

Exploring School Counselor-Principal-Teacher Collective Efficacy and School Counselor Leadership in Schools

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Abstract

Collective efficacy is the perception of a group of people to have the ability to achieve a common goal. As we explore self-efficacy and collective efficacy in schools, a question remains as to how school counselors, principals, and teachers can increase collective efficacy and foster a positive school climate to support all PK-12 students' needs. We sought to explore school counselor-principal-teacher collective efficacy and perceptions of school counselors' participation in leadership roles to guide comprehensive school counseling programs. Our results inform the acute need for pre-service and in-service training to better support each other and meet PK-12 students' needs.

Keywords: *collective efficacy, educational leadership, PK-12 schools, school counselor-principal-teacher collaboration*

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Introduction

Collaborative, positive relationships among PK-12 school educators and leaders (e.g., school counselors, principals, and teachers) can provide students with educational opportunities to thrive in schools when these stakeholders understand and support one another in their roles and responsibilities (Geesa et al., 2024). However, according to Dahir & Geesa (2022), research about the relationship between principals and school counselors “continues to identify principal perspectives regarding the role of school counselors as including many activities not directly tied to improving student achievement or school success” (pp. 1-2). School counselors can play a significant role in fostering collective efficacy among fellow school counselors, principals, teachers, and school stakeholders. In their roles in PK-12 schools, school counselors may experience opportunities to collaborate with principals, teachers, and other stakeholders to assess school climate, eliminate barriers to student success, and foster safe and positive educational environments for all students (Lowery et al., 2018; Lowery, Boyland, et al., 2019; Lowery et al., 2018; Lowery, Mayes, et al., 2019; McConnell et al., 2020; Wikoff & Wood, 2022).

While recent research relates to school counselor-principal collaboration (e.g., Dahir & Geesa, 2022; Geesa et al., 2022; Kruczek et al., 2022), research focused on *school counselor-principal-teacher* collaboration is limited. More research on school counselors', principals', and teachers' perceptions of their collective efficacy and how they can collaborate to foster a positive and supportive school culture is needed. In an effort to better understand the role of the school counselor in collaboration with other stakeholders, there is also a need to explore not only school counselors' perceptions, but teachers' and principals' perceptions of school counselors' roles and needs in schools to serve as collaborators and leaders in PK-12 schools.

Comprehensive school counseling programs in PK-12 schools are designed to help school leaders better address the academic; social-emotional; and career-, college-, and life-readiness needs of all students (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2019, 2021). It is important for school counselors, principals, and teachers to advocate for the necessary resources to support comprehensive school counseling programs and clarify the roles and responsibilities of school counselors in implementing these programs (Trombly et al., 2022). To better understand the roles of PK-12 school professionals in addressing students' needs and supporting comprehensive school counseling programs, we sought to explore how school leaders guide comprehensive school counseling programs and work with school leadership teams within schools.

In this study, we seek to explore three areas of PK-12 school leadership to better meet PK-12 students' needs. These areas include: 1) school counselor-principal-teacher collaboration and perceptions of collective efficacy in schools; 2) school counselor leadership roles in schools for implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs; and 3) how school principal, school counselor, and teacher self-efficacy may relate to their collective efficacy. In the following section, we will review literature related to these areas.

Literature Review

School counselors can play a crucial role in implementing comprehensive school counseling programs by taking on leadership roles within a school (Rock et al., 2017). There is a link between school counselor leadership and the implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs (Strear et al., 2021). While school counselors have training related to comprehensive school counseling programs and focusing on students' academic; social-emotional; and career-, college-, and life-readiness needs, we further explore literature related to self-efficacy and collective efficacy, school counselor leadership, and school counselor-principal-teacher collaboration in the following subsections.

Self-Efficacy and Collective Efficacy

The self-efficacy of school principals, school counselors, and teachers can be closely related to their collective efficacy. When individuals have high levels of self-efficacy, or the belief in one's own ability to succeed in specific tasks or situations (Sehgal et al., 2017), they are more likely to contribute to the collective efficacy of the group. Educators' collective efficacy is defined as "a group's shared belief in its conjoint capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given levels of attainment" (Bandura, 1997, p. 477). The belief in colleagues and their ability to invoke change and move initiatives forward may affect a school's culture and climate. For example, Dilekçi and Limon (2022) highlight that high self-efficacy is strongly related to professional commitment, job satisfaction, instructional behavior, and students' learning.

When educators have the opportunity to collaborate with one another, they may build relationships, share ideas, and learn from one another, which increases the value of collective teacher efficacy. The role that self-efficacy for teachers, school counselors, and principals; and collective teacher efficacy play in regard to student academic achievement can be profound. According to several studies (e.g., Donohoo, 2017; Donohoo, 2018; Goddard & Salloum, 2012; Leithwood et al., 2012; Maynard, 2023; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015), collective teacher efficacy can have a stronger relationship to student achievement than socioeconomic status and race.

By combining their unique expertise and perspectives, school counselors and principals can enhance cultural competence, dismantle racism in schools, and foster inclusive environments (Beasley & Ieva, 2022; Lowery et al., 2018; Lowery, Boyland et al., 2019; Lowery, Mayes et al., 2019; McConnell et al., 2020). School counselors can advocate for students and collaborate with principals to address students' academic and social-emotional needs and develop interventions that support student achievement and success (Gonzales et al., 2022; Wikoff & Wood, 2022). Additionally, collaboration between school counselors and teachers can enhance the effectiveness of counseling interventions and support the academic and social-emotional needs of students (Cholewa et al., 2016; Elam et al., 2019). Effective collaboration requires open and regular communication among school counselors, principals, and teachers through discussions, information sharing, and providing feedback to ensure that stakeholders are informed and involved in the implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs (Dahir et al., 2019; Lowery, Boyland, et al., 2019).

