

3-1-2014

# School Counselors' Activities in Predominantly African American Urban Schools: An Exploratory Study

Lacretia Dye

*Western Kentucky University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/mijoc>

---

## Recommended Citation

Dye, L. (2014). School Counselors' Activities in Predominantly African American Urban Schools: An Exploratory Study, Michigan Journal of Counseling, 41(1), 18-37. doi:10.22237/mijoc/1393632120

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Open Access Journals at DigitalCommons@WayneState. It has been accepted for inclusion in Michigan Journal of Counseling: Research, Theory and Practice by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@WayneState.

***School Counselors' Activities in Predominantly African American Urban Schools: An Exploratory Study***

**Lacretia Dye**

**Western Kentucky University**

**Abstract**

A total of 102 school counselors who worked in predominantly African American urban schools in Michigan were surveyed to ascertain how frequently they engaged in school counseling activities as conceptualized by the American School Counseling Association. Additionally, this exploratory study sought to determine whether there were differences in frequency of reported activities according to demographic characteristics. Implications, limitations, and directions for future research are provided.

**School Counselors' Activities in Predominantly African American Urban Schools: An Exploratory Study**

Increasing criticism of public education in United States cities and metropolitan areas has prompted members of educational specialties (e.g., teacher education, school administration, school counselor education) to lead urban school reform initiatives (Holcomb-McCoy, 2005b). School Counseling has joined the urban school reform movement. In particular, The American School Counseling Association's (ASCA) development of the National Standards and the National Model (ASCA, 2005), as well as the Transforming School Counseling Initiative a component of the Education Trust (2003), are responses by members of the counseling profession to contribute to the most recent school reform efforts.

The ASCA National Model is a call for school counselors to design, coordinate, implement, manage, and evaluate comprehensive school counseling programs. In particular, the Model is a call to action for school counselors to promote student success by closing the existing achievement gap between underachieving students (many of whom are students of color or poor) and their

Lacretia Dye, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Counseling and Student Affairs at Western Kentucky University. She is a former school counselor and community mental health counselor. For over a decade she has counseled families and children as well as supervised counselors in training. Her research interests are in the areas of urban education, urban school counselor preparation and using heart, mind and body mindfulness in counseling.

more advantaged peers (ASCA, 2005).

The Transforming School Counseling Initiative extended ASCA's call to action for school counselors and with regard to how they serve students in urban schools. According to Lee (2005), urban schools largely reflect their neighborhood/residential environment and are typically in geographical areas characterized by a high concentration of people of color, higher rates of poverty per capita, and inequities in the educational system. Within this context, urban school educators have had to contend with a lack of resources, high drop-out rates, and institutional racism (Butler, 2003; Holcomb-McCoy, 1998, 2005, 2010; Moore, Henfield & Owens, 2008; Owens, Pernice-Duca, & Thomas, 2009). Based on these contextual issues that confront urban school personnel, the National Center for Transforming School Counseling made the following recommendations. First the school counseling profession should shift its focus to meet the needs of students for whom schools have been the least successful -low-income students and students of color. Second school counselors should be trained to serve as effective advocates for these particular student populations (Education Trust, 2011; Forbes, 2007; Martin, 2002; Martin, 2007).

Empirical evidence on school counselor activities that are reflective of these initiatives has emerged in the school counseling literature. For example, Holcomb-McCoy and Mitchell (2005) examined the activities of 102 school counselors who resided in six urban cities on the east coast (e.g. New York City, Newark, New Jersey). The study's participants perceived low family function, lower academic achievement, and poverty as prevalent issues facing urban schools. The authors acknowledged the need for school counselors in urban settings to be able to work in schools that offer minimal educational opportunities to their students, diminished access to resources, and unstable financial funding. They recommended that future studies should be devoted to examining school counseling activities that specifically address the academic needs of low income students and students of color. Similarly, in a 2009 study of 60 school counselors employed in urban school districts, Owens et. al. (2009) found that school counselors were overwhelmed with addressing issues such as high dropout rate prevention and encouraging low achieving students to be successful.

School counselors are ethically bound to develop comprehensive school counseling programs that advocate for and affirm all students from diverse backgrounds (ASCA, 2005). The primary reason for having a comprehensive guidance program in place is to clearly articulate what school counselors do in that particular school or school district. Although the role of school counselors has been studied and described in urban schools, there is a dearth of information available on the activities of school counselors in urban schools that are predominately African American. Furthermore, when school counseling practicum students were placed in predominantly African American schools,

they observed that there was a discrepancy between what they had learned about school counseling and what urban school counselors actually do (Holcomb-McCoy & Johnston, 2008). Consequently, the purpose of the current study was to investigate to what extent do counselors within predominantly African American urban schools implement activities prescribed by the ASCA National Model.

The findings from this study fill a void in the literature because school counselor activities which reflect a comprehensive school counseling program in predominantly African American urban schools have never been examined. Both practicing school counselors, as well as administrators, can gain appropriate and realistic insight from the results of this study. This insight, in turn, may impact school leadership policy and practice. Actions toward maintaining, improving and creating new policies to promote effective school counseling activities specific for students in predominantly African American urban environments is essential. Through the use of the ASCA National Model (2005) as a framework for school counseling programs, the following research questions were addressed:

1. What activities recommended by the ASCA National Model received the most and least emphasis by counselors in predominantly African American urban schools?
2. Are there differences in the frequency of reported activities as prescribed by the ASCA National Model among school counselors in predominantly African American urban schools according to demographic characteristics: level of employment, years employed as a school counselor at current school, and number of students enrolled at school?

