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Special Issue

School Counselors and a Multi-Tiered System of Supports: Cultivating Systemic Change and Equitable Outcomes

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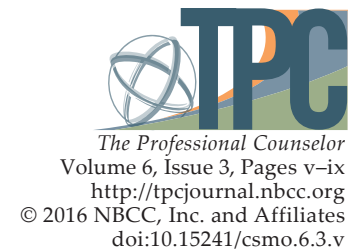Cultivating Systemic Change and Equitable Outcomes

Introduction to the Special Issue

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School Counselors and a Multi-Tiered System of Supports: Cultivating Systemic Change and Equitable Outcomes

Christopher A. Sink and Melissa S. Ockerman
Special Issue Editors

Designed to improve preK–12 student academic and behavioral outcomes, a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), such as Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS) or Response to Intervention (RTI), is a broadly applied framework being implemented in countless schools across the United States. Such educational restructuring and system changes require school counselors to adjust their activities and interventions to fully realize the aims of MTSS. In this special issue of *The Professional Counselor*, the roles and functions of school counselors in MTSS frameworks are examined from various angles. This introductory article summarizes the key issues and the basic themes explored by the special issue contributors.

Keywords: **school counselors, multi-tiered system of supports, Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports, Response to Intervention, implementation**

School counselors must proactively adapt to the varied mandates of school reform and educational innovations. Similarly, with new federal and state legislation, they must align their roles and functions in accordance with their changing requirements (Baker & Gerler, 2008; Dahir, 2004; Gysbers, 2001; Herr, 2002; Leuwerke, Walker & Shi, 2009; Paisley & Borders, 1995). One such initiative, the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), requires educators to revise their assessment strategies, curriculum, pedagogy and interventions to best serve the academic, behavioral, and post-secondary education and career goals of all students (Lewis, Mitchell, Bruntmeyer, & Sugai, 2016). Specifically, MTSS is an umbrella term for a variety of school-wide approaches to improve student learning and behavior. The most familiar MTSS frameworks are Response to Intervention (RTI) and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS; also referred to as Culturally Responsive or CR PBIS). The latter model has been implemented throughout the U.S., spanning all 50 states and approximately 22,000 schools (H. Choi, personal communication, December 15, 2014). Moreover, 45 states have issued guidelines for RTI implementation and 17 states require RTI to be used in the identification of students with specific learning disabilities (Hauerwas, Brown, & Scott, 2013). Research indicates that when these frameworks are implemented with fidelity over several years, they are best practice for addressing students at risk for academic or behavioral problems (Lane, Menzies, Ennis, & Bezdek, 2013; Lewis et al., 2016).

In 2014, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) revised its RTI position statement to encompass MTSS, including both RTI and CR PBIS (ASCA, 2014). Although there is little evidence to support this assumption, the writers averred that MTSS seamlessly aligns with the ASCA National Model (2012a) in the three developmental domains (academic, social-emotional, and college/career). Nevertheless, school counselors should view MTSS frameworks as an opportunity to enhance their

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school counseling programs through the implementation of a data-driven, multi-tiered intervention system. Doing so allows school counselors to utilize and showcase their leadership skills with key stakeholders (e.g., parents, caregivers, teachers, administrators) and to create systemic changes in their schools and thus foster equitable outcomes for all children.

The implementation of MTSS and its alignment with comprehensive school counseling programs (CSCPs) position school counselors to advance culturally responsive preventions and interventions to serve students and their families more effectively (Goodman-Scott, Betters-Bubon, & Donohue, 2016). By working collaboratively with school personnel to tap students' strengths and create common goals, school counselors can build capacity and thereby broaden their scope of practice and account-ability. Politically astute school counselors are wise to leverage their school's MTSS framework as a way to access necessary resources, obtain additional training and further impact student outcomes.

The research is scant on school counselor involvement with—and effectiveness in—MTSS imple-mentation. The available publications, including those presented in this special issue, suggest that the level of MTSS education and training for pre-service and in-service school counselors is insuffi-cient (Cressey, Whitcomb, McGilvray-Rivet, Morrison, & Shandler-Reynolds, 2014; Goodman-Scott, 2013, 2015; Goodman-Scott, Doyle, & Brott, 2014; Ockerman, Mason, & Hollenbeck, 2012; Ockerman, Patrikakou, & Feiker Hollenbeck, 2015). There are legitimate reasons for counselor reluctance and ap-prehension. For example, not only must school counselors add new and perhaps unfamiliar duties to an already harried work day, some evidence indicates that they are not well prepared for their MTSS responsibilities. Consequently, it is essential for both in-service professional development opportuni-ties and pre-service preparation programs to focus on best practices for aligning CSCPs with MTSS frameworks (Goodman-Scott et al., 2016).

To address the gaps in the counseling literature on successful school counselor MTSS training, implementation, and collaboration with other school personnel, this special issue of *The Professional Counselor* was conceived. Moreover, the articles consider various facets of MTSS and their intersection with school counseling research and practice. Overall, the contributors hope to provide much needed MTSS assistance and support to nascent and practicing school counselors.

Summary of Contributions

Sink's lead article in this special issue situates the contributions that follow by offering a general overview of foundational MTSS theory and research, including PBIS and RTI frameworks. Subse-quently, literature-based suggestions for incorporating MTSS into school counselor preparation cur-riculum and pedagogy are provided. MTSS roles and functions summarized in previous research are aligned to ASCA's (2012b) School Counselor Competencies, the 2016 Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) Standards for School Counselors (2016) and the ASCA (2012a) National Model.

The next two articles report on MTSS-related studies and specifically discuss new school counselor responsibilities associated with MTSS implementation. Ziomek-Daigle, Goodman-Scott, Cavin, and Donohue reveal through a case study the various ways MTSS and CSCPs reflect comparable features (e.g., school counselor roles, advocacy, accountability). The participating case study counselors were actively engaged in MTSS implementation at their school, suggesting that they had a relatively good idea of their responsibilities in this capacity. Addressing RTI in particular, Patrikakou, Ockerman, and Hollenbeck's investigation reported that while most school counselors expressed positive opin-

ions about this MTSS framework, they lacked the self-assurance to adequately perform key RTI tasks (e.g., accountability and collaboration). Perceived counselor deficiencies in RTI implementation also point to a potential disconnect between the ASCA (2012a) National Model's program components and themes and current RTI training of pre-service and practicing school counselors, thus suggesting a need for improved pre-service and in-service education.

School counselors are called upon to be culturally responsive and competent. They are advocates for social justice and equity for all students (Ratts, Singh, Nassar-McMillan, Butler, & McCullough, 2016; Singh, Urbano, Haston, & McMahan, 2010). Two articles speak to this issue within the educational context of MTSS. Belser and colleagues maintain that the ASCA (2012a) National Model and MTSS are beneficial operational frameworks to support all students, including marginalized and so-called problem learners (e.g., at-risk students). An integrated model is then proffered as a way to improve the educational outcomes of disadvantaged students. Positive and culturally sensitive alternatives to punishment-oriented school discipline methods are discussed as well. Similarly, Betters-Bubon, Brunner, and Kansteiner address school counselor roles in devising and sustaining culturally responsive PBIS programs that meet student social, behavioral and emotional needs. In particular, they report on an action research case study showing how an elementary school counselor partnered with other stakeholders (i.e., school administrator, psychologist, teachers) to achieve this goal.

