracking system. It would be simple to add quality accountability points for those students who graduate both college and career ready. Quality points would provide an incentive to campus and district administrators to ensure that all students were both prepared for college and prepared to enter the workforce. It is not wise to allow anyone to decide which path to take while in high school. Students must be challenged to be prepared both to enter college and to enter the workforce successfully.

With a 57% direct enrollment rate and a 6-year college completion rate below 60%, students must have skills to enter the workforce to earn a living wage. By identifying the deficiencies that exist in the “closed system” of education described earlier, processes for systematic change can be developed that will benefit students who do not matriculate directly to college, as well as those who struggle to complete their degree in a timely manner.

Through identification and education of others about high school graduates’ lack of opportunities, a solution can be found. With the knowledge of the deficiencies of the educational systems, guidance counselors and school leaders will see that preparing only the brightest to enter college will ultimately doom many to minimum-wage jobs and failure to attain a living-wage job or career.

A shrug of the shoulders and the belief in a “just world” should not be acceptable (Hupe et al., 2015). The “just world” allows the street-level bureaucrat to project the blame of their client’s adverse outcomes or circumstances on their clients. This coping mechanism enables the street-level bureaucrat to continue working in environments where there is emotional strain and often failure. The only alternative is a new expectation of college and career readiness for all
students. This expectation would be for all, regardless of class ranking or family socioeconomic standing.

**Stackable Credentials**

Additional outcomes are available to students at most high schools throughout the United States. This section provides a breakdown of how students, either youth or adult, are able to achieve and document education that will provide them a better chance of earning a living wage.

To illustrate the deficiencies of the national secondary/postsecondary system, it is vital to view the types of outcomes that people can achieve throughout their careers. Most people are aware of the vertical system of stacking educational credentials. Vertical credential stacking refers to credentials as hierarchy. Credentials and degrees start at one level and build, enabling the learner to progress toward a higher degree. The vertical stacking system occurs after students graduate from high school and enroll in a college or university. They can expect to work toward a college certificate, which could take a year or more, depending on the certificate level. College certificate programs provide coursework that builds entry-level employment skills in specific industries.

Students could achieve an Associate degree, which generally requires 2 years of full-time attendance to complete. The next degree on the rung is the baccalaureate degree, which requires 4 years or 2 years beyond the Associate degree, provided that the students are strategic with their coursework during the first 2 years. The next level is be the master’s degree. A master’s degree traditionally requires 30 to 40 credit hours and could require 1 to 4 years to complete, depending on one’s circumstances and employment status. The final or terminal degree is the doctorate. Most degree programs require 4 or 5 years to complete. There is a second part of the vertical and
stackable scenario. What was described is referred to as the academic or transferable method of vertical stacking.

**Workforce Education Course Manual**

Another resource is directed through the Workforce Education Course Manual (WECM; THECB, 2020). The federal government provides a manual that identifies careers and skills that students should have to work in those careers. For each of the programs, the educational entity and the local business and industry meet to identify the skills that are needed locally. Courses are modified locally to encompass the identified skills. The process is referred to as Developing a Curriculum (DACUM; National Institute of Corrections, 2022). Since the curriculum is developed locally by identifying required skills, courses are referred to as nontransferable. Often, colleges that offer the same programs will accept these courses toward their similar degree. Often, programs such as Fire Science, Automotive Technology, and Electrical Technology programs are guided by national standards, making the skills similar from program to program. A traditional university rarely offers these courses other than as elective credits toward a traditional degree.

WECM credentials start at the Level 1 certificate, which provides the participant/student minimal skills to enter at the ground level in a career. The Level 1 certificate does not require any core or transferable courses to be taken, which means that proof of college readiness is not needed. This college certificate will consist of 20 to 30 credits. The credits are determined by each college in conjunction with the local workforce industry. The Level 2 certificate stacks onto the Level 1 certificate and usually adds 12 to 15 college credit hours. The Level 2 certificate also requires one or two core or transferable courses (otherwise known as core courses), which will mean that students must demonstrate college readiness. The Associate of Applied Sciences is the
next level, which requires 60 or more hours. The Baccalaureate of Applied Sciences can take multiple paths as it extends the traditional WECM degree. Typically, colleges and universities require students to take all core courses that were not taken at the lower division. Some colleges utilize taught at the lower level and expand these skills while the student achieves a higher-level degree within the same professional area.

An example is a student who received an Associate degree in Child Development and transferred to an educator preparation baccalaureate degree program. Some universities are friendlier to WECM degree carriers. The division of WECM and transferrable courses can cause an issue with credit retrieval for courses taken. When local institutions do not work together to develop pathways, students/participants may lose out and take additional courses to attain a degree. There are also implications for financial aid when students must take additional courses to earn a degree. These issues may cause counselors or administrators to limit participation in WECM courses.

**Horizontal Stacking**

Through horizontal stacking, with the level of the industry credential, the subject matter is more important than the level of the credential (Williamson & Pittinsky, 2016). Wilson (2016) described a stackable credential as an industry-recognized credential offered by a program for third-party certification or occupational license. The credentials that are being stacked are referred to as industry recognized certifications (IRC). The skills that one learns are demonstrated through a recognized certification test to indicate competency level in a career field. Through horizontal stacking, people build a series of nondegree certificates and certifications across an occupation.
Prime examples of IRCs are found in the computer and networking field. People who work at the basic level of this field would be designated Computer Maintenance Technicians. Their minimum competency level to repair computers and cover the manufacturer’s warranty would be the CompTIA A+ certification test. The next level test is the CompTIA Net+, which covers the basics of maintaining a network. The next level is the CompTIA Security+ certification, which tests the competency of the individual regarding maintaining a secure computer, network, and server environment. Participants expand their subject matter knowledge by earning credentials in similar fields that, together, prepare them for a specific type of job with specific skills.

Unlike the traditional vertical stacking of college credentials, such as college certificate, to Associate degree, then to a baccalaureate, there is not necessarily a particular ranking of industry certification or credentials, nor are there specifically defined prerequisites for challenging a certification except for mastery of the skills required to pass the test. Job skills are defined and prescribed through industry standards, and a group of skills can be combined to make an industry credential or certification. Through horizontal stacking, these credentials build on one another. Through this process, the industry develops specific standards and can classify the skill level that the worker has attained through earned certifications. For example, Cisco is a major brand, and training may be transferrable to others, but the curriculum and certifications are controlled through the Cisco Corp. Stacked certifications carry more weight in some professions, such as in the technology industry, and they are often required over a degree for many mid-level job (Markow et al., 2017).
**Value-Added Stacking**

Through value-added stacking, individuals add IRCs to support a college certificate, Associate degree or baccalaureate degree. These certifications or credentials add a level of professional skills that support supervision and work in specific career areas. For example, a bachelor’s degree in Information Technology can be bolstered by Oracle Certified Associate, Java Programmer, Unity Programmer, or Python programming language certifications. The worth of a degree is often judged based on the reputation of the university from which it is achieved. Competency in specific technical skills is demonstrated through certifications.

**Importance of Certifications**

Williamson and Pittinsky (2016) cited 2012 U.S. Census Bureau statistics that 46.3 million adults of ages 18 and over held a professional certification or license. Also, 19.1 million adults held an educational certificate. According to the Georgetown Center for Workforce Development, nondegree credentials can have a major impact on earnings (Carnevale et al., 2012).

A study conducted by the Georgetown University Center on Education and National Workforce indicated that high school graduates received a 20% increase in wages for holding an industry certification (Carnevale et al., 2012). According to the same study, those holding certifications in high-earning fields earned more than many in the same field who had earned an Associate or bachelor’s degree. An example provided by Williamson and Pittinsky (2016) showed that, within computer and information services, male certificate holders have higher earnings than 72 percent of men with an associate degree and 54 percent of those who hold a bachelor’s
degree. Women certificate holders in the field earn more than 75 percent of women with associate degrees and 64 percent of those with bachelor’s degrees. (p. 1)

Through the process of skills development, the doors to a living wage or better can be opened to more graduating high school seniors. By developing both work and technical skills, students can gain credentials that provide a starting point or baseline for employment. The credentials can provide college credit toward a degree through workforce programs and can augment a college degree. The credentials can be achieved by acquiring technical skills while attending high school.

**Purpose of the Study**

It has been well documented that there are not enough resources available to accomplish all of the tasks assigned to a comprehensive school counselor (Bridgeland & Bruce, 2014; Corwin et al., 2004; Morgan et al., 2014; Murphy, 2016; Paisley & McMahon, 2001; Radford et al., 2013; Smith, 2011). With a range of 450 to 500 students per counselor, relationships with individual students cannot be managed. Counselors must prioritize the duties that they deem the most crucial, or they may perform tasks that are the most comfortable for them or for which they are best trained. There may be campus- or district-imposed obstacles that prohibit them from performing their duties. Through this study, I intended to identify the level of discretion that counselors have to prioritize their work. I hoped to provide understanding of these obstacles and possible solutions.

By ensuring that career counseling and support can be provided for all high school students, it is my hope that more positive outcomes can be realized for students as they leave high school. By leaving high school with documented work skills and Industry Recognized Certifications (IRCs), students can obtain jobs that yield wages above the minimum. Those who
matriculate directly to college may have to work fewer hours to meet their financial needs. They would then have more time to devote to and focus on their college classes.

In a blog post by the Brookings Institute, Ross and Bateman (2018) discussed the issue of students heading to work directly after graduating from high school without the skills to attain a good-paying job. They questioned the preparation and guidance that schools provide to students. It appears to be a black-and-white choice for students: They either choose to work at a low-paying job or to go to college in order to obtain a higher-paying job. The researchers painted the college landscape as confusing, difficult to navigate, or seemingly financially out of reach for many. They identified five things that high schools can do to improve participation in postsecondary education and entry into the labor market: (a) offer more substantial advising to high school students about educational and career options and opportunities, (b) provide high school students with opportunities to get a head start earning college credits through dual credit/enrollment programs, (c) design high schools to better prepare students for both post-secondary and career education, (d) bolster work-based and apprenticeships in school districts to help in building stronger pathways into the labor market, and (e) work with the local community colleges to increase graduation rates.

Opportunities to leave high school with skills to enter the workforce well above minimum wage and preparing all to be college ready can mean that all can be successful in obtaining a living wage. For example, many students take the cosmetology preparation program at their local high school to obtain a state license through the Texas Department of Licensure and Regulation (TDLR). For many, skills that are learned to obtain better wages allow them the latitude of working fewer hours while attending college full time.
Research Statement

The Texas Administrative Code (TAC) and district policy provide direction for high school counselors and administrators. Counselors do not have the resources to complete all defined roles. Administrators have no defined accountability for accomplishing those counselor duties. This study addressed the following questions through a constructivist grounded theory study design (Charmaz, 2014). Findings are compared with the dynamics of front-line workers through the framework of street-level bureaucracy.

1. What duties do high school counselors perceive to be required to complete their jobs successfully, and how do they prioritize those duties? To what extent do they follow district and school policy in performing their daily job duties? What level of discretion do they perceive that they have in performing their daily duties?

2. What duties do high school principals perceive to be required for the counselors whom they supervise, and how do the principals prioritize their counselors’ duties? To what extent do they allow counselors to have discretion in performing their duties?

Chapter Summary

Counselors are needed but they are not able to perform many of the tasks that are assigned to them through policy. Throughout my personal history as a student and education professional, I identified where there were needs for counselors to support the educational mission.

School administrators who supervise counselors are often not adequately trained to ensure that efficient and effective counseling plans are created and to perform their intended counseling duties (Amatea & Clark, 2005; Seashore et al., 2001). Blake (2020) suggested that counselors often struggle due to role ambiguity and role conflict in the education system.
Published reports and academic literature suggest that school counselors navigate unmanageable caseloads and have little time to develop individual relationships with their students (Murphy, 2016; Paisley & McMahon, 2001; Radford et al., 2013; Smith, 2011). There is an imbalanced student-to-counselor ratio of 423:1 (ASCA, 2016) and an extensive list of counseling and noncounseling duties (Corwin et al., 2004). There is little evidence of how counselors navigate these duties. There is little evidence of research in support of the duties that are deemed the highest priorities and the amount of discretion that high school counselors are provided to perform their duties.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

I begin this chapter with a review of national and state policies that guide counselors’ activities through defined requirements. Next, I discuss the ASCA competencies that relate to the school counselor’s prescribed duties. I provide a short history of the school counselor position. I then address Lipsky’s (2010) framework that describes the street-level bureaucrat, where legislated policy meets the public. Finally, I discuss the principal as an instructional leader in the context of accountability and the principal’s impact on the creation of a campus counseling plan.

The focus of this study was to explore the nature of high school counselors’ duties. Campus principals directly supervise school counselors and therefore have a significant influence on what the counselors do or do not do. I sought to identify how high school counselors determine the priority of the duties that they perform daily. High school counselor duties are outlined and detailed in the Texas Model for Comprehensive School Counseling Programs (TEA, 2018). The responsibilities listed in the Texas Model for Comprehensive School Counseling Programs can be performed by a credentialed counselor. School counselors can be employed by the school district or can be contracted as a service to the district. Most districts throughout the state employ full-time counselors. The state department of education has adopted the ASCA model for school counseling, which consists of three strands: personal-social, academic, and career. The career portion of the model covers both college readiness and career readiness.

Counselor duties are prescribed through state administrative codes and federal mandates that often contain compliance requirements. CTE is an area where there are such requirements at
the state and federal levels. CTE is only one area where these mandates exist, and they cluster around the area of career counseling.

**Counselor Prevalence**

The guidance movement was initiated in the early 1900s (Gladding, 2013). One of the main intentions of developing school counselors was to guide participants in the education system to take advantage of opportunities for work while the country was entering the Industrial Revolution (Aubrey, 1977). Teachers and administrators often served the role of counselor prior to the position being defined and the development of official training. In 1911, Harvard University provided the first training program for guidance counselors. Counselor training primarily encompassed the area of vocational guidance (Gladding, 2013).

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the nation witnessed a growth in school counseling that extended beyond employment support (Blake, 2020). The expansion of the counselor role supported the social and emotional state of clientele in response to World War II (Armor, 1969; Gladding, 2013; Hollis, 1997). The National Education Defense Act of 1958 provided funding to support school counseling initiatives and decrease the counselor-to-student ratio by nearly half by 1965 (Shertzer & Stone, 1966). Counselor-to-student ratios shrank from more than 960:1 to approximately 507:1. During this time, the American Counselor Association (ACA) and the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) joined forces to increase support for the profession of counseling (Gladding, 2013). School counselors’ roles were fragmented, as they involved all functions that required support in the school, such as testing, student attendance, and clerical records (Stewart, 1959).

The 1980s ushered in more standardization to the counseling profession through standards provided by the ASCA (Schweiger et al., 2011). In the past 40 years, the counseling
profession has evolved into one with national standards and master’s-level certification programs that support academics, psychosocial development, college readiness, and career development (Blake, 2020). The student-to-counselor ratio has continued to decline due to the increasing number of counselors hired by school systems. National and state policies continue to add required support that increases the duties of counselors.

Numerous studies have looked at the rate of burnout for school counselors and the potential reasons, such as other duties as assigned (Butler & Constantine, 2005; Fitch et al., 2001; Pérusse et al., 2001). Others have tried to understand how counselors can be effective while being accountable for students’ academics, psychosocial development, and college and career readiness (Blake, 2020). Blake (2020) reported evidence that counselors may help in improving test scores (Carrell & Hoekstra, 2014; Reback, 2010). Another instance was identified by Satin-Baja et al. (2018), where counselors influenced students’ choices in schools and selection of courses. Others have reported studies in which counselors helped to increase college attendance (Engberg & Gilbert, 2014; Hurwitz & Howell, 2013). I did not find evidence about the discretion that counselors are afforded to perform their duties or about priorities that counselors place on multiple duties and tasks. The identified priorities may point in the direction of student academic successes. Can lax accountability measures foretell levels of priority from those who dictate policy? How does one make sure that requirements at the end of the list are met?

**American School Counselor Association Model**

The Texas Model for Comprehensive School Counseling (TEA, 2018) was developed using the ASCA national model as a standard framework for school counseling programs across the nation. The model ascertains that school counselors need in order to make data-based
decisions (ASCA, 2008). This model consists of four attributes: foundation, delivery, management, and accountability. The foundation attribute can be described as the personal belief and philosophy that counselors possess regarding their school counseling program. Delivery refers to how the counselor provides services to the stakeholders of the school or school system. Management refers to the use of tools and resources to address the needs of the stakeholders. Accountability refers to the efficiency and effectiveness of the implementation of the school counseling program. This model was designed to assist school counselors with successful implementation of school counseling programs. The model assists practitioners and those who monitor their school counseling programs (ASCA, 2008).

The ASCA (2008) model is comprised of beliefs, philosophies, mission statement, and the ASCA national standards are meant to serve as guidance to support the academic, personal-social, and career components of the school counseling program. The state of Texas ascribes to the ASCA model for school counseling, which it cites heavily in the TMSC document.

The career component of the counseling model encompasses both college and career counseling. It is apparent that college preparation support occurs as a priority over the career counseling component. In a journal publication by Ilic and Rosenbaum (2019) titled “Going All in on College Counseling: Successes and Trade-Offs, it is stressed that one must watch out for the college culture overkill. A one-size-fits-all approach may not serve all students as some may have other dreams and plans. Also, as discussed in Chapter 1, many students take more than 6 years to graduate from college and will need to sustain a living using skills that they developed in high school.
ASCA was initially part of the research scenario, but it had not been considered as a theoretical framework. By using the model, it would become merely a checklist of what is and what is not being done. As Charmaz (2014) stated, the why questions are important.

The ASCA model is useful as a framework for the research questions in this study as it is the official school counseling model used by the state of Texas. There are requirements that school counseling programs are to abide by through the processes of implementation. Since there is an assumption that some components are not being efficiently and effectively implemented, this assumption can be tested using this framework. National, state, and local education agency documents can be used to verify the counseling standards. Counselor interviews could be used in conjunction with the standards to verify that counselor duties include defined standards.