## **Method**

### **Participants**

The participants of this study were individuals who were employed at the time of the study in the position of elementary, middle, or high school counselor in a school that is predominately African American (at least 60% student body is African American) in the major urban centers (Ann Arbor, Benton Harbor, Detroit and its surrounding metropolitan areas, Flint, Grand Rapids, Lansing, Kalamazoo, Saginaw, Muskegon, Muskegon Heights, Buena Vista, Holland, Ypsilanti and Willow Run) in the state of Michigan. Four hundred ninety two public school building representatives within the state of Michigan with over 60 percent African American population were contacted to identify if there is a school counselor and the school counselor's contact information. Of the 492 schools only 255 schools identified an individual employed in the position of school counselor.

In consideration to the current school budget crisis in the state of Michigan that often reflects the lay-off of school counselors, the researcher sought to

obtain data from a declining population. Therefore, the sample included each individual within the population who responded with a completed and useable survey. There was a response rate of 41% with 105 surveys returned (A 41% response rate is exceptionally well for snail mail surveys). Only 102 or 40% were usable. Additional participant characteristics are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1  
*Participant Personal Characteristics*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Sex</b>		
Female	89	87.3
Male	13	12.7
<b>Age</b>		
20-30 years	10	9.8
31-40 years	36	35.3
41-50 years	20	19.6
51-60 years	28	27.5
61 years and over	8	7.8
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>		
African American	61	59.8
Asian	0	0.0
Caucasian	35	34.4
Hispanic/Latino	1	1.0
Native American	0	0.0
Multi-racial	5	4.9
<b>Highest Degree earned</b>		
Bachelor's	1	1.0
Master's	94	92.2
Specialist	4	3.9
Doctorate	3	2.9

Table 2  
*Frequencies and Percentages of Participant Work Setting*

Variable	f	%
<b>School level of employment</b>		
Elementary	18	17.6
Middle	16	15.7
High School	55	53.9
Combination/Other	13	12.7
<b>Years as a school counselor at current school</b>		
0-5	60	58.8
6-10	13	12.7
11-15	8	7.8
16-20	10	9.8
21 and above	11	10.8
<b>Number of students in school</b>		
1-200	7	6.9
201-400	12	11.8
401-600	29	28.4
601-800	21	20.6
801-1000	18	17.6
1001 and above	15	14.7
<b>School counselor caseload</b>		
1-200	19	18.6
201-400	52	50.9
401-600	22	21.5
601-800	5	4.9
801-1000	4	3.9
1001 and above	0	0

## Measures

**School Counselor Activity Rating Scale.** The School Counselor Activity Rating Scale (SCARS) is designed to measure both the frequency with which a school counselor actually performs a work activity and the frequency with which the school counselor would prefer to perform a work activity (Scarborough, 2005). Work activities refer to school counseling activities recommended by the ASCA (2005) National Model and The National Standards for School Counseling Programs (Campbell & Dahir, 1997) within the categories of curriculum, coordination, consultation, counseling, and other interventions.

Users rate the frequency of the 48 work activities using a 5-point verbal frequency scale: 5 = always, 4 = frequently, 3 = occasionally, 2 = rarely, 1 = never. A higher score indicates a higher frequency of a particular activity. For the purpose of this study, respondents were asked to only complete the actual time data. The researcher's choice to collect actual data was an attempt to avoid the common practice in educational research of identifying discrepancies and deficiencies in urban settings. Instead the researcher was only interested in

exploring the import activities that participants actually performed not what they preferred to perform.

**Demographic data.** A 13-item demographic questionnaire, developed by the researcher, was used to indicate the characteristics of the participants. This section of the survey consisted of 13 items that obtained information about age, sex, race/ethnicity, school setting in which counselor works, employment demographic variables, professional training, and activity.

## Procedures

A tailored design method (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2009) was implemented to collect data. Dillman et al. (2009) suggested that researchers implement a system of multiple contacts that varied in method and content. Important to consider is the timing of each contact. A brief and personalized pre-notice letter was mailed to 255 school counselors that introduced the researcher, informed the recipient that he or she would be receiving a mailed invitation to complete a questionnaire, described the purpose of the study, and asked for his or her participation. One week after mailing the pre-notice letter, a second letter was mailed. A third and final contact was sent one week following the mailing of the survey. One hundred two usable surveys were returned representing a response rate of 40%.

## Data Analysis

Responses to research question one were explored using descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics are used to describe the basic features of data (Howell, 2002) including the frequency and central tendency of responses. For each survey item, the number and percentage of counselors performing each activity at each degree of frequency was calculated. These results are used to describe the sample.

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was employed to permit the researcher to compare the effects of demographic variables on participants' scores on the SCARS. The test was used to explore whether any significant differences in the mean response in regard to the frequency of counseling activities on the basis of demographic variables (a) level of employment, (b) years employed as a counselor at current school, and (c) number of students enrolled at school.

