

Harmonizing Educational Leadership with School Counseling: Preparing Principals to Support School Counselors

by

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Abstract

The National Educational Leadership Preparation (NPBEA, 2018) & the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (NPBEA, 2015) state that an effective school leader must promote the current and future success and well-being of each student and adult by developing supportive, equitable, culturally responsive, and inclusive school culture while implementing systems of curriculum and support through engaging in collaborative partnership with families, community, and school personnel for student learning, school improvement, and the needs of the school. Research shows that many principals struggle to effectively collaborate with school counselors to proactively promote the well-being, current and future success, and inclusiveness for all students within their schools.

The purpose of this study was to highlight perceptions around the conversation of School Counselor-Principal Collaboration and the readiness of principals from principal preparation programs. This study examined integration of school counseling into educational leadership curriculum and perceived preparedness of principals to work with school counselors from the perspective of professors in both fields. A pragmatic, sequential explanatory methodology for mixed methods allowed for thematic and statistical analysis to discuss real-world solutions and practical implications for the field of principal preparation.

The findings suggest a lack of integration of School Counselor-Principal Collaboration and the promotion of student well-being in principal preparation programs. In addition, the means for integration is not clearly understood by educational leadership professors or school counseling professors leaving room for investigation and program development.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Use Disclosure Statement

In the preparation of this dissertation, the following Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools were used: OpenAI. This tool was used primarily for idea organization. The author acknowledges full responsibility for the intellectual content of this work and has ensured that all AI-assisted sections have been reviewed and revised for accuracy and appropriate academic style. All AI-generated content was reviewed and validated for relevance, appropriateness, and accuracy before incorporation into the final document to maintain scholarly integrity of this research.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In the rapidly evolving landscape of education, the role of school counselors has adapted to better support the current needs of students in the United States of America. Historically viewed as guidance counselors who primarily focused on administrative tasks and career planning, today's professional school counselors are integral to fostering students' academic, career, and social/emotional development (Gysbers, 2010). In 2003, the ASCA National Model was created for a comprehensive and holistic approach to school counseling emphasizing a data driven approach to meeting student needs (Gysbers, 2010). The shift in name and accountability towards holding school counselors to a program that includes both direct and indirect services, embedded with collaboration, marks a new era in school counseling, according to Gysbers (2010).

This modern approach requires school counselors to proactively identify students with needs and provide inclusive educational opportunities for all students. This shift necessitates a reevaluation of how educational leaders perceive and collaborate with school counselors. This study aimed to better understand the perception of school counselor-principal collaboration among professors and investigated the integration of school counselor information within educational leadership graduate programs. Drawing on the researcher's extensive experience in both school counseling and educational leadership, this investigation attempted to highlight the importance of modernizing the role of school counselors in the eyes of principals, professors, and other educational stakeholders. By examining the evolution of the school counselor's role over the past two decades, this research provides insights into how educational leadership programs can better prepare future leaders to support and utilize school counselors effectively. Ultimately, this study aspired to contribute to the development of more cohesive and supportive educational

environments, where the expertise of school counselors is fully recognized and leveraged for the benefit of all students.

Problem Statement

Imagine a school where the principal's vision aligns seamlessly with the school counselor's empathy and data-driven leadership intersects with student-centered counseling programs. At the helm of schools, educational leaders steer the ship, navigating through turbulent waters including budget constraints, policy shifts, and community expectations. In the heart of the school, school counselors wear multiple hats (Guzman et al., 2024). School counselors are advocates, listeners, and guides for students' social-emotional and academic well-being (American School Counselor Association, 2025). Together, the principal and school counselor form a symbiotic relationship, influencing not only administrative decisions but also the very fabric of student experiences.

In the dynamic landscape of education, the interplay between educational leadership and school counseling emerges as a powerful force shaping student trajectories. This empirical study aimed to explore their intricate connections, illuminating the collective potential that lies within the principal and school counselor collaboration. By using a social emotional learning framework to combine principal preparation and school counselor preparation standards, I was seeking to understand how educational leadership preparation programs equip principals to collaborate with school counselors for leading schools towards student well-being. Leaders and school counselors jointly dismantle barriers whether they are academic, cultural, or socioeconomic. Improving student well-being while fostering hope, resilience, and social emotional learning in schools leads to greater mastery of the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL standards) for principals (NPBEA, 2015). Much like the PSEL

standards clarify responsibilities for principals, the ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards and Competencies (2025) provides the framework for how school counselors should operate. When principals and counselors embrace the ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards and Competencies, they create spaces where students thrive, regardless of their backgrounds (ASCA, 2021). Within the ASCA Standards and Competencies, Mindset five states, “Effective school counseling is a collaborative process involving school counselors, students, families, teachers, administrators, and other educational partners (ASCA, 2025, p. 2).” By examining how educational leadership programs intentionally weave information about school counselors, educational leaders can unearth pathways toward holistic school environments. These environments foster not only academic achievement but also emotional resilience and well-being. The findings from this study hope to inform educational leadership preparation programs, ultimately enhancing student success, equity, and well-being for all students through a stronger collaboration between the principal and school counselor.

Educational leadership preparation programs hold immense significance in molding the next generation of school leaders. Within the educational community, school counselors serve as vital members, offering essential support to school leadership teams. Current research is trending on mindfulness and well-being towards the principal without recognizing the role of the principal in well-being. A notable gap exists: the extent to which educational leadership graduate programs incorporate information about the role and responsibilities of school counselors remains uncertain. Despite their critical role, there is ambiguity surrounding how educational leadership programs specifically address the functions and duties of school counselors. This lack of clarity poses challenges for both aspiring educational leaders and the students they will eventually guide.

Statement of Purpose

Understanding if and how educational leadership programs incorporate this type of training is crucial for enhancing the effectiveness of these programs and ensuring that future principals are well-prepared to collaborate with and support school counselors effectively. To fully answer this question, a conceptual framework was developed based on the literature, best practices of the principal and school counselor, and the respective national standards for both school leaders (NELP, PSEL, and ASCA). The National Educational Leadership Preparation (NPBEA, 2018) & the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (NPBEA, 2015) state that an effective school leader must promote the current and future success and well-being of each student and adult by developing supportive, equitable, culturally responsive, and inclusive school culture while implementing systems of curriculum and support through engaging in collaborative partnership with families, community, and school personnel for student learning, school improvement, and the needs of the school. Research suggests that many principals struggle to effectively collaborate with school counselors to proactively promote the well-being, current and future success, and inclusiveness for all students within their schools (Geiger & Oehrtman, 2020; Lowery et. al, 2018). By emphasizing equity and well-being for students through the school counselor-principal collaboration, I aim to foster student well-being and resilience within educational contexts. The goal of this research was to add to the literature an improved understanding of the role of school counselors and increase the effectiveness of future educational leaders in creating schools that enhance well-being and academic success.

Research Question

The following mixed methods research questions guides this study:

1. To what extent do educational leadership and school counseling programs integrate knowledge about the other profession into their curriculum?
2. In what ways does the integration of knowledge about school counselors in educational leadership programs impact the perceived preparedness of graduates to work with school counselors?

Overview of Methodology

This research was founded on a pragmatic, explanatory sequential methodology for mixed methods including a quantitative survey with qualitative open-ended questions (QUAN-qual). I approached the findings in a flexible and practical manner for practical application to address the research problem. The strengths of quantitative data were desired for their ability to provide specific context and depth, complemented by qualitative results directly from professors in the fields of educational leadership and school counseling preparation. First, the data from the mixed methods survey was analyzed using IBM® SPSS® Statistics 29 GradPacks. Next, the qualitative data was analyzed using ATLAS.ti 25 Windows. I searched for themes that would offer explanations of current trends in the inclusion of the school counselor within educational leadership programs. The mixed methods approach allowed for qualitative and quantitative data to validate each other and offer themes in the findings. Using open coding then axial coding to map out themes and examples of what could be included in the code, I was able to see themes as they emerged and find quotes that would fall into coding categories with confidence of their relationship.

Rationale and Significance

The school counselor and principal collaboration is a prime example of the theory into practice gap discussed by Gimbert et a. (2003) suggesting that theoretical knowledge can be

challenging to apply in practical settings such as education. In this context, I found that there are resource constraints that often limit the possibility for a school counselor to solely focus on student well-being. There truly are administrative tasks that someone needs to complete within a short-staffed school building and often the tasks get assigned to the school counselor. One contributing factor could be the lack of, or inadequate, training for principals regarding the appropriate duties and responsibilities of school counselors resulting in a significant disconnect between the intended role of school counselors and the actual tasks assigned to them by principals (Windham & Tuttle, 2023; Gimbert et al., 2023). As a result, principals may struggle to implement the comprehensive school counseling design effectively because they lack the necessary understanding and practical application skills (Bryant et al., 2024).

This research aimed to investigate the integration of school counselor information within educational leadership graduate programs. Findings hope to inform program enhancements and contribute to the professional development of educational leaders. Ultimately, this research provided ideas for program design for educational leadership, professional development initiatives, and policy discussions as it highlights areas for improvement in comprehensive coverage of school counselor-related topics in educational leadership.

Role of the Researcher

Raised in Alabama's private school system with a Christian and conservative background, I overcame childhood trauma through licensed professional counseling as an adult. I hold a B.S. in Early Childhood and Elementary Education, a Master's in School Counseling, and an Ed.S. in Administration of Elementary and Secondary Education. My career roles have included elementary teacher, school counselor, Career Technical Education (CTE) administrator, and public virtual school operations manager. Most of my educational experience has been in

virtual public schools in the state of Alabama. My experience working for a nationwide corporate company that manages virtual schools has profoundly reshaped my understanding of education. It has allowed me to view education through diverse perspectives from people across the country and explore different approaches to learning beyond traditional formats. My perspective of schools differs from the perspectives of those who work in many brick-and-mortar schools in the state.

Researcher Assumptions

My assumptions were informed by my extensive experience in both a master's (M.Ed.) program for school counseling and a master's and education specialist (Ed.S.) program for educational leadership. Throughout my matriculation through the educational leadership program, it became evident that the role of the school counselor was often overlooked. As someone who has deeply valued the professional school counselor's role and has had to educate principals about it in a work environment, I recognized the need to inform principals about the evolving role of school counselors over the past twenty years. At the time of this research, many principals seem to perceive school counselors as guidance counselors, focusing primarily on administrative and task-oriented duties. This perception contrasts sharply with the training I received during my master's program, for it emphasized a more comprehensive and supportive role for school counselors. This discrepancy prompted me to investigate whether others also perceive a gap in the training and understanding of the school counselor's role.

Definition of Key Terminology

ASCA: American School Counselor Association (ASCA) is a professional organization that supports school counselors. They actively research the profession, provide standards for preparation, tips for advocacy of the profession, mindsets and a model for school counselors to

follow, and opportunities for collaboration and recognition. The organization is considered to hold the national model for designing and evaluating school counselor programs in schools. They provide guidance for using data and improving student outcomes through comprehensive school counseling programs (American School Counselor Association, 2023).

PSEL: Professional standards for educational leaders (PSEL) are a set of guidelines designed to outline the qualities and practices of effective educational leaders. These standards were developed by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA) and they emphasize a mission, a vision, core values, ethics, professional norms, cultural responsiveness, curriculum, instruction, and assessment within the school (NPBEA, 2017).

NELP: The National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) standards are guidelines for preparing educational leaders in graduate school programs. The standards provide performance expectations for new school and district level leaders. These standards guide graduate school program design, accreditation review, and state program approval as they ensure programs will produce competent leaders (NELP, 2011).

School Counselor: The school counselor is a term used to describe the school counselor that models their program based on the ASCA National Model for school counseling. This person focuses on academic, career, and social-emotional development for students within their school. The school counselor uses the ASCA National Model to help each student attain life-readiness and academic success (ASCA, 2021). They also are responsible for developing their program to meet the diverse needs of the school to ensure equity within the community for all students (Alabama State Department of Education, 2024).

Educational Leadership/Principal Preparation Program: There are multiple graduate school programs in America focused on preparing future principals, district leaders, and hopeful

higher education professors. These programs cover the NELP & PSEL standards within their programs to ensure students are equipped to step into a crucial role within schools to impact student achievement and teacher effectiveness.

Social Emotional Learning: SEL is a learning approach that emphasizes building knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop a personal identity, have positive relationships, manage emotions, and achieve goals (CASEL, 2020). This type of approach fosters an equitable school and community to contribute to the school-family-community partnership that is essential to provide holistic education to all students (CASEL, 2020). According to CASEL (2020) it promotes self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, relationship skills, and social awareness.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework guiding this research was developed with a social emotional learning approach to school leadership with the understanding that ASCA has shaped the ASCA National Model and school counselor standards with a positive psychology emphasis on growth and positive outcomes for students. The social emotional learning (SEL) focus from the CASEL framework (2020) provided a holistic school community approach to supporting students and the community. This type of leadership is what the ASCA Model is all about with the overall focus on creating an equitable learning environment and community for all students.

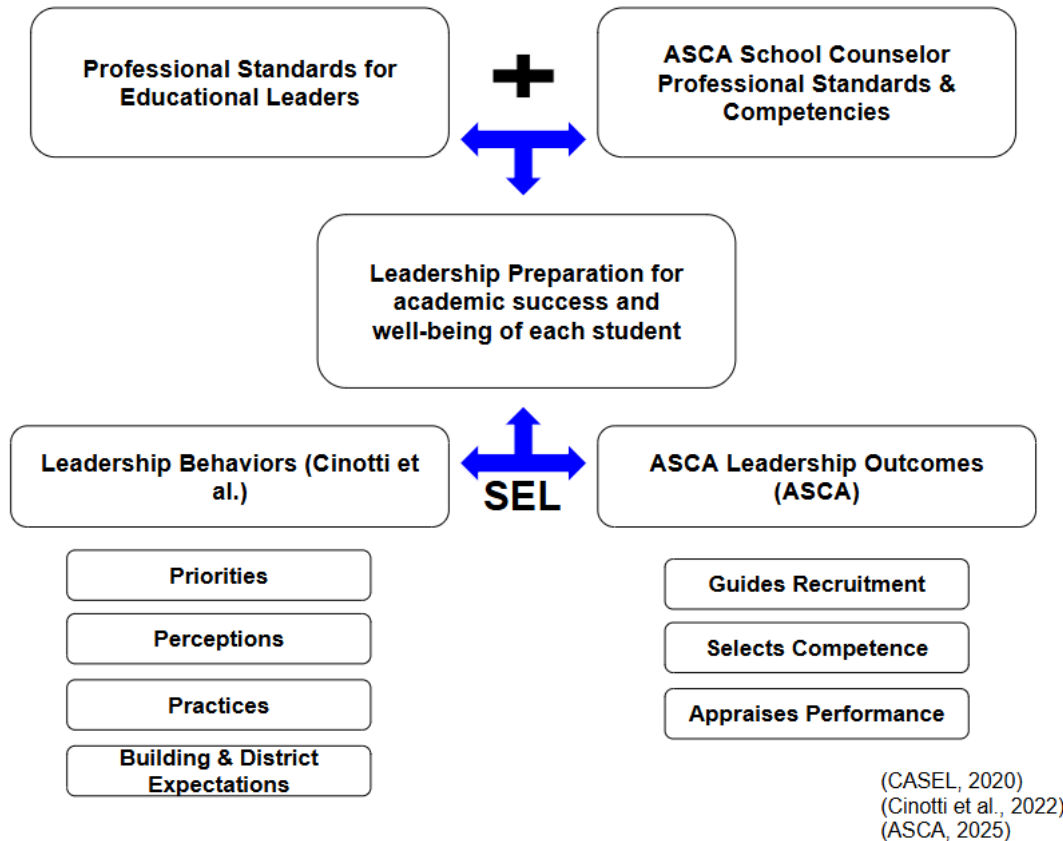
The ASCA Mindsets for School Counselors includes two competencies for school administrators. The two points explain that the ASCA Mindsets are essential in supporting administrators in guiding their recruitment to select competent school counselors and developing or informing meaningful school counselor performance appraisals (American School Counselor Association, 2019). Without the guide of what rigorous demands a modern school counselor is

expected to meet, a principal is not able to fairly partner or provide feedback in meaningful ways. In accordance with the ASCA National Model a school leader can ensure the school counselor has the resources needed to establish, maintain, or enhance a school counseling program (ASCA, 2025, p. 7).