The final article by Harrington, Griffith, Gray, and Greenspan overviews a recent grant project intended to establish a quality data-driven MTSS model in an elementary school. The manuscript spotlights the role of the school counselor who collaborated with other project leaders and educators to use social-emotional data to inform and improve practice. Specifics are provided so other practitioners can replicate the project in their schools. In brief, this contribution emphasizes the importance of data-based decision-making in MTSS implementation.

Conclusion

School counselors are faced with a myriad of responsibilities that severely tax their energy and time. Competing demands from internal and external stakeholders as well as legislative changes and educational innovations stretch these practitioners to be more efficient and effective in their services to students and families. Regrettably, MTSS implementation adds to counselors' "accountability stress." Some counselors anticipate that PBIS and RTI frameworks will go the way of other short-lived educational trends, relieving them of the responsibility to take action. However, anecdotal and empirical evidence reported in this special issue and elsewhere suggests these professionals are in the minority. School counselors largely perceive the potential and real value of MTSS programs. They desire to partner with other school educators to help all children and youth succeed. As contributors to this issue indicate, the ASCA (2012a) National Model and PBIS and RTI frameworks can be integrated to achieve higher student academic and social-emotional outcomes. With these articles, school counselors-in-training and practitioners have additional support to successfully address their MTSS duties and advocate for increased education in this area. Continued research is needed to guide efficacious MTSS practice designed to foster equitable educational outcomes for all students.

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Incorporating a Multi-Tiered System of Supports Into School Counselor Preparation

Christopher A. Sink

With the advent of a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) in schools, counselor preparation programs are once again challenged to further extend the education and training of pre-service and in-service school counselors. To introduce and contextualize this special issue, an MTSS's intent and foci, as well as its theoretical and research underpinnings, are elucidated. Next, this article aligns MTSS with current professional school counselor standards of the American School Counselor Association's (ASCA) School Counselor Competencies, the 2016 Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) Standards for School Counselors and the ASCA National Model. Using Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and Response to Intervention (RTI) models as exemplars, recommendations for integrating MTSS into school counselor preparation curriculum and pedagogy are discussed.

Keywords: **multi-tiered system of supports, school counselor, counselor education, American School Counselor Association, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, Response to Intervention**

When new educational models are introduced into the school system that affect school counseling practice, the training of pre-service and in-service school counselors needs to be updated. A multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) is one such innovation requiring school counselors to further refine their skill set. In fact, during the school counseling profession's relatively short history, counselors have experienced several major shifts in foci and best practices (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012). The latest movement surfaced in the 1980s, when school counselors were encouraged to revisit their largely reactive, inefficient and ineffective practices. Specifically, rather than supporting a relatively small proportion of students with their vocational, educational and personal-social goals and concerns, pre-service and in-school practitioners, under the aegis of a comprehensive school counseling program (CSCP) orientation, were called to operate in a more proactive and preventative fashion.

Although there are complementary frameworks to choose from, the American School Counselor Association's (ASCA; 2012a) *National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs* emerged as the standard for professional practice, offering K–12 counselors an operational scaffold to guide their activities, interventions and services. Preliminary survey research suggests that counselors are performing their duties in a more systemic and collaborative fashion to more effectively serve students and their families (Goodman-Scott, 2013, 2015). Other rigorous accountability research examining the efficacy of CSCP practices supports this transformation of counselors' roles and functions (Martin & Carey, 2014; Sink, Cooney, & Adkins, in press; Wilkerson, Pérusse, & Hughes, 2013). As a consequence of the increased demand for retraining, university-level counselor preparation programs and professional counseling organizations (e.g., American Counseling Association, ASCA, National Board for Certified Counselors) have generally responded in kind. Over the last few decades, K–12 school counselors have been instructed to move from a positional approach to their professional work to one that is programmatic and systemic in nature.

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As mentioned above, the implementation of MTSS (e.g., Positive Behavioral Supports and Responses [PBIS] and Response to Intervention [RTI] frameworks) in the nation's schools requires in-service counselors to augment their collaboration and coordination skills (Shepard, Shahidullah, & Carlson, 2013). Essentially, MTSS programs are evidence-based, holistic, and systemic approaches to improve student learning and social-emotional-behavioral functioning. They are largely implemented in educational settings using three tiers or levels of intervention. In theory, all educators are involved at differing levels of intensity. For example, classroom teachers and teacher aides are the first line (Tier 1) of support for struggling students. As the need might arise, other more "specialized" staff (e.g., school psychologists, special education teachers, school counselors, addictions counselors) may be enlisted to provide additional and more targeted student interventions and support (Tiers 2 or 3). Even though ASCA (2014) released a position statement broadly addressing school counselors' roles and functions within MTSS schools, research is equivocal as to whether these practitioners are implementing these directives with any depth and fidelity (Goodman-Scott, 2015; Goodman-Scott, Betters-Bubon, & Donahue, 2016; Ockerman, Mason, & Hollenbeck, 2012; Ockerman, Patrikakou, & Feiker Hollenbeck, 2015). Moreover, school counselor effectiveness with MTSS-related responsibilities is an open question.

To sufficiently answer these accountability questions, there is a pressing need for university preparation programs to better educate nascent school counselors on MTSS, particularly on the fundamentals and effective ways PBIS and RTI can be accommodated within the purposes and practices of CSCPs (Goodman-Scott et al., 2016). While educational resources and research are plentiful, they are chiefly aimed at pre-service and in-service teachers and support staff working closely with special education students, such as school psychologists (Forman & Crystal, 2015; Owen, 2012; Turnbull, Bohanon, Griggs, Wickham, & Salior, 2002). Albeit informative, nearly all school counselor MTSS research and application publications are focused on in-service practitioners (ASCA, 2014; de Barona & Barona, 2006; Donohue, 2014; Goodman-Scott, 2013; Martens & Andreen, 2013; Ockerman et al., 2012; Ryan, Kaffenberger, & Carroll, 2011; Shepard et al., 2013; Zambrano, Castro-Villarreal, & Sullivan, 2012). With perhaps the exception of Goodman-Scott et al. (2016), who provided a useful alignment of the ASCA National Model (2012a) with PBIS practices, there are few evidence-based resources for school counselor educators to draw upon in order to rework their pre-service courses to include MTSS curriculum and instruction. To successfully prepare counselors to work within PBIS or RTI schools, students must understand the ways MTSS foci are aligned with professional counseling standards for practice. Such a document is noticeably absent from the literature.

The primary intent of this article is to offer school counselor educators functional and literature-based recommendations to enhance their MTSS training of pre-service counselors. To do so, MTSS programs are first contextualized by summarizing their major foci, operationalization, theoretical underpinnings and research support. Next, the objectives of MTSS models are aligned with the ASCA (2012b) School Counselor Competencies and the 2016 CACREP Standards for School Counselors. Finally, using PBIS and RTI models as exemplars, recommendations for school counselor preparation curriculum and pedagogy are offered.