## Results

### **Research Question 1: What activities recommended by the ASCA National Model received the greatest and least emphasis by counselors in predominately African American urban schools?**

Previous researchers, using the School Counseling Rating Scale, reported the number and percentage of counselors performing each activity at each degree of frequency (i.e., 50% of the respondents) at varied thresholds (Berry, 2006; Gloster, 2009). Of the 48 activities listed in the School Counseling Activity Rating Scale (SCARS), eight activities were performed on an always or frequent basis by more than 50% of the respondents. In Table 3 the eight activities performed on an always or frequent basis by more than 50% of the respondents (sum of columns always and frequently) are highlighted.

Of the eight activities there were five activities in the subgroup of counseling that 50% or more of the respondents reported performing on an always or frequent basis. Counseling students regarding school behavior and consulting with staff regarding school behavior were performed frequently by more than 70% of the respondents. There were five recommended activities that 50% or more of the respondents reported never performing (see Table 4).

**Table 3**  
*Percentage of SCARS Activities Performed on an Always and Frequent Basis by Fifty Percent or More of Respondents*

Activity	Percentage of Performance					Sum of Always and Frequently
	Always	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Never	
Counsel students regarding school behavior	43.1	30.4	17.6	6.9	2.0	74.5
Consult with school staff concerning student behavior	33.3	38.2	20.6	5.9	2.0	71.5
Counsel students regarding personal/family concerns	29.4	40.2	28.4	2.0	0.0	69.6
Schedule students for classes	58.8	6.9	3.9	1.0	29.4	65.7
Counsel students regarding academic issues	42.2	22.5	27.5	6.9	3.0	64.7
Counsel students regarding relationships	21.6	33.3	34.3	10.8	0.0	54.9
Participate on committees within the school	30.4	27.5	23.5	12.7	5.9	57.9
Follow-up on individual and group counseling participants	27.5	25.5	25.5	8.8	12.7	53.0

*Note.* SCARS = School Counselor Activity Rating Scale

Table 4  
*Percentage of SCARS Activities Never Performed by Fifty Percent or More of Respondents*

Activity	Percentage of Performance				
	Always	Frequently	Occasional-ly	Rarely	Never
Conduct classroom lessons regarding substance abuse	2.9	2.9	7.8	25.5	60.8
Small group counseling for students regarding substance abuse issues	1.0	5.9	23.5	20.6	56.9
Enroll students in and/or withdraw students from school	26.5	5.9	6.9	5.9	54.9
Conduct classroom lessons on personal safety issues	3.9	7.8	13.7	24.5	50.0
Conduct or coordinate teacher in-service programs	2.9	3.9	13.7	29.4	50.0

Note. SCARS = School Counselor Activity Rating Scale.

Of the ten activities within the category of counseling, five were performed on an *always* or *frequent* basis by more than 50% of the respondents, and six activities were performed on an *always* or *frequent* basis by more than 30% of the respondents. The consultation category consisted of seven activities; all seven of the activities were performed on an *always* and *frequent* basis by more than 30% of the respondents. Seven of 13 of the coordination activities were performed on an *always* or *frequent* basis by more than 30% of the respondents. The curriculum activities were the least performed activities with only one of the eight activities performed on an *always* or *frequent* basis by more than 30% of the respondents. Activities in the “other” category were performed on an *always* or *frequent* basis by more than 30% of the respondents for nine of the 10 activities.

**Research Question 2: Are there differences in the frequency of reported activities as prescribed by the ASCA National Model among school counselors in predominantly African American urban schools according to demographic characteristics (level of employment, years employed as a school counselor at current school, and number of students enrolled at school)?**

Results of the ANOVA revealed statistically significant findings among the groups for school level of employment in four of the five school counseling activities categories. Post hoc analysis revealed statistically significant differences among the elementary school counselors and high school counselors groups within the four categories of counseling, curriculum, coordination and consultation.

**Counseling.** In the area of counseling, results of the ANOVA revealed that school counselor's level of employment (e.g., elementary, middle, high, and combination/other) showed statistically significant findings among the groups  $F(3, 98) = 9.371, p < .001$ . Tukey's post hoc analysis revealed statistically significant differences in the mean frequency between elementary and high school counselors. Elementary school counselors ( $M = 3.76, SD = .639$ ) more frequently reported participation in counseling activities than high school counselors ( $M = 2.91, SD = .632$ ).

To further understand how elementary and high school counselors' activities differed, individual non-parametric tests examined the frequency of endorsement for each of the ten counseling activities reported in the SCARS. A Bonferroni-type adjustment to the Type I familywise error rate was implemented for these post hoc tests. For example, there are 10 counseling activities pooled under the counseling area, thus the Bonferroni Type I error rate was set at  $.05/10 = .005$ . Contingency analysis of elementary and high school respondents revealed differences in the amount these counselors reported engaging in three areas: (a) counseling students regarding school behavior ( $\chi^2 = 23.072, p < .001$ ); (b) providing small group counseling addressing relationship and social skills ( $\chi^2 = 39.328, p < .001$ ); and (c) conducting small groups regarding family and personal issues ( $\chi^2 = 23.564, p < .001$ ). The results are shown in Table 5.