Likewise, the PSEL standards provide a guideline for principal preparation and district expectations for principals in schools (NPBEA, 2015). The PSEL standards set what priorities, perceptions, practices, and building and district expectations should look like for a school principal. Further, research from Cinotti et al. (2002), has used the Assessment of School Counselor Needs for Professional Development to compare perceptions of key stakeholders in relation to school counselor priorities, perceptions, practices, and expectations. I used this tool to evaluate because it is a known tool that is closely aligned with the ASCA Model and has shown strong evidence of validity and reliability in previous studies (Cinotti et al., 2022). Together, ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards and Competencies and PSEL standards provide a social-emotional learning approach to school leadership for greater equity and academic success for all students. This type of leadership is guided by the principal but is accomplished only by the collaboration of the principal and the school counselor. An informed principal can have ASCA and PSEL aligned priorities, perceptions, practices, and building and district expectations that will ensure the best school counselor is hired and the best chances for success of a school counseling program are given. These types of decisions need to be intentional and developed as a collaborative team, therefore the information from ASCA and PSELs must guide the school principal in the planning and implementation of a SEL approach to leadership. The conceptual framework that guided this research was developed with both sets of standards in mind with the concept of the CASEL SEL Framework as a guide for holistic SEL.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework for Harmonizing Educational Leadership with School Counseling



Organization of the Dissertation

The dissertation has been organized into five chapters: introduction, literature review, methodology, results, and discussion and implications. Chapter One is focused on providing an overview while explaining the scope and limitations of the study. Chapter Two will explain the current literature from nearly the past five years on the topic of school counselor-principal collaboration, principal preparation programs and student well-being, and modern school counseling. Chapter Three will discuss the methodology including data collection, sampling, ethical considerations, and instruments used for data collection and analysis. Chapter Four will include the results and findings of the study and has tables and graphs to illustrate key findings

without interpretation. Chapter Five provides the interpretation of the results in context of the research question and the literature reviewed. The limitations, conclusions, suggestions for future research, and implications of the research can also be found in chapter five.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Who helps students plan out their academic journeys, navigate their social and emotional territory, and map out goals for college and career planning? Who advocates for equitable access for opportunities, builds partnerships in the communities, considers the well-being of students before the testing of students? School counselors in America are supposed to be those people. They are prepared to be the mental health expert, the champion in every student's corner, and the perfect partner for a principal to meet the well-being component of every PSEL and NELP standard. The principal is held equally by the standards to meet the academic and well-being needs of every student. This literature review considers the school counselor as an essential school leader partner in meeting the well-being side of every school leadership standard. If the principal neglects student well-being, they inadvertently promote stress, excessive testing, and overall student unwellness. In response to searching for "educational leadership" and "principal preparation" in the Education Research Complete database for empirical publications in 2025, I was able to identify that principal preparation is focused on understanding artificial intelligence, social justice, leading for equity, and the workload of a principal. I did not see information on school counselors, furthering the notable gap in research identifying whether educational leadership professors perceive themselves as covering the modern, school counselor or not. In researching articles related to Dr. Rachel Geesa, from Ball State University, I was able to uncover a recent recommendation for further research in gaining insight into whether or not principals understand the role of the school counselor in relation to the ASCA National Model for school counseling (Kirk et al., 2025). The explicit instruction of the modern school counselor matters because schools that focus on the well-being of students and academic success have an added layer of caring leadership that leads to a culture of belonging that impacts and elevates

graduation rates, creates motivation to learn and engage in school, and strengthens staff commitment within schools (Ryu et al., 2022). This literature review provided an overview of modern school counseling in America, specifically, principal preparation, and the concept of school counselor-principal collaboration for student well-being.

Overview of Modern School Counseling

Often principals and school counselors have conflicting perceptions of who school counselors are, whether they consider them to be guidance counselors or school counselors (Dhair & Geesa, 2022). The names of vocational counselor or guidance counselor are not current representations of the professional role of school counselors (ASCA, 2023). Principals, as the instructional and organizational leaders of their schools, hold the responsibility of assigning duties, supervising, and shaping the program that school counselors provide (Geesa et al., 2022). Although the responsibility is present for the principal to lead and supervise school counselors, it is not a requirement for graduate schools to cover relevant information for pre-service training and knowledge in principal preparation programs (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015; Geesa et al., 2022). Geesa et al. (2022) explained that principal preparation often does not include information on the school counselor. School counseling programs designed to incorporate the data-driven and specialized skillsets of school counselors with appropriate advocacy of the counselor and the principal are essential for holistic student growth and achievement (Dahir & Geesa, 2022). The voice of the principal should be heard regarding their preparation for leading school counselors toward implementing comprehensive school counseling programs. Before a principal can be knowledgeable enough to share his or her training toward leading school counselors, a description of comprehensive school counseling programs needs to be provided (Bringman et al., 2010). Principals working off of on-the-job

training or outdated information on counseling will need current and researched based evidence of the American School Counseling Association National Model (ASCA National Model) when evaluating their own understanding of leading school counselors. In this literature review, the national model from ASCA was presented through the lens of current literature and research in the field of school counseling and educational leadership (ASCA, 2021).

The principal is essential in establishing a program aligned with the ASCA National Model, but the principal must see the importance of the model (Kirk et al., 2025). Selecting school counselors, developing, and appraising of counselors is the responsibility of the school principal (ASCA, 2019). Principals often assign duties to school counselors that take away from their time that should be aligned with the ASCA National Model (Windham & Tuttle, 2023). According to McConnell et al. (2020), school counselors are often assigned duties that are considered additional and inappropriate tasks for how a highly qualified school counselor is taught in graduate school. These tasks could include test administration, student record maintenance, student discipline, or other related tasks (McConnell et al., 2020).

Role ambiguity is common among school counselors, likely due to incomplete or inconsistent expectations and goals for evaluation of school counselors (Blake, 2020). Direct and indirect services of school counselors should be used to systematically change the school in ways the principal has not been trained to do (Kirk et al., 2025). The school counselor provides a specialized skillset that complements the skillset of the principal as the organizational and instructional leader (Dahir et al., 2010). Lashley and Stickl (2016) noted, “Working together as instructional leaders from different perspectives, principals and counselors can lead the school improvement team to become fully aware of the school’s status according to evidence that has been formally validated” (p. 15). The National Policy Board for Education Administration

Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL, 2015) contain standards for principals to act as change agents for improvement in student’s academic success and well-being, promote coherence of school programs, and develop leadership capacity amongst staff members (Lashley & Stickl, 2016).

Literature on the topic of the ASCA National Model explains that the model encompasses three sets of standards: ethical standards, professional standards and competencies, and mindsets and behaviors for student success (Lewis et al., 2022). College Board (2021) stated, “The ASCA National Model defines professional standards and competencies in both mindsets (“beliefs school counselors hold about student achievement and success”) and behaviors (“essential behaviors school counselors demonstrate through the implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program;” p. 11). The school counseling program should be developed with the principal while examining the school and district mission and vision to create the counseling goals (College Board, 2021). Ultimately, the ASCA National Model exists to assist school counselors in meeting students’ needs through targeted services outlined in a comprehensive school counseling program, so students can achieve academic success, college and career readiness, and social-emotional well-being (ASCA, 2021). According to ASCA Student Standards: Mindsets and Behaviors for Student Success (2021), “School counselors deliver the ASCA Student Standards to all pre-K–12 students in classrooms, groups or individual settings in a manner that is appropriate for the students’ development level/age” (p. 4). The comprehensive school counseling program is for all students to promote equity and access in student success (ASCA, 2021).

Historically, school counselors have been crisis managers or reactive to situations within the school. Presently, school counselors should proactively identify needs based on standardized

testing, credits earned, overrepresentation in discipline, high absenteeism, stakeholder input, and needs assessments (ASCA, 2021). Define, manage, assess, and deliver are the components of an ASCA National Model program that the school counselor should intentionally implement (Lewis et al., 2022). Data-driven approaches to closing the achievement gap and proactively providing support to students is embedded in the ASCA National Model to promote systemic change (Lashley & Stickl, 2016). School counselors use a comprehensive program model to show the measurable results of the change in students and the school due to the impact of their program. Also, school counselors must be able to provide action plans based on various data for their prevention and intervention strategies that will impact student achievement, behavior, and attendance rates (Lashley & Stickl, 2016).

School counselors are in a special place within a school, for they are not in the highest leadership position, nor do they focus on only one class of students. Counselors have a view from above while understanding what the view from the floor is (Lashley & Stickl, 2016). The resources that counselors have can lead to a more equitable and personalized approach to learning and instruction that respects the principal's perspective of where the whole school is headed. School counselors are uniquely trained in mental health to support students where they are and where they are headed while holding a space for who they are as an individual within the school environment (Blake, 2020). The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) defines social-emotional learning as an essential focus for the education of children through techniques to apply knowledge, skills, and attitudes to reach personal goals for emotions, empathy, relationships, and decision making (Gimbert et al., 2023). The concept of providing individual support can be difficult to conceptualize and evaluate, so it can be easy for principals to give more duties to counselors because they are not sure what else they are doing

(Blake, 2020). The school counselor role should be a safe place for all students and a recognized space for social and emotional learning and well-being to be provided and supported. This role of the school counselor is a complement to the structured and disciplined relationship the principal often has to have with students to ensure compliance and organization.

The school counselor is the ideal partner on the school leadership team to ensure that social emotional support is provided in a proactive manner to support the emotional development that leads to academic achievement (Howell et al., 2019). The principal, according to Howell et al. (2019), is often focused on the needs of students academically or through the lens of discipline, so it is imperative that the school counselor is able to be the dedicated support member of the leadership team that has the lens of well-being as the central priority. School counselors are the mental health experts in the building everyday with students. They are to be the partner with all other mental health experts, teachers, and administrators (Howell et al., 2019). An article covering school tragedy and school crisis teams in 2024, covered an entire scenario where a school leadership team handled a crisis where the school counselor is only mentioned as the person who led the response debrief with students after the tragedy (Abney et al., 2024). This is one example in educational leadership research where there is a gap in understanding the proactive role the school counselor plays in this type of crisis team and the active partner a school counselor can be in a traumatic event.

The school counselor is also trained for the specialized role of promoting equity and opportunity for all students within the school (ASCA, 2024). Promoting student achievement through ensuring equal access and equitable opportunities is an essential aspect to principal and school counselor partnerships (Lawrence & Stone, 2019, p. 152). Principals need to be able to focus on the whole need of the school while the school counselors can help identify the specific

needs that each student has. Working towards equitable opportunities for all students is a strong focus in the ASCA National Model and is an area that counselors are equipped to support their principal.

Another specialized skill set that school counselors have is the training to support the school at the beginning of counseling and transition support. In a school, transition support and social-emotional well-being play roles in the culture and climate of the building. The school counselor is trained to be the support for identifying the pulse of everyone in the building and supporting them within confidentiality (Lawrence & Stone, 2019, p. 151). The principal can be a partner in this task by interacting with students and monitoring students' behavior in the school, but it does help to have a safe place to go to that has less of a risk. The school counselor can be the safe, risk-free option for all people within the school.

“The principal comes from one perspective, the school counselor comes from another, and with the two perspectives, the school would be unstoppable” (Lawrence & Stone, 2019, p. 151). The principal is the leader, and the school counselor is the advocate (McConnell et al., 2020). With the two perspectives, there needs to be a partnership in place focused on goals and shared values. According to Lawrence & Stone (2019), a recent example of a university including exposure on school counselor and principal collaboration is the Transformed School Counseling initiative at University of North Florida. The graduates of University of North Florida were more prepared to start working as counselors with the understanding that they do not only need the support of the principal but a relationship to be effective. The counselors graduate with exposure to things that prepare them for work. The TSC initiative at the University of North Florida in school counseling preservice training has equipped completers to be data-driven and leaders for advocacy, counselor-principal partnership, and other areas for greatest

collaboration within the school (Lawrence & Stone, 2019). The principals who hired these graduates had schools that had a better partnership toward student success and commitment to equity (Lawrence & Stone, 2019).

The school leadership team can collaboratively provide comprehensive student support by leveraging the expertise of the principal and the school counselor for the holistic development of children and youth (McConnell et al., 2020). Children are the reason schools exist, and the counselor is the primary staff member in the building trained to build relationships that support a strong foundation for development and learning (Lewis et al., 2022). The principal and the school counselor have differentiating educational agendas within the school, therefore the supported advocacy by both members in the school leadership team is essential for meeting the holistic needs of students within the school community (Beck & Lane, 2019). Principals that are exposed to what the ASCA National Model is make way for the school counselor to effectively advocate, “stand up and be the expert,” and articulate their perspectives of what a school counselor program should embody (Beck & Lane, 2019, p. 181).

A common theme in research today is for school counselors to advocate to their principals for a Comprehensive School Counseling Program like the National Model (McConnell et al., 2020; Windham & Tuttle, 2023). Advocacy is considered to be an ongoing practice for counselors as they speak up while being conscientious of the cultural norms and educational norms of their school and district (Beck & Lane, 2019). As the principal-school counselor relationship is established and grows, the counselor is being encouraged by publications to speak up and advocate for themselves in order to serve students. “With the principal as the understood “leader” of the school and the counselor acting as “advocate,” the success of the school and the wellbeing of the students are dependent upon the mutual leadership and collaboration of the two

roles, according to McConnell et al. (2020).” “When counselors are working as clerical staff, they can’t build relationships with students” (Lewis et al., 2022, p. 15). Administrative tasks within a school are not a component of the ASCA National Model, yet they are prevalent among the use of counselor’s time reporting (Lewis et al., 2022). An important part of the ASCA National Model is for school counselors to work through a process of defining, managing, delivering, and assessing their program with the collaborative support of their principal (Lewis et al., 2022). Principals can create the appropriate systems and utilize staff in suitable ways that support the fulfillment of the ASCA National Model for the school counselor (Lewis et al., 2022). Awareness of inappropriate versus appropriate duties according to the model is an important step towards mobilizing the counselor towards working within their expertise for student development and achievement (McConnell et al., 2020; Windham & Tuttle, 2023).

Within a school leadership team, who is the safest person for students and parents to go to in times of transition or change? Given the assurance of confidentiality, a school counselor should be one of the most trusted members of the leadership team, capable of supporting families and students in achieving social, emotional, and academic success. This trusted role within a school highlights that a school counselor is not an administrator. Therefore, they should not be burdened with administrative tasks that detract from their primary focus: building relationships and becoming the most trusted member of the school staff. If principals begin each school year with the goal of the school counselor only holding duties that will allow for student rapport to be built proactively and trusted relationships to flourish, then the school counselor will be more productive in times of crisis, minor behavior difficulties, or life changes for students. Without the perspective of the principal and the school counselor leading collaboratively, the school may not be focused on the whole student in school improvement plans that are in place (Rock et al.,

2021). When the principal-counselor relationship is not understood, the counselor is not supervised or allowed to partner appropriately in the school leadership team (Windham & Tuttle, 2023; Bryant et al., 2024).

Since 1952, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) has been providing professional development, research, and resources for supporting school counselors. ASCA aims to support the programs of all school counselors to promote student success in academics, social-emotional development, college, career, and life readiness (ASCA, 2023). The ASCA National Model for school counselors is an encouraged model to follow because it provides a framework for aligning time and duties that allows for the specialized skillsets of school counselors to serve students. Equity to services, building community, inclusion, belonging, and individual student success are the main focus of the systemic change that ASCA promotes for school counselors in their programs (ASCA, 2023). School counselors are prepared in graduate school to use data to be a valuable and proactive member of the school leadership team. The uses for the data can be to proactively identify student needs, identify gaps in achievement, identify attendance issues, support discipline, locate resources, and find opportunities for academic, social emotional, and well-being support.

The ASCA National Model is a helpful resource for schools and districts to adopt as a guiding tool to ensure that student-centered school counseling is prioritized with a focus on equity (ASCA, 2019). The model suggests that there is a 250 students to 1 school counselor ratio with a majority of the school counselor's time being spent on direct services to students, not administrative tasks such as discipline or testing (ASCA, 2026; Howell et al., 2019). Within the model, the school counselor should plan times to communicate to stakeholders what services are offered during the delivery component of school counseling to ensure students are being

positively impacted by the program (Gonzales et al., 2022; Geiger & Oehrtman, 2020; Howell et al., 2019).

In accordance with the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) and their National Model, school counselors are to lead the efforts of creating a safe place for effective learning for all students (Fajriani et al., 2023). There is an expectation based on the ASCA National Model for school counselors to define, deliver, manage, and assess a comprehensive school counseling program in collaboration with their principal (ASCA, 2019). Ultimately, the principals are an integral part of the ASCA National Model as the recruiter, selector, developer, and appraiser according to the American School Counselor Association (2019). The principal supervises the duties and implementation of the school counseling program as the counselor manages and develops a program that meets the social-emotional, academic, and post-secondary needs of all students in the school for equitable and holistic support (ASCA, 2025).

Lewis et al. (2022) interviewed principals about what they perceived the role of school counselors to be. During the study, the principals were able to discover that without relationships being the foundation of a school counselor's duties, nothing really mattered. The intentional relationships that school counselors build support a foundation for all students to have a trusted adult in the school, a base of well-being to handle stress and transitions, and more motivation for academic growth (ASCA, 2021). One principal even noted, "You are not a disciplinarian. That is an administrative role. You are there to help students work on behavior strategies and develop new skills" (Lewis et al., 2022, p. 16). The principals were able to see that counselors need to be a safe person for students and families in times of crisis or life change, and that only can occur if the counselor is a trusted member within the school community. In the end, a principal

determined that fostering relationships is the key aspect of a counselor's responsibilities (Lewis et al., 2022).

School counselors are a valuable resource in the school to identify what the students' needs are, how to meet their needs, and how to work towards the success of each student while considering their individual needs (ASCA, 2019). The school counselor can offer a unique data-driven perspective to assist in meeting student needs to lead to their individual success. Based on the findings of Lewis et al. (2022), it was concluded that while academic success within the school is crucial, a significant portion of a student's life unfolds within the community. According to the ASCA National Model, the school must understand what is needed within the community and in the life of the student to lead to a holistic approach to academic, career, social, and emotional success. Lewis et al. (2022) found that when school members, including counselors, are involved in processes or programs according to their leadership abilities and insights, they feel more committed and engaged. Additionally, supporting the community and understanding its needs further enhances this investment and fosters a more comprehensive approach to student success.