**Counselor Job and Role Satisfaction**

School counselors take on a broad range of job responsibilities. They provide individual and group counseling sessions and conduct psycho-educational outreach with the student body. They support educational testing and conduct academic advising. They support school administrative tasks and support clinical supervision of school counselor trainees (Butler & Constantine, 2005; Fitch et al., 2001; Kuranz, 2002; Pérusse et al., 2001; Pérusse et al., 2007). Due to the many professional assigned roles, extensive workload, and conflict in role assignments, school counselors are susceptible to burnout (Freeman & Coll, 1997; Kendrick et al., 1994). Burnout is defined as emotional fatigue, disengagement, irritability, and apathy due to the daily stresses of the work environment (Butler & Constantine, 2005; Haddad, 1998).

To serve students efficiently and effectively, the school counselors’ well-being is of the utmost importance. Butler and Constantine (2005) identified collective self-esteem as a measure to prevent counselor burnout. Collective self-esteem is identified as one’s perceptions of oneself
as a member of a social, racial, ethnic, religious, community, or workgroup encompassed with
the value and emotional significance of membership of such group (Bettencourt & Dorr, 1997;
components: private collective self-esteem, public collective self-esteem, membership self-
estee m, and importance to identity collective self-esteem. Private collective self-esteem identifies
the depth to which one feels positive about one’s group. The extent to which one believes that
others feel the same about the social group is public collective self-esteem. How one believes
that one is a good participating member of the group is referred to as membership collective self-
estee m. The importance of identifying collective self-esteem refers to how one decides that
group members define who one is.

The interrelationship between the individual and the group has been determined to be
related with the person’s self-esteem (Bettencourt & Dorr, 1997; Butler & Constantine, 2005;
Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). Members of groups who perceive interconnectedness and identify
with the group often display uniform attitudes, which helps them to sustain through difficult
situations (Butler & Constantine, 2005).

Role conflict and ambiguity are two potential stressors in to the counselor’s job, which
encompasses a multitude of tasks (Butler & Constantine, 2005). As indicated by Olk and
Friedlander (1992), role conflict occurs when people are faced with expectations requiring
specific behaviors that are either competing or opposing. Role ambiguity is referred to by Olk
and Friedlander (1992) as “a lack of clarity regarding the expectations for one’s role, the
methods for fulfilling those expectations, and the consequences for effective or ineffective
performance” (p. 390). Role conflict can occur when there are two or more simultaneous
incompatible pressures such that compliance with one role compromises fulfilling the other roles
(Olk & Friedlander, 1992). Similarly, Drury (1984) and Thompson and Powers (1983) stated that role conflict might start when two or more concurrent and incompatible expectations exist in a specific way that the specific role compromises fulfillment of the other roles. Counselors’ role ambiguity occurs when there is confusion regarding their professional responsibilities (Moracco et al., 1984).

School counselors are described as a strong and important social group (Butler & Constantine, 2005) due to their strong professional identity, the diversity of their skills, and the roles that they play in education (Murray, 1995; Paisley & McMahon, 2001). Role ambiguity and conflict are two overarching stressors to which many school counselors attribute their diverse and often conflicting job assignments.

Role ambiguity may occur when school counselors are unsure of their professional or institutional roles or expectations (Moracco et al., 1984). In essence, school counselors who are assigned duties such as clerk, substitute teacher, or other noncounselor tasks may feel that the expectations are not consistent with their own expectations for which they were trained (Schmidt, 2003). These sources of role strain are related to the perceptions of job dissatisfaction in school counselors (Butler & Constantine, 2005; Thompson & Powers, 1983).

Other stressors in the school organization may increase counselor burnout (Butler & Constantine, 2005). Teachers, principals, and administrative staff may not have positive perceptions of the counseling profession. These perceptions may be why counselors are assigned duties that are not related to the duties that counselors are trained to perform (Kendrick et al., 1994; Moracco et al., 1984; Parr, 1991). Also, school counselors are not identified as working in leadership roles in the school setting, which may reduce their credibility and worth (Drury, 1984).
A study that compared reported burnout and job stress in school counselors, school psychologists, teachers, reading specialists, and school social workers indicated that school counselors experienced the highest role ambiguity and role conflict scores, as well as the second-highest emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment scores (Pierson-Hubeny & Archambault, 1987).

Budgetary constraints have limited local education agencies’ ability to staff schools with the appropriate ratio of students to counselors to support the requirements of counselor duties (Butler & Constantine, 2005). These phenomena have resulted in a sizeable student-to-counselor ratio and have increased the work role demands of school counselors (Freeman & Coll, 1997). Some school counselors feel ill prepared to work in schools with changing demographics and expectations of the new millennium students who are being educated in the current school systems, which may cause work-related stress (Kendrick et al., 1994).

**Street-Level Bureaucrat**

In this section, I introduce Lipsky’s (1980) framework of the street-level bureaucrat and discuss how the framework can be used to view the high school counselors’ and school principals’ jobs and potentially describe how they function daily. Counselors receive direction for performing their duties through policy, largely through the school principal. Street-level bureaucracy is a framework that describes how civil servants carry out their jobs. As policies are created at the national, state, and local levels, it is up to the front-line workers to enforce policies that have been placed upon them while serving the public (Lipsky, 1980). Through their interaction with the public, these street-level public servants carry out their work while complying with policy requirements. Often, those policies are rigid, conflict, and do not serve the best interest of the public.
In a study of counselor caseworkers by Rice (2013), it was posited that “the street-level bureaucracy approach introduced by Lipsky should be married with institutional theory, thereby laying the groundwork for a micro-institutional theory of policy implementation” (p. 1038). The rigidity of policy implementation can result in less discretion and the inability of the worker to provide for individual needs (Lipsky, 1980). The inherent looseness of policy at the front line may result in nonuniformity of the disbursement of resources and development of policy at the front line. Although Rice (2013) focused on the context of welfare policy implementation, the policy play may be consistent with that of high school counselors providing resources for high school students.

The street-level bureaucrat framework reveals instances such as the servant’s judgment, availability of resources, and methods of accountability that may affect a decision with regard to policy enforcement. Lipsky (1969) proposed that the lack of resources in an agency causes a simplified process of implementing policy. Carrington (2005) proposed that discretion is the act of using personal judgment to act or to take no action. Judgments are typical actions of those who work in the public service industry when interacting daily with constituents. Sattin-Baja et al. (2017) indicated that these frontline workers are often overburdened by federal, state, and local policy and are extremely short of resources.

Wilkins and Wenger (2015) introduced representative bureaucracy in street-level bureaucracy to identify how demographics and experiences construct identities that influence interactions between the street-level bureaucrat service provider and the client. Two forms of identity representation were identified: passive and active. Mosher (1968) described passive identity representation when the street-level bureaucrat comes from the same demographic as their clients. Active identity assumes that the bureaucrat will advocate for the client because of
common experiences arising from a shared identity (Mosher, 1968; Pitkin, 1967; Wilkins & Wenger, 2015). These identities shape the individual’s attitudes and behaviors toward their clients (Meier & Nigro, 1976). Street-level bureaucrats advocate for the interest of clients who share their background as they implement policy (Wilkins & Wenger, 2015). Discretion with policy implementation is a requirement for these interactions to play true. The organization’s mission and the role in the street-level bureaucrat hierarchy, stratification, professionalization, and individual socialization are all factors in the link between active and passive representation engagement with the client (Keiser et al., 2002). Representative bureaucracy theory poses a relationship between the street-level bureaucrat’s values and addressing clients’ needs (Baker, 1996). When a street-level bureaucrat is charged with providing a service to a client, they are more likely to provide more or better service to whose with whom they relate. This will happened much more often when they are provided greater levels of discretion.

The linkage between identity and behavior may be minimalized due to the following circumstances. The mission of the agency is essential to determine whether the street-level bureaucrat’s values influence client outcomes (Wilkins & Wenger, 2015). The mission of the organization of which the street-level bureaucrat works must be in relation to that person’s own values. The structure of the organization may allow for the street-level bureaucrat to impart their values in their work. Also, the street-level bureaucrat belongs to a profession that influences their behavior. They require specialized training and specific terminology with codes of conduct and standards of ethics (Beckman, 1990; Torestendahl, 1990).

High school guidance counselors are on the front line in schools as they work with students, parents, teachers, or the community at large. Counselors act as street-level bureaucrats through implementation of counseling implementation plans. Counselors must comply with
district requirements, which should be aligned with national and state counseling standards. They report to the campus principal, who also must act on many policy requirements that may directly or indirectly conflict with the district and/or campus counseling plan.

Campuses often lack resources to realize a small student-to-counselor ratio, which forces them to make judgment calls regarding what they do and what they postpone to another day. These judgments may occur due to the immediate accountability for the issues at hand, which forces them to defer items that do not have immediate implications. The dynamics of a street-level bureaucrat fit the description of the high school guidance counselor and the campus administrator who is accountable for all aspects of the campus.

The campus counselor is certified through the state after completing a college-based training program or participating in a training program provided through a Texas Regional Educational Service Center (ESC), which requires a master’s degree in education. This system catered to teachers where the certification requires two years of teaching experience and where the pool of future counselors is pulled. The Texas State Board of Education (SBEC) is now requiring that individuals who seek a counselor certification “hold, at a minimum, a 48-hour master’s degree in counseling from an accredited institution of higher education (Hoover, n.d., para. 4). This process eliminates the Counselor Alternative Certification Programs that were prevalent throughout the ESCs and sets colleges and universities as the only pathway to counseling certification. It is understandable that the college degree program may provide a more robust and enriching program for participants. Requiring applicants to have a master’s degree in counseling may reduce the counselor pool by limiting opportunities for teachers to enter the counseling profession.
The street-level bureaucrat framework is useful as it links other phenomena with the current study. What was discovered through the current research can be compared to what was found in other studies that used the same framework. Established themes discovered in other studies are available to be compared to the themes in the current study. A study of police officers’ discretion in the enforcement of a law or policy, such as a citation (Hupe et al., 2015; Lipsky, 2010), could be compared to a counselor’s discretion to offer career development training to the sophomore class. Although the outcomes of a scenario may be known by the public in one case and not another brings to light the notion of accountability. Both scenarios bring into account the notion of professionalization (Hupe et al., 2015) of workers, which can reduce discretion in policy implementation (Wilensky, 1964).

Hupe et al. (2015) identified a fundamental issue with the professionalization of street-level bureaucrats because of the extent to which formalization of policy delivery and elimination of discretion will occur. This study adds to the identified potential conflict within the dichotomy. Formalization of the implementation of local policy may reduce the ability of those who provide services to use discretion in performance of a variety of duties. When full policy implementation cannot be achieved due to lack of resources, the policy must be changed or the street-level bureaucrat must prioritize duties and use discretion to complete tasks.

**Street-Level Bureaucrat Discretion**

Discretion is a necessity for public servants so they can efficiently and effectively deliver resources at the front line. Through this delivery, street-level bureaucrats provide these resources and scrutinize personal preferences or favoritism as they decide whom to serve and how they will serve them (Dubois, 2010; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003; Vinzant & Crothers, 1998). Frontline work conditions can pressure street-level bureaucrats to rely on their innate tendencies
and stereotypes due to the pressures of the client or work overload (Lipsky, 2010; Zacka, 2017).

These internal categorizations of clients correspond with street-level bureaucrats’ “attitudinal developments that redefine . . . the nature of the clientele to be served” (Lipsky, 2010, p. 141). Simple categorizations can cause the street-level bureaucrat to impose personal bias that may shift client outcomes as the bureaucrats “are conspicuously prone to scan their environment for empirical validation of their views” (Lipsky, 2010, p. 115). As a result of this perceived categorization, street-level bureaucrats’ attitudes toward clients can introduce bias in the delivery of resources (Keiser, 2010). It was found that street-level bureaucrats with a distaste for their clients more strongly dismissed their needs than did those without such negative perceptions (Baviskar & Winter, 2017; Winter, 2002). Also, it was found that street-level bureaucrats who were more client-oriented were more likely to use their discretion to benefit their clients (Kroeger, 1975), while street-level bureaucrats with a condemnatory moralistic view of their clients were more likely to take a punitive stance with their clients (Stone, 1981). The general attitude that a street-level bureaucrat has toward clients will often result in categorization of what they believe is the client’s needs and what they feel that the client deserves (Jilke & Tummers, 2018; Keulemans & Van de Walle, 2018; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003). It is likely that street-level bureaucrats who possess a positive attitude towards clients will be more likely to identify the clients as deserving of their assistance (Keulemans & Groeneveld, 2019).

The social relations that people create form attitudes that they carry (Briñol & Petty, 2005; Ledgerwood & Wang, 2018; Prislin & Wood, 2005). Within the street-level bureaucracy literature, there is sufficient evidence of the importance of relationships to their success (e.g., Keiser, 2010; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003; Raaphorst, 2017). Maynard-Moody and Musheno (2003) found that street-level bureaucrats define their work and, to a large extent,
themselves in terms of relationships with their customers more than with rules that are meant to guide them. “Their judgments are rendered more in the context of social relations, and less ... in the context of formal duties and responsibilities” (p. 20). Regarding the street-level bureaucrat and the supervisor, change requires a social relationship and the need for and use of discretion must be understood by both parties (Keulemans & Groeneveld, 2019). The professionalization of the counselor provides that person with certain authority through the organization or established ethical standards to guide the practice (ASCA, 2016).

**Principal as Instructional Leader**

An identified area of contingency that has been documented is that of the high school principal lacking the training to maintain an effective counseling program (Dahir et al., 2019; Limberg et al., 2016; Randick et al., 2018). When counselors are supported by their principals, they have less stress and tend to stay in the career field much longer (Randick et al., 2018).

When campuses strive to achieve the ASCA RAMP school designation, it is a sign that school administrators support the ASCA structure (Dodson, 2009; Wilkerson et al., 2013). These administrators typically had more training on the ASCA counseling model. Dodson’s (2009) study indicated that administrators from RAMP-designated schools supported counselor collaboration with teachers to provide guidance lessons. They supported counselors working closely with students who had disciplinary problems and the counselors were more likely to interpret student records for a means to support students.

Upon reviewing the Texas principal standards, I have determined that there is no competency that links to the understanding of support of the Texas School Counseling Model or mention of the support for a comprehensive school counseling plan. The guidance and training for up-and-coming school principals are based on the principal as an instructional leader. The
“Principal as an Instructional Leader” standards were part of a redesign through the TEA based on provisions included in the Texas Principal Evaluation and Support System (T-PESS, 2020). The principal standards are intentionally structured to move them away from a manager of the physical plant and general operation to the leader of effective instructional operations. The new design created five new standards that would guide school improvement productivity and increase student achievement by continuously reflecting on improving one’s craft as a school/instructional leader (Texas Principal Evaluation and Support System [T-PESS], 2020).

Standard 1, instructional leadership, focuses on the principal, ensuring that every student receives high-quality instruction. The principal is to use the state curriculum standards and be involved in the planning and development of a curriculum that considers the needs of the diverse student population. The principal must set high standards for teaching rigor and must model these rigorous standards and expectations. The principal must monitor classrooms and planning sessions to provide constructive feedback, which, in return, should yield effective instruction and increase student performance. Principals are evaluated on four indicators: (a) rigorous and aligned curriculum and assessment, (b) effective instructional practices, (c) data-driven instructional intervention, and (d) maximize learning for all students.

Standard 2 addresses the principal focusing on the human capital in the school. The principal is responsible for ensuring that there are high-quality teachers and staff in every classroom. Staff is the most valuable resource in the school building and the educational process. The principal is to be strategic in hiring practices and select the best talent available. The principal should provide professional development that will help teachers to be the best practitioners that they can be. The principal should provide layered support and continuous instructional feedback. Data are to be part of the feedback that guides a continual growth...
process. Staff will know what the expectations are and will know the criteria for evaluation. Evaluations are to contain areas of success and growth and areas that need additional instructional support. The intent of continual support is to build leadership and retention of quality staff. Collaboration is an integral part of the growth process. Principals are evaluated on four indicators: (a) targeted selection, placement, and retention of staff; (b) tailored development, feedback, and coaching of staff; (c) staff collaboration and leadership; and (d) systematic evaluation and supervision of staff.

Standard 3 focuses on executive leadership. The principal is responsible for modeling a consistent focus and holding personal responsibility for improving student outcomes. The principal is tasked with motivating the entire learning community to achieve excellence. The leader is to be continually in pursuit of excellence through reflective practices. When an implemented process fails, the principal must use communication skills to rally the educational community to review that data and develop alternative plans. Principals are evaluated on four indicators: (a) resilience and change management, (b) commitment to ongoing learning, (c) communication and interpersonal skills, and (d) ethical behavior.

Standard 4 focuses on the principal developing school culture. Through this standard, the principal is responsible for establishment and implementation of a shared school vision. The principal is expected to cultivate a culture of high expectations for all faculty, staff, and students. Through a shared vision of high expectations, school improvement is paramount. Student success and student social and emotional well-being drive the direction of the campus. Parents and students are treated as partners, and feedback from them is welcome. Feedback from stakeholders is used to make decisions about the directions of the campus. All students are expected to be successful in all aspects of their education and in fulfillment of identified
expected outcomes, including discipline and attendance. Principals are evaluated on five indicators: (a) shared vision of high achievement, (b) a culture of high expectations, (c) intentional family and community engagement, (d) safe school environment, and (e) discipline.

Standard 5 focuses on the strategic operations of the campus. The principal is responsible for outlining and tracking clear, attainable goals, targets, and strategies that are aligned to the school vision that continuously improves teacher effectiveness and student outcomes. The principal creates a calendar and timelines. The principal works with school leaders and central office staff to implement the instructional plan. The principal monitors and adjusts the implementation based on data points. Resources are used to support the plan. The staff is provided opportunities to participate in professional development that will support the success of students. Resources are identified as staff time, dollars, and tools. Principals are evaluated on four indicators: (a) strategic planning, (b) maximized learning time, (c) tactical resource management, and (d) policy implementation and advocacy.

These standards guide what the principal does as an instructional leader. Goals are identified as instructional, based on expectations for student behavior and student achievement.