Elementary school counselors reported that they counseled students regarding school behavior all of the time while high school counselors had a broader spread across the response scale. Elementary and high school counselors also differed in their reported frequency of counseling small groups addressing relationship and social skills. A majority of high school counselors reported doing this activity *never* or *rarely* while elementary counselors reported *frequently* counseling small groups addressing relationship and social skills. High school counselors reported that they *never* or *rarely* conducted small groups regarding family or personal issues, compared to elementary counselors who reported with a broader spread across the response scale.

Table 5

*Frequency Difference Between Elementary and High School Counselors SCARS Counseling Activities*

Activity and School level		Frequency of Performance				
		Always	Frequently	Occasional-ly	Rarely	Never
2. Counsel with students regarding behavior	Elementary	15	3	0	0	0
	High School	12	20	15	6	2
5. Provide small group counseling addressing relationship/ social skills	Elementary	9	6	2	1	0
	High School	2	3	10	20	20
7. Conduct small groups regarding family/ personal issues	Elementary	2	5	6	5	0
	High School	0	3	8	17	27

**Consultation.** In the area of consultation, results of the ANOVA revealed that only the school counselor's level of employment (e.g., elementary, middle, high, and combination/other) showed statistically significant findings among the groups  $F(3, 98) = 6.901, p < .001$ . Elementary school counselors ( $M = 3.691, SD = .732$ ) more frequently reported participation in consultation activities than high school counselors ( $M = 2.831, SD = .777$ ).

Seven activities pooled under the consultation area, thus the Bonferroni Type I error rate was set at  $.05/7 = .007$ . Contingency analysis of elementary and high school respondents revealed differences in the amount these counselors reported engaging in four areas: (a) consult with school staff concerning school behavior ( $\chi^2 = 15.870, p = .003$ ); (b) consult with parents regarding child/adolescent development issues ( $\chi^2 = 17.034, p = .002$ ); (c) coordinate referrals for students and/or families to community or education professionals ( $\chi^2 = 25.354, p < .001$ ); and (d) assist in identifying exceptional children ( $\chi^2 = 17.935, p = .001$ ). The results are shown in Table 6. Elementary school counselors reported that they consulted with school staff concerning student behavior routinely while high school counselors had a broader spread across the response scale. Counselors also differed in their frequency of consulting with parents regarding child/adolescent development issues based on school level. High school counselors more frequently reported *never* or *rarely* performing this activity than did elementary counselors. Coordination of referrals for students and/or their families to community or education professionals was another activity that was performed to different degrees according to school level. A higher number of high school counselors than elementary school counselors reported *never* or *rarely* performing this activity.

Table 6

*Frequency Difference between Elementary and High School Counselors  
SCARS Consultation Activities*

Activity and School level		Frequency of Performance				
		Always	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
1. Consult with school staff concerning student	Elementary	13	3	2	0	0
	High School	12	22	13	6	2
3. Consult with parents regarding child/ adolescent development issues	Elementary	6	5	6	1	0
	High School	3	8	16	22	6
4. Coordinate referrals for students and/or families to community or education	Elementary	9	3	4	2	0
	High School	2	8	16	22	7
5. Assist in identifying exceptional children	Elementary	7	4	1	4	2
	High School	4	3	17	20	11

**Curriculum.** Results of the ANOVA revealed that only the school counselors level of employment (e.g. elementary, middle, high and combination/ other) showed statistically significant findings among the groups  $F(3, 98)=7.145$ ,  $p < .001$  in the area of curriculum. Tukey's post hoc analysis revealed that elementary school counselors ( $M=3.166$ ,  $SD=1.216$ ) more frequently reported participation in curriculum activities than high school counselors ( $M=2.014$ ,  $SD=.874$ ).

Since there are eight curriculum activities pooled under this area, the Bonferroni- *type I* error rate was set at  $.05/8 = .006$ . Contingency analysis of elementary and high school respondents revealed differences in the amount these counselors reported engaging in five areas: (a) conduct classroom les-

sons on various personal and/ or social traits ( $\chi^2 = 26.268, p < .001$ ); (b) conduct classroom lessons on relating to others ( $\chi^2 = 22.982, p = .001$ ); (c) conduct classroom lessons on personal growth and development issues ( $\chi^2 = 20.364, p < .001$ ); (d) conduct classroom lessons on conflict resolution ( $\chi^2 = 21.972, p < .001$ ); and (e) conduct classroom lessons on personal safety issues ( $\chi^2 = 26.577, p < .001$ ). The results are shown in Table 7.

Counselors in elementary schools reported more often conducting classroom lessons on personal and social traits, relating to others, personal growth and development issues, conflict resolution and personal safety issues compared to high school counselors.