School counselors are the members of the school leadership team that have the potential to unite all stakeholders together to collaboratively support students towards well-being and achievement (Howell et al., 2019). Without thorough introduction to the national model for school counseling, the ASCA National Model, research shows that principals are not likely able to assign appropriate duties and evaluate school counselors (Gonzales et al., 2022). Proper understanding of the roles, responsibilities, and expertise of all members of the school leadership team sets a stronger foundation for student support and impact of all professionals. The leadership style of the administrator was a predictor for the leadership style of the school

counselor. Lowery and colleagues (2019) conducted a research study that shed light on the idea that school counselors have duties that need to be reassigned to other school members to open time for counselors to serve in ways that reflect what the achievement, attendance, discipline, and close the opportunity gap data shows for the school (Lowery et al., 2019). School counselors are trained to provide services to students aligned with the ASCA National Model that encompass their specialized skill sets to deliver proactive services to students that are data driven, so principals need to know about the services aligned to the model and specialized skills that school counselors can provide.

The role of the school counselor is to be a collaborative leader in the school according to the ASCA Model. Principals may not understand what the duties of a counselor in a school should be, but there is a national model that can be implemented into schools. Part of the ASCA National Model is to collaborate with the principal each year to determine what is important to the leadership team and what the top goals will be for the school counselor. Therefore, understanding the appropriate role for the school counselor to hold within the school is essential for planning purposes (Windham & Tuttle, 2023). Collaboration and partnership in the principal-counselor relationship is essential for effective collaboration and supervision. When the principal-counselor relationship is not understood, the counselor is not supervised or allowed to partner appropriately in the school leadership team (Cinotti et al., 2022). Frustration occurs when the principal-counselor relationship is not clearly defined, and expectations are not aligned (Geiger & Oehrtman, 2020). When the principal-counselor relationship is not established with a shared vision, then there could be multiple beliefs of what student success looks like (Rock et al., 2021). Without the perspective of the principal and the school counselor leading collaboratively,

the school may not be focused on the whole student in school improvement plans that are in place (Rock et al., 2021).

Principal preparation programs are considered vital, according to Geesa et al. (2022) in preparing for school counselor supervision and collaboration. The collaboration between pre-service principals and school counselors is crucial for fostering positive relationships and mutual understanding of each other's roles (Lowery et al., 2018). This partnership is essential as they prepare to work together effectively in a school setting (Bryant et al., 2024). Most principals may not be prepared in graduate programs to collaborate or supervise a school counselor, according to Lowery et al. (2018). These educational leadership professors from Ball State University, including Gees and Lowery (2018), mention that it is vital to stay attuned to the growing research that will build capacity for principal-school counselor collaboration as it will contribute to increased student outcomes in educational leadership programs. There is typically only one school counselor in a school; therefore, there is not a team of people to advocate for their position within a school. It is left to the one school counselor to know their role and collaborate effectively with all members of the school community. It is essential for the principal to know the appropriate duties of a school counselor to be able to support, collaborate, and supervise fairly.

School counselors are educated to provide services to students aligned with the ASCA National Model that encompasses their specialized skillsets to deliver proactive services to students that are data-driven, so principals need to be aware of the services aligned to the model and specialized skills that school counselors can provide. School counselors and principals would benefit from establishing boundaries to allow for the counselor to be the safe place for students and other stakeholders in the school community. If principals begin each school year in

the Annual Administrator Conference that is held between the principal and the school counselor, with the goal of the school counselor only holding duties that will allow for student rapport to be built and trusted relationships to flourish, then the school counselor will be more productive in times of crisis, minor behavior difficulties, or life changes for students (ASCA, 2025). Lewis et al. (2022) reported that a principal stated this about a school counselor, “You are not a disciplinarian. That is an administrative role. You are there to help students work on behavior strategies and develop new skills” (p. 16).

Research has shown that many school counselors and principals may feel frustration because of the lack of an established principal-counselor relationship (Lowery et al., 2018). If a strong principal-counselor relationship is established within a school, the principal will be empowered to share vision, collaborate, supervise a school counselor. Principals are tasked with utilizing the school counselor within the school, yet it is the job of the principal to learn how to effectively support the counselor as a leader and trusted member of the school (Lowery et al., 2018). Ultimately, the principal-counselor relationship can lead to a positive climate for the school leadership team (Rock et al., 2021).

There is a clear and present need for school counselors to address student needs (Lewis et al., 2022). With a data-driven school counseling program schools can be proactive in understanding and meeting the social, emotional, academic, and career needs of students for individualized success. It is important for the school counselor to be aware of the perception of needs to ensure time is allotted to meet the social-emotional needs as well as the academic and career needs of students. The needs of a school can change based on cultural needs, socio-economic needs, or age-level of students in the building (Lewis et al., 2022). The importance of

the school counselor as a team player in meeting the needs of students is vital for principals and others in the school to be aware of and collaborate with.

The school leadership team should include trusted and respected members of the school that can make informed and valued decisions to help bring progress towards school goals. When the principal understands, values, and respects the role of a school counselor, the counselor is able to implement the ASCA National Model and serve in the school leadership team for a data-driven and student-focused approach to meeting student needs. School counselors can view students in ways that the principal has not been trained to do. The multiple perspectives in the school leadership team will enhance the team's approach to meeting the diverse needs of students (Rock et al., 2021).

Principals are the leaders of schools. They hold the power to breathe life into the people and programs of the school or to stifle the growth of everyone. Principal preparation programs need to include more intentional training for principals to learn to collaborate with the key members of a school leadership team, including the school counselor. School counselors are not used appropriately in all schools, leading to students being underserved in social, emotional, career, and college needs (Trombly et al., 2022). If the principal is properly trained in the role and purposes of a school counselor, then the school counselor will be more effective in implementing an ASCA National Model program for their school. Lewis et al. (2022) suggest, "Knowing one another's preparation, role, and utility will go a long way to ensure functionality" (p. 6).

The specialized skill sets that counselors can fill within a school should direct principals in assigning job duties, establishing the culture of the school counselor relationship to the school, and help with all supervision and expectation. The building and district expectations can be a

mystery for a principal that might not have much guidance in this area, so it is important for principals to be able to identify these things from their pre-service training to ensure all staff members in the building feel their job duties are meeting their expectations as well.

The roles that school counselors and principals play in a comprehensive school counseling program are pivotal in properly creating a safe and productive learning environment for all students. Although there is a model school counseling program from ASCA, many principals are not equipped to collaborate or evaluate if their school is aligned to the national model (Mayes et al., 2018). Mayes et al. (2018) have stated, “Interestingly, school principal-counselor relationships heavily impacted school counselors’ ability to align with the ASCA National Model” (p. 15). If principals and counselors can develop relationships of shared vision, collaboration, and proper supervision, then the national model should be attainable within the school. The principal’s buy-in is essential in carrying out the ASCA National Model through their understanding, advocacy for appropriate roles and boundaries, and the need for strong collaboration. The knowledge of the differentiation between school counselors and an assistant principal is critical in properly providing direction and supervision of a school counselor. Strong collaborative work between a school counselor and principal can lead to a more effective and specialized support system.

The peer-reviewed articles cited in this literature review were from experts in the field of educational leadership or school counseling empirical research (Bryant et al., 2024; Geesa et al., 2022; Lewis et al.; Mayes et al., 2018; 2022; Rock et al., 2021; Windham & Tuttle, 2023). The professional organization of American School Counselor Association (ASCA) specializes in best practices for providing equitable learning experiences and environments for all students. These experts in the research on school counselor-principal collaboration emphasize the importance for

expanding the knowledge and training of the principal to lead a well-developed and structured school counseling program to ensure support for all students.

The school goals could incorporate targets for specific populations of students within the school to ensure students are identified and advocated for by the school counselor (Lewis et al., (2022). The methods for meeting goals and interpreting data may need to be adjusted depending on the student. Mayes et al. (2018) stated that training is needed for schools to use data and interpret it to understand the needs of students (p.18). The school counselor working in collaboration with the school can provide assistance in understanding data and meeting diverse needs of a population. There are many correlations that can be found between self-reported data, behavior, and attendance. It is the job of the school leadership team and the teachers to work together to identify the needs and what it will take to bring every student towards their personal success.

The knowledge of a school counselor should not be an assumed role that was observed as a child in school or on-the-job as a new principal, but this should be an explicitly understood role within the school that is explained in a principal preparation program (Lewis et al., 2022). The older models of school counseling involved the use of the term guidance counselor with roles that are not encouraged today for the school counselor. It is vital to understand where education is today in reference to the support we are offering to students through the ASCA National Model for school counseling (Lowery et al., 2018). If principal preparation programs provide explicit opportunities for aspiring principals to uncover the purposes and ways of collaboration with a school counselor, then the future leaders will be better equipped to lead and support the other leaders within their schools (Lowery et al., 2018). With a thorough introduction to the ASCA National Model, principals will be better prepared to lead schools that are holistically

supporting staff and students. The principal cannot possibly be the advocate and the leader in all situations, so working proactively to ensure a voice of advocacy focused on equity is always heard is a suggested best practice. The school culture and well-being of students must be a regular focus within the school leadership team and the school counselor can support this focus with the principal.

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) has been established for over fifty years specializing in supporting a model for counselors across the country. The school counselor using the ASCA Model can focus on academics, mental health, and equity. “The American Psychiatric Association (2000) [APA] suggested that childhood trauma can lead to various negative mental health conditions during adolescence” (Howell et al., 2019, p. 27). Supporting students early and consistently is crucial in developing students that are successful in school and after school. Hargreaves and Shirley (2022) argue that simply inserting SEL curriculum into a school ignores child well-being and argues that a focus on providing counselors and a focus on the whole child is what will encourage student well-being. Children are more likely to reach academic success when they are not tired, hungry, anxious, or depressed (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2022). Therefore, a focus on the school counselor and the comprehensive school counseling program is essential to the success of the student and the principal in reaching student success in academics and well-being.

The role of the principal is to lead all aspects of the school towards success, yet there are far too many people and tasks to do all alone. “Collaboration between principals and school counselors for advocacy is particularly significant in the context of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which replaced the No Child Left Behind Act and reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965” (Lowery et al., 2019, p. 3). Meeting the needs of students through

collaboration and continuous learning is the best way to ensure all people in the school are having their needs met.

Harmonizing Educational Leadership and School Counseling

In American school districts, thirty states have mandates for school counseling programs. Often, the state and the local districts have laws or policies in place to mandate the programs and counselor ratios. There are requirements for certifications for hiring but also for evidence of comprehensive school counseling programs (ASCA, 2023). For example, with mandated programs in place for Alabama, there are still limited intersections of the Colleges of Education and the Counseling Programs offering clear instruction to principal preparation programs on preparing the school leaders to effectively utilize the school counselors on staff. If principals are required to hire them, assign duties, and manage them, there should be training included in principal preparation. These mandates show that the principal is responsible for leading more than teachers towards effective support for all students in the school. Dahir and Geesa (2022) suggest, “With so many responsibilities, principals may lack knowledge about comprehensive school counseling programs and the appropriate role of school counselors to best meet all students’ academic, social/emotional, and postsecondary preparedness needs” (p. 2).

One way to begin collaboration in a school year is completing the annual administrator conference as school goals and needs are discussed and aligned to the school counselor standards, mindsets, student needs, and goals for the school (Cinotti, 2022). Research has shown that principals have certain perceptions of school counselors that lead to how they lead them and could impact the outcomes for counselors with adequate knowledge (Cinotti, 2022). To adjust perspectives of school counselors from a historic guidance counselor role to a modern school

counselor role, principals need the knowledge and support to engage in a mutually respectful, collaborative relationship (Dahir & Geesa, 2022).

A second way to build and foster collaboration is to allow advocacy for appropriate roles and duties according to the modern role of school counselors. Advocacy can allow for collaborative relationships to develop and sustain the culture and comprehensiveness of a program for greatest alignment to the ASCA Model and effectiveness for student success (Dahir & Geesa, 2022). Geesa et al. (2022) write that a counseling program that is comprehensive and focused on equity for students is impossible without advocacy from the school counselor and the principal. Principals and school counselors are a logical partnership for establishing community support for equity and optimum utilization of community resources to meet the needs of all students (Geesa et al., 2022).

Ultimately, shared decision making, and mutual respect will establish and grow school counselor-principal collaboration. Sharing an understanding of each other's training, skillset, and responsibilities creates a foundation for supporting each other in the work that is being done and needs to be done. The work that the principal does in an operations or management manner differs from the work that school counselors do, therefore the counselor can provide direct services to meet the goals towards student achievement and overall success as the principal leads the way (Geesa et al., 2022). A principal is the leader within the school while the school counselor is the advocate for individual student needs and a voice for equity (McConnell et al., 2020).

Research shows that schools with strong school counselor-principal collaboration are seen as less at risk to external factors such as parents or members of the community, higher levels of teacher respect are seen, and the principal is viewed as more supportive (Geesa et al.,

2022). With greater satisfaction and more support to carry out expected and appropriate job duties, school climate is stronger leading to greater retention in school counselors (McConnell et al., 2020). With a mandated program that may or may not include alignment with the ASCA National Model, school counselor retention is important to consider when planning for the relationship between the principal and the school counselor (McConnell et al., 2020).

Mutual admiration is not enough to support true collaboration between a principal and a school counselor (McConnell et al., 2020). Collaboration springs from time spent understanding each other's skillsets, training, and allowing for discussion and planning according to what each person advocates is important to the work and the program (McConnell et al., 2020). Working inside intended job responsibilities leads to job satisfaction and retention. When the principal is supportive towards a comprehensive school counseling program, students are provided holistic support with their needs in the forefront of decision making (McConnell et al., 2020).

Principals that might be looking for assistance from their school counselors can use this information to guide continuous learning of the modern school counselor and the comprehensive programs focused on student needs and equitable opportunities (McConnell et al., 2020). Shared learning, understanding, and advocacy are building blocks for collaboration between a principal and school counselor. McConnell et al. (2020) suggest that the principal can shift from distant administrator to meaningful collaborator. The relationship should not be a burden, but it should be two or more leaders joining as a team to reach the school goals from multiple perspectives and skill sets.

The ASCA National Model presents a call to action for principals and school counselors to increase access to opportunities for greater equity within the school. Social Capital Theory explains that networks of people in an institution have greater access to resources, opportunities,

and information when there are strong indicators of social capital in a team or organization (Geesa et al., 2022). Researchers suggest that social capital in a school at the individual level and the institutional level is related to student achievement (Geesa et al., 2022). Without strong social capital within the school and the surrounding community towards the school, according to Geesa et al. (2022), students could miss out on opportunities and resources that could make a difference towards achievement and success in school and after school. There are multiple ways social capital can be developed in pre-service programs for principals and school counselors including the following: collaborative workshops, combined courses for both specialties, model sites, and research on both specialties to further understanding (Geesa et al., 2022).

A few responsibilities that principals carry are the tasks of creating an inclusive school that equitably meets the needs of all students, engages the community, and shows academic achievement. Principals are also required in many states to hire, assign duties to, and supervise school counselors. The major responsibilities of equity, school culture, opportunities, achievement, and resources align with the training that school counselors receive; therefore, principals have a partner in the goals that are important for their school as long as they know how to collaborate effectively and lean into the social capital that could be created among the school with strong relationships. Training for these areas could be aligned into a principal preparation program for instructional leadership, culture of well-being, and other standards (NPBEA, 2015).

Collaboration can be embedded into principal preparation programs in various ways to meet preparation standards and build knowledge. Partnership can be modeled by professors in the educational leadership programs and the school counselor programs to jointly prepare future practitioners for working together. Collaborative workshops, combined courses, model sites with

practitioners, and research in specific fields are some of the methods for providing joint preparation. The work to holistically prepare students academically, social-emotionally, and for college and career is more effective with the principal and school counselor working together.

The Collaborative Training Framework is based on a review of current literature from Geesa et al. (2022). This framework assumes that the responsibilities and skillsets vary between principal and school counselor. Geesa et al. (2022), “This framework includes six elements: 1) effective pre-service preparation; 2) sustainable partnerships; 3) stakeholder collaboration; 4) current practitioner support; 5) model site development; and 6) ongoing research and professional learning” (p. 885). The framework aligns NELP standards and ASCA standards for principal preparation with suggestions for topics to include during courses.

Partnerships and collaboration are to leverage the resources of others to benefit students and help support them towards success. Leadership networks bridge gaps to provide opportunities for students (Dahir & Geesa, 2022). Students come to school with diverse backgrounds, and all need a bridge to be built by school staff and community members towards current and post-secondary success. Marginalized students that have trauma-filled pasts, traditional students that have supportive homes, special education students, and regular education students can all benefit from the resources and opportunities that strong social capital can provide within a school and surrounding community (Dahir & Geesa, 2022). Geesa et al. (2022) suggests, “To increase development of social capital networks, pre-service candidates must also learn methods of reaching out and forming strong partnerships with families and community organizations” (p. 882). Social capital increases shared responsibility and efforts towards common goals (Dahir & Geesa, 2022).

Shared understanding and mutual respect amongst professionals allow for more buy-in, more support, and more contributions towards shared goals. Social capital is valuable in a school leadership team because it builds a bridge for strong partnership, information, and opportunity in their work towards supporting students. Principal preparation programs and schools can implement collaboration in specific ways to ensure strong relationships and shared understanding are valued. Creating space for relationships to be built and shared understanding to be present is important for service towards students and for perceptions of roles and others on the leadership team. School counselors often are unsatisfied due to their perceptions of what they are expected to do and that leads to less respect and collaboration. (Rock et al., 2021).