Although the staff is continually identified as instructional support, there is only mention of social and emotional support as an expectation. There is no identifiable indicator of the implementation or monitoring of a counseling plan in the principal’s evaluation tool framework (T-PESS, 2020). Therefore, there appears to be an inconsistency between what the state holds as counselor requirements and the expectation of what a supervising principal is accountable. It has been determined that principals utilize school counselors to perform duties that are prescribed as secretarial or administrative in nature (Fitch et al., 2001). Counselors work in areas that are slightly related to the areas for which they were trained (Baker, 1996). Their duties were mainly
defined as student scheduling, participation in disciplinary responsibilities, and performing clerical tasks. These areas would support the school’s instructional requirements from which the campus administrator is marginally evaluated.

**Street-Level Bureaucracy Assumptions**

The assumptions of the street-level bureaucracy framework relate to those being studied at the front line who are public servants and who are implementing or enforcing policy. The framework focuses on policy implementation at the front line and discretion in implementation, which is a form of policy development. This discretion brings into light the notion that, in some cases, the street-level bureaucrat can understand and meet client needs. This discretion can also lead to corrupt or unethical behavior that can exist without strict guidelines and levels of accountability (Hupe et al., 2015; Lipsky, 1980). There appears to be a balance between strict guidelines and the amount of discretion the front-line worker is provided.

The level of professionalism of the frontline worker is also a factor. Professionals have organizations that support their endeavor and work to provide guidelines that standardize their categorization of work (Lipsky, 1980). This is true for school counselors, as they have the American Counselor Association (ACA) and the ASCA, which develop standards and work with state agencies to incorporate those standards into state policies.

The use of the street-level bureaucrat framework in the reviewed studies seemed to have used the same questions that I had outlined in my research proposal. My general observations of counselor duties were in alignment with the documented street-level bureaucrat observations and established understanding of public servant dilemmas. The availability of resources and the use of discretion in the completion of the public servant’s duties appear to match the scenario of the high school counselor. The school district would provide resources such as the counselors-per-
student ratio and support for these counselors. The supervisor, the high school principal, would have some control over resources at the campus level and would either add to or remove the component of discretion allowed to the high school counselor.

Using this framework with the methods of Charmaz (2008), constructivist grounded theory codes may yield results that can be checked through the street-level bureaucracy framework to generate findings that can compared with those in other studies. The results may affirm or refute outcomes or discoveries of further studies or may add outcomes that were not identified. It is essential to ensure that the framework is not used at the onset of the study to ensure that all data about the phenomena can be discovered.

By framing the research using specific methods, the framework was used only when the study had been coded. Frameworks such as street-level bureaucracy (Lipsky, 2010) can be used as a lens to make sense of what is discovered. By using lenses, the researcher can have a perspective to describe what is occurring and can provide verification and validity to what has or has not been discovered. Finding the best lens or lenses allows for the data to have true and comparable meaning.

Research should be attainable and it can be if the scope is limited. Frameworks such as street-level bureaucracy have established vantage points from which to look at data gleaned from the research. Using established vantage points, one can compare data in a study to data gathered by other researchers and contribute to the research field.

The agenda of research is to add to existing research so that solutions to pertinent everyday problems can be realized. Researchers can use a multitude of frameworks to provide clarity to research studies. One can take previous research and use newly established frameworks to understand better the data that were uncovered.
The street-level bureaucracy framework can provide understanding of how new research data can provide support to other research and outcomes described based on the existing framework. The framework provides a comparative method for qualitative research studies. Conceptual frameworks can provide an understanding of data from various vantage points. Depending on the research, there may be very few or many frameworks that can describe the research data.

**Assessing Administrators’ Commitment**

Legislation has recently been passed in numerous states requiring school districts to implement planned counseling programs and to use a data-driven approach to implementation of those programs (Dahir et al., 2019). Policy implementation for change is intended to create a systematic approach to counseling implementation with less emphasis on what is referred to as “traditional guidance” (Dahir et al., 2019).

Since adoption of the school counselor’s position in the early 1900s (Gladding, 2013), school principals have had a significant influence on the roles that counselors play (Remley & Herlighy, 2010). School counselors are often engaged in reactive tasks rather than functioning in specific roles with defined tasks. Boyer (1988) provided an account of counselor tasks of the assigned and reactive nature:

> Today in most high schools, counselors are not only expected to advise students about college, but they are also asked to police for drugs, keep records of dropouts, reduce teenage pregnancy, check traffic in the halls, smooth out tempers of irate parents, and give aid and comfort to battered and neglected children. School counselors are expected to do what our communities, our homes, and our churches have not been able to
accomplish, and if they cannot, we condemn them for failing to fulfill our high-minded expectations. (p. 3)

Due to the diverse roles and scope of school counselors, organizations have been driven to understand and provide resources to support development of more structure for school counselors (Dahir et al., 2019). The ASCA, the Education Trust, the National Office for School Counselor Advocacy or the College Board, the National Association of College Admissions Counselors, and the National Association of Secondary School Principals have all focused on defining the roles of school counselors.

The development of the ASCA National Counselor Model promoted uniform national standards for school counseling. Through ASCA, district and campus administrators were provided a standard direction through a model to provide standard counselor deliverables (ASCA, 2003, 2005, 2012; Campbell et al., 1997). Through implementation of this model, principals could no longer consider counseling as a supplementary administrative function (Stone & Dahir, 2011) and, in turn, limit counselors’ ability to perform the core of the ASCA model: conducting academic, career, and personal social counseling for the entire student body (Dahir et al., 2019). Through effective implementation of the ASCA model, principals could no longer call on the counselor to perform crisis counseling or perform tasks to support administrative purposes.

Through efforts to educate school administration on the ASCA counseling program, counselors were less apt to be asked to perform nonprogrammatic tasks and would suffer less from the effects of role uncertainty or ambiguity (Dahir et al., 2019). Olk and Friedlander (1992) defined role ambiguity as “a lack of clarity regarding the expectations for one’s roles, the methods for fulfilling those expectations, and the consequences for effective or ineffective
performance” (p. 390). Counselors are often conflicted and powerless as they attend to never-ending crisis intervention, administrative tasks, and other noncounselor duties rather than assist students in achieving success (Chandler et al., 2008). It has become a national cry for school systems to develop comprehensive counseling programs that are aligned with national, state, and local goals for school improvement and student success.

As spelled out through ASCA (2012), a comprehensive school counseling program is an essential part of a school’s mission. The comprehensive school counselor plan should consider the needs of the school population, focus on providing equitable access to all students, and provide services based on supporting academics, college and career, and personal social student development (ASCA, 2012).

**Analytical Framework**

Analytical frameworks are often used in empirical research to provide vocabulary and structure to a theory (Coral & Bokelmann, 2017). Frameworks are used to deal with complex ways in which humans interact with their environment. There are many parts at play in this study, including various levels of policy, interactions with supervisors, and interactions with clients. I have developed a framework to illustrate the issue that arises where policy and plan meet students. The framework is described in two figures. Figure 1 illustrates where the counseling begins and flows to the campus counseling plan. Figure 2 begins with the campus counseling plan and flows to the student outcome. The illustrations provide a sense of the complexity of the process that occurs from the state-approved policy that prescribes the services that students should receive and eventually identifies student outcomes that should prevail. From the school counselor to the student, many tasks and challenges are presented due to many types of demands and limited resources. Since, typically, more demands are placed on counselors at
the high school level, including graduation credit audits, graduation and loss of credit plans, maintenance of student endorsements, and college preparation, counselors are likely to be forced to choose what is to be attempted and what must wait to be addressed. This is where this study provides support for additional policy demands.

Evans (2011) studied the relationship between professional practitioners and their managers. He indicated that there had been substantial research on managers’ power over and distance from professional social workers. Counselors as professionals are not only bound by policy but are expected to adhere to professional standards. The relational and/or working distance that appears between the counselor and the principal would appear to be more of a local
school situation. Manager control and distance from the counselor practitioner would be another area of inquiry. Another area that appeared in research into counselors was accountability.

Accountability appears with the emergence of the ASCA national model for school counseling, which was published in 2002 (Stone & Dahir, 2011). Through the ASCA model for school counseling, counselors are called on to demonstrate the effectiveness of their programs through data. Through accountability, counselors are held to their goals to improve student success academically, socially, and in career readiness.
Chapter Summary

The evolution of the school counselor was imminent due to the need for the school system to provide resources in support of students. As societal needs changed, so did the scope of the counselor. The ASCA developed a model to provide national guidance and counseling implementation. Counselors often struggle to implement efficiently and effectively due to role ambiguity and role conflict.

Principals who supervise counselors are often not trained on the ASCA model, which has been demonstrated to support successful implementation. Principals’ evaluations may not include implementation and sustainability of the school guidance program. Without accountability for a strong counseling program, there may not be a periodic review of the local plan.

Counselors are street-level workers who bring services directly to the students whom they serve. Using the lens of the street-level bureaucracy, Lipsky’s (2010) comparisons can be made through the multitude of studies that have been conducted outside the education field. Assumptions can be verified using information gained through other street-level workers and identified solutions to other problems may be introduced for consideration.

Charmaz’s Ground Theory (CGT) methods were used to perform this research study. CMG coding can be used in lieu of a theoretical framework to identify themes. When using CMG, the researcher would develop their theory through the codes that were identified throughout each participant’s transcript. Street-Level Bureaucracy (SLB) was also used as a Theoretical Framework for this research study. The use of SLB required there to be more detailed questioning that would allow for me to identify the processes for prioritization of duties and discern the level of discretion or autonomy that high school counselors have when
performing their duties. The use of SLB along with CMG stifled the development of broad theory development that would come from broad open CMG questioning. The methods of Charmaz’s SLB were ideal for the qualitative research process that I had determined for this research. Once I found the SLB framework and found that it was highly adaptable for viewing the processes of institutional policy implementation, I did not seek to find any additional frameworks to use as a lens for this research study.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I describe the proposed constructivist grounded theory (CGT; Charmaz, 2014) approach to examine how high school counselors prioritize their daily job duties. Through this research, I have discovered the extent to which the supervising administrator has assigned duties that indicate specific priorities of the district or campus. I used the street-level bureaucrat as my theoretical framework (Hupe et al., 2015; Lipsky, 2010; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003). Through the street-level bureaucrat framework, I connect this research to an existing body of knowledge to make comparisons.

This chapter starts with an overview of qualitative methodology with grounded theory as the framework for preparing for, conducting, and analyzing this research project. Using this CGT, I outline prescribed practices for sampling, data collection, data analysis, and rigor. I present the research questions that provided the focus for the study. I discuss the methodology and describe the procedures used to conduct the study. I define the procedures that demonstrate rigor, provide my positionality statement, and describe the study’s potential limitations.

Grounded Theory Methodology

This study examined high school counselors’ personal experiences that influenced their decisions in each workday. Qualitative methods are ideal for researching all types of experiences because qualitative research is a process that aims to address the why questions (Charmaz, 2014) to increase understanding about processes, meanings, and experiences about specific phenomena (Given, 2016). “A social constructionist approach to grounded theory allows us to address why questions while preserving the complexity of what exists in social life” (Charmaz, 2008, p. 397). One objective of qualitative research is to explore, discover meaning, and make an interpretation
of collected data (Flick, 2009). Data can be collected through a variety of methods, such as interviews, observations, film, photographs, and written or printed data (Holliday, 2016).

Grounded theory was introduced in Glaser and Strauss’s book *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (1967). To date, grounded theory is one of the dominant qualitative methodologies in the social sciences, which includes the study of counseling (Patton, 2002). Grounded theory methods consist of systematic and flexible guidelines that assist in collecting and analyzing qualitative data for construction of theory (Charmaz, 2014). Grounded theory begins with what Charmaz referred to as an inductive data form by which the researcher uses strategies to go back and forth between data and data analysis. This process uses comparative methods and keeps the researcher interacting with the data, leading to discovery through comparative analysis, which helps to construct theories.

Because this study’s focus was on understanding the perspectives of those who work in a school in a social context, I chose to use CGT methodology. Charmaz (2008) and Creswell (2015) stated that grounded theory enables the researcher to generate a broad theory about the studied phenomenon. Charmaz (2008) took a constructivist stance on grounded theory as the process addresses the why, the what, and the how questions. The why questions have been left out of most prior qualitative studies. “The term [CGT] refers to both the research product and the analytical method of producing it” (Charmaz, 2008, p. 397). Charmaz indicated that the grounded theory method begins with inductive strategies for collecting and analyzing data to be used in developing what she referred to as middle-range theories. A critique of traditional grounded theory concerns the rigidity of applying methods that resemble quantitative practices. The social constructivist approach to grounded theory encourages innovation, which allows the researcher to develop new ways of looking at individualistic phenomena.
Grounded Theory Methods

There are three types of grounded theory, classic grounded theory, which was introduced by Glaser and Strauss (1967); systematic grounded theory, introduced by Strauss and Corbin (1998); and CGT, introduced by Charmaz (2008, 2014). In this section I explain the three types of grounded theory and describe why the CGT methodology was appropriate for this study.

Systematic grounded theory, otherwise known as Straussian or CGT, was developed using the classic grounded theory method. Glaser and Strauss (as cited in Charmaz, 2014) advocated development of theories grounded in qualitative data rather than deducing testable hypotheses from existing theories. They proposed that systematic qualitative analysis possessed its own form of logic and could generate theory.

The three methods are more similar than they are different. All three methods use coding, constant comparison, theoretical sampling, and stressing the process of memoing (the act of recording reflective notes about what the researcher is learning from the data) throughout the research process. All three methods use the same processes of how the researcher gathers, codes, compares, categorizes, and creates themes for the data to develop theories. Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggested that substantive or local theory is the bedrock for formal theory, which is a uniform or transferable theory. Grounded theory researchers must understand this additional element of the GT research. Through the GT process, all data are gathered through various methods such as developing field notes, conducting interviews and observations and ultimately identifying an emerging theory (Glaser, 1978). The key differences among the types of grounded theory lie in the specific type of paradigm used, which is the focus on the objective of research or positionality, how literature is used, and the notion of how rigid or flexible the coding and data analysis should be.
The research paradigm is an area of contingency between the researchers who were instrumental in developing the three types of grounded theory. Glaser and Strauss’s classic grounded theory fits in the postpositivist paradigm, where the researcher views the research objectively (Levers, 2013). Glaser (1978) acknowledged that researchers bring biases with them, and he argued that researchers could develop a new theory by remaining objective throughout the study. Postpositivists support the possibility of discovering partial truths, as researchers can uncover general knowledge through empirical validation. Bryant (2002) and Urquhart (2002) refuted the postpositivist label to the classic grounded theory paradigm. They contended that the texts did not address the question of the epistemology and ontology of the revolutionary method. Glaser held that the methodology itself was “discovered, not invented,” and thus he did not want to link it to another paradigm, stating that it would “stand alone as its own, as a conceptualizing methodology” (Glaser & Holton, 2004, p. 39). Charmaz (2000) argued that Glaser’s classic grounded theory appeared to be correlated with traditional positivist as it implicitly assumes “an objective, external reality, a neutral observer who discovers data, reductionist inquiry of manageable research problems, and objectivist rendering of data” (p. 510).

Systematic or Straussian grounded theory, created by Strauss and Corbin (1998), would be considered an interpretivist paradigm model in which research is subjective and is influenced by the researcher’s beliefs, values, and culture (Denzin & Lincoln, 2012). Interpretivists maintain that knowledge is subjective and objectivity is truly unattainable (Levers, 2013). Systematic or Straussian grounded theory is intended to identify and retell experiences of the research, not to discover knowledge.

Charmaz (2000) argued that Straussian grounded theory is filled with positivist assumptions. She highlighted the ontological view of an external and objective reality. The
defined methodological procedures that are used to collect impartial data appear to claim a process of verification. Through this process, the participant and the analyst may not share the same perspective, which could fit the post-positivism ontology (Charmaz, 2000). Indeed, Strauss and Corbin’s intentions appear to be consistent with a post-positivist paradigm from which Hallberg (2006) stated, “Although reality exists to be uncovered by inquiry, it is never perfectly apprehensible” (p. 146).

CGT, created by Charmaz (2014), would be considered to fit within the constructivist paradigm. It was argued by Levers (2013) that CGT has “aspects of both postpositivist and interpretivist paradigms” (pp. 3-4). CGT reconciles essential aspects of both the classic and systematic grounded theory methods. Charmaz (2008, 2014) argued that one cannot separate the researcher from the participants. Through the CGT research method, knowledge is constructed rather than discovered (Charmaz, 2008, 2014). Charmaz (2000) proclaimed that alternative CGT “offers accessible methods for taking research to the 21st century” (p. 510), as she claimed a platform between postmodernism and positivism.

Another comparison of the three main types of GT would be that of the use of literature. Classic grounded theory positions the literature review after the study has been completed. It does not depend on theory, literature, or a specific type of data. Reliance on an already constructed theory of past literature limits researchers’ ability to develop a new theory (Glaser, 1978). Researchers using CGT seek literature to support their emerging theories during the later stages of the research process (Glaser, 1978). Glaser and Holton (2004) suggest that, when embarking on research, the grounded theory analyst should suspend preexisting knowledge from literature or professional or personal experiences to ensure an open mind and avoid undue influence.
Strauss and Corbin, authors of systematic or Straussian grounded theory, opposed Glaser’s position of suspending the literature search process until the later stages of the research study. They encouraged optimal use of literature at every stage of the study, distinguishing between an empty head and an open mind (Hunter et al., 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This would maintain consistency with the postpositivist philosophy that the researcher ultimately influences the research.

Charmaz (2014) endorsed the use of the literature review at the beginning of the research process, during data collection, and during or after data analysis. Charmaz argued that literature helps the researcher to “claim, locate, evaluate, and defend [the] position” (p. 305). Charmaz’s stance with literature is like that of Strauss and Corbin but includes an additional step. Charmaz (2006) recommended compiling the literature in a review chapter and using it throughout the study to support the entire thesis. Charmaz also advised writing a specific literature review chapter after the data analysis stage.