Foundational Considerations

Since MTSS programs are extensively described in numerous publications (e.g., Bradley, Danielson, & Doolittle, 2007; Carter & Van Norman, 2010; Forman & Crystal, 2015; R. Freeman, Miller, & Newcomer, 2015; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Horner, Sugai, & Lewis, 2015; McIntosh, Filter,

Bennett, Ryan, & Sugai, 2010; Sandomierski, Kincaid, & Algozzine, 2007; Sugai & Simonsen, 2012), including articles in this special issue, there is little need to reiterate the details here. However, for those school counselor educators and practitioners who are less conversant with MTSS's theoretical grounding, research evidence and operational characteristics supporting implementation, these topics are overviewed.

MTSS programs by definition are comprehensive and schoolwide in design, accentuating the importance of graduated levels of student support. In other words, the amount of instructional and behavioral support gradually increases as the student's assessed needs become more serious. Although the most prominent and well-researched MTSS approaches, PBIS and RTI, are considered disparate frameworks to address student deficits (Schulte, 2016), the extent of their overlap in theoretical principles, foci, processes and practices allows for an abbreviated synthesis (R. Freeman, et al., 2015; Sandomierski et al., 2007; Stoiber & Gettinger, 2016).

Initially, RTI and PBIS programming and services emerged from special education literature and best practices. Over time these evidence-based approaches extended their reach, and the entire student population is now served. Specifically, PBIS aims to increase students' prosocial behaviors and decrease their problem behaviors as well as promote positive and safe school climates, benefitting all learners (Bradley et al., 2007; Carter & Van Norman, 2010; Klingner & Edwards, 2006). Although RTI programs also address students' behavioral issues, they largely focus on improving the academic development and performance of all children and youth through high-quality instruction (Turse & Albrecht, 2015; Warren & Robinson, 2015). RTI staff are particularly concerned with those students who are academically underperforming (Greenwood et al., 2011; Johnsen, Parker, & Farah, 2015; Ockerman et al., 2015; Sprague et al., 2013). Curiously, the potential roles and functions of school counselors within these programs were not delineated until many years after they were first introduced (Warren & Robinson, 2015). Even at this juncture, often cited MTSS publications neglect discussing school counselors' contributions to full and effective implementation (Carter & Van Norman, 2010). Instead they frequently refer to behavior specialists as key members of the MTSS team (Horner, Sugai, & Anderson, 2010).

MTSS Theory and Research

PBIS and RTI model authors and scholars consistently implicate a range of conceptual orientations, including behaviorism, organizational behavior management, scientific problem-solving, systems thinking and implementation science (Eber, Weist, & Barrett, n.d.; Forman & Crystal, 2015; Horner et al., 2010; Kozleski & Huber, 2010; Sugai & Simonsen, 2012; Sugai et al., 2000; Turnbull et al., 2002). It appears, however, that behavioral principles and systems theory are most often credited as MTSS cornerstones (Reschly & Cooloong-Chaffin, 2016). Since PBIS and RTI are essentially special education frameworks, it is not surprising that behaviorist constructs and applications (e.g., reinforcement, applied experimental behavior analysis, behavior management and planning, progress monitoring) are regularly cited (Stoiber & Gettinger, 2016). Furthermore, MTSS frameworks are in concept and practice system-wide structures (i.e., student-centered services, processes and procedures that are instituted across a school or district), and as such, holistic terminology consistent with Bronfrenbrenner's bioecological systems theory and other related systems orientations (e.g., Bertalanffy general systems theory and Henggeler and colleagues' multi-systemic treatment approach) are commonly cited (see Reschly & Cooloong-Chaffin, 2016, and Shepard et al., 2013, for examples of extensive discussions).

MTSS research largely demonstrates the efficacy of PBIS and RTI models. For instance, Horner et al. (2015) conducted an extensive analysis of numerous K–12 PBIS studies, concluding that this systems approach is evidence-based. Other related literature reviews indicated that PBIS frameworks

are at least modestly serviceable in preschools (Carter & Van Norman, 2010), K–12 schools (Horner et al., 2010; Molloy, Moore, Trail, Van Epps, & Hopfer, 2013), and juvenile justice settings (Jolivette & Nelson, 2010; Sprague et al., 2013). Across most studies, PBIS programming yields weak to moderately positive outcomes for PK–12 students from diverse backgrounds (e.g., African American and Latino) and varying social and academic skill levels (Childs, Kincaid, George, & Gage, 2015; J. Freeman et al., 2015, 2016). Similarly, evaluations of RTI interventions are promising for underachieving learners (Bradley et al., 2007; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Greenwood et al., 2011; Proctor, Graves, & Esch, 2012; Ryan et al., 2011). Students tend to especially benefit from Tier 2 and 3 interventions. In their entirety, PBIS and RTI models are modestly successful frameworks to identify students at risk for school-related problems and ameliorate social-behavioral and academic deficiencies. It should be noted, however, that the long-term impact of MTSS on students' social-emotional outcomes remains equivocal (Saeki et al., 2011). As mentioned previously, there is a paucity of evidence demonstrating that school counselors indirectly or directly contribute to positive MTSS outcomes. As with any relatively new educational innovation, research is needed to further clarify the specific impacts of MTSS on student, family, classroom and school outcome variables. The next section summarizes the ways MTSS frameworks are viewed and instituted in school settings.

Operational Features

For school counselors to be effective MTSS leaders and educational partners, they must understand the conceptual underpinnings and operational components and functions of PBIS and RTI frameworks. Given the introductory nature of this article, we limit our discussion to essential characteristics of these frameworks. Extensive practical explanations of MTSS models abound in the education (R. Freeman et al. 2015; Preston, Wood, & Stecker, 2016; Turse & Albrecht 2015) and school counseling literature (Goodman-Scott et al., 2016; Ockerman et al., 2012, 2015). To reiterate, MTSS frameworks are designed to be systems or ecological approaches to assisting students with their educational development and improving academic and behavioral outcomes. As described below, they attempt to serve all students through graduated layers of more intensive interventions. School counselors deliver, for example, evidence-based services to students, ranging from classroom and large group interventions to those provided to individual students in the counseling office (Forman & Crystal, 2015). By utilizing systematic problem-solving strategies and behavioral analysis tools to guide effective practice (Sandomierski et al., 2007), students who are most at risk for school failure and behavioral challenges are provided with more individualized interventions (Horner et al., 2015).

Practically speaking, MTSS processes and procedures vary from school to school, district to district. To understand how these frameworks are operationalized, there are numerous online school-based case studies to review. For instance, at the PBIS.org Web site, Ross (n.d.), the principal at McNabb Elementary (KY), overviewed the ways a PBIS framework was effectively implemented at his school. Most importantly, the reach of PBIS programming was expanded to all students, requiring a higher level of educator collaboration and "buy in." Other pivotal changes were made, including (a) faculty and staff visits to students' homes (i.e., making closer "positive connections"); (b) the implementation of summer programs for student behavioral and academic skill enrichment; (c) additional school community engagement activities (e.g., movie nights, Black History Month Extravaganza); and, (d) further PBIS training to improve school discipline and classroom management strategies. Other MTSS schools stress the importance of carefully identifying students in need of supplemental services and interventions using research-based assessment procedures (e.g., functional behavioral analysis or functional behavioral assessment [FBA]). Most schools emphasize these key elements to successful schoolwide PBIS implementation: (a) data-based decision making, (b) a clear and measurable set of behavioral expectations for students, (c) ongoing instruction on behavioral expectations, and (d) consistent reinforcement of appropriate behavior (PBIS.org, 2016).