Program Collaboration (PSEL, NELP and ASCA)

The PSEL and NELP standards, along with the ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards and Competencies (2025), are key frameworks that shape educational leadership for principals and school counselors. These standards, viewed through the lens of CASEL's SEL Framework (2020), guide the integration of the two preparation programs into a unified framework. This framework aims to enhance principal preparation by incorporating more comprehensive training on school counselors. Considering all three sets of standards, principal preparation programs should prioritize both student academic success and well-being as essential components of the principal training (Bryant et al., 2024). Student well-being is a shared responsibility that involves the teachers, parents, community, and principals (Beard & Thomson, 2021). "School leaders need to know how to examine and advance their own SEL and the educators they supervise," (Gimbert et al., 2023, p. 5). This matters because in today's schools students are ill, according to Shirley and Hargreaves (2022, pg. 45) and a time for a small change is not going to adequately patch up student problems. Well-being is not found in excessive

technology use in the classroom or teaching students coping skills to “keep calm and carry on,” suggests Shirley and Hargreaves (2022, pg. 45). Their suggestion emphasizes that a strong focus on well-being from a leadership perspective is crucial for removing barriers and enabling students to achieve academic and social-emotional success. This can be accomplished through restorative power structures, ethical use of technology, and fostering social prosperity (Shirley & Hargreaves, 2022, pg. 46). A common focus of traditional social emotional learning is for students to learn to cope and calm down in the face of a world around them that has gone wrong. A focused and empowered social emotional program focused on student well-being could combine problem solving initiatives that teach students to be change makers and resolve issues in their school, community, and their own lives (Shirley & Hargreaves, 2022). PSEL and ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards and Competencies (2025) call professionals to action focused on equity and opportunities for all students that address the barriers that hinder student success (Bryant et al., 2024). True student well-being should be a focus in the mission and vision of the school as curriculum is implemented and data is being evaluated so all decisions are being made in the lens of breaking down barriers and equipping students to find solutions to the challenges that surround them. In acknowledgement of the gap in social emotional programming research, this section of the literature review has been organized into sections explaining how each educational leadership standard weaves together to complete a holistic approach to leadership that promotes academic success and student well-being.

The PSEL and NELP standards are central to educational leadership programs. The NELP (National Educational Leadership Preparation) standards provide guidelines for what should be taught to future school leaders, while the PSEL standards outline the expectations for current principals in their roles. Traditionally, these are the primary standards referenced in

educational leadership programs; however, this research argued for the inclusion of an additional set of standards to fully prepare principals to focus not only on student academic success but also on an equitable approach to student well-being. The ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards and Competencies (2025) outline the specific roles and responsibilities of school counselors. However, principals often lack training in these areas, leading to duties being assigned based on assumptions rather than informed understanding. By incorporating ASCA standards into principal preparation programs and integrating them with principal standards, future principals can better appreciate the leadership and expertise of school counselors (Bryant et al., 2024). This holistic approach to leadership will enhance student well-being by leveraging the strengths of both roles. The principal is the vision caster for the school. Developing the vision and mission of the school fall under PSEL standard one and within ASCA Mindsets and Behaviors. Together, the principal and school counselor can create a shared vision that promotes student academic success and well-being. The second area that is shared in the standards is ethical leadership for principals and school counselors. It is in PSEL standard two that the principal is instructed to uphold ethical principles and professional norms. Likewise, the counselor is expected to have an ASCA Mindset to demonstrate ethical behavior, integrity, and confidentiality in interactions with students, staff, and families. Third, a shared focus on equity is found in PSEL standard three for principals to ensure students have equitable access to learning opportunities. The school counselor is also to remove barriers for students and address equity, diversity, and inclusion needs for all students within the school community. Standards five and eight from PSEL Standards call for principals to engage families, community members, and stakeholders.

Similarly, the school counselor is expected to bridge the gap between the school and the community to engage all adults to support student success and opportunities. Next, standard six joins together the principal and school counselor mindset for recruiting, developing, and retaining effective staff members. The counselor mindset from ASCA emphasizes the need to grow professionally and advocate for their role to include appropriate duties, student ratio, and time ratio for their schedule. Standards seven and nine from PSEL give guidance on managing resources effectively while ASCA Mindsets also provide guidance for school counselors on this topic while reminding counselors to align all services with time spent on school goals. Finally, PSEL standard seven and ten join ASCA Mindsets in covering continuous professional learning towards school improvement.

A school leader plays a facilitative role that connects members of a community to each other to grow, serve, and attempt to flourish. A comprehensive partnership within a school that takes ownership of communication, and the fostering of community engagement is considered more successful (Beard & Thomson, 2021). The overlapping and integrating of educational and psychological spheres create stronger influence on students and the development of stronger relationships (Beard & Thomson, 2021). Integrating influences of different ecological systems within a school is considered more impactful to students than keeping them all separate, so why would the school leadership team function in silos? The harmony of different thought systems and concerns of what is important all coming together for one goal is far more impactful than one leader working towards their singular goal. Combining the standards and mindsets from principal preparation and school counseling preparation integrates ecological systems within a school setting to create a more dynamic approach to student well-being. Creating systems for combining priorities of all school leaders for continuous and comprehensive support allows for

greater impact and a more equitable approach for meeting student needs and supporting their overall well-being (Beard & Thomson, 2021). The relationship building aspects that school counselors are trained to build through SEL in a school environment strengthen the trust and rapport of staff through active listening and communication causing staff members, students, and community members to feel more connected (Gimbert et al., 2023).

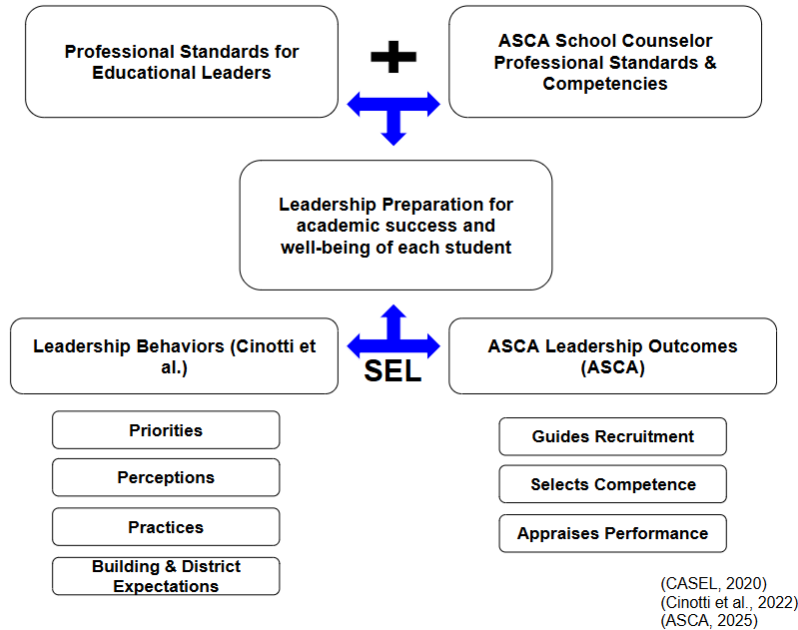
Conceptual Framework

Principals who better understand the priorities, perceptions, practices, and building and district expectations for their school counselors will be able to impact the overall well-being and academic success of the students. The conceptual framework combines the principal preparation standards and the school counseling preparation standards to form a harmonized approach to preparing school leaders for student well-being practices. CASEL's SEL Framework (2020) provides a well-being lens to view school leadership with an emphasis on social emotional learning. The PSEL standards and the ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards and Competencies (2025) are two frameworks that shape educational leadership for principals and school counselors. Furthermore, Cinotti et al. (2002) utilized the Assessment of School Counselor Needs for Professional Development to compare the perceptions of key stakeholders regarding school counselor priorities, perceptions, practices, and expectations. This tool was chosen due to its strong alignment with the ASCA Model and its demonstrated validity and reliability in previous studies (Cinotti et al., 2022). A proposed framework to combine the principles into a shared framework through the lens of CASEL's SEL Framework (2020) that proposes to guide educational leadership programs as they strive to incorporate well-being into programs for principal preparation. This framework guided research of educational leadership

preparation programs as we look for evidence of implementation of ASCA standards into their curriculum to support student well-being.

Figure 2

Conceptual Framework for Harmonizing Educational Leadership with School Counseling



Starting in the top left of the conceptual framework, the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) block represents the PSEL and NELP standards used in principal preparation programs by universities across the United States. In the top right block, the ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards and Competencies (2025) block represents the ASCA National Model for the expectations of school counselors in the United States. Together, these blocks create the middle block for “Leadership preparation for academic success and well-being of each student.” This middle block represents the combined principal and school counselor standards and/or programs designed to prepare school leaders to lead for academic success and well-being, meeting the requirements of the PSEL and NELP standards. The blocks under the

middle section represent the outcomes of leadership preparation for the academic success and well-being of each student.

On the bottom left, “Leadership Behaviors” are broken down into categories defined by the Assessment of School Counselor Needs for Professional Development, which outlines key stakeholder understanding and perceptions of school counselors (Cinotti et al., 2022, p. 3). On the bottom right, the “ASCA Leadership Outcomes” defines the areas where ASCA Mindsets expect principals to partner specifically with a school counseling program. This includes “guides recruitment, selects competence, and appraises performance” (ASCA, 2021, p. 2). Principals are expected to be knowledgeable enough about modern, school counselors to recruit those who are competent in the ASCA National Model and can build a program to meet the needs of all students. Principals should also be able to appraise the performance of their school counselors according to the ASCA National Model and understand where more partnerships might be needed for the ultimate success of the comprehensive programming by the school counselor.

Table 1

PSEL, NELP, and ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards and Competencies Aligned

NELP Standards	PSEL Standards	ASCA Standards	Common Areas of Focus
Standard 1: Mission, Vision, and Improvement	Standard 1: Mission, Vision and Core Values	Professional: B-PF 3, 4 Direct & Indirect Services: B-SS 1-6 Planning and Assessment: B-PA 1-9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Standards emphasize the importance of establishing a clear vision and mission for educational institutions. b. Goals are developed based on student data and needs. c. Improvement is focused on data and equity.

<p>Standard 2: Ethics and Professional Norms</p>	<p>Standard 2: Ethics and Professional Norms</p>	<p>Professional: B-PF 1-9 Direct & Indirect Services: B-SS 1-6 Planning and Assessment: B-PA 2-4</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. PSEL/NELP Standard: Upholds ethical principles and professional norms with a focus on student success. b. ASCA Mindset/Standards: Demonstrates ethical behavior, integrity, and confidentiality in interactions with students, staff, and families.
<p>Standard 3: Equity, Inclusiveness, and Cultural Responsiveness</p>	<p>Standard 3: Equity and Cultural Responsiveness</p>	<p>Professional: B-PF 1-9 Direct & Indirect Services: B-SS 5-6</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. PSEL/NELP Standard: Ensures equitable access to high-quality learning opportunities. b. ASCA Mindset/Standards: Advocates for equity, diversity, and inclusion, addressing barriers that hinder student achievement.
<p>Standard 4: Learning and Instruction</p>	<p>Standard 4: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment</p> <p>Standard 10: School Improvement</p>	<p>Professional: B-PF 1, 7, 8 Direct & Indirect Services: B-SS 1-4 Planning and Assessment: B-PA 1-5, 9</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. PSEL/NELP Standard: Designs, implements, and evaluates effective curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices. Engages in continuous professional learning towards school improvement. b. ASCA Mindset/Standard: Develops comprehensive, data-driven counseling programs aligned with student needs.
<p>Standard 5: Community and External Leadership</p>	<p>Standard 5: Community of Care and Support for Students</p> <p>Standard 8: Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community</p>	<p>Professional: B-PF 1-6 Direct & Indirect Services: B-SS 2-6</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. PSEL/NELP Standards: Engages families, community members, and stakeholders. b. ASCA Mindset/Standard: Collaborates with families, educators, and community partners to support student success.

<p>Standard 6: Operations and Management</p>	<p>Standard 9: Operations and Management</p>	<p>Professional: B-PF 1-3 Direct & Indirect Services: B-SS 5-6 Planning and Assessment: B-PA 1, 3-8</p>	<p>a. PSEL/NELP Standard: Provision of resources for staff, students, and community. Utilize data and technology for school improvement. Implement laws and policies for student and staff well-being.</p> <p>b. ASCA Mindset/Standard: Supports professional growth for school counselors and advocates for their role. Use data to inform decisions. Maintain relationships with district schools for vision and mission.</p>
<p>Standard 7: Building Professional Capacity</p>	<p>Standard 6: Professional Capacity of School Personnel</p> <p>Standard 7: Professional Community for Teacher and Staff</p>	<p>Direct & Indirect Services: B-SS 4-6 Planning and Assessment: B-PA 1, 3-9</p>	<p>a. PSEL/NELP Standards: Hire, select, and recruit staff. Develop professional culture for student and adult well-being and success. Supervise and evaluate staff for school improvement.</p> <p>b. ASCA Mindset/Standard: Promotes well-being, self-care, and professional development.</p>
<p>Standard 8: Internship</p>		<p>ASCA Standards for School Counselor Preparation Programs 1-7</p>	<p>Aspiring principals and school counselors complete an internship.</p>

(ASCA, 2019; Bryant et al., 2024)

Summary

Recent research underscores the critical role of School Counselor–Principal (SCP) Collaboration in advancing equitable student outcomes in academic achievement, social-emotional development, and college and career readiness. However, many principals are not

adequately prepared to supervise or support school counselors due to limited training in pre-service educational leadership programs, which tend to focus more on academic staff. This lack of preparation contributes to misunderstandings about the scope of school counseling programs and insufficient support for counselors. Scholars such as Geesa et al. (2022, 2024) and Cinotti et al. (2022) advocate for collaborative training frameworks that involve both school counseling and educational leadership professors to bridge this gap. Additionally, the absence of consistent evaluation tools aligned with the ASCA National Model further complicates effective supervision. By equipping principals with appropriate training and tools, they can better understand, evaluate, and collaborate with school counselors, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness of school counseling programs and improving student outcomes. Research highlights that comprehensive school counseling programs, when supported by principals and leadership teams, help close achievement and opportunity gaps while fostering a sense of belonging and motivation among students (Rhu et al., 2022; Geesa et al., 2023). This research aimed to grow research in the educational leadership field to build capacity for principal-school counselor collaboration and increase the student outcomes for leading this type of collaboration (Lowery et al., 2018).

Chapter 3: Methodology

A mixed methods approach was chosen for the design type for this research. The specific method was explanatory sequential methodology for mixed methods, with a pragmatic paradigm allowing for a comprehensive understanding of a research problem through the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. The pragmatic worldview goes beyond whether a test or theory works in a laboratory but seeks to understand if it works to improve or build the future that people want (Gillespie et al., 2024). This methodology is relevant because it focuses on truth being directly tied to values of people. This type of research is willing to take the problem at the “here and now” and begin to shed light on or solve problems with the information gathered (Gillespie et al., 2024, p.44). The setting for this research was graduate programs for educational leadership and school counseling in America. Approaching these two graduate programs to understand if they value integrating more knowledge about the other field allowed me to identify real-world conflicts and work to address solutions that could be practical and useful to the professions. The research questions will be answered both with data from the survey and follow-up interviews.

Research Questions

The following mixed methods research questions guides this study:

1. To what extent do educational leadership and school counseling programs integrate knowledge about the other profession into their curriculum?
2. In what ways does the integration of knowledge about school counselors in educational leadership programs impact the perceived preparedness of graduates to work with school counselors?

Participants

In this research, I did not collect any identifiable information from the participants. This allowed participants the least potential risk for participating in the research. The sample was identified through the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) membership list. The sample was selected based on being identified as active professor members within the field of educational leadership, resulting in 81 members. The entire list of members from UCEA was not included as some were not listed as active in the directory or they were not shown as Educational Leadership professors. The professor members were only emailed if they were serving as a professor member in the United States of America. The other participants were invited to complete the survey through a post from an active member in one Facebook group, the School Counselor Educators' Discussion Group (539 members). There was not an email sent to the members of the Facebook group. The participants were identified through sequential nonrandom nested sampling.

To summarize characteristics of the participants, descriptive statistics were calculated. The categorical variables such as race and gender were used with frequencies and percentages calculations. Continuous demographic variables were not collected to see how long the professors had been in practice, so I am not able to present means or standard deviation for those types of variables about the participants. The professor members that chose to report gender (n=11) were mostly female at 54% (n=6) while men were 36% (n=4) and one respondent chose not to choose a gender. Most of the respondents were in the age range of 40-50 and White ethnicity.

Table 2*Demographic Characteristics of Participants*

Variable	Category	Frequencies	Percentages
Gender	Female	6	54.5
	Male	4	36.4
	Prefer not to say	1	9.1
	Total	11	100
Age	30-40	1	9.1
	40-50	5	45.5
	50-60	2	18.2
	60-70	3	27.3
	Total	11	100
Ethnicity	White	9	81.8
	Black of African American	1	9.1
	Other	1	9.1

Note

Valid responses only were calculated in gender and age calculations (n=11).

The data analyzed were quantitative and qualitative data collected from professor members in educational leadership and school counselor education through the internet-based survey. With a pragmatic lens on analyzing data, the data is evaluated in both qualitative and quantitative perspectives. “There are three purposes for both qualitative (describing phenomena, theoretical framing, generating explanations) and quantitative (measuring phenomena, testing hypotheses, exploring associations) methods, and each has distinguishable questions, contributions, and indicative analyses” (Gillespie et al., 2024, p. 71). The qualitative data

provided explanations of what educators believe and practice while providing a foundation to view the phenomena. Then, the quantitative data provides testing and measuring of hypotheses and any associations available.