The three grounded theory methods address the process of coding much differently. The initial classic framework was designed to discover an emergent theory through a systematic analysis of data (Glaser & Holton, 2004; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Holton, 2010). Glaser (2002) stated that researchers are human; they inevitably tend to influence the research unintentionally with personal biases in interpretation. He argued that, if the researcher carefully undertakes the coding procedures, rigorously employs the constant comparison technique, abstains from literature, and collects a breadth of data from many sources, the totality of these precepts will “correct for bias,” diminish the effects of the researcher’s personal input, and uncover the underlying “latent patterns” of the phenomena (2002, p. 24). Glaser argued that this would “make the data objective” (2002, p. 24).
Charmaz studied under Glaser and Strauss at the University of California, San Francisco. She forged a new methodology out of grounded theory called CGT, which deviated from Straussian grounded theory (Charmaz, 2008). Charmaz contended that Straussian grounded theory was too concrete and had too many rules for coding and thought that it stifled the researcher’s creativity. She developed a highly adaptable coding guidelines that created an “imaginative engagement with data” (Charmaz, 2008, p. 168). Her coding regiment involved two steps, whereas Straussian coding consisted of four steps, with each step consisting of up to five stages.

For this study, I chose to use CGT (Charmaz, 2014). I recognize that there are countless stories to tell and that each story has a different perspective from which to be told. CGT method assisted me in working with each participant independently and allowed me to update my questions continually as new information provided an additional direction for the inquiry. Grounded theory allowed me to be flexible and to achieve rigor as I engaged in rich, in-depth descriptions of experiences and phenomena (Charmaz, 2014). It is a flexible and complex methodology using comparative analysis. In this section, I outline the techniques that I used for CGT sampling, data collection, analysis, and reporting.

**Constructivist Grounded Theory: Sampling**

Within CGT, the sampling group is created to assist in developing a theory, and the respective population size is of lesser concern (Charmaz, 2014). Sampling used in grounded theory is referred to as purposeful (Creswell, 2015). Through purposeful sampling, the researcher selects participants who are experiencing a similar phenomenon and who can contribute to the discovery of rich data to develop an emerging theory (Creswell, 2015). Criterion sampling is a type of purposeful sampling by which the researcher selects participants who meet specific
criteria (Creswell, 2015). A researcher can widen the search for participants by asking potential participants to suggest or refer others who may fit the criteria (Bryant & Charmaz, 2010). Theoretical sampling may also be used to support CGT development. Theoretical sampling is accomplished by the researcher by selecting participants who can support emerging concepts and theories (Charmaz, 2006).

**Constructivist Grounded Theory: Data Collection**

Once a researcher’s participant sample has been defined, data can be collected and analyzed. In this section, I identify the data collection, analysis, and reporting procedures that are supported through the CGT methodology.

Charmaz (2014) provided a chart of the CGT process (Figure 3). Charmaz explained that the CGT in practice is not linear, as the explanation throughout her book might lead one to believe. As a researcher gains insight, they may change direction. They may stop and journal the ideas or connections that they have just discovered (Charmaz, 2014). Researchers who use grounded theory conduct data collection and data analysis simultaneously, using the constant comparative method, which was an instrumental piece in the methods introduced by Glaser and Strauss (1967).

Data for a CGT study can be gained through many sources, such as observations, interviews, videos, photographs, or written records (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Holliday, 2016). The focus of this study was interviews to support understanding the ways that counselors and their supervising administrators make daily decisions about what work to perform. By reviewing written records that support the state, local, and campus policy documentation dictate requirements, I saw how high school administrators’ and counselors’ workload decisions are guided.
Charmaz suggested that, if researchers use interviews as their primary source of data, they must use what she described as intensive interviews. Charmaz (2014) described intensive interviewing as a “gently guided, one-way conversation that explores research participants’ perspective on their personal experience with the research topic (p. 46). She listed key characteristics of intensive interviewing. The first is to select participants who have first-hand connections to the research topic. The second is to explore in depth the participants’ experiences and situations. The third is to rely on open-ended questioning with the objective of noting detailed responses. The fourth is to gain an understanding of the participants’ perspectives, meanings, and experiences. The fifth is to follow up on areas of inquiry that were not anticipated.
The researcher uses these techniques to identify specific topics that each participant describes through their experiences (Figure 4).

Charmaz (2014) explained that the researcher takes the grounded theory project into theory construction. Four theoretical concerns affect the data that the researcher seeks and how the data are collected: theoretical plausibility, direction, centrality, and adequacy. Charmaz stated that these four theoretical concerns about data collection supersede the interview process.

Charmaz (2014) insisted that researchers using CGT should use intensive interview strategies. They should use lightly guided questions that assist in exploring each research
participant’s perspective and experiences related to the research topic. Topics are to be broad in nature to assist in navigating each participant’s personal story. While the research participant tells their story, the researcher “encourages, listens, and learns” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 56). Intensive interviews require participation by those who have working knowledge of the studied phenomenon. Open-ended questions should be used to gain understanding of the meanings behind participants’ experiences and unique perspectives. Researchers must be able to adapt to whatever directions and unforeseen areas of inquiry or emerging theory that a participant may take them. This may entail updating questions or scheduling follow-up interviews.

In the CGT methodology, data analysis should start as soon as data are collected, followed by use of a constant comparative method for data analysis (Glaser, 1965; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Glaser (1965) identified four stages in the constant comparative method. The first stage is to compare incidents that are applicable to each established category. The researcher codes each experience with as many categories as possible. Charmaz (2014) identified the first stage of coding as line-by-line coding. She referred to it as “the initial grounded theory coding with gerunds, is a heuristic device to bring the researcher into the data, interact with them, and study each fragment of them” (p. 121). By coding line by line, the researcher gains awareness of where to go next for additional data. When coding a new incident, the researcher compares it with all previously coded experiences.

The second stage of comparative data analysis is to integrate established categories and their respective identified properties. When coding an experience, the researcher compares against previous codes, matches properties, and searches for additional undocumented properties. The third stage is to develop the theory or theories. In the fourth stage, the researcher writes the developed theory.
Glaser and Strauss (1967) referred to the constant comparative method as the search to compare data to other forms within the same data set or to other data sets. The comparisons lead to categories that are compared to support themes. The development and comparison of categories and themes results in development of theory.

Charmaz (2014) stated that coding shapes the intellectual framework from which a researcher builds the analysis. She identified two phases. The first phase consists of naming each word, line, and segment of the raw data. Then, in the second phase, through what was referred to as focus coding, the researcher identifies the most “significant or frequent initial codes” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 113) that can be used to sort, order, and/or organize to make sense of a large amount of data.

Theoretical coding uses initial codes to develop theory. Through constant comparison, codes are grouped into categories that support emerging theories (Charmaz, 2014). Through constant comparison, the researcher develops and compares categories. When categories become redundant, it can be concluded that the research has reached theoretical saturation (Charmaz, 2014). Data reporting can occur once the researcher has concluded that there is no additional comparison to be made and that theoretical saturation has occurred. Charmaz (2014) argued that data reporting involves telling the participants’ stories through thick, detailed description.

**Constructivist Grounded Theory: Rigor or Integrity**

Rigor is essential to the integrity of a study. I used eight rigor considerations of methodological integrity suggested by Levitt et al. (2017): adequate data, contextualization, catalyst for insight, perspective management, groundedness, coherence, and meaning contribution. Levitt et al. (2017) participated in a task force that advocated for a way to design and review qualitative research. The two-way process encompassed fidelity and utility to guide
design and evaluation, combined with methodological integrity. The intent of the task force was not to develop rules for identifying trustworthiness and rigor but to promote a process of research design and evaluation that respects the diversity and complexity and ethical standards in qualitative research (Osbeck, 2014; Figure 5).


I grounded the data using Charmaz’s (2008, 2014) coding regiment to understand the phenomena using participants’ words and accounts of their descriptions and accounts.
Constructivist Grounded Theory: Research and Interview Questions

This study was divided into two participant categories: the high school counselor and the high school administrator who supervises the counselors. This study was designed to explore the following research questions: (a) How do high school administrators prioritize counselors’ work, and what discretion do they provide to counselors in performing their daily duties? and (b) How do high school counselors prioritize their work, and to what extent do high school administrators provide them discretion in performing their daily tasks? The following interview questions were posed to counselors and principals.

Counselors were asked, (a) What are the different components of your job as a high school counselor? (b) Describe a typical workday; (c) Of these components, which are a priority? (d) What makes these components a priority? (e) What components are not a priority? (f) What is it about the components that keep it from being a priority? (g) What would you say are the counseling priorities of your school administration? and (h) What would you say are the counseling priorities of the school district?

Administrators were asked, (a) What are the different components of the high school counselor’s job? (b) What would you say are the priorities of the campus counseling department? (c) Of the counseling components, which are a priority? (d) What makes these components a priority? (e) What components are not a priority? (f) What is it about the components that keep it from being a priority? (g) What would you say are the priorities of the campus counseling department? and (h) What would you say are the counseling priorities of the school district?

Bordertown Independent School District (Site)

Bordertown Independent School District (pseudonym) serves approximately 50,000 students in kindergarten through 12th grade. Like most nearby school districts, high schools are
large, serving more than 2,200 students. Typically, six administrators and six counselors serve the school population. The student-to-teacher ratio in the BISD (pseudonym) is 25:1 and the student-to-counselor ratio is 350:1. With the use of the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds provided through the Corona Virus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act), school districts across the nation, such as BISD, have earmarked counseling as an area of need. Additional counselors will affect the student ratio. The student population consists of more than 80% Hispanic, 10% Anglo, 7% Black, 2% Asian and Pacific Islander, and less than 1% Native American. Approximately 80% of the students come from low socioeconomic homes. The graduation rate has fluctuated between 89% and 91% in the past 5 five years. Just under 60% of graduating seniors matriculate directly to college. This district offers more than 40 CTE programs and a robust Fine Arts program.

Participants

In this study, the participants were local high school counselors and administrators. The sampling method was purposeful and convenient sampling. All high school counselors and high school principals in a selected U.S. southern border community were invited to participate by sending the description of the research study with contact information via email. Through contact information provided, they returned a signed copy of the informed consent form and identified a time when they would be able to meet via Zoom for the interview. Zoom and Microsoft Teams were chosen as the interview platforms due to Institutional Review Board (IRB) rules implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic requiring that all interviews be conducted virtually as a safety measure.

The 45-minute to 1-hour screening interview began with a brief series of interview questions. The interview opened with general questions developed to gather information about
the interviewee’s educational background and work history. Also, the questions clarified the role of the counselor. I determined whether the interviewee was a general counselor who served the general school population or served in a specialized role, such as supporting early college high schools, special education, or bilingual programs. The interview was also used to determine whether the interviewee would consider participating in the research study. The interview contained questions about the potential participant’s work experience, the size of the school population and helped in screening potential participants. The intent was to identify counselors who had at least 3 years teaching experience and preferably had served for at least 3 years as a counselor at the high school level. For principals, the ideal participant would have had at least 3 years experience in teaching and 3 years experience as a principal. The experience should have allowed for them to have developed systems and protocols for prescribing and conducting job duties. This would have allowed them to have received state- and district-level training.

Of the counselors and administrators who were interviewed, four high school counselors and four high school administrators were selected to participate in the study. Although the intent was to select participants from larger schools in three or four districts, the selection was from the one school district that approved the research request. Two school districts cited COVID-19 issues as overwhelming their counselors. Another district viewed the study as an audit of the district’s counseling programs.

The participants came from five schools with student populations from 2,200 to 2,600. Charmaz (2008, 2014) suggested three criteria for determining the number of research participants. The first suggestion was that the determination would barely, adequately, credibly, or exemplarily satisfy the study’s needs. The second suggestion was that an expert researcher would be able to identify the necessary number. The third suggestion was that researchers could
agree on a concrete number of participants. The number of counselors and principals selected to participate in this study was determined to ensure that the data would be credible (Charmaz, 2008, 2014).

It was presumed that each face-to-face interview would take approximately 1 hour and that the interviews would be recorded. The interviews would later be transcribed. Charmaz (2008) stressed that each interview should be transcribed as soon as possible to record ideas that may have been generated. Also, the researcher can update or modify questions that may yield more fruitful responses. The intent is to establish grounded theory and to develop shared meaning that may be grounded in the data (Morgan et al., 2014).

Member checking was used by providing all who participated in the interviews with a transcript for verification. Follow-up questions were not needed, as responses to questions and follow-up questions were clear. Themes were layered and comparisons were made. A hierarchical tree diagram was created to display themes. Campus counselor goals were identified to see where the administrators and campus counselors prioritized their areas of need.

**Positionality**

Charmaz (2014) stated that the researcher and the research participant together create knowledge. One cannot separate oneself from the phenomena being studied. By understanding the position as a researcher and having researched and gaining knowledge through observing and participating throughout life, the researcher must restrain from imposition.

As my life has been shaped through skills-based and career education, my passion for providing career opportunities for youth and adults propels me to work diligently to support these opportunities for others. I have participated in academic education, achieving both a bachelor’s degree and a master’s degree. I have participated in military education, including
basic and advanced education for the enlisted serviceman. While I served for 6 years as a national guardsman, I participated in various levels of leadership school.

Throughout my life, I have realized the value of every educational opportunity that has been provided to me. I have been a student, taught, developed curriculum, and directed implementation of curriculum as a school administrator and a district director. I have worked with counselors, teachers, administrators, coordinators, and district directors at the institutional level. I have worked with community leaders, government officials, local businesses, and postsecondary education institutions to support positive educational outcomes for a variety of local community citizens.

One thing that I have not done is to function in the capacity of counselor. Through working with counselors while I in my various roles and through research, I have a very good idea of what school counselors do and I understand the multitude of obstacles that are presented to them. I also know what they do not do and understand that there is a lack of standardization of duties from district to district and school to school.

Understanding my position regarding this study, I was cautious about how to proceed so as not to sway responses and the process. To provide a fair and fruitful outcome that can improve the future of research, I continually checked my positionality.

Chapter Summary

The methods of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014) were used to retrieve data that assisted in determining how counselors and administrators prioritized the high school counselors’ duties and assessing the level of discretion that counselors have in performing their daily tasks. Using the framework and concepts of a street-level bureaucrat, I analyzed the interactions that counselors have while working with their clients or students. I assessed the underlying factors of
counselors’ and administrators’ decision-making processes and documented the duties that school counselors ultimately perform. Using collected documents and artifacts, I compared the perceptions of counselor duties at the state, district, and campus levels.

Through the discovery process, I identified information that can be used to shape policy to define high school counselors’ role more effectively. With a perceived unmanageable workload coming from multiple levels of state administrative code, policy, and socially constructed demands, the current counseling scheme requires reconstruction or updating, at the very least. Using the street-level perspective led to comparison of what is happening with counselors to studies with other professionals and nonprofessionals who provide services at the street level.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

I have provided the background and an overview of the problem that set the stage for the study. A review of the literature and an overview of the methodology and procedures were presented. The main purpose of this research study was to explore how counselors and supervisors prioritize what they do and to identify the level of discretion that they are provided to perform their duties. Through this research study, I gained understanding of the obstacles that counselors face daily while performing their job duties. While facing obstacles, counselors must prioritize what must be done and use discretion as they perform their work. An understanding of how they prioritize their duties and what level of discretion they have is paramount to this research. Gaining insight from the campus administrator who supervises the counselors adds a layer to the implication of priorities and an understanding of autonomy or discretion when working.

The research questions were (a) How do high school administrators prioritize counselors’ work, and what discretion do they provide to counselors in performing their daily duties? and (b) How do high school counselors prioritize their work, and to what extent do high school administrators provide them discretion in performing their daily tasks? In this chapter, I describe the setting of the study, data collection and analysis processes, demographics of the participants, and an overview of the collected data.

Discussion

Research has shown that counselors are often not able to perform college and career readiness activities, for many reasons. Morgan et al. (2014) and Bridgeland and Bruce (2014) indicated that counselors are enthusiastic about supporting college and career readiness
initiatives but do not think that they have the support and resources to promote student postsecondary goals and achievement. There are not enough resources available to accomplish all of the tasks required of comprehensive school counselors. In a multistate study of ASCA program implementation, Parzych et al. (2019) indicated that the availability of community resources has an impact on counselors’ effectiveness to deliver a comprehensive school counseling program. School counselors must be provided time and resources to support underrepresented students and their parents (Cholewa et al., 2015). These underrepresented people required to support to access information to make decisions about postsecondary education options. Some counselors indicated that they have not had the experience or training to feel comfortable in performing career readiness activities.

The literature suggests that school counselors work with unmanageable caseloads and have little time to develop individual relationships with their students (Murphy, 2016; Paisley & McMahon, 2001; Radford et al., 2013; Smith, 2011). There is an imbalanced student-to-counselor ratio of 430:1 (ASCA, 2019) and an extensive list of counseling and noncounseling duties that they are expected to perform (Corwin et al., 2004). There is little evidence of how counselors navigate these duties. There is little evidence of research in support of the duties that are deemed the highest priorities and the amount of discretion that high school counselors are provided to perform their counseling duties.

This study was developed and conducted to address an identified gap in past research. Although many research studies have identified what counselors do (Blake, 2020; Chandler et al., 2008; Jones et al., 2019; Randick et al., 2018; Stone & Dahir, 2011), none was found that measured the level of discretion that counselors have in performing their jobs. There appeared to
be a need to determine the extent to which high school counselors lack discretion in performing their daily tasks.

Two counseling models guide Texas school counselors: (a) the ASCA (2016) model, and (b) the Texas Model for Comprehensive School Counseling (TEA, 2018), which was developed from the ASCA framework. With all the sanctioned and unsanctioned requirements prescribed for school counselors, the research questions probed to discover how they prioritize the duties that they perform.

Charmaz’s (2014) grounded theory methods were used to gain information for the research study. Lipsky’s (2010) concept of the street-level bureaucrat was used as the lens through which to discover research themes. The street-level bureaucrat framework has been used widely in the public service sector, but there is little research using the street-level bureaucrat framework with school counselors. High school counselors and high school administrators who supervise counselors were interviewed to determine the level of discretion that counselors were provided in performing their counseling duties.