Table 7  
*Frequency Difference between Elementary and High School Counselors SCARS Curriculum Activities*

Activity and School level		Frequency of Performance				
		Always	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
3. Conduct classroom lessons on various personal and/or social traits	Elementary	6	5	4	0	3
	High School	2	3	8	20	22
4. Conduct classroom lessons on relating to others	Elementary	3	6	5	0	4
	High School	2	2	8	14	29
5. Conduct classroom lesson on personal growth and development issues	Elementary	2	7	4	1	4
	High School	2	3	5	16	29
6. Conduct classroom lessons on conflict resolution	Elementary	6	3	4	2	3
	High School	2	1	9	13	30
8. Conduct classroom lessons on personal safety issues	Elementary	3	5	2	5	3
	High School	35	13	6	0	1

**Coordination.** In the area of coordination, results of the ANOVA revealed that only the school counselors level of employment (e.g. elementary, middle, high and combination/other) showed statistically significant findings among the groups  $F(3, 98)=4.918, p=.003$ . Elementary school counselors ( $M=3.214, SD=.791$ ) more frequently participated in coordination activities than high school counselors ( $M=2.453, SD=.704$ ).

A Bonferroni-type adjustment to the type I family-wise error rate was set at  $.05/13 = .0038$ . Contingency analysis revealed differences in only one item - the frequency in which these counselors reported engaging in the area of for-

mally evaluating student progress as a result of participation in individual/group counseling from student, teacher and/or parent perspectives ( $\chi^2 = 18.687, p = .001$ ). The results are shown in Table 8.

Table 8  
*Frequency Difference Between Elementary and High School Counselors SCARS Coordination Activities*

Activity and School level		Frequency of Performance				
		Always	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
11. Formally evaluate student progress as a result of participation in individual/ group counseling from student, teacher and/ or parent perspective	Elementary	2	7	4	1	4
	High School	2	3	5	16	29

**Other.** The final category of school counselor activities is *other*. Results of the ANOVA revealed that of the three explored demographic characteristics only school years of employment at current school (e.g. 0-5 years, 6-10 years, 11-15 years, 16-20 years, and 21 years or more) showed statistically significant findings among the groups  $F(3, 98) = 4.918, p = .003$ . Tukey's post hoc analysis revealed statistically significant difference in the mean frequency of *other* activities between school counselors employed at their current school for 0-5 years and 6-10 years. Those employed at their current school for 0-5 years ( $M = 2.653, SD = .59139$ ) less frequently reported participation in other activities than school counselors employed for 6-10 years ( $M = 3.415, SD = .59139$ ). Contingency analysis of elementary and high school respondents revealed no significant differences in any one particular item.

## Discussion

The objective of the study was to explore the frequency of activities recommended by the ASCA National Model by counselors in predominantly African American urban schools. According to the study results, counselors performed many of the activities outlined by Gysbers and Henderson (2006) and the ASCA National Model (2005). As a group, the participants spent more time in activities that represent the SCARS core areas of counseling, consultation, and coordination activities. The result, though limited to the participants in this study, is encouraging. One of the findings in the literature was that urban school counselors engaged in too much time in non-counseling related activities (Holcomb-McCoy & Mitchell, 2005). Such responsibilities prevent school counselors from performing activities that assist students in academic achievement. In the current study, the *other* area contained the non-counseling related duties. With the exception of scheduling students for classes and participating on committees in school, the participants reported performing *other* activities on a less frequent basis than school counselors in general in other studies (Partin, 1993; Perusse,

Goodnough, Donegan, & Jones, 2004; Holcomb-McCoy, 2005).

The findings in this study suggested that counselors were engaged routinely in counseling activities with individual and small groups for personal, social, and academic concerns. In their study of 475 high school counselors in Texas, Nelson, Robles-Pina, and Nichter (2008) found that counselors working in urban areas prefer to do more counseling than counselors in suburban and rural areas. Counseling activities were found to be the most performed type of activity in the current study of urban school counselors' activities. Eschenauer and Chen-Hayes (2005) encouraged school counselors in urban schools to reconceptualize individual counseling as a collaborative act of advocacy and accountability to close achievement and opportunity gaps.

Consultation and coordination activities were found to be the second and third most frequent activities, by category, performed by the counselors in this study. The school counseling literature has suggested that consultation and coordination activities are important to school counselors' roles as advocates (Bemak & Chung, 2005), ability to function as leaders (Hanson & Stone, 2002), and skill to develop school-family-community-partnerships (Bryan, 2005; Bryan & Holcomb-McCoy, 2007) in urban schools. Researchers found that these activities foster systemic change and help to close the achievement gap (ASCA, 2005; Education Trust, 2011; Sears, 1999). Additionally, scholars House and Martin (1998) encouraged counselors to be a part of committees in the school to better advocate for their students. School counselors in this study frequently participated in activities of consultation and coordination. Activities such as team/grade level/subject meetings and the coordination of community referrals, which are pertinent to the success of urban schools (Amatea & West-Oltunji, 2007; Bemak, 2000), were frequently performed by school counselors in this study.

Activities of counseling students for student behavior and consulting with school staff regarding student behavior ranked the first and second most frequent of the 48 activities identified in this study. Two considerations can be noted relative to these findings. First, urban students, specifically African American students, are often viewed by teachers and administrators with a deficit view. For instance, in a review of secondary data from the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS:88), researchers Adams, Benshoff, and Harrington (2007) found that teachers were more likely to contact the school counselor concerning behavioral issues when the student was male and African American. Moreover, a study that used the Educational Longitudinal Study (ELS:2002) that was conducted by Bryan, Vines, Griffin, and Moore-Thomas (2012), found that race was a predictor of disciplinarian referrals written by English teacher referrals. African American students in general and in particular African American and multiracial females were more likely to receive disciplinary referrals to the school counselor by their English teachers.