Furthermore, MTSS frameworks, such as PBIS and RTI, have two main functions. First, they offer an array of activities and services (prevention- and intervention-oriented) that are systematically introduced to students based on an established level of need. Second, educators carefully consider the learning milieu, particularly as it may influence the development and improvement of student behavior (social and emotional learning [SEL] and academic performances). MTSS staff must be well educated on the signs of student distress, including those indicators that suggest students are at risk for school-related difficulties (e.g., below grade level academic achievement, social and emotional challenges, mental health disorders, long-term school failure). Moreover, educators should be provided appropriate training on various assessment tools to determine which set of students require more intensive care.

Within a triadic support system, all students (Tier 1: primary or universal prevention) are at least monitored and assisted by classroom staff. Teachers are encouraged to document student progress (or lack thereof) toward academic and behavioral goals. At the first level, school counselors partner with other building educators to conduct classroom activities and guidance to promote academic success, SEL (e.g., prosocial behaviors), and appropriate school behavior (Donohue, 2014). Counselors also may assist with setting behavioral expectations for students, suggest differentiated instruction for academic issues, collect data for program decision making, and conduct universal screening of students in need of additional behavior support (Horner et al., 2015). In short, the aim of Tier 1 is to (a) support all student learning and (b) proactively recognize individuals displaying the warning signs of learning or social and behavioral challenges.

Once the signals of educational or behavioral distress become more pronounced, relevant staff may initiate a formal MTSS process. For example, in many states and school districts, within the context of an MTSS, the struggling learner becomes a "focus of concern" and a multidisciplinary or school support team is convened (Kansas MTSS, 2011). Panel members are generally comprised of the school psychologist, administrator, counselor and relevant teachers. Counselors may be asked to collaborate with other educators to appraise the student's learning environments. If potential hindrances are detected, these must be sufficiently attended to before further educational intervention is provided. Once the determination is made that the "targeted" learner received high-quality academic and behavioral instruction, and yet continues to exhibit deficiencies, the student is considered for Tier 2 services (Horner et al., 2015). School counselor tasks at this level may include providing evidence-based classroom interventions, short-term individual or group counseling, progress monitoring and regular school–home communication. Other sample interventions might involve the application of a behavior modification plan, the assignment of a peer mentor and tutoring system, and the utilization of "Check and Connect" (Maynard, Kjellstrand, & Thompson, 2013) or Student Success Skills (Lemberger, Selig, Bowers & Rogers, 2015) programs.

In most cases, identified students make at least modest progress at Tier 2 and do not require tertiary intervention. Even so, a small percentage of students receive Tier 3 services involving, for example, a comprehensive FBA, additional linking of academic and behavioral supports, and more specialized attention (Horner et al., 2015). School counselor support at this level commonly incorporates and extends beyond Tier 2 services. Ongoing consultation with and referrals to community-based professionals (e.g., learning experts, marriage and family counselors, child psychiatrists, and clinical psychologists) and out- or in-patient treatment facilities may be necessary.

In summary, the essential focus of collaborative MTSS programming is to improve student performance by first carefully assessing student strengths and weaknesses. Once these characteristics are identified, the MTSS team, with input from the school counseling staff, develops learning

outcomes and, as required, may institute whole-school, classroom, or individual activities and services to best address lingering student deficiencies. As such, counselors should be significant partners with other appropriate staff to deliver the needed assistance and support (e.g., assign a peer mentor, provide individual or group counseling, institute a behavior management plan) to address students' underdeveloped academic or social-emotional and behavioral skills. To close the MTSS loop, follow-up assessment of student progress toward designated learning and behavioral targets is regularly conducted by teachers with assistance from counselors and other related specialists. Based on the evaluation results, further interventions may be prescribed. School counselors therefore contribute essential MTSS services at each tier, promoting through their classroom work, group counseling and individualized services a higher level of student functioning. Regrettably, anecdotal evidence and survey research suggest that many are ill-equipped to conduct the requisite prevention and intervention activities (Ockerman et al., 2015). The following sections attempt, in part, to rectify this situation.

Alignment of MTSS With Professional School Counselor Standards and Practice

Before considering the implications for pre-service school counselor preparation, school counselors and university-level counselor educators should benefit from understanding the ways in which MTSS school counselor-related roles and functions are consistent with the preponderance of the ASCA (2012b) School Counselor Competencies and CACREP (2016) School Counseling Standards. Because there are so few publications documenting school counselor roles and functions within MTSS frameworks, a standards crosswalk, or matrix, was developed to fill this need (see Table 1). It should be noted that the ASCA standards and CACREP competencies are largely consistent with the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards' (National Board; 2012) School Counseling Standards for School Counselors of Students Ages 3–18+. As such, they were not included in the table.

Table 1

Crosswalk of Sample School Counselor MTSS Roles and Functions, ASCA (2012b) School Counselor Competencies, and CACREP (2016) School Counseling Standards

MTSS School Counselor Roles and Functions*	ASCA School Counselor Competencies	CACREP Section 5: Entry-Level Specialty Areas – School Counseling
	I. School Counseling Programs B: Abilities & Skills	1. Foundations 2. Contextual Dimensions 3. Practice
Shows strong school leadership	I-B-1c. Applies the school counseling themes of leadership, advocacy, collaboration and systemic change, which are critical to a successful school counseling program I-B-2. Serves as a leader in the school and community to promote and support student success	2.d. school counselor roles in school leadership and multidisciplinary teams

Collaborates and consults with relevant stakeholders	I-B-4. Collaborates with parents, teachers, administrators, community leaders and other stakeholders to promote and support student success	3.l. techniques to foster collaboration and team-work within schools
Collaborates as needed to provide integration of services	I-B-4b. Identifies and applies models of collaboration for effective use in a school counseling program and understands the similarities and differences between consultation, collaboration and counseling and coordination strategies	1.d. models of school-based collaboration and consultation
	I-B-4d. Understands and knows how to apply a consensus-building process to foster agreement in a group	
Provides staff development related to positive discipline, behavior and mental health	I-B-4e. Understands how to facilitate group meetings to effectively and efficiently meet group goals	
Leads with systems change to provide safe school	I-B-5. Acts as a systems change agent to create an environment promoting and supporting student success	2.a. school counselor roles as leaders, advocates and systems change agents in PK–12 schools
Intervention planning for SEL and academic skill improvement Provides risk and threat assessments	I-B-5b. Develops a plan to deal with personal (emotional and cognitive) and institutional resistance impeding the change process	2.g. characteristics, risk factors, and warning signs of students at risk for mental health and behavioral disorders; 2.h. common medications that affect learning, behavior and mood in children and adolescents; 2.i. signs and symptoms of substance abuse in children and adolescents as well as the signs and symptoms of living in a home where substance use occurs; 3.h. skills to critically examine the connections between social, familial, emotional and behavior problems and academic achievement