Studies by Fitch et al. (2001) and Baker (1996) found that counselors could not perform all of the duties that they were supposed to perform according to their training and the counseling model that Texas prescribes. Through this research study, the goal was to identify how policy that is initiated at the state level is transferred to the counselor and to determine whether the intent of the high school counselor position is being realized. Do counselors have discretion to perform their counseling duties? Through interviews with counselors and their supervisors, I identified the priorities that were set and how they were determined. I discovered that counselors could use discretion in performing their assigned duties. Also, I refined the concept of street-level bureaucrat under which counselors could be classified based on the heavily managed
conditions in which they work under at the high school (Evans, 2011; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003).

**High School Administrators**

Table 5 summarizes the educational and work experience of each participant administrator. All administrators must possess a master’s degree and an administrative license to hold that position. The administrators were randomly assigned pseudonyms by gender.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Pastora</th>
<th>Martin</th>
<th>Guillermo</th>
<th>Jannah</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselor</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselor supervisor</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other job in education</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Participants were assigned pseudonyms.*

All four high school administrators had 8 years or more experience as a high school administrator. None had experience as a school counselor, and two had served in other capacities in the K–12 education system. One had worked with a contracted program to provide support for struggling students in a public school. One had been an educational aide prior to becoming a teacher and later became a school administrator. None held a counseling certificate and none had prepared to earn a guidance counseling certification. All were familiar with the TMSC and the ASCA model for school counseling.
Within the Texas Model for School Comprehensive School Counseling (TEA, 2018), there is not a definition of a school counselor. There is a quite extensive definition of a comprehensive counseling program. The definition of counselor sums what the individual feels the job entails. One participant high school administrator, Pastora, stated that a counselor is “pretty much a surrogate parent.” The counselor must ensure that students’ social-emotional state is in a condition that will allow them to achieve academically. Martin stated, “Counselors teach kids all the things they need to know to be college-ready and to graduate. They must also address students’ social and emotional needs.” Counselors help students to achieve beyond their own expectations. Guillermo stated that counseling is probably the hardest job in the high school. “Counselor’s duties revolve around academic guidance which accounts for three quarters of the job at the high school level.” Jannah stated that “counselors wear many hats.” They are instructional leaders, well versed in academics and students’ social and emotional needs. At times, they perform duties of scheduling clerks; during student lunch times, they are expected to interact with the students in the cafeteria.

High School Counselors

Table 6 summarizes the educational and work experience of each participant counselor. All counselors possessed a master’s degree and a school counseling license to hold that position. Pseudonyms were randomly assigned by gender.

The participant counselors had taken various pathways to their current jobs as high school counselors. One participant had earned a master’s degree in another area and had participated in an alternative certification program to become a counselor. The counselor started the career in business and later came into education as a CTE teacher and then entered the area of counseling. The other participant counselors had taken the traditional teaching route and then
earned master’s degrees in counseling. Both pathways to the counseling certification required an extensive counseling internship. Table 6 summarizes the participant counselors’ experience.

Table 6: Experience of Participant High School Counselors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Career path</th>
<th>Ariana</th>
<th>Darwin</th>
<th>Kristen</th>
<th>Marcela</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s in counseling</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative certified</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASCA trained</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other job in education</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job outside education</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students served</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>385</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>337.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Kristen summed the definition of a high school counselor as “organized chaos.” She stated that high school counselors are involved with everything that occurs on campus. Darwin noted that the definition encompasses “someone who can multitask and assess situations to address the needs of students. Those needs can be social and emotional, but they can also be academic because we need to keep them moving towards being on track to graduating on time.” This statement indicates that the main priority is addressing the social and emotional needs of students to ensure that they take care of academics and graduate. This statement reflects accountability (TEA, 2020a).

Marcela, a high school lead or head counselor, defined the high school counselor in a pie chart of responsibilities encompassing nine areas that counselors must fulfill to ensure that
everything is done for students to be successful. She did not provide a breakdown of percentages associated with each of the responsibilities that she described. Figure 6 shows the nine areas in which counselors are called on to perform the majority of their duties. Although Marcela is a lead counselor, which position would include additional job duties, her list reinforces the research findings that describe the multitude of duties often assigned to counselors (Blake, 2020; Chandler et al., 2008; Jones et al., 2019; Randick et al., 2018; Stone & Dahir, 2011),

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Administrative</th>
<th>Clerical</th>
<th>Developing Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lessons</td>
<td>Clinical Personal Social</td>
<td>Academic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career</td>
<td>Teacher and Staff Support</td>
<td>Student Activities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6: High School Counselors’ Responsibilities

**Requirements for School Administrator and Counselor**

School administrators and counselors are guided through their career preparation by achieving a higher education advanced degree (TEA, 2017, 2020c). Once the degree in the area of certification is earned, one is eligible to challenge the state examination to gain a certificate that permits practice as a licensed administrator or counselor. Another way to gain access to the state certification test is an Alternative Certification Program (ACP; TEA, 2019b). A teacher who holds a master’s degree and wishes to become a counselor or administrator may enroll in an ACP. These programs are sanctioned through state legislation and rules set by the state board of education, the state board for higher education, and the commissioners who lead the two entities. Licensing rules guide the processes that have been approved and put into place. The ACP allows successful participants to register for the certification exam.
College and university preparation programs and ACPs require candidates to participate in an internship or practicum that allows them to work alongside licensed practitioners and to perform many of the duties required of the position in order to garner skills and insight into the expectations for the future role. However, the quality of the internship may have a bearing on the skills gained, the understanding of the scope of the job, and the regulations that guide practice. Warren and Schwarze (2017), in a study of counselor internship experiences, identified the need for faculty members serving as placement coordinators to monitor and vet placement sites. Ensuring a mutual fit between the site and the student would help to reduce anxiety and ultimately result in a rewarding field experience.

Most employers expect their new hires to come with a general working knowledge of the job. The employer can then train the employees on the expected processes at their institution. Although all institutions are expected to follow the same rules and regulations in accordance with standards set at the state level, each institution’s practices and processes are unique. In a study titled “The Crossroads Between Workforce and Education” (Jackson et al., 2016), the authors studied employers to determine whether workforce preparedness was adequate for workers as they entered industry. A disconnect was found between academic training and employee preparedness to enter the workforce.

The questions posed in the interviews were intended to gather the participants’ assessment of their own experiences as they trained to move into their position and took the reins of their new role as a school counselor. Understandably, systems will change with new leadership, just as new laws and regulations will change the scope of what one does. Understandably, systems are expected to undergo changes and adjustments during periods of leadership changeover, implementation of new laws, and new regulations.
Reasons to Enter Education

There is a popular adage, “To become an educator is a calling.” Lynch (2015) suggested three reasons why most teachers enter the education profession. First, many have a desire to work with young people. They want to have a positive influence on young people’s lives. Others have a passion for a subject matter or to pass knowledge to others. The desire to pass knowledge through pedagogical processes provides satisfaction. Others are influenced by former teachers or family members. Through encouragement and positive experiences, they develop a desire to deliver those experiences to others.

Balyer and Özcan (2014) identified the reasons people choose the teaching profession. The first group was classified as altruistic-intrinsic reasons. The altruistic-intrinsic reasons match the first three reasons suggested by Lynch (2015), all of which have to do with the pride and satisfaction one feels by working in the profession. The second group is identified as extrinsic reasons. These reasons consist of economic conditions of service, such as the working day and calendar and one’s social status. The third group of reasons is influence of others. This reason matches the third reason identified by Lynch (2015). The following are the responses that identify the reasons that the research study participants chose to enter the field of education.

Darwin, a high school counselor who participated in this study, entered business and marketing as his first career. As a manager, he trained employees, which he enjoyed. While working on a master’s degree, a friend reminded him of the joy of training that he possessed and informed him of an ACP in which she was enrolled. He enrolled in the program and was soon teaching students at the elementary school level. Darwin had been teaching for several years when, one day, he noticed a CTE posting for a position at a high school for which, through his experience in business, he was qualified. He applied, interviewed, and received the job. While on
the job, he supported students in developing college and career plans and assisted them while they worked in industry. He enjoyed this and thought that much of what he did seemed similar to what school counselors do. He earned a master’s degree and proceeded to enroll in a counselor ACP. Soon after earning the counselor certification, he was offered a position as a high school counselor.

Ariana, a high school counselor, started her career as a social worker and worked with an agency that supported youth with mental health issues. The youth with whom she worked had behavioral problems and were assigned through the juvenile justice system. As a case manager, she was involved with the children’s schooling and often attend Section 504 (TEA, 2022b), a Texas educational program that supports students with physical or mental impairments, as well as Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD; TEA, 2022b) meetings to support the child’s individual needs. Because of this work, she decided to enroll in an ACP to become a public school teacher with the intention of eventually becoming a school counselor. She worked on a master’s degree; after becoming certified to teach, she was hired as a high school counselor.

Kristen, a lead or head high school counselor, worked for a school district as a clerk in the Human Resources Department. An assistant superintendent encouraged clerks to go to school and earn college degrees. Kristen completed the degree and was hired to teach career exploration at the middle school level. She worked with the counselors regarding course content to schedule and support guidance and counseling lessons. She learned about what counselors do and decided that counseling was where she should be. After completing the master’s degree and receiving counseling certification, she stayed in the classroom for several years because she was comfortable with her current assignment. A reduction in teachers at her campus pressed her to
seek a counseling position. Although she was looking for a middle school counseling position, she secured one at the high school level.

Marcela, a lead or head high school counselor at a different high school, is not from Bordertown, and she did not plan to become a teacher. Her family had moved to Bordertown and she started teaching adults through a North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) retraining program. She speaks both English and Spanish, which she needed to retrain workers through the NAFTA training program. She entered the teaching profession by supporting English Language Learners. As a first-year teacher, she carried a heavy load, teaching five preparation courses or course curricula. She was exposed to the Gifted and Talented program, the Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS) tests and Language Proficiency Assessment Committee (LPAC) meetings. She took a position as a curriculum coach, where she helped to develop teachers and improve teaching and learning in classrooms. From this position, she decided to prepare to be a counselor. Three years after becoming a high school counselor, she was given the position of lead counselor.

Martin, a school administrator, had become an instructional aide, and he supported students with special needs at a high school in Bordertown. This job solidified his desire to become a teacher. After he earned a master’s degree and school administrator certification, he sought an administrator position where he could serve a larger population of students. He became an assistant principal and later was hired as a high school principal. He has guided his campus counseling department by performing his work as an assistant principal and, later, as a campus principal.

Guillermo always knew that he wanted to be a teacher. The career of education runs deep in his family. While he was teaching at a Bordertown high school, his supervisors saw his
potential and provided opportunities to lead and learn as he taught high school students. He served as a department head and supported the administrator who built the campus schedule. He completed an online master’s degree program in educational administration, which allowed him to challenge the state licensure examination to become a campus administrator. He has led the counseling department throughout his career as a school administrator.

Pastora began her career in education by working as a contractor through an entity called Communities in Schools in Bordertown. Through a contract with a Bordertown school, she worked alongside the school counselors to support students who had been identified as in need of support. She provided individualized instructional support and worked with community agencies to provide family support when needed. Her passion for helping students led her to become a teacher and then a school administrator. She has served as an assistant principal, and she currently supports a BISD school serving as the campus principal.

Jannah began her career as a science teacher in a high-need community in Bordertown. She had always aspired to be an educator and she enjoyed working with students. She enjoyed supporting students who came to school with challenges, such as English Language Learners, as well as meeting the special needs of students in her classroom. When she became an administrator, she found it advantageous to work with the counselors to ensure that her special needs students received the proper support to ensure academic success. At her current school, she has worked with the counselors as their supervisor for 1 year—the year of the COVID-19 pandemic, when the area schools closed for an entire semester and taught students online. This was a challenging year for school counselors. Identified by a report titled “Education in a Pandemic: The Disparate Impacts of COVID-19 on America’s Students” (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.), 10 observations were listed that pertained to K-12 agencies. Observation 6
stated that nearly all students have faced some issues with their mental health and well-being due to experiences faced during the pandemic. Support for this is core to a school counselor’s job. Also identified were the loss of services to English Language Learner (ELL) students and students receiving services through the Department of Special Education.

**Graduate Program Assessment**

Both administrators and counselors expressed mixed feelings about the adequacy of their graduate preparation. Martin stated that there should be more training on budgeting and funding. “You need to be prepared to provide technology and professional development to support teaching and learning.” These areas were identified as shortfalls in the training program that Martin completed. Jannah noted she had taken several classes in which they used scenarios to teach the content. They role played to gain alternative perspectives. Practitioner panelists provided current perspectives in the areas under study. She stated that this method of instruction provided the best possible retention of the required objectives.

I wish there had been more of that course because I feel that, especially when we did the role-playing, Doctor Swanson used to come up with some doozies. Especially like when we practice doing ARDs, he was that parent, that parent that’s gonna come after you with 10 lawyers. He really put us on the hot seat, having to defend our actions. And the same thing when we talked about personnel now, but did I mean he really was a master at doing that . . . I wish we had more of that because I feel that during those two semesters of those courses they were able to give us a lot of information. (Janna)

Marcela described her curricular experience as lacking active practitioner discussion and scenario-based learning. She stated that her training was “too much based on theory and not a lot
of practical practice.’’ She said that there should be practical training, such as managing a student outcry and auditing student transcripts to support students.

I think there needs to be a whole lot more training. I think the training is very theory based and not a lot of practical practice that should be embedded in training. I think it’s great to understand the theory. It’s great that a lot of the courses I took helped me to understand “OK, this is what you would do with individuals in this particular ethnic group” and other training and understanding, the different theories, counseling theories out there, but when you’re regurgitating all that information but not putting it into practice. (Marcela)

Guillermo, a campus administrator, had gone through an online program but had gone through his internship phase of the program at the school where he was employed to teach. He praised his principal for providing ample and diverse experiences to plan and make decisions with the administrative team.

I will tell you that in every position I’ve been in, you’re never fully ready for when you get in yourself into. Especially when it comes to careers that are very hands-on, but I have been blessed with great mentors. I was given a lot of opportunities to grow and going back to the question you asked me before. Being able to look up to people who truly care about kids and we’re making decisions based on the best interests of kids kind of prepared me to be a good administrator. I was given a lot of opportunities as a teacher to continue growing. Whether it was summer school or whether it was due to different projects that I was given. As soon as I began my master’s program, I did an online program, and I was kind of worried about it, just cause I’m not much of an online learner, but I felt that they did a really good job. The internship itself and the trust that my admin
team at that moment allowed me to slide in smoothly. I know that I had the opportunity to oversee attendance, councilors, and master schedule, for example. (Guillermo)

Jannah also expressed gratitude to her principal for providing a robust internship experience.

The neat thing about Doctor Pope was when she brought me to her campus; she told her administrators, “Jannah is my intern, which means she’s yaws intern. She’s not gonna learn from me; she is going to learn from all of you.” And so, what she did was she made sure that I spent time with every one of her administrators. And so, I spent a day doing ARDs with her SPED administrator. I spent a day going to attendance court with Mr. Rand. Dr. Emanuel took me to an alternative placement intake, you know, so they all kind of took me underneath their wings and taught me their special areas, and so that was very beneficial. (Jannah)

The ability for programs to ensure that participants receive a robust experience often depends on what their internship provides. Coursework provides theory and legal studies, but it was identified that participants prefer scenario-based instruction that can be called on in the future when they are working on the job.

In a study of clinical training by Battista (2017), the researcher looked at the engagement of activities in scenario-based and simulations-supported learning. This type of learning is similar to what was described by Janna. Identified within the study were three components that aided in the learning process: (a) use of physical clinical tools and artifacts, (b) social interactions, and (c) performance of structured interventions. The findings provided insight into how participants make meaning of clinical artifacts through social interactions and structured interventions to the scenarios. Jannah, a high school administrator, praised her training program.
for providing such rich scenarios. Marcela, a high school counselor, indicated that her education program did not provide enough scenario-based learning.

**District and Campus Support**

A university graduate program is intended to prepare participants to pass the state assessment. Some programs use strategies or best practices to support goals. Experiences that provide first-hand skills development are praised for the learning outcomes. When a new administrator or counselor enters the job, what type of support are these new practitioners providing to support the school district’s success?

Jannah stated that BISD provides assistant principals monthly training sessions that cover information about each department, as well as state regulations. The training program is referred to as Future Principals Academy.

I honestly can say that we’ve had some really, really good training at the District Service Center as administrators. I know that the one where we were doing the baseball theme, and they have just been very innovative, very good, making us be very reflective and very informative. They provide us information, just knowledgeable, and make us see the importance of our jobs and why we do what we do. (Jannah)

Martin stated that the district provided training that supported administrators. He had received a binder containing the Texas Plan for School Counseling. Regarding counselor training, Martin stated,

We talked about ASCA; we’ve never attended a full-blown professional aspect training, but the district does give us the binder, and they do highlight some things about how much time counselors need to be directly working with and talking to kids.
Martin had read the book for guidance and understanding of state requirements. He stated that the counselors often met with district officials to receive updates on state regulations and upcoming timelines.

All of the participant school counselors were positive about the district counseling department. Monthly meetings are held to discuss items on the counseling calendar. There is training to support them and their duties. Kristen stated that the district counseling director and coordinator are on speed dial. “If there is an issue or circumstance that occurs at the campus which requires their expert support, we always receive assistance.” The district counseling department pulls together a team from around the district when there is an issue in which many teachers or students may require support. All schools provide resources to the campus in need if resources are available.

**Dissemination of Information**

Kristen, a high school lead counselor, compared high schools to large cities. There is always something happening with athletics, Fine Arts, CTE, and student club activities. These activities are in addition to the academic, remediation, and testing activities that comprise the regular instructional day.