School Counselor Leadership

When school counselors have the opportunity to serve within school leadership cohorts, their professional skills are strengthened, as well as the support they receive from colleagues (Kneale et al., 2018). While working collaboratively, school counselors often have opportunities to enhance their leadership skills, which can help build and sustain culture and increase student academic success (Kneale et al., 2018). Additionally, by participating in leadership roles, school counselors can advocate for the needs of students and contribute their expertise to the leadership team (Harman, 2022). School counselors believe that by stepping up as leaders and advocates they can promote empowerment, self-advocacy, and meaningful change across educational systems and broader communities (Barrow, 2022). School counselors and the work they complete does not happen in isolation, but rather collaboratively, which makes it imperative for them to learn the skills and dispositions of a school leader (Janson et al., 2009).

The ASCA (2019b) *National Model* provides a framework for building a comprehensive school counseling program and emphasizes the importance of clear communication with stakeholders and advocacy for the roles of school counselors. Collaboration between principals and school counselors is crucial for the successful implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs (Dahir & Geesa, 2022; Geesa et al., 2019, 2023; Gonzales et al., 2022; Lowery et al., 2018). Stronger relationships between principals and school counselors are associated with higher job satisfaction, lower turnover for school counselors, and a positive overall school climate (Akyurek & Aypay, 2023; Elam et al., 2019; Geesa et al., 2019; Stone, 2022).

As school leaders, school counselors should implement comprehensive school counseling programs that align with the school's mission and collaborate with school leadership to guide systemic change (Lawrence & Stone, 2019). Leadership practices (e.g., building a foundation for the school counseling program) are positively related to the implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs (Walsh & Gibson, 2019). School counselors should also work with colleagues to address inequities within the school system that may prevent students from reaching their full potential (Beasley & Ieva, 2022; Oehrtman & Dollarhide, 2022).

School Counselor-Principal-Teacher Collaboration

Collaboration among school counselors, principals, and teachers is crucial for developing collective efficacy within a school community (Holzberger & Schiepe-Tiska, 2021; Meyer et al., 2020; Robinson et al., 2008). School counselors and principals can collaborate to align the comprehensive school counseling program goals and activities with the overall school goals and priorities (Cinotti et al., 2022). This collaboration ensures that the school counseling program is integrated into the school's overall educational mission and supports all students' academic, social-emotional, and career development (Gonzales et al., 2022).

The collaboration between school counselors and principals can support a common goal of improving student success in schools (Geesa et al., 2022; Stone, 2022). By working together, they can build social capital throughout schools (Boyland et al., 2019; Dahir & Geesa, 2022; McConnell et al., 2020; Wikoff & Wood, 2022). Additionally, school counselors can advocate

for social justice and equity in collaboration with principals, families, teachers, and community members (Beasley & Ieva, 2022; Boyland et al., 2019; Lowery, Boyland, et al., 2019; McConnell et al., 2020; Oehrtman & Dollarhide, 2022).

Collaboration between school counselors and teachers can enhance students' career development using project-based learning (Limberg et al., 2021). When teachers and school counselors collaborate, they can strengthen their ability to create interventions that address students' academic, social, and emotional needs (Wikoff & Wood, 2022). By working together, they can facilitate students' active learning and respond to real-world challenges, problems, or questions (Limberg et al., 2021).

School counselors and principals agree that time and testing are barriers to effective collaboration (Hannon-Walker et al., 2022). School counselors may face role conflict, ambiguity, and spend time on non-counseling functions, which negatively impacts their job satisfaction (Waalkes et al., 2018). Limited school resources and increased pressure on principals may lead to school counselors being assigned clerical or quasi-administrative functions, which can hinder collaboration (Cinotti et al., 2022). To overcome these challenges, school counselors and principals need to openly communicate, collaborate, and create structures of support (Beasley & Ieva, 2022). Overcoming these barriers and challenges is crucial to fostering effective collaboration between school counselors, principals, and teachers.

As previously mentioned, while recent studies about school counselor-principal and school counselor-teacher collaboration exist, there is limited research about *school counselor-principal-teacher* collaboration. Thus, we sought to explore the topics of school counselor-principal-teacher collaboration and school counselor leadership to meet PK-12 students' needs in this study.

Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

We refer to social capital theory (Leenders, 2014) as a theoretical framework and professional standards from the American School Counselor Association (ASCA; 2019a) and National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA; 2015) as conceptual frameworks to guide our study. These frameworks are described in the following subsections.

Social Capital Theory

Social capital theory guides our research on school leadership collaboration. Leenders (2014) suggests that social capital refers to the social resources that are gained through relationships, or social networks, that promote the achievement of goals of the individuals involved. Kruczek et al. (2022) describe that social capital within schools can be improved by utilizing social networks to build and strengthen factors such as trust, empathy, shared identity, community, respect, and collaboration. Furthermore, building social capital assists individuals and groups of people in creating shared norms, sharing information, and increasing social support (Dahir & Geesa, 2022; Jordan, 2022; Leenders, 2014). Recent research indicated the connection between school counselor-principal collaboration and shared goals, and the improved social capital and efficacy of interventions, to promote educational equity and enhance student

educational programming (e.g., Gibson et al., 2022; Gonzales et al., 2022; Oehrtman & Dollarhide, 2022; Wikoff & Wood, 2022).

In the context of implementing a comprehensive school counseling program, social capital theory suggests that the collaboration and relationships among school counselors, principals, and teachers can contribute to the development of collective efficacy. By working together and leveraging their social connections, these stakeholders can access and mobilize resources, knowledge, and support that are essential for the successful implementation of comprehensive counseling programs (Kruczek et al., 2022).

Professional Association Standards

The National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA) *Professional Standards for Educational Leaders* (2015) and the ASCA's *School Counselor Professional Standards & Competencies* (2019a) include focuses on leadership, collaboration, and efforts to support all students (Boyland et al., 2019; Dahir & Geesa, 2022; Geesa et al., 2022). We refer to these standards from national educational leadership and school counseling associations as we explore how teachers, school counselors, and principals can best collaborate with one another to meet the needs of all students.