Findings from previous studies have revealed that teachers often doubt that education is important for low-income students of color (Cho & DeCastro-Ambrosetti, 2005) and have feelings of inadequacy when teaching students of color (Marbley, Bonner, McKisick, Henfield, & Watts, 2007). Both of these views can have a negative impact on students' self-image, academic achievement, and behavior (Manning & Baurth, 2004).

A second consideration relevant to these findings is that teachers and administrators have a tremendous impact on school counselor service utilization (Amatea & Clark, 2005; Kirchner & Setchfield, 2005; Ponec & Brock, 2000; Zalaquett, 2005). Teachers as well as principals often have a misperception about the expected role of school counselors which determine to a great extent the services that school counselors actually provide to students (Reiner, Colbert, & Perusse, 2009; Ponec & Brock, 2000). Perhaps the frequent individual counseling activity as well as consultation regarding student behavior may be related to the belief of teachers and principals that school counselors are available primarily for remedial services, such as responding to student behavior (Borders, 2002; Fitch, Newby, Ballestero, & Marshall, 2001). In contrast according to the ASCA National Model, responsive services such as responding to student behavior should be performed *only* occasionally by school counselors. Yet, the results of this study showed that these types of activities were performed frequently by a majority of the participants. It would be important to further investigate school counselors' perceptions and experience with student behavior referrals.

Findings from several research studies have suggested that school level of employment influences school counselor practice (Gibson & Mitchell, 1995; Gysbers & Henderson, 2000; Myrick, 1993; Nelson et al., 2008; Scarborough, 2002). Sisson and Bullis (1992) asserted that there is an expectation of varied job roles when counseling with students that differs between the elementary, middle school, and high school levels. Accordingly, comprehensive school counseling models account for some differences in the amount of time recommended to be spent in counseling, consultation, curriculum, and coordination activities by school level (see Gysbers & Henderson, 2006; Myrick, 2003).

Particular to the current study, elementary school counselors had a significantly higher frequency of participation in counseling, consultation, curriculum, and coordination activities than high school counselors. Prior research leads us to expect this pattern of differences between counseling activities at the elementary and high school levels. Elementary school counseling is rooted in child development and does not share the historical influence of career guidance at the high school level (Hardesty & Dillard, 1994). Additionally, the literature acknowledges that the comprehensive school counseling program has been more common in elementary schools since programs were initially implemented at this level. Academic scheduling and postsecondary planning are significantly higher priorities for high school counselors than for elementary and middle school counselors (Dahir, 2004). Current findings are consistent with other studies that have reported differences in how school counselors spend their time based on grade level of employment (Davis, 1999; Johnson, 1993). In regards to counseling activities there were three specific activities that elementary school counselors reported engaging in more frequently than high school counselors. Counselors at elementary schools had a larger percentage of respondents who indicated they routinely or frequently counseled students regarding school behavior, provided small group counseling addressing relationship/social skills, and conducted small groups regarding family/personal issues.

There was a significant difference in the frequency of *other* activities based on the number of years employed as a school counselor at current school. Those employed at their current school for 1-5 years were less frequently involved in "other" activities than those employed for 6-10 years. These find-

ings are similar to those in Gloster's (2009) study regarding school counselor activities in Title I schools. In that study, a greater percentage of counselors with more experience reported that they performed *other* activities more routinely than those with six or fewer years of experience. Performance of *other* activities by those employed six years but less than ten in their current position may be related to the counselor's familiarity of the environment and a higher awareness of unfulfilled school environment needs.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

The findings of this study revealed a low frequency in the number of recommended activities performed by participants. This raises the question of whether or not certain activities beyond the scope of the current ASCA National Model recommendations are needed to meet the needs of students in predominantly African American urban schools. Future studies that include open-ended questions may allow school counselors to describe other activities they perform that were not included in the SCARS. Such additions may reveal activities that may be particular to predominantly African American urban schools.

Beyond this, the results of this study do not include information about the school climate where participants are employed. It is possible that the building principal or other administrative/union forces largely determine the activities of the school counselors. Further investigation of how school staff in predominantly African American urban schools conceptualize counselors' roles needs to be conducted.

Finally, the results of this study provide only descriptive information associated with school counselor practice in predominantly African American urban schools. The findings and limitations of this study suggest future lines of research that would seek to replicate the study's findings with a larger sample size as well as include other significant variables such as school climate and school counselors' perceptions of self-efficacy while in urban settings.