Two participant counselors indicated that counselors are students’ source of information for what is happening at the campus. Sometimes, decisions are made at the campus or district level but the counselors are not addressed. In these cases, counselors do research to seek accurate information to address student and parent inquiries. The nature of the counselors’ direct communication with students makes them a natural access point for campus information. Being managers of information provides a vantage point to check on students but adds a caveat to their job duties and may affect their job performance.
Kids come to us for everything, like, for example, these SB4545 things that require individualized tutoring, like we didn’t know anything about it, and this brought a lot of inquiries to the counseling office. Administration has to keep us in the loop. Who do the kids come to when they have questions about anything? They ask us, and often, we don’t know because they don’t let us know. So, we’re like the hub of everything that goes on. They have to let the counselors know because kids come to us for every little thing.

(Kristen)

Assignment of Duties

The BISD counseling department actively supports and guides the campus guidance and counseling departments. Campus principals or campus administrator designees supervise campus counselors and therefore assign counselor duties. The assignment of duties is often a shared task at each of the Bordertown high schools. The supervising administrator involves the head counselor and, at times, the entire counseling staff, when developing yearly duty assignments.

In the research study’s target school district, all schools divided their students by alphabet. Alphanumeric assignments allow counselors to serve siblings (Williamson, 2011). This arrangement would mean that counselors would deal with duties and activities for various grade levels. At BISD, each school’s counseling department was guided by a head counselor who worked hand in hand with the assigned administrator. Guillermo mentioned that his school did not have a head counselor at one time, but he was glad that the district had gone back to the model that had a head counselor to whom all others reported. Two of the participant counselors were head counselors. Both stated that they were the go-between for the district counseling office and their campus administration. They disseminate information from the campus or district to the campus counselors. They also assign and monitor projects.
Besides being assigned a portion of the student body through a division of the alphabet, the counselors are provided additional duties. Various methods are used to identify talents described by the counselor supervisors. The principal provides direction and support for the method of determining the duties assigned to each of the counselors.

**Needs Assessment, Talent, and Goal Setting**

Marcela, a high school lead counselor, identified one of the duties as development of data. The term *data* appeared in each interview. All campuses shared some form for identifying their needs before setting goals for the year. In a study entitled “All Hands on Deck,” the principal and counselors aligned campus goals with the ASCA model to improve student graduation outcomes (Salina et al., 2013).

Martin shared his campus process of discovery:

So, what we do every summer is that we go to a retreat, and within that retreat, we look back at our data, and we identify our needs. We perform a needs assessment. So, before we assign anybody anything, we need to know what it is that we’re struggling with and that we need to focus on during the upcoming year. So, that needs assessment identifies whether it be grades, whether it be state test, et cetera.

Guillermo described his campus process for developing a needs assessment:

I wish we could provide more time for them, and I know that they also wish they did have more time, but they do make the time at the beginning of the year to the meeting for the committee and people just composed of students and some parents and teachers and of course myself and other administrators to set up their smart goals as a campus and then. They have identified what the needs of the campus are.
Identifying needs is a shared responsibility at several campuses. At each campus, the administration and counselors work together. One of the campuses adds the caveat of the entire school community to the counseling goal-setting process. This process of bringing stakeholders together to review data and process and assist in making decisions is known as site-based decision making (TEA, n.d.)

All administrators and lead counselors shared that they had taken into consideration the skills and areas of expertise that their counselors held when assigning tasks. They used the identified talents to support their counseling programs. In an article entitled “The Rewarding Work of Turning Talents Into Strengths” (Matson & Robinson, 2017), the authors stated that it is important to know employees’ strengths and weaknesses. One should capitalize on employees’ talents. Employees can master what they are talented in and being well rounded may hedge on being mediocre. If people surround themselves with partners who complement them, they can bring out their best work.

Martin described the method used to determine assignment of duties. After the counselors spent the day together in what was referred to as a retreat, they discussed the outcomes from the previous year and set goals for the upcoming year. Martin met with the head counselor and reviewed the goals, and they identified the strengths of the counseling staff. They assigned duties according to the identified strengths. Jannah described a similar method of talent and goal setting. The counselors met at the start of the school year, worked together to set goals, and identified the goals that they would be able to support.

Guillermo described a community event to gather information from their stakeholders to support the counseling goals. Administrators, counselors, teachers, students, and local community members meet and review the school data, such as attendance, graduation rates,
discipline, college matriculation rates, and other data. These stakeholders who meet to provide input for the campus are referred to as Campus Improvement Teams or School Improvement Teams. They discuss ideas for activities that could be implemented to improve the campus. Then the group discusses campus goals that pertain to the counselors. The counselors review the goals and rework them to make the goals their own. The counselors decide which counselor would be suited to take on which goal and which goals each would address. The process of involving stakeholders is referred to as site-based decision making (TEA, n.d.).

Pastora described the process to promote growth and success. Her counselors are assigned tasks matched with their talents to ensure success. New tasks are assigned to foster growth in their counselor position. Proper support and use of teamwork ensure that all tasks are completed successfully. This approach is the same that she has taken with the development of her assistant principals, and it has been shown to prepare them for their next step as a school principal.

Although campus counselor goals were uniform throughout the interviews, how those goals were developed and assigned were unique at each campus. All administrators mentioned specific talents that each of their counselors possessed. These talents were a consideration when duties were assigned.

**Counselor Discretion**

Discretion in performing counseling duties is a key concept in this study and is linked to which responsibilities may be performed and which responsibilities may not be performed. Discretion is also a key term for the street-level bureaucrat framework (Lipsky, 2010).

Guillermo, a seasoned campus administrator, indicated that, although specific duties are assigned, the counselor has discretion to determine how those duties or responsibilities are
implemented or carried out. The counselor may not have discretion to choose what they would like to do each day, but they can develop a plan to perform their assigned duties to achieve the best possible outcomes.

Pastora, a high school principal, described the school year as seasonal, with priorities placed on items to ensure that her school functions run smoothly. There is a calendar of requirements that have deadlines throughout the school year. Priorities are dictated by the events on these calendars. For example, counselors take the front stage in scheduling students. They must review each student’s academic record and monitor the student’s progress. When students preregister for courses, the counselor must meet with them to select courses that the students need to graduate. Students have selected endorsements that dictate many of their elective courses. Many students would like to take dual-credit courses, as well. The scheduling process begins in December, although the campus schedule and student schedules will not be complete until summer.

Marcela, a lead counselor, used the term project managers when discussing the assignment of additional duties to counselors. Her counselors have autonomy or discretion to develop and complete projects, as approved by her and the administrator who is assigned to the counseling staff. Implementing some of the planned activities may affect instruction and draw on valuable resources, but the plan is ultimately the counselor’s to control.

Martin, a high school principal, identified the importance of auditing and monitoring transcripts and course completion related to eligibility for graduation. Guillermo mentioned that graduation audits are a reason that the student population is divided by the alphabet. He stated that the process of auditing transcripts for graduation requirements is extremely time consuming and noted that it would not be fair to place this process on only two counselors. Assigning
students by alphabet ensures that all counselors equally support all grade levels, including the 12th grade.

Counseling Priorities

When there is a shortage of resources and an extensive list of duties to be performed, one must prioritize them. The results of a study by the Missouri Department of Secondary and Elementary Education (2011) indicated that administrator and counselor working together to identify priorities and benchmarks will help the counselor to reach identified goals. Guillermo stated that the duties could not be prioritized. A student’s social-emotional state affects the ability to perform successfully academically. Students who have social or emotional issues and are struggling academically will not be successful in setting or achieving college and career readiness goals. They will struggle to graduate from high school. These duties cannot be prioritized. Students who are struggling with social and emotional states should be a priority for high school guidance counselors.

“I always place social and emotional learning at the top of my list of duties,” stated Darwin. The term social-emotional addresses the student’s overall well-being, which is essential to success in school. Academics was the second on Darwin’s list of priorities. “As counselors, we make sure they are scheduled in the appropriate classes needed for them to graduate on time. It is important to check academic progress and audit each student’s academic record.”

When they prioritized what counselors do, all administrators mentioned that student outcries take precedence over everything else. Pastora described an outcry as a situation in which a student states the intention to take their own life. She noted that an outcry could take the time of one or two counselors for an entire day or longer. The follow-up with the student and parents...
can be longlasting. Outcries have become more common; students learning from home adds a dimension to the process.

Another instance when counselor resources can be depleted occurs on the death of a student or staff member. Opportunities are provided for the school community to talk with a counselor. Kristen stated, “The school district will always provide support when there is a dire need at the campus.” Additional counselors will be brought in from the district counseling department and other campuses to support the immediate needs of the campus in crisis.

When asked to rank counselor priorities, Guillermo, a high school principal, stated, “All of what counselors do is interconnected. Student attendance and discipline ultimately affect student grades. The student’s personal and social well-being affects everything else.”

**Deadlines**

Accountability is not lost on counselors who work in BISD. Deadlines are often set by benchmarks on the district calendar or set by the state. Deadlines often detour counselors’ weekly schedules and are a cause of stress on the counselors. Through a research project, Falls and Nichter (2002) recorded the concerns of many counselors, describing how they prioritized their work based on deadlines. They described students walking in, with everything that they needed requested immediately.

I remember this time out of frustration. There was one time, and I beat myself up over it. There was a student who was stressed out, and they were having a hard time just dealing with it. . . . I don’t remember what it was, but we had this deadline that day by 4 o’clock, and it was already 2, and we had a spreadsheet that we had to turn in. The student came in at about, I’m going to say around 12:30. And of course, you know you welcomed the student in, and I was sitting with this student, and I felt terrible because as the student
was sitting in front of me, I was trying to give them my 100% undivided attention, but I felt myself thinking, Oh my God, thinking to myself, if this is going to take longer, I’m not going to finish. You know, I’m definitely going to be, you know, late on my deadline, and I felt like I was not genuine. I felt, you know, the kids know when you’re not genuine, but this student didn’t say anything to me. I didn’t rush them. You know, they ended up in my office for a good hour and a half or so. (Ariana)

Performing graduation audits is an example where a timeline is crucial. One counselor mentioned this as a concern about all that is to be done. Several interviewees related heavy turnover of high school counselors. When a counselor leaves, students are redistributed to the remaining counselors until a new counselor is hired. The additional load and the time when a counselor leaves may affect many of the remaining counselors’ deadlines. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, excessive absences of school staff have led to shortages as counselors were called on to cover for colleagues who were on quarantine or cover for teachers due to the shortage of substitute teachers throughout the Bordertown region.

**Administrative Preparation**

All administrator participants in this research study had gone through the traditional pathway to becoming a school administrator. Guillermo was the only administrator who had gone through an online master’s program in educational administration. He stated that he learned much in this program, although learning in a college program is limited. While teaching, Guillermo benefitted from his principal’s trust in his potential leadership skills. He had been performing extra duties as on-the-job training before his required internship. He had assisted his assistant principal in developing a high school campus schedule while he was a teacher at his campus.
Building capacity in this way is referred to as distributive leadership. Distributive leadership is the building of capacity of future leaders at all levels of the organization (Harris, 2013). An internship may not yield rich experiences and outcomes such as those that Guillermo indicated he had received at his own campus. Assigning an internship experience to a future leader yields trust in the one who provided the opportunity.

Janna attended a traditional face-to-face program at her local university. She had an instructor who provided learning scenarios that allowed her class to engage in the curriculum, which helped in building competencies. Her principal saw Janna as taking on an administrative role in the future. She was provided opportunities to troubleshoot and solved problems in situations hand in hand with her principal and other staff members at her campus.

Marcela described the program that she had attended as stagnant. Courses were taught verbatim; content was not changed from cohort to cohort. She mentioned the need for scenario-based learning that would provide a benefit to participants in the program. This type of learning, using current practitioners in the field, would provide a much better experience and support for one’s future job.

**Professional Development and Support**

BISD provides its assistant principals monthly training sessions that address information about each department and about state regulations. The training program is referred to as the Future Principals Academy. Janna mentioned this as a valuable resource for building competency in the assistant principals. The intent of the Academy is to prepare all assistant principals to understand all aspects of the campus so they can take on a principalship.

Martin stated that the district provided training that supported administrators. He had received a binder that contained the Texas Plan for School Counseling. He had read the book for
guidance and understanding of state requirements. Martin also stated that the counselors met often with district officials to receive updates from the state and to address upcoming timelines.

Kristen reported the counselors meet regularly with the district counseling department. Timelines and additional information from the district leadership or the state are presented during these meetings. There are also committees that meet, such as the Grade Placement Committee. When students from out of the country register for school, a committee reviews the documentation and decides the grade for student and what services should be provided to support the success of the student. Although the Grade Placement Committee is not considered professional development; it is another example of other tasks that counselors perform.

BISD provides opportunities for counselors and administrators to grow. Marcela said that there are also professional development opportunities through the Regional Support Center and conferences. Unfortunately, counselors are not able to participate in these opportunities as they are scheduled during the normal workday. Evening and Saturday options are better for counselors to attend trainings.

There’s additional training and others additional training that gets offered through our Regional Support Center, and then there’s are different conferences, for example, the ASCA conference. At the high school, though, you don’t get to send everyone, and so in the middle school, you have a budget, and you get to send one or two counselors, so that has become how can I? . . . when it comes to those offerings, then we have to rely a lot on our team members from the district to provide us training. So we’re lucky in that sense that they can provide us with different types of training since we don’t often get a chance to go to those conferences; we really just rely a lot on that. (Marcela)
As described, the opportunities for learning are there but, due to a lack of resources, counselors often rely on training being brought second hand to the campus. Darwin also described similarly the process of sending one counselor to a training session or conference and sharing the information when the delegate returned.

**Time and Compensation**

It is expected that counselors, as professionals, will perform all of their duties. Their duties and emergencies are time sensitive and there is little leeway for them to defer unfinished items to another day. Both Guillermo and Martin mentioned the lack of time for counselors to do their work. Martin stated that a counselor’s job would be much like an administrator’s day if it were done right. They would need to work 12 hours to do their job right.

I’m always believed, if you’re not working at least 12 hours a day, you’re not working. And yeah, it’s tough. It’s tough because the first part of those 12 hours is going to be your the routine that you set every morning and what you do in addressing those needs, those emergencies that come up. The middle part of those 12 hours is going to be you actually talking to kids talking to parents going out and performing those home visits. Also talking with them about the curriculum and degree plans. And then the last third almost 12 hours is taking care of your paperwork. That’s when you’re doing everything. That’s when you’re crunching the numbers, you’re being creating the files, and documenting everything that you did during the day. (Martin)

Guillermo had a similar comment. Counselors have to work with their students when they are in school; when students are gone, counselors can perform their office work.

I think the biggest limitation any high school counselor will have is time. There are a lot of times it’s reactionary because they’re so busy or they are in care of 400 kids. So within
the tasks they must perform, they must try to be able to effectively get to know every one of the kids. This is a tough task and it’s not always possible to do. (Guillermo)

The other two administrators commented on the lack of time that counselors have to meet with students due to the numbers and the other requirements of their job.

One might ask, would offering a more competitive wage and increased hours improve the effectiveness of a counseling program? Numerous studies have looked at the rate of burnout of school counselors and potential reasons for burnout, such as “other duties as assigned” (Butler & Constantine, 2005; Fitch et al., 2001; Pérusse et al., 2007). Due to the many professional roles that counselors fill, extensive workloads, and role ambiguity, counselors face heavy burnout rates.

Butler and Constantine (2005) highlighted work done by Crocker and Luhtanen (1990) that described four types of self-esteem. Membership collective self-esteem represents those who see value in their work group which is identified as a social group may function more interdependently. The value placed on one another within the group will help to build the group’s self-esteem, which will carry over when they act independently. These group relations may help them to achieve more positive outcomes, especially when they face adversity, both collectively and independently. This paradigm is referred to as the intergroup paradigm.

Others have tried to understand how counselors can be effective while being accountable for students’ academics, psychosocial development, and college and career development (Blake, 2020). Opoku et al. (2021) examined ways to reduce the negative effects of emotional exhaustion in health care workers. They study found that a safe climate and ample compensation, coupled with the sense of job satisfaction, reduce emotional exhaustion, burnout, and employment separation. Linos et al. (2021) studied burnout rates in front-line workers in government
agencies. The use of low-cost belonging affirmation techniques helped agencies to retain workers. Current research tends to indicate that measures can be taken to retain workers in crucial front-line positions.

BISD places counselors on a teacher pay scale with a nominal counselor stipend. Since they are placed on a teacher pay scale, they have set start and end times. Like teachers, counselors qualify to earn extra duty pay for hours worked beyond their posted times. Administrators also have posted work hours, but they do not qualify for extra duty pay when they work late, on weekends, or on holidays. As identified by two administrators, counselors would need to work administrative hours to perform their duties effectively. Thus, the pay for these counselors would need to be adjusted as well. Working longer hours without additional compensation may be detrimental to retention. Jannah mentioned that her campus counseling department was comprised primarily of new counselors. This statement may indicate a retention issue at their campus. Guillermo also identified that his campus counseling department had relatively new counselors and attributed the turnover to the workload.

**COVID-19 Pandemic Implications for Counselor Job Duties**

Reported by the research participants, outcries were identified as the priority on each of the campuses during the 2020-2021 school year. Students and teachers who working from home stretched counselors in their work and made it more difficult to address student social and emotional issues. A study conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2020) showed that many low-income and minority students lost resources that had been available to them through the school, such as special education services, counseling, and other programs. As the pandemic continued, social and emotional well-being gave way to loss of credit, failures, and a graduation crisis at BISD, across the county, and across the country. This is even more
concerning, taking into account that, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, students with disabilities were less likely than their peers to graduate in 4 years with a regular diploma than their peers (U.S. Department of Education, 2019).

At the beginning of the pandemic, Bordertown was one of the hardest-hit areas in the nation. The local health authority closed schools and nonessential businesses to lower hospital rates in the community. While the Bordertown community struggled to provide ample hospital beds and ventilators for patients, teachers faced a considerable learning curve to bring their students to 100% online learning. Teachers were not equipped with pedagogy to support digital learning nor to address resistance by students to attend class in home-based learning environment (Narvaez Brelsford et al., 2020). Counselors at Bordertown schools were on the first line of the crisis, addressing student social and emotional needs and addressing failures and attendance problems that arose from the unfamiliar academic road.