Data Collection

I collected new information through an internet-based survey that served as a questionnaire. The survey was designed to protect the identity of the participants and not collect personally identifiable information. This work was approved by Auburn University's Institutional Review Board as a study that was approved to be exempt from IRB review (STUDY00000835) prior to the start of research activities. I sent digital surveys to professor members of the University Council of Educational Administration to gain the perspective of active researchers and professor members in the field of educational leadership. The electronic survey was sent through email by the researcher. I also shared the electronic survey in one Facebook group, a school counselor educator research group (539 members). The interest in research social media groups assisted the research in reaching more participants.

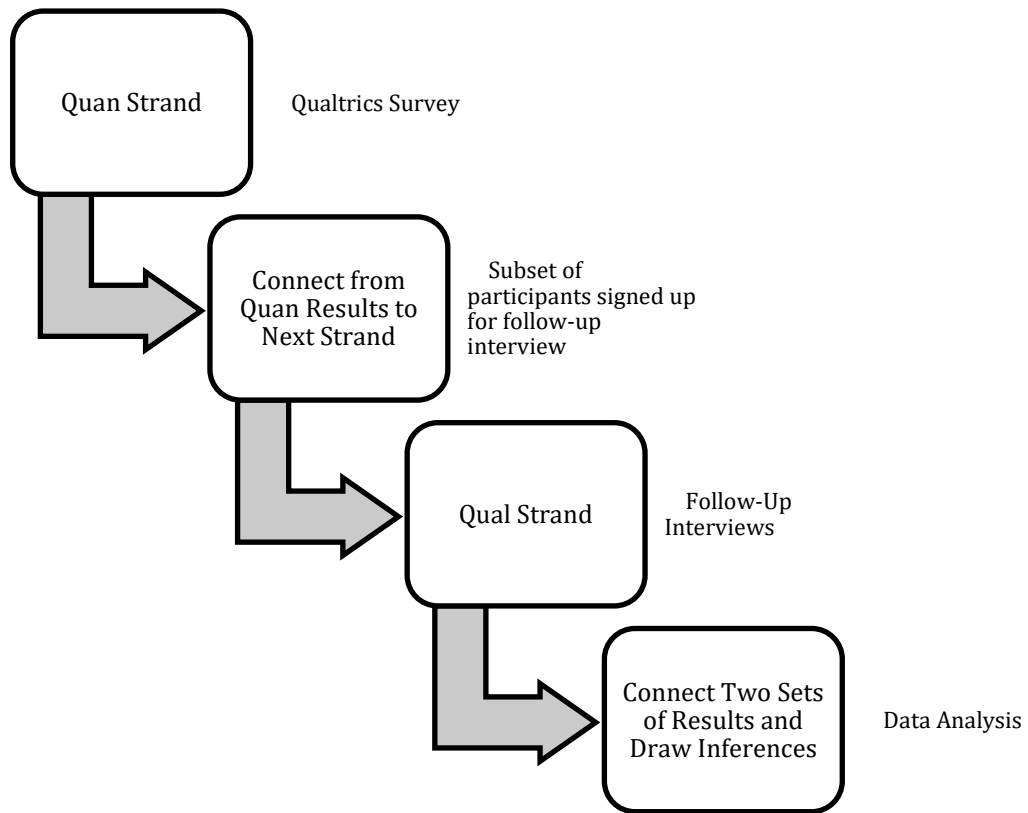
Methods

The method was an explanatory sequential methodology for mixed methods allowing for a model to be built to aid in providing real-world solutions and practical implications for practitioners. The data is not to be only viewed as true or false but an explanation of its overall utility towards the new phenomena being understood (Gillespie et al., 2024, p. 71). There were quantitative and qualitative questions in the internet-based survey that was sent to research participants for a more complete understanding from the participants. There were Likert scale questions to allow for quantitative data to be collected, then there were open-ended questions to allow for qualitative data to be collected. Qualitative results to open-ended questions on the

internet-based survey provided explanations to the phenomena through the words of the participants. In the initial stages of survey design, an IRB was approved to complete a pilot study to facilitate pre-testing the self-administered questionnaire (Fowler, 2014). Creswell and Plano-Clark's (2018) QUAN-QUAL design for a two-phase sequential explanatory design allowed for the quantitative data to be collected first in a survey, then a follow-up interview to be held to collect qualitative data (McMillan, 2016). The qualitative, follow-up interviews did not take place until the survey was first completed. This sequence allowed for the initial quantitative results to be elaborated, explained, or confirmed (Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2016).

Figure 3

Diagram of Mixed Methods Design in Reference to QUAN- QUAL (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018)



Pilot Survey

Qualtrics was used for survey creation and question evaluation for estimated methodology success with user-friendliness in mind for completion and accurate representation of the data submitted. The internet-based survey was piloted with an IRB approved study with a sample of 14 participants. The researcher analyzed results to determine if the questions seemed to make sense to the participants or if questions needed to be worded differently. There was also an expert panel that reviewed the questions to provide feedback on questions to determine if there was validity in the responses received. The panel assisted in determining if the questions were relevant and the responses were significant enough to continue research. Some questions and formatting were edited for user-friendliness and clarity to provide greater credibility. There was no data collected or stored that recorded interviews or tracked participants' personal information.

Instruments

The anonymous, Qualtrics survey began with a description of the research and asked if the participant was willing to participate with a yes or no answer. The instrument was created to gather data on program perceptions of school counselors. The survey began with one identifying question to distinguish between participants in the Educational Leadership or School Counseling programs. It includes a demographics section with six questions featuring dropdown response options. The core of the survey consists of four groups of five Likert scale items designed to measure participants' program's perceptions of school counselor roles and effectiveness. Additionally, four questions focus on understanding how each program implements school counselor-principal collaboration. To gain deeper insights, the survey concludes with two open-ended questions, allowing participants to elaborate on their perceptions and experiences.

Data Analysis

Pretesting of the survey was conducted under an approved IRB protocol using a similar set of questions and an electronic format, allowing the researcher to evaluate item clarity and gather feedback on the relevance of the topics. Qualtrics was used to design and distribute the survey, offering built-in analytics and feedback tools that helped refine question structure and improve the overall format for better completion rates. The survey was modeled after a survey used by R. L. Geesa et al. (2018) combined with the subscales from the Assessment of School Counselor Needs for Professional Development (ASCNPD). Both surveys are grounded in the ASCA National Model to ensure content validity, with each section aligned to themes that reflect the priorities and roles of school counselors. The survey developed by Cinotti et al. (2022) contains four subscales with questions developed in alignment with the ASCA National Model to ensure appropriate roles of school counselors were presented to professors as they completed the survey.

Figure 4

Diagram of the ASCA National Model (Fifth Edition)

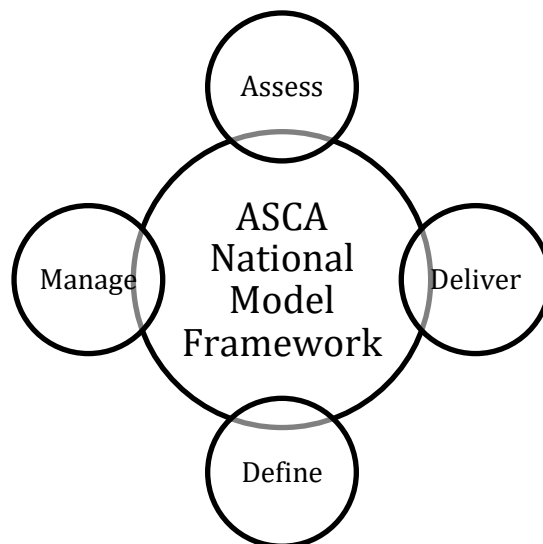


Table 3

Alignment of ASCA National Model (Fifth Edition) Components, Survey used by Geesa et al. (2018), and the ASCNP used by Cinotti et al (2022) used to format survey questions

Subscales in Survey	Subscale Description	ASCA National Model Components
School Counseling Priorities	“School counselor activities and tasks associated with the well-being of a school, as defined in the ASCA National Model (Cinotti et al., 2022, p.3).”	Define: Mission statement, vision statement, program goals, standards, competencies, ethical standards
School Setting Perceptions	“Items that elicit respondents’ beliefs concerning appropriate roles for school counselors (Cinotti et al., 2022, p.3).”	Manage: Use of time assessment, annual administrative conference, advisory council, action plans, resource management
Practices (Frequency)	“Asked respondents to identify how often school counselors have worked with students on skills, such as “managing emotions,” “strengthening interpersonal relations,” and “social-emotional issues” (Cinotti et al., 2022, p.3).”	Deliver: Identifying indirect and direct services to students
Building and District Expectations (Expectations)	“Items addressed school counselors’ involvement in activities that provide continuing support to the general school environment. The subscale also addressed administrative expectations regarding tasks, including those considered non-counseling responsibilities (Cinotti et al., 2022, p.3).”	Assess: program assessment, reporting results, performance appraisals, continuous improvement

(Geesa et al., 2018) (Cinotti et al., 2022)

Reliability was supported through consistent digital communication, with identical messaging sent to all participants and detailed documentation maintained for all outreach efforts. Reliability analysis was tested with Cronbach’s alpha and indicated good internal consistency for

the overall Likert scale items used in the study ($\alpha=.82$). The questions were tested in the pilot study to ensure they were understood the same by every respondent and all wording in questions were complete. The results from the qualitative questions were coded through ATLAS.ti for themes. To analyze the data, I attempted to employ several statistical tests in SPSS: Chi-Square tests to examine associations between categorical variables (e.g., Likert responses and demographic groups), ANOVA to compare means across more than two groups, and Independent Samples t-tests to compare means between two groups when Likert data is treated as interval-level. I pivoted my Pearson Chi-Square test to Fisher’s Exact Test due to not having enough responses to present valid findings (McMillan, 2016). The more appropriate test, according to McMillian (2016, p. 297) was the Fisher’s Exact Test as it can be used for small samples, allowing for associations to be analyzed between categories in a smaller scale. Further, the quantitative data from the qualitative questions in the survey allowed for associations to be considered and more concrete data sets to evaluate. The quantitative data was not used to evaluate if the qualitative data was true or false, but it was used to tell more details and provide more solutions to the problem. The data was also used to search for correlations between educational leadership data compared to school counselor educator data. Last, the data was all evaluated for themes to gain a better understanding.

Table 4

Research questions, data sources, and specific analyses to answer questions

Research Question	Data Source to Answer Question	Dichotomy	Test or Analysis to Answer Question
1. To what extent do educational leadership and school counseling programs integrate knowledge about the other profession into their curriculum?	Quantitative: Q2, Q8 Awareness Levels x Q1 (school counseling vs. Educational Leadership)	Recoded 5 Likert Scales to 2 Scales, Low or High Awareness 0-34 = Low 35-100 = High	Differences were not statistically significant in Fisher’s Exact test due to small sample; Cramer’s V has a large effect size ($V=.41-.55$)

	Quantitative: Q3 Methods of Integration x Q1	5 Point Likert Scales	Chi-Square likelihood ratio was significant p=.020 and Cramer's V = .86 suggesting differences in integration styles between educational leadership and school counseling professors
	Qualitative: Open- ended Questions in Survey & Follow-Up Interview Questions		Examples of content that has been included for cross-disciplinary instruction by school counseling vs. educational leadership professors
2. In what ways does the integration of knowledge about school counselors in educational leadership programs impact the perceived preparedness of graduates to work with school counselors?	Quantitative: Q5		Asked if professors thought it was important to provide ASCA aligned direct services to students by school counseling vs. educational leadership professors
	Qualitative: Open- ended Questions (Q 10 & 11) in Survey & Follow-Up Interview Questions		Examples of experiences and barriers integrating content that have been included for cross- disciplinary instruction by school counseling vs. educational leadership professors

Limitations

The survey was distributed through a social media group associated with professors in school counseling to 539 members, which introduces certain limitations. Because of this distribution method, it cannot be confirmed that all respondents were professors members at American universities. Additionally, those who are active on social media and chose to participate may hold different perspectives than professors who are less engaged online or who

opted not to respond. This self-selection bias could influence the findings, as non-respondents may not perceive a significant shift in the relationship between school counseling and educational leadership and therefore may not see the relevance of participating in such a study. As a result, the sample may reflect a subset of professors who are more attuned to or supportive of evolving trends in these fields. Also, due to not being a member of the social media group, the researcher could not post the request for responses multiple times or monitor if anyone was responding to the post. This caused a limited response from members in the group to the survey.

Delimitations

The participants in this study were intentionally limited to professor members involved in principal preparation within educational leadership programs and professors responsible for school counselor preparation programs across the United States. This deliberate scope was chosen by the researcher to maintain a focused and manageable study population, ensuring the findings would be directly relevant to those who design and deliver pre-service training for future school leaders and counselors. By concentrating on these two groups, the research aims to generate insights and resources that reflect the current landscape of preparation programs and the perspectives of those shaping them. The goal is to inform and support professors in educational leadership by providing data-driven recommendations and contextually grounded information that can enhance the alignment and collaboration between leadership and counseling preparation programs.

Transferability

This research can inform state-level investigations into how educational leadership preparation programs incorporate standards such as those from the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) and the National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP). By

examining these frameworks, educational leadership and school counseling professors can gain mutual insights into each other's priorities and pedagogical approaches. This cross-disciplinary understanding may reveal evolving expectations in the professional roles of principals and school counselors. Consequently, findings can guide the adaptation of university-based leadership programs to better align with the current demands of the educational landscape, thereby enhancing the preparedness of future graduates.

Chapter 4: Findings

With the shift of guidance counselor to school counselor, the phenomena of principals needing to be explicitly trained for school counselor partnership and management is a growing concern (Lewis et al., 2022). To answer the research questions, University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) members who are active professors in Educational Leadership along with School Counselor professors, were invited to participate in an electronic survey and an optional follow-up interview. A pragmatic, sequential explanatory methodology for mixed methods allowed for real-world solutions and practical implications to be discussed and presented. The Quan-Qual method (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018) (Roberts, C., & Hyatt, L., 2019) allows for reasoning through deduction and induction, data collection with questionnaires with open-ended questions, thematic and statistical analysis. This chapter will include a description of the participants, assumptions, and data screening, and findings of quantitative and qualitative research.

The following mixed methods research questions guided this study:

1. To what extent do educational leadership and school counseling programs integrate knowledge about the other profession into their curriculum?
2. In what ways does the integration of knowledge about school counselors in educational leadership programs impact the perceived preparedness of graduates to work with school counselors?

Participants

Of the 81 professors from UCEA and the 539 members of the school counselor private group, there were 17 individuals that responded to the survey who were included in the analysis. Ten participants provided their state of residence with eight states being represented in America. These states were Florida, Louisiana, Missouri, Nebraska, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Texas, and Virginia. Texas has the most participants with two professor members reporting residence there. Half of the participants that reported gender were female (54.5%, n=6), the male respondents reported at under half (36%, n=4) because one person preferred to not disclose the gender (9.1%). Using a multiple choice format, participants were asked to report their ethnic background. There was a majority of White participants (n=9) with only one reporting Black or African American (n=1) and one responding as “other” (n=1). There were options to respond as American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, but there was no participant that chose to respond with one of those ethnicities. The mean age was the group of 40-60 year olds that completed their graduate school program between 2001 and 2010 for educational leadership or school counseling. This does suggest that our participants have not been trained in modern school counseling trends in their graduate programs. Their programs were completed at various locations such as University of Alabama, Vanderbilt University, Northwest Missouri State University, University of Holy Cross with 52.9% of the programs being educational leadership.

Table 5

Participant Profile

FIELD OF EDUCATION	PARTICIPANT	GENDER	EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE
EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP PROFESSOR	Professor Jane	Female	Ph.D.
SCHOOL COUNSELING PROFESSOR	Professor Sutton	Female	Ph.D.

Assumptions

Assumptions for this study include the study design of each participant working independently to complete the study one time. The design was for no group participation and no repeated measures by individuals. I asked each participant to only complete the survey one time. Next, the expected cell counts in Chi-Square tests presented an output of 100% of cells have expected counts less than 5 (SPSS) with my Likert scale reports. I pivoted my test from Pearson Chi-Square test to Fisher's Exact Test due to not having enough responses to present valid findings (McMillan, 2016). The more appropriate test was Fisher's Exact Test as it can be used for small samples, allowing for associations to be analyzed between categories on a smaller scale (McMillan, 2016).

Findings

Open-ended survey responses and interviews were coded using open and axial coding phases. A first review of the responses was made with open coding to review what important themes emerged. Then, an axial phase included making a chart with codes and examples of what

could be included in the code for confidence in choosing a theme and validating if codes were present. Coding was completed in ATLAS.ti which also allowed for highlighting important areas that did not fit into a theme but was still an important comment to note. The findings are presented with direct quotes and structured coding in presenting results without incorporating my bias as a school counselor or educational leader.

RQ 1: To what extent do educational leadership and school counseling programs integrate knowledge about the other profession into their curriculum?

Quantitative Results

To examine whether there is awareness from the professors of cross-disciplinary content in Educational Leadership and School Counseling programs, a Chi-Square analysis was conducted in SPSS. The small response rate and population size limited the possibility of using a Pearson Chi-Square test (100% of cells <5). Therefore, a Fisher's Exact Test needed to be conducted instead of a typical Chi-Square test (McMillan, 2016). The five Likert scale responses were dichotomized into two categories (0-34 = low, 35-100= high) of awareness instead of five to allow for the test to run. The initial awareness level of the professor was not statistically significant in its connection to their field of education (Fisher's Exact Test $p=.524$). Cramer's V reported .41 indicating a medium to large effect size even though the relationship might not be significant. This could suggest that School Counseling professors are more aware of cross-disciplinary curriculum or content integration than Educational Leadership professors have reported in this sample. Next, the school counseling professors reported having most of their integration of content through guest speakers (67%) as compared to educational leadership reporting case studies (80%) for learning about other roles within a school. The response to this

question was N=8, so it was not stable enough for a chi-square. Although, there is a practical difference here in styles of integration between school counseling professors and educational leadership professors. The likelihood ratio of the chi-square being $p=.020$ and Cramer's $V = .856$ showing a statistical significance in how the two groups of professors incorporated knowledge about the other professions. This could impact the perceived awareness as school counselor professors had more hands-on types of experiences.