II. Foundations B: Abilities and Skills

	II-B-4. Applies the ethical standards and principles of the school counseling profession and adheres to the legal aspects of the role of the school counselor	2.n. legal and ethical considerations specific to school counseling
	II-B-4c. Understands and practices in accordance with school district policy and local, state and federal statutory requirements	2.m. legislation and government policy relevant to school counseling

III. Management B: Abilities and Skills

Effective collection, evaluation, interpretation and use of data to improve availability of services	III-B-3. Accesses or collects relevant data, including process, perception and outcome data, to monitor and improve student behavior and achievement	1.e. assessments specific to PK–12 education
Assists with schoolwide data management for documentation and decision making	III-B-3a. Reviews and disaggregates student achievement, attendance and behavior data to identify and implement interventions as needed	
Collects needs assessment data to better inform culturally relevant practices	III-B-3b. Uses data to identify policies, practices and procedures leading to successes, systemic barriers and areas of weakness	
	III-B-3c. Uses student data to demonstrate a need for systemic change in areas such as course enrollment patterns; equity and access; and achievement, opportunity and/or information gaps	3.k. strategies to promote equity in student achievement and college access
	III-B-3d. Understands and uses data to establish goals and activities to close the achievement, opportunity and/or information gap	
	III-B-3e. Knows how to use data to identify gaps between and among different groups of students	
Measures student progress of schoolwide interventions with pre/post testing	III-B-3f. Uses school data to identify and assist individual students who do not perform at grade level and do not have opportunities and resources to be successful in school	
Promotes early intervention Designs and implements interventions to meet the behavioral and mental health needs of students	III-B-6a. Uses appropriate academic and behavioral data to develop school counseling core curriculum, small-group and closing-the-gap action plans and determines appropriate students for the target group or interventions	3.c. core curriculum design, lesson plan development, classroom management strategies and differentiated instructional strategies
	III-B-6c. Creates lesson plans related to the school counseling core curriculum identifying what will be delivered, to whom it will be delivered, how it will be delivered and how student attainment of competencies will be evaluated	
Provides academic interventions directly to students	III-B-6d. Determines the intended impact on academics, attendance and behavior	3.d. interventions to promote academic development
	III-B-6g. Identifies data collection strategies to gather process, perception and outcome data	

Coordinates efforts and ensures proper communication between MTSS staff, students and family members	III-B-6h. Shares results of action plans with staff, parents and community	
	III-B-7b. Coordinates activities that establish, maintain and enhance the school counseling program as well as other educational programs	

IV. Delivery B: Abilities and Skills

Provides specialized instructional support	IV-B-1d. Develops materials and instructional strategies to meet student needs and school goals	3.c. core curriculum design, lesson plan development, classroom management strategies and differentiated instructional strategies
	IV-B-1g. Understands multicultural and pluralistic trends when developing and choosing school counseling core curriculum	
	IV-B-1h. Understands and is able to build effective, high-quality peer helper programs	3.m. strategies for implementing and coordinating peer intervention programs
Engages in case management to assist with social-emotional and academic concerns	IV-B-2b. Develops strategies to implement individual student planning, such as strategies for appraisal, advisement, goal-setting, decision making, social skills, transition or post-secondary planning	3.g. strategies to facilitate school and postsecondary transitions
Understands social skills development	IV-B-2g. Understands methods for helping students monitor and direct their own learning and personal/social and career development	3.f. techniques of personal/social counseling in school settings
Provides interventions at three levels	IV-B-3. Provides responsive services	
	IV-B-3c. Demonstrates an ability to provide counseling for students during times of transition, separation, heightened stress and critical change	
Coordinating with community service providers and integrating intensive interventions into the schooling process	IV-B-4a. Understands how to make referrals to appropriate professionals when necessary	2.k. community resources and referral sources
Train/present information to school staff on data collection and analysis	IV-B-5a. Shares strategies that support student achievement with parents, teachers, other educators and community organizations	2.b. school counselor roles in consultation with families, PK–12 and postsecondary school personnel, and community agencies
Implements appropriate interventions at each tier	IV-B-5b. Applies appropriate counseling approaches to promoting change among consultees within a consultation approach	

V. Accountability B: Abilities and Skills		
Collects, analyzes, and interprets school-level data to improve availability and effectiveness of services and interventions	V-B-1g. Analyzes and interprets process, perception and outcome data	3.n. use of accountability data to inform decision making 3.o. use of data to advocate for programs and students
Uses progress monitoring data to inform counseling interventions		
Understands history, rationale, and benefits of MTSS		

Note. *Primary sources: ASCA (2012b, 2014); CACREP (2016); Cowan, Vaillancourt, Rossen, & Pollitt, (2013); Ockerman et al. (2015).

The MTSS School Counselor Roles and Functions column was generated from several sources, including a recent study examining school counselors' RTI perspectives (Ockerman et al., 2015), ASCA's (2014) RTI position statement, and a lengthy school psychology publication that specifically addresses school counselor roles in creating safe MTSS schools (Cowan, Vaillancourt, Rossen, & Pollitt, 2013). Essentially, the crosswalk reveals that K–12 school counselor MTSS roles and functions correspond substantially with the ASCA (2012b) School Counselor Competencies and CACREP (2016) Standards. Similarly, MTSS school counselor tasks fit well within the broad and longstanding role categories traditionally associated with counseling services: (a) coordination of CSCP services, interventions and activities; (b) collaboration with school staff and other stakeholders; (c) provision of responsive services (e.g., individual and group counseling, classroom interventions, peer helper and support services, crisis intervention); (d) consultation within school constituencies and external resource personnel; and (e) classroom lessons (i.e., MTSS Tier 1 services; Burnham & Jackson, 2000; Goodman-Scott et al., 2016; Gysbers & Henderson, 2012; Schmidt, 2014; Sink, 2005). Since the ASCA (2012a) National Model also is a systemic and structural model aimed at whole-school prevention and intervention of student issues, school counselor MTSS roles (direct and indirect services) also align reasonably well with the model's components (e.g., foundation, management, delivery and accountability; Goodman-Scott et al., 2016). In short, including MTSS into the pre-service training of school counselors is professionally defensible as well as best practice.