### **Conclusion**

Despite three decades of consistent documentation of challenges affecting urban school counseling programs (Avis, 1982), few studies have explored the actual activities and frequency of activities performed by school counselors in African American urban schools. Consequently, current discussion of urban schools and recommendations for urban school counseling are the same as those that have been discussed for the past three decades (e.g. Avis, 1982; Barnes, 1980). There is a sense of urgency. Time and time again scholars have shown that counselors in urban schools are often forced to confront a number of significant issues that affect the psychosocial, emotional, and intellectual development of their students (Bryan, 2005; Green, Conley, & Barnett, 2005; Lee, 2005; Holcomb-McCoy, 1998, 2005a). Also discussed are factors such as minimal resources, violence, and high drop-out rates all of which have a detrimental effect on urban school counseling (Holcomb-McCoy, 1998). Even with these noted challenges, school counselors in the present study in predominantly African American urban schools are doing activities as prescribed by the American School Counseling Association and comprehensive school counseling models (ASCA, 2005; Gysbers & Henderson, 2000). While the actual frequency of performing specific counseling activities in this study

may vary from the recommendations of ASCA's and other school counseling models, it is possible that current models may not include recommendations that are relevant in meeting the needs of predominantly African American urban settings. As stated earlier, this needs to be investigated in future research efforts to help determine urban school counselors' perspectives on which school counseling activities are essential for providing effective service for all students in urban environments. This knowledge will contribute to the current urban school counseling discussion and serve as a foundation in the investigation and development of meaningful comprehensive school counseling services by school counselors in a manner that respects, understands, and honors the particular needs of students in predominantly African American urban schools.

## References

- Adams, J. R., Benschoff, J. M., & Harrington, S.Y. (2007). An examination of referrals to the school counselor by race, gender, and family structure. *Professional School Counseling, 10*(4), 389-398.
- Alreck, P., & Settle, R. B. (1985). *The survey research handbook*. Homewood, IL; Irwin.
- Amatea, E. S., & Clark, M. A. (2005). Changing schools, changing counselors: A qualitative study of school administrators' conceptions of the school counselor role. *Professional School Counseling, 9*(1), 16-27.
- Ellen, S. A., & Cirecie, A. W. (2007). Joining the conversation about educating our poorest children: Emerging leadership roles for school counselors in high-poverty schools. *Professional School Counseling, 11*(2), 81-89.
- American School Counselor Association. (2005). *The ASCA national model: A framework for school counseling programs* (2nd ed.). Alexandria, VA: Author.
- Avis, J. P. (1982). Counseling: issues and challenges. *Education and Urban Society, 15* (1), 70-87.
- Barnes, K. (1980). *The State of Urban School Guidance and Counseling in the Major School Districts of America*. Ohio State Univ., Columbus: National Center for Research in Vocational Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED186675).
- Bemak, F., & Chung, R. (2005). Advocacy as a critical role for urban school counselors: Working toward equity and social justice. *Professional School Counseling, 8*(3), 196-202.
- Berry, E. L. (2006). *Counselor as leader: Investigating school counselor activities*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. (Accession Order No. 3218456).
- Borders, L. D. (2002). School counseling in the 21st century: Personal and professional reflections on the four focus articles. *Professional School Counseling, 5*(3), 180-185.
- Bryan, J. (2005). Fostering educational resilience and academic achievement in urban schools through school-family-community partnerships. *Professional School Counseling, 8*(3), 219-227.
- Bryan, J., Day-Vines, N. L., Griffin, D., & Moore-Thomas, C. (2012). The disproportionality dilemma: Patterns of teacher referrals to school counselors for disruptive behavior. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 90*(2), 177-190.

- Bryan, J., & Holcomb-McCoy, C. (2007). An examination of school counselor involvement in school-family-community partnerships. *Professional School Counseling, 10*(5), 441-454.
- Butler, S. K. (2003). Helping urban African American high school students to excel academically: The roles of school counselors. *The High School Journal, 87*(1), 51-57.
- Campbell, C. A. & Dahir, C. A. (1997). *Sharing the vision: The National Standards for School Counseling Programs*. Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.
- Cho, G., & DeCastro-Ambrosetti, D. (2005). Is Ignorance bliss? Pre-service teachers' attitudes toward multicultural education. *The High School Journal, 89*(2), 24-28.
- Dahir, C. A. (2004). Supporting a nation of learners: The role of school counseling in educational reform. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 82* (3), 344-353.
- Davis, K. M. (1999). *An analysis of counseling work behaviors by school counselors*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertation and Theses. (Accession Order No. 304536834).
- Dillman, D. A., Smyth, J. D., & Christian, L. M. (2009). *Internet, mail, and mixed mode surveys: The tailored design method (3rd ed.)*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons Inc.
- Education Trust (2011). : Retrieved October 2011, from <http://www.edtrust.org/dc/tsc/vision>.
- Eschenauer, R., & Chen-Hayes, S. F. (2005). The transformative individual school counseling model: An accountability model for urban school counselors. *Professional School Counseling, 8*(3), 244-249.
- Fitch, T., Newby, E., Ballesteros, V., & Marshall, J. L. (2001). Future school administrators' perceptions of the school counselor's role. *Counselor Education & Supervision, 41*, 89-99.
- Forbes, D. (2007). *What is the role of counseling in urban schools?* In S. Steinberg & J. Kincheloe (Eds.) 19 urban questions: Teaching in urban schools (pp. 69-83). New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Gibson, R. L., & Mitchell, M. H. (1995). *Introduction to counseling and guidance* (4th ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Gloster, A. (2009). *Counselor implementation of the ASCA National Model at Title I elementary schools*. (Georgia Southern University). Electronic Theses & Dissertations, Retrieved from [http://dspaceprod.georgiasouthern.edu:8080/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10518/2631/gloster\\_aronica\\_m\\_200908\\_EDD.pdf?sequence=1](http://dspaceprod.georgiasouthern.edu:8080/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10518/2631/gloster_aronica_m_200908_EDD.pdf?sequence=1).
- Green, A. G., Conley, J. A., & Barnett, K. (2005). Urban school counseling: Implications for training and practice. *Professional School Counselor, 8*(3), 189-196.
- Gysbers, N. C., & Henderson, P. (2006). *Developing and managing your school guidance program* (4th ed.) Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.
- Hardesty, P., & Dillard, J. (1994). The role of elementary school counselors compared with their middle and secondary school counterparts. *The*