Table 6

Levels of Awareness of Integrating Knowledge of Other Profession into Curriculum

Profession	Initial Question (Q 2) %	Follow Up Question (Q 8) %
School Counseling Professor	75	100
Educational Leadership Professor	33	40

In comparison to the initial awareness of the professors, the awareness level was assessed towards the end of the survey after information on each program was assessed. These results did vary from the initial assessment with 100% of school counseling professors reporting high awareness while only 40% of the educational leadership professors held that level of awareness. Again, with the collapsed Likert five-point scale into two reference points, Fisher's Exact Test presented $p=.429 (>.05)$, proving no statistical significance. However, the Cramer's V in this assessment was a value of .548, indicating a large effect size for the professor member's field of

education and their level of awareness at the end of the survey. This might be more statistically significant if the sample size were larger in a future study as this sample size was a limitation as it could have inflated the value of Cramer's V. In conclusion, the awareness patterns are consistently differing for the two professions, the integration of cross-disciplinary programs is different, and there are large effect sizes even if the overall N is lower and hard to give statistical significance to.

Qualitative Results

From the qualitative side, school counselor professors were most likely to mention in open-ended questions and in interviews that they have contributed to or have included cross-disciplinary content in their programs and curriculum. A school counseling professor reported in an open-ended question that he or she provided a curriculum addition for an educational leadership professor members to utilize, but they were not sure if it was ever used in the courses. In a follow-up interview, Professor Sutton, a school counseling professor, reported that she has invited an educational leadership professor to her classes each year to share his experience of a school shooting and the impact it had on the school. This was an example of providing cross-disciplinary instruction to gain insight of perspectives and roles of the principal for school counselors to better understand before they enter the job. Professor Jane also stated that she has provided resources such as journal articles for educational leadership professors and feels like she has to be mindful not to "keep, like, hounding them about it" as she is attempting to teach them about who school counselors are. She (Professor Jane) admitted to having conversations such as, "Do you guys ever teach your principals about what school counselors are, or can I come talk to your students about what school counselors are, so they know what we do and how they should work with us?" She stated it is hard to have a working relationship with the

professors in education fields at her university because the school counselors are in the counseling department and not in the school of education. She stated that most of the training the counselors get is focused on ASCA or counseling practices, not on education topics while most job descriptions still say guidance counselor in her local school district. Professor Jane also shared that she believes professors supervision of school counselors should continue after they start their jobs because they are working with human lives and most principals do not understand how to supervise beyond instructing a counselor to go teach their counseling classes. She stated most school counselors are evaluated on teacher scales, not evaluation scales that are aligned to ASCA standards and mindsets. She explained, “You’re assessing me on a job that’s not my job title. I think we all know with the needs of students today, and the mental health needs of students, like, we school counselors can’t not address that...Historically, there’s just been a shift in the needs of kids.” She shared that “teaming up” with principals towards school-wide culture and climate or positive behavior expectation support would be great places for school counselors to offer support rather than completing administrative tasks for principals or just filling in a spot in the lunchroom for student supervision. She stated, “Maybe they should take time to understand what it is we do, and how we can assist them.” She shared that if school counselors knew that principals have well-being standards that they are responsible to meet, it would provide a way for them to partner in MTSS, social-emotional learning, and other appropriate roles listed by ASCA. She shared that in a school counseling podcast that she listened to recently, it reminded school counselors about the responsibility to advocate for themselves and their roles. This was her response, “I get it, we have to advocate, but also, who's advocating for us? Like, nobody! I'm like...Where is the Ed Leadership World? And I think it should be heard, you know? It should be out there.”

In a contrasting interview with an Educational Leadership professor, Professor Jane, reported that she does notice when school counselors join a cohort for educational leadership that they bring different perspectives. In her normal cohorts though, it's a lockstep and fast-paced program with a focus on gaining a certification. She stated that as a professor, she understands that counseling topics or needs related to counselors need to be in the program, but it's also about focusing on more human-centered leadership practices and providing strategies for leaders that allow them to understand when discipline and mental health situations differ from each other. This professor shared that her current research is centered on well-being, flourishing, and mindfulness topics and that she includes information on these topics, but she believes she only does that due to her research agenda. She also finds that when people want to put in the extra work, she has to encourage them to do even more to make up for the administrators who come before them. That often does include being understanding of school counselors or other niche staff members within the school building. The leaders have to realize that people in their school will have been burned by principals before them and they have to build bridges.

RQ2: In what ways does the integration of knowledge about school counselors in educational leadership programs impact the perceived preparedness of graduates to work with school counselors?

For research question two, I was looking for concrete ways that professors could report that their leadership programs impact perceived preparedness of graduates to work with school counselors. In an open-ended question, I offered professors to provide a response to the following prompt, "Describe any experiences you have with integrating information about school counselors into a principal preparation program, and explain if this influenced the preparedness

for the principal to work with school counselors.” Of the responses, 80% of the answers on this question were from school counselor professors rather than educational leadership professors.

Table 7

Responses reported to question 10: “Describe any experiences you have with integrating information about school counselors into a principal preparation program, and explain if this influenced the preparedness for the principal to work with school counselors.”

Theme	School Counselor, n	Educational Leadership, n
Cross-professional learning activities	2	1
Lack of Integration	2	1
Recommendations for Improvement	1	
Departmental or Structural Barriers	1	
Professors Capacity Constraints	1	

The next question in the survey was also open-ended and asked, “What challenges or barriers exist in integrating this knowledge into your curriculum?” This question did have a higher response rate from educational leadership participants. This did provide an insight into the challenges and suggestions the professors were willing to share.

Table 8

Responses reported to question 11: What challenges or barriers exist in integrating this knowledge into your curriculum?

Theme	School Counselor, n	Educational Leadership, n
Curriculum Overload	1	4
Lack of Integration		1
Recommendations for Improvement	1	3
Lack of Integration	1	2
Departmental or Structural Barriers	1	

Professors Capacity Constraints	1	1
Standard or Policy Misalignment	1	2

One professor simply stated, “The ed leadership curriculum is packed. Because leadership prep is heavily regulated by the state via mandated standards, there is limited room to add or incorporate counselor ed into ed leadership.” The same professor went on to explain that without explicit guidelines to incorporate counselor education standards, it would be extremely difficult to incorporate more into education leadership courses due to heavily mandated state standards. Another professor shared that they do not see time or space as available for integration of school counselor content, although they see the need as principals do not understand how to differentiate student needs from mental health to discipline. Another professor shared that they believe principals need to understand how to help school counselors focus on direct services of students rather than get involved in too many meetings just to be busy. I have one additional theme that only emerged in my interviews. This theme was informal or incidental exposure to cross-discipline learning. This did appear when professors discussed having a student that was a school counselor before they entered their educational leadership program or informal conversations between professors where they might share resources about their profession in hopes the other professor will utilize the information or invite the other to help lead a class. These findings aligned with question five in the survey that asked if professors thought it was important to provide ASCA aligned direct services to students and 79.36%

believed it to be important with $SD = 18.35$. None of the responses directly stated that they had experience impacting the preparedness of principals to lead school counselors. There was an absence of evidence of a finding, possibly indicating lack of intentional preparation towards this type of learning outcome.

To summarize the themes that emerged when answering this question, the following themes were included in coding:

Table 9

Qualitative Coding from Follow-up Interviews

Theme 1: Cross-Professional Learning Activities (7 Quotes)		Pragmatic Impact
Professor Jane	Educational Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professors could incorporate collaborative research opportunities for students in school counseling and educational leadership courses. Information about the other profession could be intentionally added in the practicum courses.
	<p>“We included information about wellbeing, mental health, and working with counselors in our practicum courses.”</p> <p>“Collaborative research; a counseling professor has engaged with our leadership students to apply solution-based strategies.”</p> <p>“Even though there's not a lot of wiggle room for a full course, we have a seminar...we have always had one of our counseling</p>	

professors or a school counselor come in and talk to our administrators to talk about counseling guidelines, the counseling job descriptions, the... I think it's the... What, the Counseling Association.”

Professor Sutton	School Counseling	“Have developed modules for Ed Leadership classes that are implemented by a professor of record.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Invite professors from the other departments of education or counseling to assist in developing modules in courses.
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Theme 2: Curriculum Overload (10 Quotes)

Pragmatic Impact

Professor Jane	Educational Leadership	<p>“We have a seminar that is kind of a catch-all course...we always have one of our counseling professors come in and talk to our future administrators about counseling guidelines, job descriptions, and what the counseling association is.”</p> <p>“While EL program professors view this</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Guest speakers, supervision courses, and practicum are straightforward courses that integrating content on school counselors or principals would fit.
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integration as important, the leadership prep program is structured around state EL standards and the admin prep portfolio. Unless states explicitly incorporate CE into the EL standards, it will be difficult to fully incorporate into leadership prep.”

Professor Sutton

School Counseling

“...Because our clinical and school counseling programs both share a core together, we only have, 4 school counseling specific classes, not including the practicum and internship, so...”

“Time. We have so much to cover, and only a handful of school counseling specific courses.”

- There is limited time, but when the topic of advocacy is introduced from the ASCA lens, the role of the principal could be fully introduced.
- When advocacy is introduced through the lens of the ASCA National Model, educational leadership students or professors could be invited to have a debate, role play

discussion, mock
 administrative
 conference on advocacy
 and appropriate duties.

Theme 3: Departmental or Structural Barriers (3 Quotes)

Pragmatic Impact

Professor Jane Educational Leadership

“We've done that work as full-time faculty, but I do worry that when we farm things out to adjuncts, that you lose a bit of control, because we're not, like, the kind of place that says, this is your class, here's your syllabus, you have to do these things in this order. We'll say, here's a sample syllabus, here's some things we suggest.”

- Training and guidance for all professors could be developed on school counselors and principals, so adjunct and full-time professors could accurately explain the role and expectation.

Professor Sutton School Counseling

“Programs operating in silos. Limited understanding by other educators about the role of school counselors.”

“None yet, but we just approved a Principal certification program at our university, so I'd

- As faculty members or professors within a school of education, there should be opportunities created for showcasing updated policies, initiatives, laws,

	love to start to connect with them.”	research trends, and other relevant information with other professors to keep educational leaders in the know.
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Theme 4: Faculty Capacity Constraints (8 Quotes)	Pragmatic Impact
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Professor Jane	Educational Leadership	“But we're inviting people to teach because of their expertise. So I think some of those things probably get diluted at times.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● When hiring new professors, offer them a set of initiatives the department is working to promote. In educational leadership, this could include the understanding of the role of the modern, school counselor as a partner for student well-being.
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Professor Sutton	School Counseling	“Our school counseling program develops modules for ed lead courses, but module implementers often pick and choose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The challenge of teaching “How it really is” and “How it needs to
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	<p>what they believe is important or what they interpret as "how it really is" versus an appreciation for best practices.”</p> <p>“We have a clinical program and the school counseling program (not in school of education).”</p> <p>“And it kind of just... I didn't pursue it, I didn't keep, like, hounding them about it, necessarily.”</p> <p>“I have not been able to do this yet. I have talked to our educational leadership faculty but have not yet been invited to talk to their students.”</p>	<p>be” is a vital challenge for all of educational leadership and school counseling professors.</p> <p>The challenge is, how can future leaders navigate a culture change for a role in their schools.</p>
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Theme 5: Informal or Incidental Exposure (4 Quotes)		Pragmatic Impact
Professor Jane	Educational Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Staff well-being and student well-being need to be included in educational leadership courses.

Burnout and well-being get taught in there a little bit. I think they're going to be a lot more in our new course, the Human-Centered Leadership course, which I'm actually researching."

"In every cohort that we actually have someone with a counseling license, there is always unintentional overlap."

"I think that's come up when we talk about burnout and well-being..."

Professor Sutton	School Counseling	"Like, hey, like, do you guys ever teach your principals about what school counselors are, or can I come talk to your students about what school counselors are, so they know what we do and how they should work with us?"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● School counselors need to know what the role of the principal is, just as the principal needs to understand a school counselor.
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Theme 6: Lack of Integration (15 Quotes)		Pragmatic Impact	
Professor Jane	Educational Leadership	"Integration of school counselors in leadership prep is very limited."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● In a module on supervision, in any

	<p>Or</p> <p>“None (is incorporated)”</p> <p>“There’s not enough (time).”</p> <p>“We’re just gonna train people, check the boxes, get the certificate.”</p> <p>“...Time and space...”</p>	<p>module covering a</p> <p>NELP/PSEL standard,</p> <p>cover the student well-</p> <p>being aspect of the</p> <p>standards. This is the</p> <p>perfect time to include</p> <p>who the partner is for</p> <p>meeting this side of the</p> <p>NELP/PSEL standards.</p>
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Professor Sutton	School Counseling	<p>“I have not been able to do this yet. I have talked to our educational leadership professors but have not yet been invited to talk to their students.”</p> <p>“Time. We have so much to cover, and only a handful of school counseling specific courses. “</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Professors, invite a guest speaker from another department to help you explain the aspiring role of their students to your students.
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Theme 7: Standards or Policy Misalignment (11 Quotes)	Pragmatic Impact
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Professor Jane	Educational Leadership	<p>“Everything is so headed towards... certification is so headed towards this lockstep training program, right? We're just gonna</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● True mastery of the standards will be accomplished when the
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		<p>train people, check the boxes, get the certificate.”</p> <p>“Core programs are becoming abbreviated. We're about to go to a one-year online program, which I think is a horrible idea...”</p> <p>“But so... so you don't roll into it with your priorities, you definitely roll into a course with that course's learning goals and standards established.”</p>	<p>academic and well-being success for each student is addressed.</p>
Professor Sutton	School Counseling	<p>“...So those (required courses) kind of divide the model into two bite-sized pieces, and then we also, I suppose we do, for standards-wise, we align with our state, you know, Department of Education standards as well. We have to meet those standards.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● In the advocacy portion or the administrative conferences sections, the principal guest speaker would fit perfectly.

Theme 8: Recommendations for Improvement (34 Quotes)

Pragmatic Impact

Professor Jane Educational Leadership

“We have a well-being aspect of our standard, and an academic success well-being of our standard, you know what I mean?”

“One of the things that I keep bringing up is administrators have to be able to recognize that not every discipline referral is a discipline referral. Like, sometimes there's something happening under the surface that I need to take that referral...”

“How do I do the legal things, and how do I understand the student needs and behaviors, so that when I need to not step out and do something illegal, but when I... I can recognize the gray area where I can say I need to work with somebody else on this. We don't... we don't do a good job of that.”

- As an educational leadership professor, remember that you are training future principals. These principals must be able to see a child and staff member as a holistic person while meeting the legal and ethical responsibilities of their role. Prepare your aspiring principals to know who their partners are in holistic, equitable, and ethical student support within the school.

Professor Sutton	School Counseling	“Because it’s important not be a silo...”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● There is a shift in school counseling, but there is a greater need than advocacy for the counselor role. There is a need to equip school counselors to partner and be informed of what principals need to accomplish and how they can seamlessly build programs and curriculum that will honor the role of the principal while fulfilling their role as the school counselor.
		“Historically, there's just been a shift in the needs of kids.”	
		“So, I had no idea that they had, like, well-being standards that they have to meet. That's interesting. If their standards include well-being, they need to know...”	
		“Talking about universal screeners, or, you know, the school-wide culture and climate, positive behavior expectation support across the school, and things like that, and I think teaming up with principals.”	
		“I get it, we have to advocate, but also, who's advocating for us? Like, nobody!”	

Summary of Findings

To summarize the findings for research question one, professors of educational leadership initially believed themselves to be aware of the integration of school counselor information into their programs more than they did after the survey was concluded. Towards the end, when the

question was asked again if they were aware of integration, the educational leadership awareness level dropped. The educational leadership professors shared that they see the need, but do not see the space or explicit requirement allowing for the direct integration. To summarize question two, there was not explicit integration practices to be able to identify a clear perceived preparedness of graduates to work with school counselors. Research question two indicated an absence of evidence of a finding, suggesting this type of learning goal is not intentionally anticipated by professors. The implications will be discussed in chapter five.

Chapter 5: Discussion

While the sample was small in this study, there were some important takeaways from professors in the fields of educational leadership and school counseling. One professor mentioned, “Integration of school counselors in leadership prep is very limited.” Mastering the National Educational Leadership Preparation Program (NELP, 2018) standards to their full intent means that principals are leaders in their schools who promote academic success and student well-being (Adair, 2024). The standards included in the PSELs from NELP encompass the whole student. The standards require principals to act as change agents for improvement in students’ academic success and well-being, promote coherence of school programs, and develop leadership capacity amongst staff members, yet in this study there is a sample of professors of principal preparation claim that programs do not connect the principal to their school counselor as a partner in meeting these standards (Lashley & Stickl, 2016).