Implications for School Counselor Preparation

PBIS and RTI frameworks are now firmly established in a majority of U.S. schools. As documented above, research, particularly within the context of special education, largely demonstrates their positive impact on student academic achievement and SEL skill development, as well as on school climate (Horner et al., 2010, 2015; McDaniel, Albritton, & Roach, 2013). However, school counselors in the field report a lack of MTSS knowledge and their roles and functions within at least RTI schools are somewhat inconsistently and ambiguously defined (Ockerman et al., 2015). In some circumstances, school counselors' MTSS duties may not fully complement their CSCP responsibilities (Goodman-Scott et al., 2016). Given these realities, many school counselor preparation programs need to be revised to effectively account for these limitations. To accomplish this end, the following literature-based action steps are offered. First, counselor educators should conduct a program audit, looking for

MTSS curricular and instructional gaps in their school counseling preparation courses. Curriculum mapping (Jacobs, 1997) is a useful tool to recognize program content deficiencies (Howard, 2007). Essentially, the process involves

> the identification of the content and skills taught in each course at each level. A calendar-based chart, or "map," is created for each course so that it is easy to see not only what is taught in a course, but when it is taught. Examination of these maps can reveal both gaps in what is taught and repetition among courses, but its value lies in identifying areas for integration and concepts for spiraling. (Howard, 2007, p. 7)

Second, the various options for program revision should be weighed. The two most obvious alternatives are to either add a separate school counseling-based MTSS course or to augment existing courses and their content. Classes already focusing on topics associated with MTSS theory, research and practice (e.g., special education, at-risk children and adolescents, comprehensive school counseling, strengths-based counseling and advocacy) are perhaps the easiest to modify. Certainly, accreditation standards and requirements, funding implications, and logistical concerns must be considered.

Third, specific MTSS content and related skills should be reviewed and syllabi revised accordingly. To inform decision making and planning, Table 2 provides sample core MTSS content areas associated with school counselor roles and functions. Curriculum changes might involve strengthening these four broad areas: (a) assessment, data usage and research, (b) general knowledge and practices, (c) specific interventions, and (d) systems work. To alleviate potential redundancies in pre-service education, it is imperative that any proposed modifications be aligned with current CSCP training (e.g., ASCA's [2012a] National Model; see Goodman-Scott et al., 2016 for details). Consult the crosswalk provided in Table 1 to ensure that any course changes are consonant with ASCA's (2012b) School Counselor Competencies and CACREP (2016) standards.

Table 2

Core MTSS Content Areas Aligned With School Counselor Roles and Functions

Content Areas
Assessment, Data Usage and Research • Academic and SEL skill assessment and progress monitoring • Applied experimental analysis of behavior/functional behavior analysis (FBA) • Behavioral consultation assessment • Evidence-based (data-based) decision making and intervention planning (academic and social-behavioral issues) • Research methods (e.g., survey, pre/posttest comparison, single subject designs) • Student and classroom assessment/testing • Use of student assessment and schoolwide data to improve MTSS services and interventions
General Knowledge and Practices • Best practices in support of academic and social-behavioral development • Integration with comprehensive school counseling programs (e.g., ASCA National Model) • Ethical and legal issues • Educational, developmental and psychological theories (e.g., behaviorism, social learning theory, ecological systems theory, cognitive, psychosocial, identity) • Effective communication

- Students at risk and resiliency issues (i.e., knowledge of early warning signs of school and social-behavioral problems)
- Leadership and advocacy
- Mental health issues and associated community services
- Models of consultation
- Multicultural/diversity (student, family, school, community) and social justice issues
- Referral
- Special education (e.g., relevant policies, identification procedures, categories of disability)

Specific Interventions
- Check and Connect (Check In, Check Out)
- Individualized positive behavior support (e.g., behavior change plans, individualized education plans)
- Peer mentoring/tutoring
- Schoolwide classroom guidance (academic and SEL skill related)
- Short-term goal-oriented individual and group counseling

Systems Work
- Collaboration and coordination of services with counseling staff, MTSS constituents, external resources and families
- Consultation with caregivers, educational staff and external resources
- Staff coaching/liaison work (e.g., conducting workshops and training events to improve conceptual knowledge and understanding as well as skill development)
- MTSS (PBIS & RTI) structure and components and associated practices
- Resource providers (in-school and out-of-school options)
- Policy development addressing improved school environments and barriers to learning for all students
- Systems/interdisciplinary collaboration and leadership within context of comprehensive school counseling programs

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Note. Primary sources: Cowan et al. (2013); Forman & Crystal (2015); R. Freeman et al. (2015); Gibbons & Coulter (2016); Goodman-Scott et al. (2016); Horner et al. (2015); Ockerman et al. (2015); Reschly & Coolong-Chaffin (2016).

Finally, course syllabi need to be updated to integrate desired curricular changes and appropriate instructional techniques instituted. It is recommended that counselor educators design the MTSS course using a spiral curriculum (Bruner, 1960; Howard, 2007). This theory- and research-based strategy rearranges the course material curriculum and content in such a way that knowledge and skill development and content build upon each another while gradually increasing in complexity and depth. Research informed pedagogy suggests that MTSS course content be taught using a variety of methods, including direct instruction for learning foundational materials and student-centered approaches, such as case studies and problem-based learning (PBL), for the application component (Dumbrigue, Moxley, & Najor-Durack, 2013; Ramsden, 2003; Savery, 2006). Specifically, given that scientific (systematic problem-solving) and data-driven decision making are indispensable educator practices within MTSS frameworks, these skills should be nurtured through "hands on" and highly engaging didactic methods rather than relying on conventional college-level teaching strategies (e.g., recitation, questioning and lecture; Stanford University Center for Teaching and Learning, 2001). Specific activities could be readily implemented during practicum and internship. PBL invites students to tackle complex and authentic (real world) issues that promote understanding of content knowledge as well as interpretation, analytical reasoning, interpersonal communication and self-assessment skills (Amador, Miles, & Peters, 2006; Loyens, Jones, Mikkers, & van Gog, 2015). Problems can take the form of genuine case studies (e.g., a sixth-grader at risk for severe depression),

encouraging pre-service counselors to reflect on issues they will face in MTSS schools. Succinctly stated, when developing a new course or refining existing courses to include MTSS elements, counselor educators are encouraged to use research-based methods of curriculum design and student-centered pedagogy.

Conclusion

School counselor roles and functions must be responsive to societal changes and educational reforms. These shifts require university-level counselor preparation programs to be adaptable and open to new practices. K–12 schools around the nation are committed to instituting MTSS (PBIS and RTI) to better educate all students as well as to reduce the number of learners at risk for academic and social and emotional problems. School counselors largely indicate that they require further training on these MTSS frameworks and best practice (Goodman-Scott et al., 2016; Ockerman et al., 2015). It is therefore incumbent upon counselor education programs to revise their curriculum and instruction to meet this growing need. This article provides a clear rationale for instituting pre-service program changes, as well as summarizes MTSS's theoretical and research foundation. Literature-based recommendations for pre-service course and curricular modifications have been offered. Preparation courses are encouraged to align their MTSS curriculum and content with ASCA's (2012b) and CACREP's (2016) school counseling standards, and the role requirements of comprehensive school counseling programs. Subsequent research is needed to determine whether this added level of pre-service education support actually impacts school counselor MTSS competency perceptions, and more importantly, whether schoolchildren and youth are positively impacted by better trained professional school counselors.