Darwin noted that limited technology in the home and lack of high-speed Internet were initial issues related to learning at home. When multiple siblings were at home with their working parents, they faced learning issues. Older siblings were often expected to assist younger siblings to ensure that they were participating, at the expense of their own education. When students did not show up online, he and his fellow counselors made contacts, often through home visits, to identify the reason for nonparticipation. Kristen stated that the immediate emergencies that typically arose on campus did not occur during the period of COVID-19. Their focus shifted to online attendance issues, course failures, and additional support of a larger group of seniors who were listed as potential nongraduates.

Jannah described her counseling team as relatively new. There were only two veteran counselors; all others had been hired within the year. She indicated that, if there were anything
positive about students leaning from home, it would be that the counselors learned together, without the normal daily chaos. Darwin stated something similar. It was not that no chaos was occurring; it was that they had to identify it and address issues while the students were learning from home. The loss of learning will be addressed for years to come. With this comes students’ social and emotional baggage, as many navigate their future with large educational gaps.

Darwin explained that there were other indicators that teachers used to refer to students who were learning online.

I think the social and emotional stability suffered because I know many kids have their cameras off. When they had their cameras off, the teachers would identify them for support and contact us. The teacher would say, “Oh, I think you need to talk to this student because it looks like something is not right.” Teachers could tell that there was something wrong when they had them in person. While attending school in person, they would often go to the office to talk, a process that could not occur with home learning. Home visits were used to identify students with issues and help them work out their problems. (Darwin)

Karaman et al. (2021) investigated the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on high school students. They reported a significant effect on students’ anxiety, negative self-concept, somatization, and hostility. During the pandemic, when students are attending school from home, an arena to address the needs of the students did not exist. The authors concluded that school counselors are crucial to well-being and psychosocial development. Schools must ensure that these services are available to students when they are not able to participate in the traditional school setting due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
A study conducted by the U.S. Department of Education (2019) to support the reopening of schools identified issues and barriers to student success that were either brought on or exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Most of the observations in the report were related to areas that will require assistance from school counselors to support the identified student needs. Identified was the issue of student mental health brought on by isolation, fear, and grief associated with the loss of people around them.

The COVID-19 pandemic was mentioned throughout my interviews with counselors and administrators. Since the research took place during the pandemic, it would be understood that it had a heavy influence on the outcomes of the research study. COVID-19 displaced students, teachers, and staff from schools. This displacement introduced new scenarios when serving students and additional barriers to student success. Had this research been conducted pre-pandemic, there may have been other topics that arose.

**COVID-19 Border Issues**

Some BISD students faced additional hurdles during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many students who attend schools in the United States are residents or have passes to travel from Mexico to the United States. Due to family support and the cost of housing in the United States, many either live in Mexico and travel to the United States daily or they reside with a relative throughout the week and return to Mexico on weekends and during school breaks (West, 2019). West (2019) described issues faced by college students who are not Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) students and not U.S. citizens. The same issues apply to K–12 students who attend public schools across the border from Mexico.

When the Bordertown community shut community schools in spring 2020 and changed to online learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic, students who had been crossing the border to
attend school in the United States returned to Mexico with a lack of technology infrastructure to support online education (Zapata-Garibay, 2021) and struggled to complete the school year. On April 10, 2020, the Department of Homeland Security closed the border to essential travel (Department of Homeland Security, n.d.). The closure of the border meant that residents had no access to the United States. Students who had planned to return to the United States to continue their education had no access. The order occurred on a Friday, which did not allow families to plan strategically for the well-being of their children. On November 8, 2021, the border restrictions were lifted for nonessential travel provided the border crossers had records of COVID-19 vaccinations.

West (2019) referred to these students as transborder students, who were now able to cross the border again. Due to the border closure, some students had missed the opportunity to continue their education while others enrolled in school and continued their education while in Mexico. Although the COVID-19 pandemic had a devastating effect on all students in the Bordertown community, transborder students were affected by the border closure, which was in effect for 1 year and 8 months.

Although this issue was not uncovered as a theme in this research, it has played out throughout the U.S. and Mexican border communities from Brownsville, Texas, to San Diego, California. As a resident of Bordertown and an educator in the community for 30 years, I understand that border communities are closely tied, both socially and economically.

**Counseling Goals and Goal Classification**

The data showed that each campus has a counseling plan. This plan may not be written as a strategic plan, but it exists in the form of goals that are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound (otherwise known as SMART goals). By achieving their counseling
goals through implementing strategies and activities, the campus addresses an identified area of need for counseling support. Each campus where participants worked had its own methods to identify campus needs and took different steps to determine who would perform specific duties. Counselors at all of the schools had discretion in fulfilling their assigned responsibilities.

Counseling goals can be categorized into areas outlined in the Texas Plan for School Counseling and the ASCA model. Some goals may cross into multiple areas, as mentioned by Guillermo. He stated that no activity would solely address one identified rung of the counseling model because all rungs are interconnected: (a) Increase the dollar amount of scholarships, promote additional student scholarship opportunities, and make students aware of scholarship deadlines; (b) increase the number of seniors who complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FASFA; awareness and bilingual resources); (c) increase student attendance rates (Climate Survey and COVID-19 attendance protocols); (d) increase the number of students passing all EOC tests (promote tutorials); and (e) decrease course failure rate (virtual leaning, social and emotional needs).

These goals were implemented for the 2022 school year as students reentered classrooms for face-to-face instruction. Each campus used its own methods to identify their goals. All goals can be traced back to deficiencies exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Three of the five address the core of student academic success. Although there is one SMART goal identified per campus, counselors are also responsible for all other assigned and obligatory duties at their respective campuses.

**Counselor Choices and Counselor Control**

To address the research question of whether counselors are provided discretion to perform duties, many dynamics must be addressed. There are five distinct issues at hand. The
The first issue is that of supervision and accountability. Counselors report to a lead counselor and are supervised by an administrator. They are assigned student loads and additional duties. The second issue is that of emergencies and outcries. Student emergencies are a safety concern and become first on the priority list, which requires addressing them immediately after learning of the issue. The third issue is that of additional assigned duties. There are usually time constraints for when these duties can be performed. The fourth issue is that of tasks beyond normal duties. Visibility is important on campus. Often, counselors are assigned duty in the morning, during student class transitions, and during lunch. Although this type of duty can provide opportunities for students to see counselors, it makes the workday less efficient. This type of duty also limits the amount of individual time that a counselor has to discuss confidential items with students.

The fifth issue is that of teamwork and accountability. Each of campus counseling department functions as a team. Each counselor is responsible for a student group and additional assigned duties. The student assignment forces them to plan and work together as a team. Ariana described how the teamwork dynamics prevents individual autonomy.

The counselors, we all do it as a unit, so one counselor cannot decide. Well, I’m going to work with the English department, and I’m going to provide guidance lessons, everything is the same. It’s kind of a campus driving force in the same direction, so if we’re going to do coordinated guidance lessons, everyone has to provide the guidance lessons. There has to be an official schedule with a particular department. So, it is definitely a big no no, like you cannot kind of do your own thing if that’s what you want to do. (Ariana)

Ariana indicated that, when working with their assigned groups of students, they should function as one to ensure that all students are receiving the same information.
Conclusion

The interviews conducted for this research provided information about what high school counselors at BISD do as job duties and how the high school administrators perceive to be counselor job duties. I discovered how these counselors are assigned their duties and the level of discretion that they have in performing their counseling duties.

It is important to understand how both the counselor and supervisor prioritize these duties to understand which of the many tasks may not be completed. The interviews revealed that school counselors in BISD were assigned 300 to 400 students. High school counselors serve students in Grades 9 through 12, which means that they are responsible for supporting first-year student orientation, testing, and all activities through graduation. Although there are required activities to perform with the variety of groups of students, they have the authority to develop their plan and process for implementation of each activity. They often work together to support their heavy workload.

The ASCA (2016) model divided standards into three domains: academic, career, and personal social. It is difficult to separate counselors’ tasks and to prioritize those tasks. The consensus is that their priority is the safety and welfare of each student. The core of each student’s success is social and emotional well-being. By addressing students’ social and emotional needs, the counselor is addressing attendance, discipline, and academics. To address the social and emotional needs of students, counselors are first addressing the symptoms, which are poor grades and attendance, or disciplinary issues. Due to the number of students and the multitude of duties, assigned, the system tends to be reactive in nature.

Working directly with students is why counselors chose the career of school counseling. High school counselors are sometimes overwhelmed with emergencies and find themselves
addressing the symptoms of student need rather than being proactive and preventative in practice. Attendance, discipline, and grades are all linked to students’ social and emotional well-being.

At BISD, high school counselors function as a campus team, with some autonomy to work independently. They tend to work better as a campus group to reach efficiency and effectiveness in carrying out certain tasks. Each campus has a lead counselor, and the counselor unit is directly supervised and evaluated by a campus administrator. These supervising administrators have limited training in developing a school counseling plan and limited training on the ASCA model or the Texas Model for Comprehensive School Counseling.

As front-line workers, counselors have little autonomy to work independently of the campus counseling unit. To the level of Lipski’s street-level bureaucrat, the dynamics of choosing personal priorities and infusion of personal bias in their job are limited. Assigned a large group of students, addressing emergencies, and assigned a multitude of additional duties, school counselors have little time to work directly with students. However, it is during this time that a street-level bureaucrat may have the most discretion about individual services that they provide to students.

Bordertown ISD sits on the U.S. and Mexico border. Approximately 26 percent of the student population of Bordertown ISD is enrolled in the Bilingual / ESL and students are coded as Limited English Proficient (LEP) (Murphy et al., 2022). A little over 92 percent of the district’s student population is of Hispanic Ethnicity, and 69.7 percent of the student population comes from homes identified as economically disadvantaged. When reviewing these numbers, many may be surprised that Bordertown ISD boasts a 93.7 percent graduation rate with a 93.9
percent Hispanic graduation rate which exceeds the state graduation rate by 3.4 percent and 5.3 percent, respectively.

When reviewing the priorities identified by the counselors and supervising administrators, two of the top three were supporting students' social and emotional well-being of students, and another was ensuring that students graduated from high school. By focusing on these priorities, it appears that initiatives implemented are providing dividends when it comes to graduation rates.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND SUMMARY

The purpose of this research study was to provide an understanding of what counselors do and identify the obstacles that they face. By understanding what they do and the obstacles that they face, one can understand how counselors prioritize their duties and determine the level of discretion that they have when performing their duties. High school counselors are essential to students graduating from high school, going to college, and taking on a meaningful career. However, research has shown that counselors perform many duties that are not within the scope of their job (Butler & Constantine, 2005; Fitch et al., 2001; Kuranz, 2002; Pérusse et al., 2001).

The Texas Model for Comprehensive School Counseling was designed based on the ASCA national model for school counseling. The ASCA model has three rungs: academic, career, and social and emotional. The Texas Model for Comprehensive School Counseling identifies the state administrative code and regulations that guide school districts in lawful implementation of their counseling plans.

Studies have shown that counselors often perform tasks that are not within their scope of duties. These tasks can detour them from performing the functions that are laid out in their job descriptions or that have been identified as duties required by the governing state. Counselors report to a campus principal and often are assigned duties by their supervising school administrator or campus principal. Principal training does not include learning about counselors’ roles and duties, nor is the counseling plan part of a school administrator’s evaluation system (T-PESS, 2020). If campus administrators do not receive training on the responsibilities of counselors, they may be subject to using them as another resource when school resources are limited.
The research was designed to determine the extent of discretion that counselors have in performing their duties. The intent was also to determine the support that campus principals and high school counselors perceived in accomplishing their mission.

**Discussion**

This research was conducted through eight semistructured interviews with four high school counselors and four high school administrators who supervise counselors. This summary reviews the data and reports findings that address how high school administrators and counselors deal with their workload and the lack of resources to conduct prescribed counseling activities. Through the interviews, participants contributed data by answering questions about their personal experiences. The themes that emerged throughout the interviews are reported in this chapter.

**Themes Emerging From the Results**

**Discretion**

Counselors at BISD were allowed discretion to determine how to do their assigned duties but not necessarily to determine what duties they could perform. Some counselors chose some of their individualized duties in accordance with what they perceived to be their talents. Others were assigned their individualized duties by the head counselor or the supervising administrator, based on the counselors’ perceived talents.

One supervisor assigned some duties based on counselors’ perceived traits that supported the duties. One administrator assigned a duty that was new to the counselor to help the counselor to develop and grow.

Unlike the report by Lapan, Gysbers, et al. (2012) that, on average, counselors serve more than 500 students, counselors in BISD served 250 to 300 students each. This was
accomplished by using federal ESSER funds to support students who were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. As prescribed by the state, the school counselor should maintain a holistic view of the student’s academic plan and monitor progress in achieving goals, as well as other duties for which counselors may be responsible (TEA, 2018). All four interviewed high school counselors at BISD have little discretion in determining what types of duties they would perform on a daily basis. Tending to emergencies, heavy oversight, accountability, and teamwork processes limited individual counselor autonomy, as well as the time to perform discretionary tasks. This may ensure that all duties identified by the district and campuses are uniformly assigned and the end results are uniformly expected. This limits the ability of counselors to provide as much individualized support as they would like to provide to students. Counselors have the autonomy to develop and implement individualized plans for assigned events.

During the Texas 87th legislative session, SB 179 was passed and signed by the governor. SB 179 directs each school board to adopt a policy that requires school counselors to spend a minimum of 80% of their total work time on duties that are components of a comprehensive school counseling program. As this requirement has been implemented for the 2021-2022 school year, it will be interesting to see how it affects the ability of counselors to work individually with students or whether students will receive additional support for college and career readiness.

In the next 3 to 5 years, school counselors will be called on to support students regarding issues derived from the corona virus pandemic. As discovered in the interviews, a student’s social and emotional well-being is the primary concern and the core of the counselor’s job. By taking care of the core, students’ attendance, grades, and discipline, students will ultimately be in check for graduation.
Prioritization of Duties

Regarding prioritizing duties, the participants stated that academic, career, and personal-social areas could not be separated. All counselor duties support students’ successful completion of high school and successful entry into society, college, or a career. Several participants indicated that all counselor functions are intertwined and cannot be prioritized. Although duties can be categorized, they may serve multiple functions and support outcomes in multiple areas of the development of students. Social and emotional development was identified as the foundation for student success and the area that they were least able to address. Several counselors mentioned that, when this was addressed, it was often initiated by the student, a teacher, or a friend of the student.

Calendar of Duties

The instructional calendar provides the seasons of counselors’ work. The plan is built into benchmarks set by the state or the district. Counselors’ work is organized yearly around the district instructional calendar. Guillermo stated, “After they have identified what the needs of the campus are, they do follow the calendar and set up time and allocate a certain percentage of time that they must do to address what has been identified.”

Counselors’ start of the school year entails auditing academic records and ensuring that students are enrolled in the correct courses. As school starts, attendance becomes a concern and counselors work with students who are struggling to attend. The first report cards are issued after the first 6 weeks. Grades are addressed by teachers, administrators, and counselors. The completion of FASFA, college applications, and college scholarship applications are slated for October. ARDs for students with special needs and Section 504 meetings to support students who require assistance due to a physical need occur throughout the year. Although counselors
are not listed as a required participants in these meetings, they are often invited to provide academic alternatives for the student. Spring brings additional auditing for senior graduation. BISD schools assign students by alphabet; each counselor serves students in Grades 9 through 12.

**Deadlines and Accountability**

District and state deadlines and accountability may limit the counselors’ autonomy. Although safety and student social and emotion well-being are paramount, time (the number one resource) is depleted each time an emergency arises. Local education agencies are becoming increasingly accountable to state and federal funding entities. Funding must yield results. To be accountable and to assess results, there must be clear parameters of what counselors do (Stone & Dahir, 2011). Table 7 shows the history of counseling paradigms. Through the brief history of school counselors, their jobs or purpose have changed. The development and implementation of the ASCA national counseling model in 2003 brought the nation into the most current paradigm. Accountability appears in this paradigm.

BISD must adhere to all state data requirements. Counselors are responsible for the generation and verification of numerous data points. District-imposed deadlines are often placed days or weeks prior to submission to the state for verification purposes.

**Outcries and Emergencies**

Outcries involve a student reporting thoughts about suicide. These reports can come through a teacher, students, or parents. Outcries occur throughout elementary, middle, and high school. The student may report directly to the counselor; however, often, the student is reported by a teacher or a friend. BISD has in place an detailed protocol for working through the process of outcries. One outcry may take a day or two to work through and to ensure that the
### Table 7: Historical School Counseling Paradigms

<table>
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<tr>
<th>20th-century school counseling: Service driven</th>
<th>Intentional and purposeful counseling programs</th>
<th>Transformed school counseling: New vision proactive practice</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Consultation</td>
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<td>3. Coordination</td>
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<td>5. Advocacy</td>
<td>5. Social justice advocacy</td>
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<td>6. Teaming and collaboration</td>
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<td>7. Assessment and use of data</td>
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<td>8. Technology</td>
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A student and family have support and resources to address the underlying issues that the student and possibly the family are facing.

A *USA Today* article on young people dying of suicide reported a steady increase in youth suicide since 2007 (Dastagir, 2020). Much has to do with financial swings and changing of lifestyles of those affected through a change in family finances. More young people are dying by suicide, and experts are not entirely sure why this is happening. Keveney (2021) discussed issues with students’ mental health related to being out of school during the pandemic. These issues are found at all age ranges, from elementary school to college. Financial changes and loss of family members have occurred in households throughout Bordertown and across the country. These changes may have an effect on the frequency of student outcries for years to come.
Administrative Hours

Counselors who want to be successful must put in hours similar to those of administrators, as much as 10- to 12-hour days. To capitalize on the hours that students are accessible during the school day, they must defer tasks such as scheduling, auditing, and creating reports to when students leave the campus for the day. In order to retain a veteran counseling department, it is proposed that high school counselors receive competitive pay to offset the additional hours needed to complete their job. These are hours that would be spent supporting their families.