A school counseling professor in this study stated, “It’s important not to be a silo...” The collaboration of principal and school counselor from the graduate school level would greatly improve the current culture of school counseling from the movement of advocating for one’s role to their principal (Blake, 2020), to a culture of collaboration. This collaboration could lead to embracing a shared goal of academic and well-being success for all students (Boyland, et al., 2019). There is a noted lack of understanding in recent literature from the principals’ perspective of the school counselor role (Glenn-Akers, 2025). The lack of understanding might be improved if collaboration opportunities exist more frequently for professors in related departments.

“Unless states explicitly incorporate counselor education into the educational leadership standards, it will be difficult to fully incorporate into leadership prep,” shared professor Jane.

The potential challenge appears to stem from many programs lacking explicit guidance from higher education accreditation institutions on implementing principal preparation for well-being (Adair, 2024). Furthermore, the challenge remains that there is no requirement to include explicit instruction on collaboration with the school counselor or the ASCA National Model for school counseling in principal preparation graduate programs in America, yet research is suggesting this could benefit to be included (Boyland et al., 2019).

This chapter aims to interpret and contextualize the results and findings of Chapter 4. The study was a mixed-methods study that used qualitative and quantitative methods to further answer the research questions in ways the literature review could not. This chapter also includes implications for practice and research with potential next steps. The conclusion of this chapter will include recommendations for next steps in research.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the integration of school counselor information within educational leadership graduate programs due to the requirements for student well-being in the NELP (2018) and PSEL (2015) standards. Findings aim to inform program enhancements and support the professional development of educational leaders. By investigating the perspectives of educational leadership and school counseling professors who actively prepare future school leaders and are members of UCEA organization, this research aimed to gain insight into the importance of this topic and the challenges that professors face to overcome this challenge.

Additionally, a goal of this research is to advance the current literature on this topic to encourage improvements in explicit guidance on implementing content and curriculum in

principal preparation programs. The content needed would cover the topics of student well-being and staff collaboration (including school counselors) within the school to support this. Also, incorporating the conceptual framework from my research in chapter 2 with the work of Geesa et al. (2022) would provide aligned approaches for educational leadership programs to consider as they revise courses or incorporate collaborative workshops, guest speakers, curriculum, or programs into their principal preparation.

Research Questions

The following mixed methods research questions guide this study:

1. To what extent do educational leadership and school counseling programs integrate knowledge about the other profession into their curriculum?
2. In what ways does the integration of knowledge about school counselors in educational leadership programs impact the perceived preparedness of graduates to work with school counselors?

Review of Methodology

A pragmatic, sequential explanatory methodology for mixed methods was chosen as the research design with the intent to allow for QUAN-qual methods (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018) (Roberts, C., & Hyatt, L., 2019). In this research, I included a quantitative data-collection phase that could be supported by qualitative insights from a second phase of data collection. The quantitative research included an electronic survey with 5-point Likert scales that was sent to UCEA professor members of educational leadership and was shared in a Facebook group for School Counseling professors. At the end of the survey, there were open-ended questions and an

option to opt-in for a follow-up interview. Quantitative data analysis was conducted in SPSS. The interviews that were opted into were held via Zoom and the transcripts were entered into ATLAS.ti to code for themes.

In the interviews, participants were asked clarifying questions to help provide further insight to the areas of interest in the survey. It was beneficial to hear the depth of what they found important, while also allowing for a greater explanation of the challenges they face. The school counselor interview questions had to differ from the educational leadership interview questions to allow the school counseling professors to provide insight into potential misunderstandings about the role of the school counselor.

Significance

The findings of this study show a lack of awareness of the other profession's roles for a school counselor or a principal. These graduate school programs are often housed in separate colleges within a university, which further widens the disconnect. The literature supports that principal and school counselor collaboration is essential for student well-being and holistic student success. This study found that there is a missing requirement or explicit explanation of how principal preparation programs should expect to see mastery of the student well-being standards within NELP and PSEL standards. There is not an explicit area within principal preparation programs where future principals should learn how to increase student well-being or learn to collaborate with a school counselor towards this lofty goal. The results of this study emphasize a desire to increase understanding of improving student well-being and the collaboration between modern, school counseling and educational leadership, but there is not a strong model to follow for this to support adding in accredited principal preparation programs.

Limitations

This concern in education is still a growing subject within literature. This could lead to a lack of interest or social desirability bias from members in the field of educational leadership while this continues to be a major frustration within the field of school counseling. Some limitations include the following for this study:

- A key limitation in this study is the small sample size which indicates exploratory elements while limiting generalizability and may weaken statistical claims.
- Only UCEA members that were publicly active educational leadership professors in their online membership were included in the email distribution list.
- Having an in-person event, such as the UCEA conference, could have recruited more participants, but that was not in the researcher's IRB-approved procedures for increasing sample size or response rate. The researcher was very careful not to deviate outside of the published list of UCEA members even though it was known that some were missing from personal experience. The IRB was aware that emails would only be sent to the list of professors in the directory on UCEA's website of members that were professors in America.
- The school counseling educators Facebook group was private, so I was not able to post multiple times or encourage responses within the group.
- Self-selection bias is a possibility because survey and interview responses were based on professor member knowledge of this topic or interest in signing up for an interview.

Major Findings

The first research question is, “To what extent do educational leadership and school counseling programs integrate knowledge about the other profession into their curriculum?” There is some awareness and small touches of integration in practicum or seminar spaces, but there is not a formal integration technique that professors have shared. One professor is in the mindfulness and human-centered leadership research space right now and she stated that she is very interested in developing a course that would naturally allow for school counselors to be integrated into the learning. Other than this person’s experience of what she is hoping to do, the extent of integration is very minimal currently in both fields of educational leadership and school counseling. There were no statistical differences between educational leadership and school counseling programs in regard to professors’ awareness, but there is greater effect size in awareness from the school counselors due to a small sample size in my results. There was larger awareness among the school counselor professors in comparison to the educational leadership professors, even if there was not a strong statistical significance. These results align with current literature that states the counselors see this as an issue while there is not much mentioned in educational leadership literature or addressed in programming (Bryant et al., 2024). Educational leadership professors stated they have used case studies for integration while counselors have made efforts to have guest speakers or to assist in developing modules for educational leadership courses.

To answer question two, “In what ways does the integration of knowledge about school counselors in educational leadership programs impact the perceived preparedness of graduates to work with school counselors?” In a few instances, a seminar was mentioned or practicum integration as this would be a natural time for various roles to be learned about. Although, it was

never clear if the students in these programs were more prepared for working with school counselors due to these few encounters. Professor members mostly emphasized the lack of integration and the barriers they face in aligning additional members in the school into their courses due to standards and accreditation requirements. There mainly seems to be a lack of expertise in the educational leadership field in well-being and school counseling with the challenge of alignment never being addressed.

Discussion

The qualitative and quantitative findings provide a richer perspective into this cross-professional integration issue. With the quantitative results, even with a small sample size, it was clear there was a low integration among the two professions. This warrants further investigation to indicate if there is a possible trend. When I added the qualitative perspectives to the results, I saw the explanation of why the results are the way they are. The results suggest there could be a recognition that students have historically developed into more complex individuals that have different needs from a school counselor, and even a principal, than they previously did. Having school leaders operate in a silo is creating a systemic barrier that professors in the fields of educational leadership and school counseling are not currently addressing due to a lack of understanding of how the well-being of students aligns to their principal preparation standards and is required to be covered in their programs. This misunderstanding could and should be addressed for the needs of students to truly begin to be addressed by the professionals inside the school buildings.

To examine whether there is awareness from the professors of cross-disciplinary content in Educational Leadership and School Counseling programs, a chi-square analysis was

conducted in SPSS. The results in this case showed that school counseling professors used guest speakers more than the educational leadership professors. In conjunction with the interview responses from the school counseling professor, this could be because school counselors are innately more aware of the need for others to share about their experiences and specialized areas of expertise. There is a strong motivating factor from ASCA for school counselors to advocate for their role, so that could mean they are aware that others may need to share about their expertise as well. This is done well through case studies, but it could be argued that a guest speaker could be more memorable and impactful for those learning a new role.

Next, the level of awareness of integrating knowledge of the other profession into curriculum was assessed. The participants were asked to rate their awareness, then they were taken through a survey, that was ASCA aligned, asking the professors to rate the importance of different areas of school counseling. Then, the professors were asked to rate their awareness of integration knowledge of the other profession into their curriculum for a second time. Initially, school counselor professors stated 75% of them were aware, then 100% stated they were aware. Likewise, the professors went from 33% to 40% showing an increase in awareness. It is interesting that the educational leadership professors show a low awareness both times the question is asked though. The low awareness could be an indication of a low integration in the educational leadership side of instruction. Low awareness of the other program content seemed to be related to the amount of focus each program had on their own standards and requirements.

In my attempt to identify concrete methods that professors used to incorporate information about the other profession into their curriculum, most of the answers were from school counseling professors. Lack of integration was reported equally to cross-professional learning activities with only one professor of educational leadership providing those as options

for them. That was not a strong indication to me that innovative collaborative activities were in place in either profession. In an open-ended response, an educational leadership professor shared that her curriculum is packed and heavily mandated. She did not easily see where extra information could be set as required to include covering any other topic, especially not something that is not explicitly stated as a requirement. While this research acknowledges the requirements of standards and mandated information, it would be beneficial for principals to be able to recognize the parts of their standards that a school counselor can assist in meeting. For example, NELP standard 2.1 explicitly states principals should be able to support the educational success and well-being of each student. Also, NELP 3.1 explicitly covers inclusive and supportive school culture, aligning perfectly with ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards and Competencies (2025). There are many areas that principal preparation standards explicitly align with ASCA causing an argument to be had for a better understanding of principal preparation professors to understand all members of the school, not just the teachers that they are trained to lead and supervise.

Findings Related to Literature

The literature review in Chapter 2 joins the school counselor as a school leader that directly supports meeting the well-being side of each school leadership standard. The concept of having schools that intentionally focus on the well-being of students as well as the academic success of each student have an added layer of caring leadership that leads to a culture of belonging that supports graduation rates, motivation to learn, and a stronger staff commitment to the school (Ryu et al., 2022). The literature review provided an overview of modern school counseling, principal preparation, and counselor-principal collaboration for student well-being.

Overview of Modern School Counseling

The names of vocational counselor or guidance counselor are not current representations of the role of the modern, school counselor that is graduating from Master's level programs today (ASCA, 2023). The principal who graduates from a Master's level graduate school program today is held to the standard of shaping programs and leading instruction in curriculum within the school while supervising all staff within the building. Although many principal preparation programs focus on the academic success of students, managing teachers, and the legal responsibilities of special education within their curriculum. This lack of integration was identified in my research as resulting from four main themes: standards or policy misalignment, professor's constraints, structural barriers, and curriculum overload.

This creates a lack of understanding about student well-being and the role of the modern school counselor that a principal cannot understand from previous personal experience of a guidance counselor. There is a disconnect between what counselors are trained to do, what their professional standards are, and what job duties they are assigned from their principals (McConnell et al., 2020). This was shown in my results from the school counselor professor interview where the professor recalled frustration in her previous role as a school counselor and the role ambiguity that she felt. She explained that she often will see job postings in her area titled as "guidance counselor" even with her actively advocating for the school counselor role in her local district. She stated, "historically, there's been a shift in the needs of kids," which she, and other ASCA trained school counselors, believe has influenced the shift in the training and national standards for school counselors.

Harmonizing Educational Leadership and School Counseling

In America, at least 30 states now have mandated school counseling programs in public schools. Most of the time, the building principal is the one to hire, assign duties, and provide an annual evaluation for the school counselor and other staff members. In my interviews, it became evident that the school counselor professor was unaware that principals had any standards related to student well-being. Similarly, educational leadership professors seemed to gain an understanding of school counselor roles by the end of my survey. It seems a shared understanding would greatly impact the momentum of this research and practice. Dahir and Geesa (2022) suggest, “With so many responsibilities, principals may lack knowledge about comprehensive school counseling programs and the appropriate role of school counselors to best meet all students’ academic, social/emotional, and postsecondary preparedness needs” (p. 2). Geesa et al. (2022) wrote that the counselor is the logical partner for principals to build equitable learning environments that meet the holistic needs of children, including well-being.

As stated in Chapter 2, a principal is the leader within the school, while the school counselor is the advocate for individual student needs and a voice for equity (McConnell et al., 2020). In my research findings, building positive behavior in students and administering universal screenings were mentioned as ways the two professionals could partner to support students’ needs. Data-informed decisions do not have to rest solely with the teacher; they can be a team approach that includes all aspects of MTSS, with the full school leadership team involved. It is essential that the principal learns to advocate for appropriate duties for counselors to ensure students are proactively evaluated and supported, not just reacted to and disciplined. Principal and school counseling standards call professionals to action, focusing on equity and opportunities for all students and addressing the barriers that hinder student success. Based on

my findings, professors need to be informed that there is a similar learning goal for principals and school counselors, rather than both programs operating in silos.

Program Collaboration (PSEL, NELP, and ASCA)

The Collaborative Training Framework (Geesa et al., 2022) was created by educational leadership professors to help align ASCA and NELP standards, assuming that principals and school counselors have varied skill sets but can complement each other toward shared goals. In chapter 2, I stated that Geesa et al. (2022) shared, “This framework includes six elements: 1) effective pre-service preparation; 2) sustainable partnerships; 3) stakeholder collaboration; 4) current practitioner support; 5) model site development; and 6) ongoing research and professional learning” (p. 885). The Collaborative Training Framework along with CASEL’s SEL Framework (2020) have inspired my theoretical framework focused on leadership preparation for academic success and the well-being of all students. This type of school leadership requires collaboration, social capital, and shared vision. There is a strong movement in ASCA, confirmed in my findings, for school counselors to advocate for their programs to their principals. What if there was a shift that the principal also advocated for the school counselors and for their students' needs? This would require that educational leadership programs incorporate student well-being into their curriculum and emphasize the partnership available through the school counselor. The framework in Table 1 of Chapter 2 illustrates how the standards for both programs could be combined for a streamlined approach.

In my findings, one of the main reasons professors stated they did not include information on school counselors was that they had a “structured program” or had adjunct professors with limited knowledge of some topics, who would only teach “how it really is.” One

professor stated, “Integration of school counselors in leadership prep is very limited.” It is limited, but it need not be considered a separate topic altogether. These standards can be aligned and taught to support students holistically in a climate where MTSS and other state accountability programs are expected in all schools. Scholars such as Geesa et al. (2022, 2024) and Cinotti et al. (2022) advocate for collaborative training frameworks that involve both school counseling and educational leadership professors to bridge the programs together for student success in academics and well-being.

Recommendations

Educational leadership professors are starting to research well-being and mindfulness, but that is not clearly including the role of the counselor as the missing piece in the principal's puzzle of student well-being. I believe there needs to be school counselors that step up as educational leadership graduates to rise to the challenge and be willing to teach courses on the well-being side of the standards in NELP and PSEL. This is a requirement for every principal to know these standards, so it is not inappropriate to fill space with instruction on these topics. In these courses, the natural thing would be to introduce the principal to ASCA, modern school counseling, and leading school counselors as they work in tandem towards their school goals for well-being. This researcher’s recommendations include the following topics:

- Promote principals that have school counseling and educational leadership degrees to step into professor roles to lead cross-curricular courses that integrate NELP, PSEL, and ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards and Competencies (2025).

- Explicit guidance needs to be created that shows how the school counselor is an important collaborating partner for the principal to meet all aspects of their standards including academic and well-being topics.
- Seminar courses could include joint workshop days where principals and school counselors learn about each other's standards, training, and specialized skillsets.
- Mandated standard implementation to include all aspects of PSEL and NELP into programs that includes academic and well-being topics with a focus on supervising various staff in the school and the roles they play towards academic and student well-being.

Practice

Practical ideas for implementation of content are where the pragmatic strategies for improving cross-professional preparation are embedded. Generalizability should not be assumed by the small participation, but the practical steps to take can be considered with low risk to the professors. The standards seamlessly flow together and can be a quick mention when the PSEL or NELP is presented, the ASCA can be a side note. That is a simple thing to add that keeps awareness levels high for students. Also, yearly workshops with professors to learn about the research trends in the diverse areas of education or working to align learning outcomes for school leaders could be very low-pressure but impactful for professors to bring to their classrooms. Case studies and guest speakers were a common suggestion in my findings, so these must be practical solutions that do not require the professor to be the master of the topic but a willing learner and collaborator.

Multiple professors mentioned that they notice a trend in schools now where principals are not aware of how to differentiate student referrals. They are not sure whether students need a school counselor or whether it should be handled as behavioral. This was also mentioned by a school counseling professor that it is common for counselors to feel frustrated and bitter towards their principal because they frequently encounter situations that are not within their actual scope of duties and competencies. I believe practicing principals would have a greater impact on their school counselors if they knew how to advocate for their school counselors rather than having their counselors advocate against them as the enemy. This would provide greater collaboration and impact towards student academic and well-being success within our schools in America.

Additionally, as principals are striving daily towards school culture, community partnerships, providing opportunities for learning inside and outside of school, and recruiting highly qualified staff in all positions, it would be beneficial to have a strong working understanding of how a school counselor is trained to also perform all these duties within a school and community. The scope of a principal's job is very broad, so having key partners in place, understanding their strengths, and providing training are essential for a principal to truly implement their mission and vision for their school community. ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards and Competencies (2025) emphasize partnerships as a primary role for a school counselor, while always working to provide opportunities for all students. This is a massive opportunity for principals to capitalize on as they plan for how to utilize their school counselor.