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Integrating a Multi-Tiered System of Supports With Comprehensive School Counseling Programs

Jolie Ziomek-Daigle, Emily Goodman-Scott, Jason Cavin, Peg Donohue

A multi-tiered system of supports, including Response to Intervention and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, is a widely utilized framework implemented in K–12 schools to address the academic and behavioral needs of all students. School counselors are leaders who facilitate comprehensive school counseling programs and demonstrate their relevance to school initiatives and centrality to the school's mission. The purpose of this article is to discuss both a multi-tiered system of supports and comprehensive school counseling programs, demonstrating the overlap between the two frameworks. Specific similarities include: leadership team and collaboration, coordinated services, school counselor roles, data collection, evidence-based practices, equity, cultural responsiveness, advocacy, prevention, positive school climate, and systemic change. A case study is included to illustrate a school counseling department integrating a multi-tiered system of supports with their comprehensive school counseling program. In the case study, school counselors are described as interveners, facilitators and supporters regarding the implementation of a multi-tiered system of supports.

Keywords: multi-tiered system of supports, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, Response to Intervention, comprehensive school counseling programs, coordinated services

A multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS), including Response to Intervention (RTI) and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), has been embedded in many public schools for the last decade. Specifically, these data-driven frameworks promote positive student academic and behavioral outcomes, as well as safe and favorable school climates (Ockerman, Mason, & Hollenbeck, 2012; Sugai & Horner, 2009). School counselors design and implement comprehensive school counseling programs that promote students' academic, career, social, and emotional success as well as equitable student outcomes and systemic changes (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2012). As school leaders, school counselors should understand MTSS and play a leadership role in the development and implementation of such frameworks (ASCA, 2014; Goodman-Scott, 2014; Goodman-Scott, Betters-Bubon, & Donohue, 2016).

In a 2014 position statement on MTSS, ASCA described school counselors as important stakeholders in its implementation plan, stating "professional school counselors align their work with MTSS through the implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program designed to improve student achievement and behavior" (p. 38). Several scholars have discussed the alignment of RTI and comprehensive school counseling programs (Gruman & Hoelzen, 2011; Ockerman et al., 2012; Ryan, Kaffenberger, & Carroll, 2011; Ziomek-Daigle & Heckman, under review) as well as PBIS and comprehensive school counseling programs (Donohue, 2014; Goodman-Scott, 2014; Goodman-Scott et al., 2016; Shepard, Shahidullah, & Carlson, 2013), including school counselors' roles in both. However, there remains a need to examine MTSS as an overarching construct and its overlap with comprehensive school counseling programs. In this article, we present information on

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MTSS, including RTI and PBIS, discuss comprehensive school counseling programs and the overlap of the two frameworks, and culminate with a case study illustrating the role of school counselors as interveners, facilitators, and supporters integrating MTSS and comprehensive school counseling programs in a middle school.

Multi-Tiered System of Supports

The use of MTSS offers school counselors opportunities to have a lasting impact on student academic success and behavior development while integrating these frameworks with comprehensive school counseling programs. MTSS, often used as an overarching construct for PBIS and RTI, is a schoolwide, three-tiered approach for providing academic, behavioral and social supports to all students based on their needs and skills (Cook, Lyon, Kubergovic, Wright, & Zhang, 2015; Harlacher, Sakelaris, & Kattelman, 2014; Sugai & Horner, 2009; Sugai & Simonsen, 2012). Harlacher et al. (2014) described six key tenets of the MTSS framework: (a) all students are capable of grade-level learning with adequate support; (b) MTSS is rooted in proactivity and prevention; (c) the system utilizes evidence-based practices; (d) decisions and procedures are driven by school and student data; (e) the degree of support given to each student is based on their needs; and (f) implementation occurs schoolwide and requires stakeholder collaboration.

MTSS consists of a continuum of three tiers of prevention: primary, secondary, and tertiary (Harlacher et al., 2014; Sugai & Horner, 2009). In Tier 1, or primary prevention, all students receive academic and behavioral support (Harlacher et al., 2014). Approximately 80% of students in a school are successful while receiving only primary prevention, or the general education academic and behavioral curriculum for all students. Examples include teaching expected behaviors schoolwide and the use of evidence-based academic strategies and curriculums. Students with elevated needs receive more specialized secondary and tertiary prevention, typically 15% and 5% of students, respectively (Harlacher et al., 2014; Sugai & Horner, 2009). Educators provide increasing degrees of interventions and supports in order for each student to be successful academically and behaviorally.

In regards to prevention, students are usually screened using academic benchmark assessments and behavioral data to determine their level of need (Harlacher et al., 2014; Sugai & Horner, 2009; Sugai & Simonsen, 2012). Some schools have moved to the use of universal screening to identify students with emerging mental health needs such as anxiety and depression (Lane, Oakes, & Menzies, 2010). Those with elevated needs receive interventions and are monitored to determine their progress and the interventions' effectiveness. Further, the prevention activities in all three tiers are evidence-based practices (e.g., scientifically-based interventions; Harlacher et al., 2014; Sugai & Horner, 2009) and data-driven. Specifically, data is used to determine students' needs and to measure progress. In the next section, two examples of MTSS will be discussed: RTI and PBIS.

Response to Intervention

The No Child Left Behind Act (2002) clearly emphasized that educators have unique opportunities to provide early intervention, quality instruction and data-driven decisions for all students. RTI, an outcome of the accountability movement, is "a systematic and structured approach to increase the efficiency, accountability, and impact of effective practices" (Crockett & Gillespie, 2007, p. 2). This framework was designed in 2004 as an alternative to states' use of the discrepancy model of special education assessment, which compared children's current ability and achievement levels (Ryan et al., 2011). By using only the discrepancy model to identify students in need of special education services, inconsistencies prevailed among school districts and states. Concerns about the discrepancy

model included: (a) students of color were being over-identified as being in need of special education services as compared to White peers; (b) difficulty determining if low achievement was due to a possible learning disability or inadequate teacher performance; (c) educators waiting for students to fail instead of proactively identifying discrete literacy and numeracy skills that merited remediation (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). As RTI has evolved over the years, educators expanded the model to include behavioral and social interventions that are universal (e.g., whole-school) as well as intensive services (e.g., individual or small group), more fully responding to students with varied development.

RTI is currently used in school systems as a way to decrease referrals for special education services (Gersten & Dimino, 2006). The framework and the use of tiered supports ensure that students receive the appropriate level of intervention needed (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). Previously, students who exhibited difficulties in a single academic area would be referred to special education services, potentially removing them from the general education classroom. With RTI implementation, students now receive supports that allow them to remain in the general education classroom and reduce the rate of unnecessary referrals for special education services (Gersten & Dimino, 2006). RTI can be further described as instructional and behavioral.

Instructional RTI

Most educators report having a thorough knowledge of RTI to establish early literacy and math fluency and to provide additional supports in academic areas where needed (Shepard et al., 2013). Instructional RTI often is used to describe the process in which teachers work with students to mitigate the labeling and negative effects often associated with learning disabilities (Johnston, 2010). The teacher tailors the instruction to address the perceived deficit the student is exhibiting. Most often this delivery is used in the context of reading instruction (Shinn, 2010). The focus on instructional practice can take place on the first tier with whole class instruction, on the second tier with a small reading group, or on the third tier with intensive one-on-one instruction (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006).