In this study, we pose the following research questions:

1. How do school counselors, principals, and teachers perceive their collaboration to develop collective efficacy?
2. In what ways can school counselors participate in school leadership roles in collaboration with principals and teachers to guide comprehensive school counseling programs?
3. How is self-efficacy of school counselors, principals, or teachers related to their collective efficacy?

The mixed-methods we used to answer these questions are described in the following section.

Methods

In our mixed-methods study, participants completed one quantitative electronic survey via Qualtrics (Likert-scale, ranking-, and multiple choice-based questions) and one optional interview. Participants were recruited via e-mail from eight pre-selected participating school districts in one Midwest state. Districts were chosen based on convenience of access to staff. Of the eight districts contacted for participation, eight districts consented to allow their teachers, school counselors, and principals to be contacted about the survey, which demonstrates a 100% school district participation rate. The school districts represented include both rural and suburban school districts with low- to mid-socioeconomic status demographics.

Participants

To better understand the knowledge and implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs, we focused on rural and suburban schools within the state of Iowa due to convenience and access. Across eight unique school districts in Iowa, five school counselors, nine principals, and 118 teachers completed the quantitative survey. Our focus on the state of

Iowa was related to the Stronger Connection Grant, which aimed to provide funding for states to distribute to schools of high need. School districts were able to apply for grant money to help them create and provide a safe school environment for their students (Iowa Department of Education, n.d.).

We had access to 18 school counselors, with a response rate of 28%. The five school counselors who completed the survey identified as female (100%), had a master's degree as their highest degree, and identified as white. Of these school counselors, 40% have 1-5 years of experience, 20% have 6-10 years of experience and 40% have 20 or more years of experience as a school counselor. The average age of the counselors was 51.8. Of the counselors surveyed 40% believed that their free and reduced lunch rate in their district was less than 25% and 60% believed their free and reduced lunch rate was between 25% and 50%.

We had access to 27 principals, with a response rate of 37%. The average age of the nine principal respondents was 50 years old. Of the respondents, 88% declared their race as white, and one participant declined to answer. These principals identified as 56% male and 44% female. The highest degree obtained by 11.2% of respondents was a doctorate, 44.4% of surveyed principals hold an educational specialist's degree, and 44.4% of principals surveyed have a master's degree. In terms of free and reduced lunch rate in schools of the principals surveyed, 11% perceive the rate to be 25% or lower, 33% perceive the rate of students receiving free and reduced lunch to be between 25 and 50%, and 55% of principals surveyed perceive the free and reduced lunch rate to be between 50%-75% of students.

We had access to 481 teachers, with a response rate of 25%. Of the 118 teacher respondents, 20% identified as male, 69% identified as female, and 12% chose not to respond to the question. The average age of the teacher respondent was 44 years old. In terms of race, 86% of respondents identified as white, 2% preferred not to respond, and 12% of respondents did not answer the question. Regarding the degrees teachers hold, 48% of respondents hold a bachelor's degree, 37% hold a master's degree, less than 1% hold a specialist's degree, and 2.5% hold another type of degree. The teachers' perceptions of free and reduced lunch percentage indicate that 17% have a percentage of less than 25% free and reduced, 35% indicated the free and reduced percentage in their district is between 25%-50%, 31% believe that the free and reduced percentage in their district is between 50-75%, and 4% indicated their free and reduced population is over 75% of the students they serve. The overall free and reduced lunch percentage for the eight districts is 41.5% and the state average is 40.7%.

Respondents to the quantitative survey were asked to voluntarily consent to a qualitative follow-up interview. One female school counselor, a male principal and a female principal, and five female teachers took part in individual qualitative interviews. All participants in the qualitative interviews identified as white. Of the eight school districts, five school districts were represented. The school district sizes of the participants varied: one participant was from a school district with less than 200 students, one participant was from a school district with between 300 and 400 students, three participants were from school districts that service between 500 and 600 students, and two participants were from a school district that services between 900 and 1000 students.

Instruments

Survey items included questions regarding: demographic information, perceived efficacy of school counselors' and their roles, collective efficacy perceptions of the school building, school counselors' time allotment for tasks, and school climate and culture. Two sets of interview questions were utilized for 1) school counselors and 2) principals and teachers. Interview questions focused on the following topics: introduction; school counselor roles, responsibilities, and needs to promote comprehensive school counseling programs; school counselors' self-efficacy in their school counseling role; school counselor-principal and/or school counselor-teacher collaboration (collective efficacy) in schools; and school counselors' leadership roles in the implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs.

Data Collection

We collected email addresses of school counselors, principals, and teachers from each school district's websites. The anonymous survey was deployed via Qualtrics in April 2023. This format allowed us to capture data and analyze it in an organized format. Each school district and group had their own unique link. Using separate links allowed us to evaluate data from a district level and school level. The survey links were open for one month and survey completion reminders were sent via e-mail.

When participants completed the quantitative survey, they had the option to consent to one individual interview, which could last up to one hour. Participants indicated their voluntary participation by providing their e-mail address and/or phone number in order for the second author to contact them to schedule an interview. We conducted and recorded all confidential interviews via web/video conferencing technology (i.e., Zoom). All interviews were completed by June 2023. Verbal consent was also obtained from participants for the interview. Interviews were transcribed via Zoom and/or Otter.ai, and the research team checked each transcript for accuracy.

Data Analysis

Survey data from each district were downloaded into school counselor, principal, and teacher Microsoft Excel spreadsheets and coded. The documents were merged to create three separate SPSS files for school counselors, principals, and teachers. We analyzed descriptive statistics, correlations, and regressions of items of interest related to our research questions. From the short form of the Collective Teacher Efficacy Scale created by Goddard (2002), we utilized confirmatory factor analysis by taking the 12 collective efficacy items (six group competency items; three positively worded task analysis items; and 3 negatively worded task analysis items) to create one single collective efficacy measure. Cronbach's alpha was used as a measure of reliability.