Dissemination of District Counselor Information

Counselors are often the go-to people for student access to information. Since they are involved in all aspects of the campus, they are expected to have information for students when asked. This charges them to secure information that is not readily available to parents, students, and staff. This supports the importance of counselors in the school system. It is an example of the responsibility that is placed on the high school counselor.

Street-Level Bureaucracy

When developing this research study, Lipsky’s street-level bureaucracy was reviewed as a possible lens to review how a high school counselor determines what duties to perform. School counseling is an area with limited research using the street-level bureaucracy framework. School counselors are street-level workers who work directly with their customers. Many studies have identified what counselors do and what counselors do not do. What is missing is why they do what they do, knowing that school counseling resources are scarce and that the breadth of their duties is great.
An area that requires additional support is the type of management of front-line supervisors that guides the street-level bureaucrat. Wood (2006) stated that these supervisors often have difficulty in controlling their subordinates’ behavior and thus controlling accountability if the subordinates are provided freedom to act with discretion.

**Counselor as an Agent**

The school counselor must act both as state agent and citizen, dichotomies of a street-level bureaucrat. As state agents, counselors focus on how to apply laws and rules to the cases or students for whom they are responsible (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003). They are more concerned about the full intent of the code, policy, or the verbiage of an enacted bill than about who is or who is not being served. As a citizen agent, counselors concentrate on the perceived needs of each student. Maynard-Moody and Musheno (2003) stated that these determinations consider the perceived notions about students’ identities and moral character. As state agents, counselors adhere to rules and regulations as they perform their jobs. As citizen agents, they serve their clients with what they feel will best support their clients’ needs. As citizen agents, the street-level bureaucrats use discretion when providing services to their clients.

Counselors at Bordertown serve primarily as state agents. With the number of students whom they serve at each of the four grade levels and the accountability measures that are in place, they conduct lessons and perform tasks in large groups. They receive students who walk in and address emergencies, typically on a case-by-case and with a one-to-one approach.

**Implementation Theory**

Implementation theory was developed in the 1980s to focus on policy failures. The theory focused on political implementation and how the administration reacted to the intended policy
This theory became the principal-agent theory, which recognizes the importance of hierarchical control and accountability.

The principal-agent theory is part of the research of street-level bureaucracy and appears to be where counselors are categorized regarding street-level bureaucrat classification. This theory has been used in finance as the principal agent acts in the stead of the principal. The authority figure identifies the priorities and develops accountability measures, whereas the street-level bureaucrat must conform to established rules and procedures. With a shortage of resources, the administration must identify the schools’ priorities, which in BISD are safety and the student core, which is personal-social. These priorities lead to optimal probability that students will graduate, which is one of the key accountability components for schools and school districts.

**Policy**

The Texas Model for Comprehensive School Counseling provides a robust plan for school counseling. The model complies with the state administrative code that is used as a framework for Texas school districts. Although the model is available to Texas school districts, it is only a resource. Counselors are supervised by a campus administrator whose competency in counseling is not mandated through approved administrative preparation programs. Competencies that address the creation and maintenance of an effective counseling plan should be added to the school administrators’ preparation program to ensure that the leaders of Texas schools can ensure the presence of strong comprehensive school counseling programs across the state.

Student-to-counselor ratio has been addressed by the BISD. The ratio of students to counselors will continue to be an issue as counselors are asked to do more in support of students. State appropriations should provide additional funding to support expansion of counseling in
local educational agencies. BISD has used federal ESSER funds to support additional counselors to meet the needs of students who are struggling because of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (Rincones et al., 2021). The funding is valid for 3, years with the opportunity to carry over (TEA, n.d). Ultimately, school districts that add staff using grant funding will either have to identify additional funding sources or reassign staff to vacancies when the grant funds are no longer available. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a catastrophic effect on student success. The effects of learning loss and emotional distress could linger for decades. School counselors are at the front line in addressing issues at the street level.

**Preparation and Support**

The results of this research indicated that administrator preparation programs are not required to address campus counseling programs or program outcomes. Administrators are not evaluated on their campus counseling program. The participant administrators reported that they had received ample training to support their success as high school administrators. Some attributed their learning to their principal, who supported their learning experience at the campus. Additional opportunities for counselor learning at the campus should be provided through preparation programs. Instruction based on learning scenarios should be integrated into all preparation programs (Batista, 2017). Scenario-based learning could be addressed through policy but implementation would need to occur in the college or university preparation program. District-level direction, training, and support were recommended by all participants counselors. Additional training on counseling models for high school administrators is warranted.

**Counselor Support**

Additional support was deemed necessary to ensure that counselors could perform the duties that they were trained to perform. All eight participants identified the need for additional
counselors to reduce the student-to-counselor ratio. The need for a lower student load was also identified.

Another identified need was additional clerical personnel to handle data entry and to pull needed reports. All counselors stated that the manual entry of students’ course registration was a task that lasted weeks and caused a backlog in the normal workload. Clerical personnel cost approximately one third that of a counselor; they could perform data entry and be trained to run reports to support the counselor.

Auditing student transcripts is another time-intensive task that counselors perform regularly. Although technology will never remove the need for counselors to audit transcripts, support in this area would help them in performing their daily duties. An electronic audit card could assist in day-to-day audits of students’ transcripts.

**Analytical Framework**

The analytical framework for this study was introduced in Chapter 2, where two frameworks were presented. The first framework presented global perspective that followed policy that drives school counselor responsibilities from inception at the federal and state levels to the campus. The second framework was a depiction of the local counseling process at the campus level, starting with the development of a counseling plan and then drilling down to accountability for student outcomes. The results of the study indicated that these two proposed frameworks were mostly accurate, although accountability was not identified in the first framework. Counselors are held accountable for student outcomes and those outcomes are linked to students’ social and emotional development, academic development, and college and career readiness.
When applying the requirements and jobs of counselors to the street-level bureaucrat (Lipsky, 2010) theoretical framework, the accountability piece would tend to reduce the autonomy and discretion that counselors would have.

Implementation theory focuses on political implementation and how the administration reacted to the intended policy (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003). This theory became the principal agent theory, which recognizes the importance of hierarchical control and accountability (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003). When viewing the counselor framework presented below against the principal agency theory, there appears to be a closer match to the state agent. Within agency theory, a street-level bureaucrat would function in degrees closer to a state agent rather than a citizen agent. Within any agency, there would always be some level of autonomy by the street-level bureaucrat.

The frameworks presented in Chapter 2 are missing the dynamic of the counseling team. The counseling team concept appears to reinforce that policy is followed and standards of accountability are in place to support positive student outcomes. Thus, established accountability points would take priority. Heavy control over the duties of the counselor by the district and the campus would place them in the realm of the “state agent” in street level bureaucracy (Hupe et al., 2015; Lipsky, 2010; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003). As citizen agents, counselors primarily work with students individually to support individual social and emotional needs. This occurs during crises and emergencies, but this work is reactive in nature. The majority of high school counselors address their work with students in groups due to the large number of students whom they serve. They also work with groups because they are all responsible for students in Grades 9 through 12. They must coordinate with other counselors to ensure that the information
that is provided is uniform across the campus. Figure 7 displays the analytical framework of the local school counselor.

Figure 7: Analytical Framework School Counselor: Local

**Recommendations**

The findings from this research study can be used to inform policymakers, institutions of higher education, school district leaders, principals, counselors, and any other entity that supports teaching and learning. The following are recommendations for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of a high school counseling and guidance program to ensure that counselors are able to support their students effectively through established state standards.

Policymakers must consider increasing funding to support additional resources to ensure that school districts can implement the Texas Model for Comprehensive School Counseling
effectively. Although more resources have been provided to support students who have been
affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, those funds are temporary. They must be replaced after
recovery from the pandemic.

Policymakers must consider the implementation of counseling elements in school
administration certification preparation programs. School administrators supervise counselors
and should work hand in hand with campus counselors to develop a strong campus counseling
plan that supports all elements of the Texas Model for Comprehensive School Counseling. When
there is a lack of resources available, a local school district and campuses must shift their
priorities to support the most pressing issues that present themselves.

Policymakers must consider including accountability for school counseling as part of the
principal evaluation system. By adding these elements, higher-level district administrators may
see the value of a sharper focus on the district counseling program and the outline of proposed
outcomes.

Principals must offer counselors opportunities to attend ASCA official training programs
(Brewington & Kushner, 2020). Although all principals who were interviewed for this research
study were aware of the Texas School Counseling Model and the ASCA model, none had taken
advantage of official training. Principals should also attend state and national training sessions to
learn how others are able to navigate and best use resources to support their counseling
initiatives.

District-level administrators should assess the salary scale of a high school counselor.
Counselors often spend long days addressing students’ needs, and then they take care of
paperwork when students and teachers have gone home for the day. They often prepare
counseling lessons, plan, and audit when the daily activity has subsided. By providing a safe
working climate, better salary, and support leading to job satisfaction, counselor retention should be solid, and the counseling team can maintain optimal effectiveness (Opoku et al., 2021).

District administrators should consider providing additional clerical support to high school counselors (ASCA, 2005; Fitch et al., 2001). Considering all of the required outcomes of counselors, clerical support is one area where minimal financial support would be needed. It was found through the interviews with administrators and counselors that several of the enormous tasks placed on counselors are clerically oriented. Removing these clerical duties would provide counselors more time to work directly with students.

District administrators should implement technology to assist counselors in performing their credit and graduation audits. In a study of counselors’ use of technology, Mason et al. (2019) found that technology was underutilized by school counselors. It was stated that when technology is used purposefully, it can improve efficiency and expand the counselors’ reach to support student outcomes. They noted that the issue has been underinvestigated. In BISD, an example of technology integration would be to support student course registration and student scheduling. At BISD, some of the registration components are online, and others are completed using the traditional paper-and-pencil method. If technology systems are updated, counselors would gain additional time that could be devoted to working with the core of their job: meeting proactively with students to ensure social and emotional wellness.

District administrators should consider identifying a counselor as a career counselor. While all counselors have responsibility for the safety and welfare of students, assigning one counselor solely to responsibilities related to college and career readiness would strengthen this area of service to students. A study by Falco and Steen (2018) found that a focus on career development with an emphasis on activities through CTE programs had a long-lasting impact on
students’ futures. There is evidence that career counseling interventions in high school improve students’ college and career aspirations and attainment (Corwin et al., 2004; Kenny et al., 2006). Gysbers and Henderson (2012), in their book Developing and Managing Your School Guidance and Counseling Program, provided considerations when assigning counseling duties and student caseloads. They stated that decisions should be based on the philosophy of those in charge of the program with consideration of the design of the school’s programs.

**Future Research**

This research study provided data to describe the duties of high school counselors who work for BISD. The study was designed to determine the level of autonomy or discretion that high school counselors have in performing their daily duties. After careful review, the following recommendations for further research are suggested.

1. Study a larger group of high school counselors and supervisors to determine whether other school districts have implemented counseling models that could provide additional counseling resources to campuses.
2. Study the impacts of COVID-19 and campus approaches to supporting student success during the epidemic.
3. Study the impacts of COVID-19 on students who attended K-12 schools in the United States while living in Mexico.
4. Develop a quantitative study to address counselors’ assessment of their discretion on the job.
5. Replicate this study across the state and in other states in districts of various sizes.
6. Compare the dynamics of counselors working individually and working on various sizes of teams.
7. Study how students are assigned to counselors. Are there more efficient and effective ways of supporting students?

Summary

This research study was developed to secure an understanding of what counselors do and to identify the obstacles that they face. By understanding what they do and the obstacles that they face, one can understand how counselors prioritize their duties and determine the level of discretion that they have when performing their duties. Research has shown that counselors often perform tasks that are not identified as traditional duties of counselors (Butler & Constantine, 2005; Fitch et al., 2001; Kuranz, 2002; Pérusse et al., 2001; Pérusse et al., 2007). The Texas Model for Comprehensive School Counseling and the ASCA model list duties that should not be assigned as counselor duties. These models bring accountability to the counselors’ duties (Stone & Dahir, 2011). Tasks that counselors are to perform to ensure success are outlined in both the ASCA model and the Texas Model for Comprehensive School Counseling. School administrators often add duties that are not listed in the counseling models, which has an effect on prescribed outcomes and accountability.
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138


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APPENDIX A

QUESTIONS FOR PARTICIPANTS

Research sub-questions included:

Interviewee Background
1. First, I would like to get to know you. Tell me a little bit about you.
   • Tell me more about your professional experience
2. What attracted you to this research study?
3. Tell me about your role as a high school administrator
   • How are your high school counselor duties assigned?
   • What would be your definition of a counselor as it pertains to high school?
   • What was your drive to prepare to become a high school administrator?

Preparation and Support
4. Do you feel that your training was adequate to prepare you for your current role?
   • What do you feel would be some deficiencies with the training that you received?
   • What are some of the areas where you felt that you received ample training?
5. What professional development has your school district provided to support your position, and how have these trainings supported you to perform your duties better?
   • Have you received any professional development to help you support your counselors, and what did the professional development consist of?

Expectations
6. What guidance has your school district provided to assist you in performing your daily job duties?
APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FOR INTERVIEW

University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) Institutional Review Board

Protocol Title: High School Career Guidance: From the View of a Street-level Bureaucrat

Principal Investigator: George C. Thomas

UTEP: Department of Educational Leadership and Foundations

INTRODUCTION

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by George C. Thomas, a doctoral student at The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP). Please take as much time as you need to read this form; you may keep this form for your records. You may also decide to discuss it with your family or friends. You must be 18 or older to participate. If you agree to participate, you will be given a copy of this form.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Counselors are trained to perform a variety of duties when to prepare them for the role of a school counselor. Studies have revealed that counselors often do not properly trained for the duties that they are assigned by their campus administration. They also feel ill prepared to take on some of the duties that they had received training for while through their counselor preparation program. The purpose of this study is to describe the duties that counselors do on a daily basis to support their campus and students as well as describe the duties that they perceived they would do as a high school counselor. You were selected as a possible participant because you work as a high school counselor who works at a school district within a Texas border area.

STUDY PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate, you will be asked to take part in one or more of the following research activities:

1. Interviews: You will be asked to meet with me for one or more interviews. Interviews will be scheduled at your convenience and in a private space. During interviews, you will be asked to answer questions about (a) your experiences and responsibilities at your current high school, and (b) your perspectives on the duties you perform on a daily basis as a high school counselor. Interviews will last approximately 30 to 60 minutes. If you agree, interviews will be audiotaped. If you do not want to be audiotaped, handwritten notes will be taken. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to. I may contact you for a follow-up after an interview, to make sure that I understood your answers and to see if you have any thoughts to add.
2. Focus groups: You may be asked to participate in a focus group with a small group of your colleagues. During the focus group, you will be asked similar questions about your perspectives job duties at your assigned high school. Focus groups last approximately one hour, and will be audiotaped with your permission. You are not required to answer any questions you do not want to. The information exchanged during a focus group will remain confidential and will not be shared outside the group by participants or the researcher.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS
There are no other foreseeable risks or discomforts to participating in this study. The only inconvenience might be setting aside time to talk to the researcher.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY
You will not directly benefit from your participation in the study. However, some participants appreciate the opportunity to share their perspectives with an objective listener. In addition, your insights have the potential to inform research and policy related to high school counselor duties.

PAYMENT/COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION
You will not be paid for participating in this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Any identifiable information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. I will assign a pseudonym (pretend name) to ensure confidentiality for interview participants.

When interviews take place in a public place, there is a chance that individuals outside of the study may intervene and identify study participants. Additionally, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed if you decide to discuss the contents of your interview outside of the research period.

Only the researchers and the University of Texas at El Paso's Human Subjects Protection Program (HSPP) may access the data (e.g., audiotapes of interviews and transcripts). The HSPP reviews and monitors research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research subjects. The data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet or on a password protected computer. You have the right to review audio recordings or transcripts of your interview. Data will be maintained indefinitely and may be used in future research studies. If you are not comfortable having your confidential data used in future studies, please let the researcher know and your data will not be retained after the present study concludes.

When the results of the research are published or discussed in conferences, no information will be included that would reveal your name.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL
You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if
circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

**ALTERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATION**

Your alternative is to not participate. Your employment/relationship with the school will not be affected, whether or not you participate.

**IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS**

If you have any questions or concerns about this research study, please feel free to contact George C. Thomas at (915) 525-0199 or yeorge3@yahoo.com.

**RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS**

If you have questions or concerns about your participation as a research subject, please contact the UTEP Institutional Review Board (IRB) directly at (915-747-7693) or irb.orsp@utep.edu.

**AUTHORIZATION STATEMENT**

I have read each page of this paper about the study (or it was read to me). I know that being in this study is voluntary and I choose to be in this study. I know I can stop being in this study without penalty. I will get a copy of this consent form now and can get information on results of the study later if I wish.
CURRICULUM VITA

George Thomas was raised on a dairy farm in rural Storm Lake, Iowa. He served part time in the Army National Guard for 6 years. He graduated from Teikyo Westmar University in 1991 with a Baccalaureate degree in Industrial Technology Education. He moved to El Paso, Texas, to teach in the El Paso Independent School District (5 years in high school and 3 years in middle school).

While teaching, he earned a master's degree in Educational Administration from New Mexico State University. After obtaining the degree and license to practice, he served as a middle school assistant principal for 4 years. He later served as a high school assistant principal for a career and technical center and a center that served school-age parents. In this position, he worked with 10 comprehensive campuses and two auxiliary campuses to provide Career and Technical Education (CTE) programming to more than 1,200 students.

In June 2009, he was named Director for Career and Technical Education programs for the Socorro Independent School District (SISD), where he continues to serve approximately 18,000 students in Grades 6-12 by providing rich CTE programs. During this time, he attended Sul Ross State University, where he received Texas School Superintendent certification. He has served SISD for 13 years as CTE director.

In 2016, he was admitted to the Department of Educational Leadership and Foundations Doctor of Education program at the University of Texas at El Paso and earned the doctorate in 2022. His research focused on high school counselors’ discretion in performing job duties.

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This dissertation was edited and formatted by Jerry D. Byrd, Ed.D.