*School Counselor*, 29, 83-90.

- Hanson, C., & Stone, C. (2002). Recruiting leaders to transform school counseling. *Theory Into Practice*, 41(3), 163-168.
- Holcomb-McCoy, C. (1998). School counselor preparation in urban settings. Greensboro, NC: ERIC/CASS. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED418343).
- Holcomb-McCoy, C. (2005a). A descriptive study of urban school counseling programs. *Professional School Counseling*, 8(3), 203-208.
- Holcomb-McCoy, C. (2005b). Professional school counseling in urban settings: Introduction to special issue. *Professional School Counseling*, 8(3), 182-183.
- Holcomb-McCoy, C. (2010). Involving low-income parents of color in college readiness activities: An exploratory study. *Professional School Counseling*, 14(1), 115-124.
- Holcomb-McCoy, C., & Johnston, G. (2008). A content analysis of pre-service school counselors' evaluations of an urban practicum experience. *Journal of School Counseling*, 6(16), 1-26.
- Holcomb-McCoy, C., & Mitchell, N. (2005). A descriptive study of urban school counseling programs. *Professional School Counseling*, 8(3), 203-208.
- Reese, M. H., & Patricia, J. M. (1998). Advocating for better futures for all students: A new vision for school counselors. *Education*, 119(2), 284-291.
- Howell, D. C. (2002). *Statistical methods for psychology* (5th ed.). Pacific Grove, CA: Duxbury/Thomson Learning.
- Kirchner, G. L. & Setchfield, M. S. (2005). School counselors' and school principals' perceptions of the school counselor's role. *Education*, 126, 10-16.
- Lee, C. (2005). Urban school counseling: Context, characteristics, and competencies. *Professional School Counseling*, 8(3), 184-188.
- Manning, M. L., & Baruth, L.G. (2004). *Multicultural education of children and adolescents* (4th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.
- Marbley, A. F., Bonner, F. A., McKisick, S., Henfield, M. S., & Watts, L. M. (2007). Interfacing culture specific pedagogy with counseling: A proposed diversity training model for preparing preservice teachers for diverse learners. *Multicultural Education*, 14(3), 8-16.
- Martin, P. J. (2002). Transforming school counseling: A national perspective. *Theory Into Practice*, 41(3), 148-153.
- Moore, J., L. III, Henfield, M. S., Owens, D. (2008). African American males in special education: Their attitudes and perceptions toward high school counselors and school counseling services. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 51(7), 907-927.
- Myrick, R. D. (1993). *Developmental guidance and counseling: A practical approach*. Minneapolis, MN: Educational Media.
- Myrick, R. D. (2003). Accountability: Counselors count. *Professional School Counseling*, 6(3), 174-179.
- Nelson, J. A., Robles-Pina, R., & Nichter, M. (2008). An analysis of Texas high school counselors' roles:  
Actual and preferred counseling activities. *Journal of Professional Counseling: Practice, Theory, and Research*, 36(1), 30-46.
- Owens, D., Pernice-Duca, F., & Thomas, D. (2009). Post-training needs of urban high school counselors: Implications for counselor training pro-

- grams. *Journal of School Counseling*, 7(17), 1-23.
- Partin, R. L. (1993). School counselors' time: Where does it go? *School Counselor*, 40, 274-281.
- Perusse, R., Goodnough, G. E., Donegan, J. & Jones, C. (2004). Perceptions of school counselors and school principals about the National Standards for School Counseling Programs and the Transforming School Counseling Initiative. *Professional School Counseling*, 7(3), 152-161.
- Ponec, D. L. & Brock, B. L. (2000). Relationship among elementary school counselors and principals: A unique bond. *Professional School Counseling*, 3(3), 208-217.
- Reiner, S. M., Colbert, R. D., & Perusse, R. (2009). Teacher perceptions of the professional school counselor role: A national study. *Professional School Counseling*, 12(5), 324-332.
- Scarborough, J. (2005). The school counselor activity rating scale: An instrument for gathering process data. *Professional School Counseling*, 8(3), 274-283.
- Sears, S. (1999). Transforming school counseling: Making a difference for students. *NAASP Bulletin*, 83(603), 47-53.
- Sisson, C. F., & Bullis, M. (1992). Survey of school counselors' perceptions of graduate training priorities. *The School Counselor*, 40, 109-117.