Regarding interview data, we first analyzed all transcripts through an open-coding process (Saldaña, 2009). Examples of open codes included: school counselor roles, collaboration goals, school counselor-principal-teacher relationship, and counselors as leaders. Upon completion of open coding all transcripts, we utilized an axial coding process to identify emergent themes in the qualitative data (Saldaña, 2009). Examples of axial codes included:

school counselor support, school counselor/principal/teacher (SCPT) collaboration, school counselor leadership, and school-wide needs. The identified emergent themes are shared in the findings section and quantitative results are reported based on the total number of participants.

Findings

In this mixed-methods study, we collected quantitative and qualitative data. Findings from our data analysis are discussed in the following subsections.

Quantitative Data

We present descriptive statistics, correlation findings, and factor analysis from our quantitative data from the school counselor, principal, and teacher surveys.

Descriptive Statistics

When evaluating descriptive statistics of each unique group (i.e., school counselors, principals, and teachers), we drew quantitative data from five school counselors, nine principals, and 118 teachers (see Table 1). While the number of participants for each unique group varied, we compared the values each group placed on school counselors playing a vital role in the school system, school counselor-teacher collaboration, and school counselor-principal collaboration. Participants also expressed their perceptions of amount of time the school counselors spent with the school leadership team, as well as the positive impact school counselors had on the school. School counselors had a mean of 23.75 in regard to school leadership collaboration, whereas teachers viewed this relationship higher ($M=28.14$) and principals scored their collaboration with school counselors lower ($M=18.83$).

Teachers perceived school counselors spending more time on the school leadership team ($M=25.08$). Principals and school counselors viewed the time school counselors spent with the school leadership team as much less. The principal mean for the amount of time school counselors spend with school leadership was 4.40, whereas the mean from the school counselors' data was 8.67.

One question was asked that pertained to the school counselor playing a vital role in the school system. These means increased with each group with the school counselors expressing the role as less vital ($M=4.00$), and teachers ($M=4.15$) and principals ($M=4.33$) seeing the role as more vital.

School counselor and teacher collaboration is an important concept in a school system. Individuals in these roles can collaborate to help formulate plans for students and best practices to help students be successful. Principals' perceptions of the amount of time school counselors collaborate with teachers was low ($M=3.0$). School counselors had a higher mean ($M=12.25$) in regard to the amount of time they collaborate with teachers. Teachers surveyed viewed the time they spend collaborating with school counselors higher ($M=23.8$).

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics

Respondents	Variable	Min	Max	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
School counselors (<i>n</i> =5)	Collective efficacy mean	2.83	3.92	3.31	0.45
	Self-efficacy mean	3.47	4.58	3.99	0.46
	Counselor role vital	2.00	5.00	4.00	1.23
	School counselor positive impact	4.00	5.00	4.60	0.55
	School leader collaboration	2.00	53.00	23.75	21.30
	Teacher collaboration	4.00	28.00	13.25	10.30
	School leadership team	4.00	17.00	8.67	7.20
Teachers (<i>n</i> =89)	Collective efficacy mean	1.85	4.62	3.46	0.54
	Self-efficacy mean	2.67	4.96	3.96	0.45
	Counselor role vital	1.00	5.00	4.15	0.95
	School counselor positive impact	1.00	5.00	3.96	1.09
	School leader collaboration	0.00	100.00	28.14	27.45
	Teacher collaboration	0.00	100.00	23.80	29.81
	School leadership team	0.00	92.00	25.08	27.75
Principals (<i>n</i> =9)	Collective efficacy mean	3.25	4.67	3.79	0.51
	Self-efficacy mean	2.39	4.56	3.87	0.77
	Counselor role vital	3.00	5.00	4.33	0.71
	School counselor positive impact	3.00	5.00	4.22	0.68
	School leader collaboration	3.00	50.00	18.83	16.62
	Teacher collaboration	1.00	5.00	3.00	1.90
	School leadership team	1.00	18.00	4.40	7.60

Note. Respondents are from 25 school buildings.

Correlation Findings

We investigated the correlations of collective efficacy, self-efficacy, and variables related to the impact and role of the school counselor and the collaborations the school counselor has with teachers, principals, and the school leadership team. Findings from data related to teachers' perceptions demonstrated significant positive correlations between teacher self-efficacy and collective efficacy (see Table 2). Other significant correlations from teacher perceptions at the <.01 level are the collaboration of teachers with school leaders, and the collaboration of teachers and school counselors having a positive impact on the overall school climate. Another positive

correlation is the counselor having a vital role in the school’s leadership team and school counselors having a positive impact on the climate.

Table 2

Teacher Perceptions

Variable	Collective teacher efficacy	Self-efficacy	School leadership team	School leader collaboration	Teacher collaboration	School counselor role vital
Self-efficacy	.251**					
School leadership team	0.127	0.058				
School leader collaboration	0.195	0.079	.708**			
Teacher collaboration	0.165	0.246	.767**	.795**		
School counselor role vital	0.979	0.003	0.089	-0.015	0.155	
School counselor positive impact	0.117	0.038	.257*	0.104	.262*	.539**

Note. ** p <.01, * p <.05

When we evaluated the correlations of the perceptions of principals, we found that collective efficacy and the role of the counselor was vital to the leadership team. Collective teacher efficacy and the school counselor having a positive impact on school climate were positively correlated and statistically significant (see Table 3). The correlations based on the quantitative data from school counselors did not demonstrate any statistical significance (see Table 4). However, we found it interesting that school leader collaboration was negatively correlated with the school counselor’s self-efficacy and collective efficacy. This means that as the Likert points decreased for school leader collaboration, a school counselor’s self-efficacy and collective efficacy decreased.