Research

Future research should include larger and more diverse samples. Recruiting for survey responses and interviews at a UCEA conference could be a great way to gain buy-in and further explain the research. Adding data that explains how long professors have been practicing would also be helpful. Allowing respondents to indicate whether they have ever practiced as principals or school counselors could add a layer of validity to their practical or conceptual knowledge of these topics. Qualitative studies with in-depth interviews and possible focus groups would be impactful for truly understanding the perspectives and challenges that face this type of systemic change, which might be needed for educational leadership to better understand student success and the school counselor role.

Conclusion

Research highlights that comprehensive school counseling programs, when supported by principals and leadership teams, help close achievement and opportunity gaps while fostering a sense of belonging and motivation among students (Geesa et al., 2023; Rhu et al., 2022). In this research, it is apparent that school counseling and educational leadership professors do not know how to integrate collaborative learning, which is mostly why it is not commonly seen. The hope for this research and findings is to encourage professors to take a look around the college of education and see how school counseling and educational leadership could be more aligned. This could take some course restructuring and thinking outside the box, but it could be the missing piece we are looking for in student well-being. The mandates, programs, and data can all be overwhelming, especially when working in silos, so starting in graduate school, professors should equip principals to collaborate with like-minded leaders around them. This preparation

should occur before principals enter the field, rather than relying solely on mentorship or on-the-job learning. Leaders working with diverse skillsets towards shared goals are our best hope for student academic and well-being success in our schools and communities.

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Appendix A



EXEMPT DETERMINATION

September 29, 2025

Ellen Hahn
3348444460
reamseh@auburn.edu

Dear Ellen Hahn:

On 9/29/2025, the IRB reviewed the following submission:

Protocol Information	Submission Details
Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title:	Harmonizing Educational Leadership with School Counseling: Preparing Principals to Support School Counselors
Investigator:	Ellen Hahn
IRB ID:	STUDY00000835
Funding:	None
Grant Title:	N/A
Grant ID:	None
IND, IDE or HDE:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Email Template, Category: Recruitment Materials;• Email Template for Opt In Participants - Interview, Category: Recruitment Materials;• Facebook Post, Category: Recruitment Materials;• HRP 503a Exempt Research Protocol, Category: IRB Protocol;• Information Letter HRP 581, Category: Consent Form;• Interview Questions, Category: Script;• Survey WORD, Category: Survey/Questionnaire;

The IRB determined that this protocol meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review. This determination is valid through 9/29/2028. The IRB has implemented a three-year determination period for Exempt submissions to better manage the active research portfolio.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in HRP-103 - INVESTIGATOR MANUAL.

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these activities impact the exempt determination, please submit a modification in the Endeavor system.

Sincerely,



AUBURN UNIVERSITY

Institutional Review Board

IRB Administration
540 Devall Drive
Auburn, AL 36849
irbadmin@auburn.edu
(334) 844-5966

Appendix B

Interview questions:

1. Can you describe the key processes involved in recruiting, selecting, and supporting students in your educational leadership program?
2. How is your educational leadership program structured in terms of course sequencing, delivery format (online, hybrid, in-person), and professors roles?
3. What types of joint or collaborative course content is provided during courses in your program to facilitate diverse learning experiences for an aspiring school leader?
4. How do professors and program coordinators facilitate collaborative opportunities with experienced school leaders?
5. How does your program align with national or state leadership content standards (e.g., PSEL & NELP)?
6. In what ways does the program ensure that content standards translate into practical leadership competencies?
7. What instructional strategies are used to prepare future school leaders for supporting student well-being?
8. How does your program incorporate case studies, problem-based learning, or simulations to enhance leadership decision-making?
9. How does your program address leading all staff within a building, not just the teachers?
10. Are there specific courses, workshops, or initiatives that focus on social-emotional learning for future leaders?
11. How are internship experiences designed to provide hands-on leadership development working with diverse staff members of a school, including school counselors?
12. How does your program collaborate with local school systems to ensure alignment between coursework and real-world leadership expectations?
13. What methods do you use to assess the effectiveness of your leadership preparation program, both during the program (formative) and after completion (summative)?
14. How do you collect and use feedback from graduates and school districts to improve the program?



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EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATIONS, LEADERSHIP AND TECHNOLOGY

INFORMATION LETTER

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS AN IRB APPROVAL STAMP WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN APPLIED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

Title of research study: *Harmonizing Educational Leadership with School Counseling: Preparing Principals to Support School Counselors*
23-297 EX 2306

Investigator: Candace Doak, Ellen Reames Hahn

You are invited to participate in a research study to investigate the integration of school counselor information within educational leadership graduate programs. The study is being conducted by Candace Doak, Ph.D. Candidate, under the direction of Ellen Reames Hahn, professor, in the Auburn University Department of Educational Foundations, Leadership, and Technology. You are invited to participate because you are a faculty member in educational leadership or school counseling in America and are age 18 or older.

What will be involved if you participate? If you agree, you will complete an anonymous online survey (10–15 minutes). The survey will ask for general background information such as your academic field, age, gender, ethnicity, where you earned your pre-service degree, and the year of completion. Your participation is voluntary, and your answers will remain confidential. At the end of the survey, you may choose to provide your contact information through a separate link if you would like to take part in a short follow-up interview (optional). The interview will be held virtually on Auburn's Zoom platform, will last less than 30 minutes, and your responses will also be kept confidential. The interview will allow for questions along the same topic, but more in-depth answering. By continuing, you indicate that you have read this information and agree to participate.

Are there any risks or discomforts? There are no known risks beyond what you might experience in daily life, and you may skip any question or stop at any time. The risks associated with this research are signing up for the optional follow up interview as that survey will provide some personally identifying information. Although, the research survey will not collect personally identifying information.

Are there any benefits to yourself or others? There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study. The benefit to researchers is to collect data to use in their Ph.D. dissertation.

Will you receive compensation for participating? There will not be any compensation for participating.

Are there any costs? There will not be any costs associated with participating in this research.

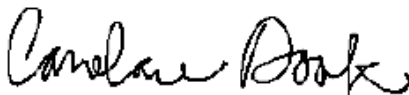
If you change your mind about participating, you can withdraw at any time during the study. Your participation is completely voluntary. If you choose to withdraw, your data can be withdrawn as long as it is identifiable. Your decision about whether or not to participate or to stop participating will not jeopardize your future relations with Auburn University, the Department of *Educational Foundations, Leadership, and Technology* or the researcher.

Any data obtained in connection with the research survey in this study will remain anonymous. The follow up, optional, survey will have personally identifiable information but will be deleted once follow up communication has been initiated. The list of email addresses will be kept separate from the data from the research survey and interview data. Any allowed recordings of the interviews will be kept in Auburn Box in a secure folder until the dissertation process is complete. Then, the recordings will be deleted. We will protect your privacy and the data you provide by coding any identifiable information and keeping the key confidential. Information collected through your participation may be used to fulfill an educational requirement, published in a professional journal, and/or presented at a professional meeting.

If you have questions about this study, please ask them now or contact Candace Doak at cmd0114@auburn.edu.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Auburn University Office of Research Compliance or the Institutional Review Board by phone (334) 844-5966 or e-mail at IRBadmin@auburn.edu or IRBChair@auburn.edu.

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED, YOU MUST DECIDE IF YOU WANT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT. IF YOU DECIDE TO PARTICIPATE, THE DATA YOU PROVIDE WILL SERVE AS YOUR AGREEMENT TO DO SO. THIS LETTER IS YOURS TO KEEP.

	8/16/2025
Investigator's signature	Date
Candace Doak	
Investigator's Name	
Co-Investigator's signature	Date
Co-Investigator's Name	



AUBURN UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATIONS, LEADERSHIP AND TECHNOLOGY

Dear _____,

You are invited to participate in a research study to investigate the integration of school counselor information within educational leadership graduate programs. The study is being conducted by Candace Doak, Ph.D. Candidate, under the direction of Ellen Reames Hahn, professor, in the Auburn University Department of Educational Foundations, Leadership, and Technology. You are invited to participate because you are a faculty member in educational leadership or school counseling in America and are age 18 or older.

Participants will be asked to complete an anonymous web-based survey. The survey should take about ten minutes, and I hope to recruit 20 participants.

If you would like more information about this study, please click the survey link below.

- When you open the link, you will first see the Information Letter that explains the study in detail.
- After reading the letter, you can decide if you want to participate.
- If you choose to participate, you can continue directly into the anonymous survey from the same link.

You can access the survey from this anonymous link:

https://auburn.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0JVm8lg1f3dMkg6

If you have any questions, you can contact me at 251-366-5425 or my advisor, Dr. Ellen Reames Hahn, at reamseh@auburn.edu. This project has been reviewed and approved by The Auburn University Review Board. If you have questions, you may contact the IRB at 334-844-5966.

Thank you for your consideration,

Candace Doak



AUBURN UNIVERSITY

Institutional Review Board
Approved 5/25/2025 to 9/29/2028
Protocol STUDY00000835

Harmonizing Educational Leadership with School Counseling

Start of Block: Introduction

Q1 Introduction to the Research Imagine a school where the principal's vision aligns seamlessly with the school counselor's empathy. Findings from this research will inform program enhancements and contribute to the professional development of educational leaders. By emphasizing equity and well-being for students through the school counselor-principal collaboration, we aim to foster student well-being and resilience within educational contexts. The researchers hope that an improved understanding of the role of school counselors will enhance the effectiveness of future educational leaders in creating schools that enhance well-being and academic success. Ultimately, this research will inform program design for educational leadership, professional development initiatives, and policy discussions as it highlights areas for improvement in comprehensive coverage of school counselor-related topics in educational leadership. For more information about the research, click here: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1UKsYqZ__lcrNACqxO8h5tbnc9yJc1-eC/edit?usp=sharing&oid=103347362325954763803&rtpof=true&sd=true

Consent Do you consent to participate in this anonymous survey for an Auburn University graduate student?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Skip To: End of Survey if Consent = No

End of Block: Introduction

Start of Block: Pre-Survey Question

Q1 Are you a professor of Educational Leadership or School Counseling?

- School Counseling (1)
- Educational Leadership/Administration (2)

Q2 To what extent are you aware if your program includes content about the other profession (school counseling or educational leadership)?

Not Aware of Inclusion Somewhat Aware of Inclusion Very Aware of Inclusion Not Applicable



Q3 Which of the following best describes how your program includes this content? (Select all that apply)

- Joint coursework or modules (1)
- Guest lectures from the other profession (2)
- Case studies involving both roles (3)
- Collaborative field experiences (4)
- None of the above (5)






End of Block: Pre-Survey Question

Start of Block: Principal Evaluation

Please answer the following questions about how your program. **School Counselor Priorities** From your perspective, what do you teach the level of importance is that the school counselor(s) place on the following priorities?

Q4 What do you believe your program views as most important for a school counselor?

Not at all Important Somewhat Important Very Important Extremely Important Not Applicable

School counselor working with administrators and teachers on school improvement issues. ()	
School counselor developing and implementing prevention programs focused on well-being and academic success. ()	
School counselor monitoring student academic performance using school data. ()	
Delivering an American School Counselor Association (ASCA) comprehensive school counseling program that addresses student academic, career and college readiness, and social/emotional development (ASCA Student Standards & ASCA Ethical Standards utilized). ()	
School counselor serving on district/building committees and in grade-level academic meetings. ()	

End of Block: Principal Evaluation

Start of Block: School Counselor Perceptions



Q5 School Counselor Perceptions

Please rank the following statements about your program.

To what level of importance do you teach your students to agree to the follow statements?

Not at all Important Somewhat Important Very Important Extremely Important Not Applicable

School counselors are viewed as school leaders. ()	
School counselors should have established strong collaborative relationships with local community organizations and agencies. ()	
School counselors should regularly consult with parents, teachers, and school administrators. ()	
School counselors provide classroom, group, and individual counseling based on identified student needs and aligned to ASCA Student Standards. ()	
School counselors provide classroom, group, and individual counseling based on identified student needs and aligned to ASCA Student Standards. ()	

End of Block: School Counselor Perceptions

Start of Block: School Counselor Service

Q6 School Counselor Service Please rank the following statements about your program. *What do you believe the level of priority would be from your students that the school counselor services improve the school in the following ways?*

Never a Priority Sometimes a Priority Often a Priority Always a Priority Not Applicable

School counselor services improve student time and task management. ()	
School counselor services improve student grades. ()	
School counselor services improve student well-being through direct student services for social-emotional learning. ()	
School counselor services improve student school discipline incidents. ()	
School counselor services improve student development of annual educational and career plans (annual progress review). ()	

End of Block: School Counselor Service

Start of Block: School Counselor Building and District Expectations

School Counselor Building and District Expectations Please rank the following statements about your program.

Q7 What level of importance do you teach that a principal should expect for a school counselor to complete the following tasks?

Not at all Somewhat Very Extremely Not
Important Important Important Important Applicable

Keep records that document time spent, or activities performed to determine the percentage of time spent providing direct services to students ()	
Involved in the clerical aspects of record keeping (transferring records, posting grades, managing transcripts, etc.). ()	
Involved in the development of the master schedule. ()	
Require students to maintain an educational/career/college readiness planning portfolio in Grades 9–12. ()	
Develop and implement an annual school counseling building/district plan that is aligned with school's mission ()	

End of Block: School Counselor Building and District Expectations

Start of Block: Post-Survey Question

Q8 To what extent are you aware if your program includes content about the other profession (school counseling or educational leadership)?

Not Somewhat Very Extremely Not
Aware of Aware of Aware of Aware of Applicable
Inclusion Inclusion Inclusion Inclusion

Very Unaware ()	
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Q9 Would you be willing to participate in a follow-up interview?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

End of Block: Post-Survey Question

Start of Block: Open-Ended Question

Q10 Describe any experiences you have had with integrating information about school counselors into a principal preparation program, and explain if this influenced the preparedness for the principal to work with school counselors.

Q11 What challenges or barriers exist in integrating this knowledge into your curriculum?

End of Block: Open-Ended Question

Start of Block: Demographics

Q12 In which state do you currently hold a faculty position?

▼ Alabama (1) ... I do not reside in the United States (53)

Q16 Where did you complete your graduate pre-service program in Instructional or Educational Leadership or School Counseling?

Q17 What year did you finish your graduate pre-service program in Educational Leadership or School Counseling?

- Before 2000 (1)
- 2001-2005 (2)
- 2006-2010 (3)
- 2011-2015 (4)
- 2016-2020 (5)
- 2021-Current Year (6)

End of Block: Demographics

Q13 How would you describe your gender?

- Male (1)
 - Female (2)
 - Non-binary / third gender (3)
 - Prefer not to say (4)
-

Q14 As of January 1, 2025, what was your age in years?

- 20-30 (4)
 - 30-40 (5)
 - 40-50 (6)
 - 50-60 (7)
 - 60-70 (8)
 - 70-80 (9)
-

Q15 What is your ethnic background?

- White (1)
- Black or African American (2)
- American Indian or Alaska Native (3)
- Asian (4)
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (5)
- Other (6)



AUBURN UNIVERSITY
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EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATIONS, LEADERSHIP AND TECHNOLOGY

Subject: Follow-Up Interview Invitation – Dissertation Research (Auburn University)

Dear [Participant Name],

Thank you for completing the survey for Candace Doak's dissertation research at Auburn University. As indicated in the survey, you expressed interest in participating in a follow-up interview.

The purpose of the interview is to gather additional insights into how educational leadership and school counseling programs integrate knowledge about the other profession. Your perspectives will contribute valuable depth to the findings and help inform program enhancements for the preparation of future educational leaders.

Key Details:

- Format: Virtual (via Auburn Zoom)
- Length: Approximately 30 minutes
- Confidentiality: Your responses will be de-identified and kept confidential. No names or institutions will be included in any reports or publications.
- Voluntary Participation: Participation is completely voluntary, and you may skip any questions or withdraw at any time without penalty.

If you would like to proceed, please respond to this email with two options for your availability in the next two weeks.

Thank you again for your time and willingness to support this important research. Your input is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Candace Doak

Doctoral Candidate

Auburn University



AUBURN UNIVERSITY

Institutional Review Board
Approved 5/25/2025 to 5/29/2028
Protocol 8TUDY00000835

Facebook Post: Recruitment Materials

**Title of research study: Harmonizing Educational Leadership with School Counseling:
Preparing Principals to Support School Counselors**


Investigator: Candace Doak, Ellen Reames Hahn

Option 1: Shorter, better for a Facebook Group:

🔔 Faculty in Educational Leadership or School Counseling?

Candace Doak (Auburn University doctoral research) is conducting a dissertation study on how school counselor knowledge is integrated into educational leadership graduate programs.

U.S. faculty teaching in educational leadership or school counseling are invited to complete an anonymous 10–15 minute survey.

 You can access the survey from this anonymous link:

https://auburn.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0JVM8Iglf3dMkg6

Your input will help strengthen principal preparation and counselor collaboration. Thank you for supporting this important work!

Option 2: Longer, provides more details on information and confidentiality:

🔔 Calling all Educational Leadership & School Counseling Faculty!


Candace Doak is conducting research as part of her doctoral dissertation at Auburn University and would greatly appreciate your participation.

Purpose of the Study:


This research aims to investigate the integration of school counselor information within educational leadership graduate programs. Findings will inform program enhancements and contribute to the professional development of educational leaders.

Who can participate?

Faculty in the United States who teach in educational leadership or school counseling programs.

 **What does participation involve?**

- Completing an anonymous online survey (about 10–15 minutes).
- At the end, participants may opt in (voluntarily) to a brief follow-up interview, but this is optional.

 **Confidentiality:**

No personally identifiable information will be collected in the survey. All responses are anonymous, and participation is completely voluntary.