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Measuring the Impact of School Counselor Ratios on Student Outcomes

A series of studies in three states (Indiana, Connecticut and New York) funded by an ASCA Research Grant reveal the impact of school counselor ratios on student outcomes. Results from the Indiana study indicated school counselor ratios of 1:250 have a significant correlation with

Data collection for the New York study is currently underway. Location, grade level, gender, socioeconomic status and ethnicity are constant factors considered in all three studies. (A more complete discussion of methods and analyses used in this study is available from the first author upon request. All IRB guidelines for conducting research with human subjects were followed.)

Summary of Findings

Indiana: This study included 1,529 schools, 1,565 school counselors and 874,156 students. Student absenteeism and achievement, as measured by SAT scores, were considered across school-counselor-to-student ratios at 1:100, 1:200, 1:250 and 1:471 (the reported national average is 1:471). The study found that the 1:100 ratio was associated with the highest student achievement and the lowest student absenteeism. The 1:200 ratio was associated with the highest student achievement and the lowest student absenteeism. The 1:250 ratio was associated with the highest student achievement and the lowest student absenteeism. The 1:471 ratio was associated with the highest student achievement and the lowest student absenteeism.

investigators expanded the study to include a qualitative portion of the study, conducting focus groups with school counselors from the identified higher- and lower-performing schools. This qualitative research is currently underway.

Socioeconomic status and community resources have an impact on the ability of school

Implications of the Research

Access to a school counselor should not be an amenity reserved for students with privileged backgrounds. Research indicates regular access to a school counselor is a necessity, particularly for students most in need of intervention and support in high-poverty districts (Carrell & Carrell, 2006; Lapan, Gysbers, Stanley & Pierce, 2016; McIntosh, 2010; Utphall, 2006). Further, results from this study suggest that context matters. School-counselor-to-student ratios may be optimal at 1:250, but grade level and socioeconomic factors of a district require close consideration. The current research findings extend related studies on the impact of school-counselor-to-student ratios. The results will be of significant importance to the school counseling profession in that they will inform an evidence base for the ASCA-recommended ratios. Such evidence will allow state and local districts to make more informed decisions about program needs affecting student outcomes.

About the ASCA Research Grants

The American School Counselor Association awards research grants for projects examining the effectiveness of comprehensive school counseling programs, particularly the ASCA National Model, in improving student outcomes; projects investigating the optimal school-counselor-to-student ratio(s); and other projects that advance school counseling practice. ACT has provided funding support for the grants. Learn more about ASCA at www.schoolcounselor.org.