Table 3

Principal Perceptions

Variable	Collective teacher efficacy	Self efficacy	School leadership team	School leader collaboration	Teacher collaboration	School counselor role vital
Self-efficacy	-0.299					
School leadership team	0.809	0.243				
School leader collaboration	0.318	0.034	-0.019			
Teacher collaboration	0.143	-0.452	0.431	-0.228		
School counselor role vital	.769**	-0.493	0.612	0.516	0.192	
School counselor positive impact	.859**	-0.5	0.192	0.516	0.192	.884**

Note. ** p <.01, * p < .05

Table 4

School Counselor Perceptions

Variable	Collective teacher efficacy	Self-efficacy	School leadership team	School leader collaboration	Teacher collaboration	School counselor role vital
Self-efficacy	0.433					
School leadership team	0.949	0.117				
School leader collaboration	-0.514	-0.508	-0.559			
Teacher collaboration	0.777	0.114	0.140	0.860		
School counselor role vital	0.351	0.472	0.559	0.399	0.686	
School counselor positive impact	0.713	0.759	-0.917	-0.917	0.146	0.000

Note. ** p <.01

Factor Analysis

We began analysis by creating measures for collective efficacy, self-efficacy, and school counselor role for each set of data (i.e., school counselors, principals, and teachers). Given that all constructs are well established by the literature, we used confirmatory factor analysis. All three factors were strong (collective efficacy, $\alpha = .791$.; self-efficacy $\alpha = .918$; school counselor role $\alpha = .944$).

Qualitative Data

Based on data analysis of interviews with teachers, principals, and a school counselor, emergent themes include: 1) perceptions of school counselor self- and collective efficacy vary; 2) school counselors, principals, and teachers benefit from positive collaboration; 3) collaboration requires need for time, training, and communication; 4) barriers to implement comprehensive school counseling programs exist; and 5) perspectives of school counselor leadership roles differ. These emergent themes are described in the following subsections.

Perceptions of School Counselor Self- and Collective Efficacy Vary

School counselors often navigate the assignment of inappropriate roles and responsibilities and limitations set by school districts' priorities, which have negative implications for school counselors' perceptions of their self- and collective efficacy within their school. When school counselors are asked to complete roles that do not align with the roles outlined within a comprehensive school counseling program or roles the school counselor has not been trained in, self-efficacy and collective efficacy can wane. These factors are also relevant in teachers' and principals' perceptions of their school counselor's efficacy and collective efficacy, based on interview responses. Several participants highlighted issues of time or the assignment of inappropriate roles in their perceptions of efficacy.

According to Principal 1, "when I'm thinking of my specific counselor, I think that she has the ability to complete her role to the best of her ability, within the scope of time that she has." Additionally, Principal 1 recognizes that their school counselor does not focus on college- and career-readiness with students because, "there's a lot of other needs that need to be addressed, and it's just not something that our district maybe prioritizes. Someone else teaches that and focuses on that." Principal 1's comments may illustrate how they view their school counselor's efficacy as positive, while acknowledging that collective efficacy may suffer due to inadequate time and low prioritization or the lack of assignment of a career- and college-readiness focus to the school counselor.

Similar concerns existed among other participants. Counselor 1 noted, "it (collaboration) doesn't happen, because there's just not enough time in the day for that with a balance, because you have to balance it out with their (students') academic time." Teacher 3 also outlines a lack of proper time for school counselors to meet students' needs by relating this to the school counselor's time spent on inappropriate roles. Teacher 3 explained, "so she's teaching nearly half the day, and then she's handling student concerns, but also assisting with some administrative tasks." Teacher 1 discussed how the school counselor in the building quietly completes tasks and

takes care of things in the background and others don't even know what is being completed. Although principals and teachers may view their school counselor's self-efficacy positively within the roles that they are assigned, educational leaders view time and inappropriate roles as contributing to negative perceptions of collective efficacy or the ability to meet students' needs.

School Counselors, Principals, and Teachers Benefit from Positive Collaboration

Positive collaboration can benefit school stakeholders in multiple ways. According to Principal 1,

we (principal and school counselor) meet regularly, multiple times a day to talk about students, things that are going on, meeting with students for a variety of different things. . . . that collaboration piece is high, as far as the teachers are concerned, we have lots of staff meetings together to talk about student needs, academic, social, emotional, and then trying to brainstorm ways, to help those students.

While staff recognize the importance of school counselors in schools, their roles to provide direct and indirect services may vary, as do principals' perceptions of collaboration. For example, Principal 2 noted, "I would say for the most part, that's (school counselor-teacher collaboration) been a very positive working relationship where they've tried to work together to find solutions for students academically and social-emotionally." Teacher 4 shares this sentiment, stating "I think a big strength of our administration is our relationships with our administrators and amongst us as teachers, including the counselor. I think that's something we do very, very well here." When principals can work together and utilize their unique skills in combination with one another, positive collaboration may form, providing an environment for students to flourish in.

Teacher 1 described school counselor-principal-teacher collaboration as "something that requires probably daily collaboration. I would guess student needs change daily, so they need the group- the teacher, the principal, and the school counselor - all need to collaborate." For school counselors, as leaders, to collaborate with principals and teachers, greater understanding of their roles is needed. Within the interview, two participants may have spoken to this position. School Counselor 1 shared, "the way our meetings are set up has changed drastically. . . . There is a very large disconnect that has been growing with our teachers in our building, and I think that's a big part of it." Congruent with School Counselor 1's concerns about a disconnect between teachers, school counselors, and principals, Teacher 2 stated that discipline is also a consideration.

Teacher 2 reported,

What teachers see is a lack of discipline. I know teachers don't always know both sides of the story, but we get a lot of kids that like to play mom versus dad and they will get in trouble in a class and then go to the counselor or principal, and then seem to get out of it - is the perception of the teachers.

Based on participants' responses, it is possible that greater communication and understanding of one another's roles may benefit perceptions of collaboration and ultimately aid in meeting the needs of students.

Collaboration Requires Need for Time, Training, and Communication

The importance of collaboration and various barriers to collaboration were apparent within the participants' responses during the optional interview. Collective efficacy may suffer when barriers are present that impair educational leaders' abilities to establish and maintain collaboration, even if these educational leaders are proponents of collaboration. Therefore, highlighting only one of these aspects without acknowledging the other could be misleading, providing support for combining both ideas into one theme explained within the two subsections below.

Importance of Collaboration. Collaboration among school counselors, principals, and teachers can have significant positive implications for meeting the many unique needs of students and contributing to their success. In our study, these educational professionals exhibited understanding and agreement with the vitality of collaboration and developing collective efficacy. For example, School Counselor 1 reported, "I think it's a really important role to be able to collaborate and bring people together. I think the school counselor has a big part in bridging that gap between teachers and administration." Teacher 1 also emphasized the importance of collaboration, sharing that they can see evidence of collaboration between educational leaders daily.

Notably, it appears that this sentiment remains even where there are barriers to collaboration. School Counselor 1 mentioned that it can be challenging to connect with their mentee due to time constraints, exemplifying the discrepancy between valuing collaboration and having the appropriate means to promote it. Similarly, some participants discussed instances in which collaboration amongst school counselors, teachers, and principals was lacking, despite the collective belief in the positive influence of collaboration. While Teacher 3 shared disappointment with their school's current level of collaboration, they insisted that it is critical to be "flexible and keep open lines of communication."

Needs For Developing Collective Efficacy. Developing collective efficacy requires thoughtful collaboration, and this collaboration may be impaired by a variety of barriers within schools. In our study, educational leaders specifically identified issues of communication, human resources, time, training, and support. School Counselor 1 emphasized the importance of "honesty" and "transparency" among school counselors, teachers, and principals in developing collaboration. They also outlined a district-wide need for a behavioral interventionist or other mental health professional who can focus on providing extra support for students with higher needs. Not only does this exemplify demand for mental health professionals in schools, but it also taps into the requirement of time, which Teacher 4 labeled as a "hurdle" to fostering collective efficacy.

Two principals, as potential advocates and agents of change also highlighted key points regarding needs to develop collective efficacy. Principal 1 identified continued mental health training and knowledge of available resources for school counselors and teachers; a statement that is consistent with other research demonstrating how to best support students (Geesa et al., 2021; Kneeled et al., 2017; Randick et al., 2018; Somers & Wheeler, 2022). Principal 2 rounds out the discussion of school-wide needs to foster collaboration by stating, "well, I would just say,

in probably all cases, to provide support and to try and find ways to alleviate their (school counselors') burden and other areas where we can find them help."

Barriers to Implement Comprehensive School Counseling Programs Exist

Comprehensive school counseling programs are a fundamental way in which school leaders can meet the academic; social-emotional; and career-, college-, and life-readiness needs of students. Partnered with necessary advocacy from teachers and principals, school counselors are well-equipped to act as leaders in the implementation of these programs. However, participants in our interview delineated several barriers to the implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs.

Teacher 2 shared that collaboration in developing and implementing comprehensive counseling programs is largely something that occurs during the beginning of the year, rather than throughout, suggesting that time may play a role in limited collaboration. Two participants also outlined concerns regarding staff resources. Principal 1 stated, "If we had another counselor, we had someone else available to kind of take on some of those mental health pieces, I think that maybe we would have more of a structured school counseling program; more comprehensive." Principal 2 shared concerns about staff turnover noting, "again it's been the lack of continuity that has not allowed somebody to come in and just really create the full program and then continue to push."

The interview transcripts additionally revealed that support, on multiple levels, is a necessary component for school counselors to be able to adequately develop and implement comprehensive school counseling programs. Principal 1 noted that their district does not utilize the *ASCA National Model* (ASCA, 2019b), which creates barriers for school counselors. According to Principal 1, "I try to utilize it as best as I can in my building, but it's difficult when we don't utilize it as a district." Similarly, Teacher 2 emphasized difficulty developing and implementing comprehensive school counseling programs stating, "I think we have veteran teachers here that aren't always willing to do new things, or schedule changes seem to bother a lot of us the older we get." Based on this information, advocacy within schools and within school districts as a whole, is an integral part of school counselors' ability to implement comprehensive school counseling programs.

Perspectives of School Counselor Leadership Roles Differ

It is apparent that school counselor self-efficacy, and therefore students' needs and success, are impacted by the roles and responsibilities assigned to school counselors. The same concept extends to leadership roles, in which school counselors have the opportunity to utilize their professional training to advocate for students and sustain a positive school culture. Despite the importance of such roles, professionals within our interview revealed a lack of consensus about school counselors' leadership opportunities. In addition, the types of school counselor leadership roles are varied.

In some instances, participants identified several leadership opportunities for school counselors or otherwise emphasized the school counselor's efficacy in these roles. For example, School Counselor 1 identified their main leadership roles as leading and implementing social-

emotional learning and “CharacterStrong” programs. Principal 2 highlighted other types of leadership roles that their school counselor is involved with, including assisting with National Honor Society, reviewing and promoting the use of data, working to close gaps among at-risk students, and developing action plans for students. Teacher 1 generally shared that their school counselor “does make a good leader in a lot of different leadership capacities.” In other cases, participants indicated that there are few leadership roles available for school counselors. When asked about their school counselors’ leadership roles, Teacher 3 stated that they are on the “building leadership team, which is made up of the school counselor and several other faculty members,” whereas Teacher 2 was unable to identify a single leadership role assumed by their school counselor.

Discussion

In this study, we sought to explore three research questions. Based on findings from our data and connections to research and standards, responses to the research questions are included in the following subsections.

Research Question 1: How do school principals, school counselors, and teachers perceive their collaboration to develop collective efficacy?

Collaboration is a fundamental aspect of collective efficacy for educational leaders and is prevalent throughout the standards set by ASCA (2019a) and NPBEA (2015). According to ASCA (2019a), educational leaders should collaborate with education stakeholders, school staff, and families to aid student academic achievement. Previous researchers have also identified the importance of collaboration amongst educational leaders in developing collective efficacy (Donohoo, 2017, 2018; Goddard & Salloum, 2012; Leithwood et al., 2012; Maynard, 2023; Wikoff & Wood, 2022). Furthermore, collaboration can assist educational leaders in developing a more positive school climate, eliminating barriers to success, and building social capital (Dahir & Geesa, 2022; Gonzales et al., 2022; Lowery, Boyland et al., 2019; Lowery, Mayes et al., 2019; McConnell et al., 2020; Wikoff & Wood, 2022).

Within our interview, Principal 1 specifically mentioned their school’s mission statement when discussing collaboration, stating “every student, every day. Just focusing on all of their needs...just being really mindful of all the kids that we serve and all the needs that we have.” NPBEA (2015) and ASCA (2019a) both outline the importance of developing a mission for the school to help promote the success and well-being of students, and to utilize this mission in creating goals for programs and interventions. Furthermore, NPBEA (2015) Professional Standard 7 for Educational Leaders explains the need for educational leaders to “provide opportunities for collaborative examination of practice, collegial feedback, and collective learning” (p. 15). Aligned with this standard, in our study, Counselor 1 shared that they collaborate with their principal and teachers through “meetings, small group meetings, and talking about specific students with teams.” Principal 2 also spoke to the value of consultation among educational leaders and how consultation aids students by stating,

I think that they [teachers] do a lot of talking between the middle school teachers and the high school counselor about what would be appropriate scheduling for classes for students, so they can be successful academically, their first year.

Data is an additional area of consideration for developing collective efficacy among educational leaders. Previous research indicated that utilizing data in schools can help educational leaders create developmentally appropriate curriculum, identify needs, establish goals, close opportunity gaps, and improve student outcomes (e.g., Dahir & Geesa, 2022; Rock et al., 2017). Teacher 1 outlines this position well, discussing their school's use of a program to evaluate students' well-being. According to Teacher 1,

There are enough questions through Close Gap that it will indicate that if there's a need for myself or for the principal, or for the guidance counselor to step in and do a follow up, check up with them to make sure that they're in the right state of mind... The whole thing takes about two minutes, and then I will get a message only if a child is not in a good place. That day that same message goes to the principal. The same message goes to the counselor.

Aligned with NPBEA (2015) Professional Standard 2 for Educational Leaders, school counselors, principals, and teachers can utilize technology and data to promote learning and student success.

Within the interview, Principal 1 noted their school counselor's role as an "in between" person that students and staff can go to for support if they "don't feel comfortable going to the principal." Principal 1 shared how the school counselor can then collaborate with the principal or teachers to help meet the needs brought to them. In this way, Principal 1 might be tapping into the idea of advocacy. NPBEA (2015) Professional Standard 8 for Educational Leaders explains that educational leaders should advocate for student needs, the school, and the district itself, aligned with Principal 1's statements. Wikoff and Wood (2022) have also discussed the integral role of advocacy in developing collective efficacy by explaining that school counselors can assist in student achievement through their advocacy activities, such as individual counseling, providing resources, educating other leaders within the school, and promoting positive school environments.

Research Question 2: In what ways can school counselors participate in school leadership roles in collaboration with school principals and teachers to guide comprehensive school counseling programs?

According to NPBEA (2015), effective educational leaders "design and implement job-embedded and other opportunities for professional learning collaboratively with faculty and staff." However, school counselors who are serving in small, rural school districts often operate in collaboration with the principal by providing support, which Counselor 1 described as their main role. Teacher 4 commented that the school counselor within the district serves on multiple leadership teams that are geared toward behavior and academics. While ASCA (2019a) indicates that school counselors should specifically act as leaders in developing and implementing school counseling programs, Dahir and Geesa (2022) explained that school counselors often serve in a

reactive role in situations as opposed to serving in defined roles related to comprehensive school counseling programs. Teacher 3 emphasized this point, stating, “we do a lot of reactive things, and I would like to see a few more proactive things.”

Counselor 1 and Principal 1 indicated that the nature of small, rural schools requires all individuals to “wear multiple hats.” Attributed to this sentiment, Principal 1 noted that it can be difficult to find time for school counselors to implement comprehensive school counseling programs. According to Harman (2022), school counselors can often have caseloads that are overwhelming, and are assigned roles and duties that are not in alignment with a comprehensive school counseling program. Importantly, educational leaders are expected to manage staff resources by assigning them roles that advance their ability to address the needs of students (NPBEA, 2015, p. 17). This can impact the way in which principals and school counselors interact, as well as the leadership roles in which school counselors can serve.

Additionally, some participants highlighted the role of professional characteristics as being an important element of leadership roles for school counselors. NPBEA (2015) outlines that developing and maintaining “open, productive, caring, and trusting” relationships amongst school stakeholders is integral for educational leaders to be effective in promoting student success. Aligned with this NPBEA standard, Principal 2 discussed how the school counselor interacts with students and teachers noting the value of being open and inviting, as well as being a role model. Combining the professional characteristics of school stakeholders can aid in effectively meeting the needs of students and working toward positive outcomes (McCarty et al., 2014; Rock et al., 2017; Walker, 2006). As the dynamic of education continues to change, it is imperative for principals, school counselors, and teachers to collaborate with one another. When collaboration occurs, the school counselor can effectively serve in a preventative role.

Research Question 3: How is self-efficacy of school principals, school counselors, or teachers related to their collective efficacy?

The analysis of our quantitative data indicates that teacher perceptions of self-efficacy strongly correlated to their perceptions of the collective efficacy in their respective buildings. This finding is important, yet unsurprising, as NPBEA (2015) Educational Leader Professional Standard 6 explains that positive student outcomes can be achieved through educational leaders’ promoting the continual improvement of both individual and collective instructional competencies within their schools. Furthermore, through collaborative relationships, teachers, school counselors, and principals can utilize collective social capital to improve both their own performance and student success (Özbilen & Çekiç, 2022). Tschannen-Moran and colleagues (1998) explain that a culture of low self-efficacy within a school can be pervasive and affect educational leaders who otherwise have high self-efficacy, likening this concept to the feeling of being on an island, isolated from others and collaborative efforts. Therefore, by maintaining their individual effectiveness, principals can foster “mutual accountability” among teachers and school counselors to aid in students’ academic success (NPBEA, 2015).

Through participant interviews in this study, several teachers perceived collaboration among teachers and school counselors as high, which may lead to a strong sense of collective efficacy. Similarly, some participants supplied positive comments regarding their school

counselor's or teacher's self-efficacy, demonstrating how one's self-efficacy can impact collective efficacy. For example, Principal 1 stated, "I think my school counselor's self-efficacy is high. She has a lot of knowledge and skill she brought in like BHIS homework experience to us, like with family counseling, which is really beneficial." In this way, Principal 1 is tapping into the benefits the whole school receives due to their school counselor's self-efficacy. Similarly, Counselor 1 shared,

Sometimes, I will have teachers that will ask me to talk to a student because they just seem off, like they're not doing well in their class. So academically, those pieces are kind of falling apart, and it's like a red flag.

Through empowerment and trust by principals, school counselors and teachers can utilize and grow their unique professional capacities to meet the needs of students, in alignment with the school's shared values and mission (NPBEA, 2015). When principals, school counselors, and teachers collaborate and combine their knowledge and abilities, positive student outcomes may be more likely to improve (Beasley & Ieva, 2022; Rock et al., 2017).

Implications

Previous studies indicate the importance of collaboration among school counselors, principals, and teachers in working to meet academic; social-emotional; and career-, college-, and life-readiness needs of students, particularly through comprehensive school counseling programs (e.g., Cinotti et al., 2022; Limberg et al., 2022). The *ASCA National Model* provides these professionals with a framework to develop and implement a comprehensive school counseling program (ASCA, 2019b). However, in this study, interview participants were largely unaware of or did not utilize the *ASCA National Model* (ASCA, 2019b) and the ASCA standards (ASCA, 2019a), or focused only on specific aspects of the model and standards. Therefore, our findings indicate a need for more attention on training for all educational professionals regarding the *ASCA National Model* and ASCA standards. Similar to previous research identifying the need for greater training on social and emotional learning for educational professionals, this additional knowledge may have positive implications for combatting barriers to delivering comprehensive school counseling programs and collaboration (Geesa et al., 2021). Furthermore, school principals and teachers should be cognizant and supportive of the appropriate roles and responsibilities of school counselors, in addition to other school stakeholders, to aid in effectively meeting the needs of students and creating a higher functioning education system (Gibson et al., 2022).

Social capital theory highlights the role of social networks and relationships in facilitating the exchange of information, ideas, and resources (Mellin et al., 2015). Through collaboration, school counselors, principals, and teachers can share their expertise, experiences, and best practices, leading to the development of collective knowledge and skills (Dahir & Geesa, 2022). This collective knowledge can enhance the effectiveness of the school counseling program and contribute to the collective efficacy of the stakeholders involved. While the optional interview yielded important perspectives on self- and collective efficacy, collaboration, barriers, and leadership roles, there was limited input from school counselors. As such, a focus on increased school counselor participation and input pertaining to collaboration and leadership within

schools would address a gap in the literature regarding school counselors' perceptions of collective efficacy. Additionally, future research may benefit from the exploration of the perceptions of pre- and in-service school counselors, principals, and teachers across more diverse locations and demographic or cultural domains.

Limitations

In this study, we focused on a convenience sample of eight school districts located in the state of Iowa. The school districts surveyed consisted of one suburban school district and seven rural school districts. Of the school districts in Iowa, 81% of school districts service 300-2,499 students. With our focus on one Midwest state, we recognize that our results may not fully reflect perceptions regarding collaboration, leadership, and needs of educational leaders within schools located in other geographical locations. For example, the perceptions of school counselors, teachers, and principals may differ in urban schools or schools with lower socioeconomic status.

Although we remained mindful of the schools' academic schedules, the timing of the deployment for the survey created barriers in scheduling interviews with participants. While the optional interview yielded limited results generally, both the survey and interview yielded especially limited results pertaining to school counselor input. Furthermore, it is possible that our single case study design may have implications for the reliability and external validity of our results. Based on the analysis of our qualitative data, we identified five emergent themes. We recognize that further relevant themes may be present within our qualitative data that were not identified within our coding processes.

Conclusion

The needs of PK-12 students in various educational settings may extend beyond that of academic support and career- and college-readiness to include social-emotional, psychological, and personal needs. As educational leaders consider how to best address inequities within schools, it is imperative to develop and sustain collaborative relationships among school counselors, principals, and teachers. Through studying the perceptions of how these leaders interact, we recognize that their collaboration affects their perceptions of their self- and collective efficacy, which are imperative factors in meeting the academic, social-emotional, college-, career-, and life-readiness needs of students. As described by ASCA (2019b), the implementation of schoolwide comprehensive school counseling programs directly relates to students' unique needs. To effectively promote these practices and challenge the status quo, attention should be paid to the quality of PK-12 school leaders' collaborative relationships with fellow school leaders and stakeholders (e.g., teachers, school counselors, students, community partners) and the development of collective efficacy among teachers, principals, and school counselors. Individuals may benefit from pre- and in-service professional learning regarding how best to understand roles and collaborate with one another in schools to better support all students and increase social capital throughout schools.

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