Behavioral RTI

Students may not only struggle with academic challenges, but behavioral, social and emotional challenges as well. Many students experience a host of challenging situations occurring in their homes and communities, such as poverty, homelessness, immigration and residency barriers, and the lack of fulfillment of basic needs such as adequate nutrition, transportation, and medical care (Shepard et al., 2013). Supporting social behavior is central for students to achieve academic gains, although this area is not often represented in traditional RTI implementation that may focus primarily on learning and instruction. More recent RTI frameworks reveal pyramids split in half showing both the academic and behavioral domains, more fully recognizing the complex entanglement between academic, social and emotional learning (Stormont, Reinke, & Herman, 2010). Behavioral RTI emphasizes a continuum of services that can be provided to students by school counselors and integrated into comprehensive school counseling programs.

A hallmark of both the instructional and behavioral RTI models is the focus on differentiation among the three tiers of intervention. Each approach delimits critical factors and components at the primary levels; interventions become more intense and personalized as students are provided more individualized supports. As with any type of intervention, data tracking is necessary to the success of the outcome (Utley & Obiakor, 2015). Both instructional and behavioral RTI use a system of data tracking known as continuous regeneration, in which the data is analyzed on an ongoing basis and interventions are evaluated based on recorded outcomes (McIntosh, Filter, Bennett, Ryan, & Sugai, 2010). The use of continuous regeneration means students receive the most applicable form of

intervention throughout the course of their academic career. The following section will discuss the use of the RTI within school counseling programs.

School Counseling and RTI

Researchers have discussed the school counselor's role and involvement in the RTI process (Ockerman et al., 2012; Ryan et al., 2011). Studies reveal that school counseling interventions using tiered approaches, such as universal instruction via classroom guidance programming and subsequent small group follow-up, have increased student achievement and motivation (Luck & Webb, 2009; Ryan et al., 2011). Ziomek-Daigle and Cavin (2015) discussed that positive behavior support strategies, which can be designed for students with behavioral issues in classrooms or at home, can be taught to teachers and parents for children who need more individualized support and monitoring. Additionally, school counselors have been identified as integral members to RTI teams by using behavioral observations to determine the responsiveness and effectiveness of services (Gruman & Hoelzen, 2011).

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports

PBIS, a multi-tiered system of supports, is grounded in the principles of applied behavior analysis (Johnston, Foxx, Jacobson, Green, & Mulick, 2006) and implemented in over 21,000 schools across the United States (Sugai, 2016). Further, PBIS is often described as a function of RTI, including the "application of RTI principles to the improvement of social behavior outcomes for all students" (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012, p. 4). Thus, PBIS uses the three-tiered preventative continuum of data-driven and evidence-based practices to improve students' academics and social behaviors (Sugai & Horner, 2009; Sugai & Simonsen, 2012). PBIS is implemented schoolwide, including evidence-based primary prevention for all students, and secondary and tertiary prevention for students with elevated needs (Shepard et al., 2013). Examples of primary prevention include universal behavioral expectations, discipline procedures, and acknowledgements, also known as positive reinforcement. Secondary and tertiary prevention can include behavioral contracts, social skill instruction and wraparound services.

One appealing aspect of PBIS is the use of systematic data collection for monitoring student referrals as well as PBIS implementation and fidelity (Simonsen & Sugai, 2013). Thus, data is used to continually determine student and school needs and related progress, and to guide future decisions in an iterative cycle. Examples of student data utilized include suspensions and office discipline referrals, grades, attendance, and other student outcomes (Sugai & Horner, 2009). Student data is often analyzed for patterns in office discipline referrals, such as frequency, location and time of year. Patterns can be analyzed using tools such as the *School Wide Information System*, a web-based tool for organizing and analyzing office discipline referral trends (May et al., 2006). Standardized assessments can be used to determine schoolwide data trends, including the *School Wide Evaluation Tool,* a research-validated instrument that measures the degree of PBIS implementation (Todd et al., 2012).

A plethora of researchers have demonstrated the positive impact of PBIS implementation as related to a number of school, student and staff benefits. Schools implementing PBIS have demonstrated better student academic outcomes (Horner et al., 2009; Simonsen et al., 2012), a decrease in student discipline incidences (Bradshaw, Mitchell, & Leaf, 2010; Bradshaw, Waasdorp, & Leaf, 2012; Curtis, Van Horne, Robertson, & Karvonen, 2010; Sherrod, Getch, & Ziomek-Daigle, 2009; Simonsen et al., 2012), and a more positive and safer school climate and work environment (Bradshaw, Koth, Bevans, Ialongo, & Leaf, 2008; Horner et al., 2009; Waasdorp, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2012).

School Counseling and PBIS

Several scholars have discussed school counselors' roles in PBIS implementation. Goodman-Scott et al. (2016) described the alignment between comprehensive school counseling programs and PBIS, particularly the use of data-driven, evidence-based practices and a tiered continuum of supports: prevention for all students and intervention for students with elevated needs. Further, through case studies, several researchers have demonstrated school counselors' roles in PBIS implementation in their schools. Specifically, Sherrod et al. (2009) found a decrease in schoolwide and small group office discipline referrals and described school counselors' roles in creating and implementing schoolwide interventions addressing student behaviors. Further, school counselors utilized student outcome data generated by the PBIS team to determine students' needs for and progress in school counselor interventions such as small group counseling (Goodman-Scott, Hays, & Cholewa, under review). While in PBIS leadership roles, school counselors have demonstrated collaboration and consultation with stakeholders, contributed to a safe school environment and schoolwide systems of reinforcement, utilized student outcome data, implemented universal screening, facilitated PBIS-specific bullying prevention and conducted small group interventions (Curtis et al., 2010; Donohue, 2014; Donohue, Goodman-Scott & Betters-Bubon, 2016; Goodman-Scott, 2014; Goodman-Scott, Doyle, & Brott, 2014; Martens & Andreen, 2013).

PBIS and Behavioral RTI

Behavioral RTI and PBIS, although similar in their focus on schoolwide behaviors within a three-tiered framework, are remarkably different. First, all students are exposed to behavioral RTI, but only students who attend schools implementing PBIS receive the behavioral supports of the latter. The implementation and mandate of RTI is a direct outcome of the No Child Left Behind Act (2002). On the other hand, PBIS, a manualized approach, requires ongoing training and a specific evaluation process. PBIS fidelity is necessary for successful implementation and requires ongoing data collection and analysis. The behavioral RTI approach allows schools to design and develop their own frameworks in a contextual manner to best support their students, and the method and training for implementation remains flexible. School counselors can be active in both RTI and PBIS implementation in their schools, as several of these roles overlap with comprehensive school counseling programs.

Comprehensive School Counseling Programs

Comprehensive school counseling programs were initially conceptualized in the 1960s and 1970s, have evolved over time, are tied to the school's academic mission, and are based on student competencies in the academic, career, social and emotional domains (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012). One well-known and widely used comprehensive school counseling framework is the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2012; Gysbers & Henderson, 2012). The model was based on (a) the ASCA *National Standards for School Counseling Programs*, which defined student standards and competencies regarding academic, career, personal and social development (Campbell & Dahir, 1997), and (b) the Education Trust's *Transforming School Counseling Initiative*, which emphasized school counselors' roles in closing the achievement gap for low-income and minority students, and performing leadership, advocacy, systemic change, and collaboration and teaming (Martin, 2015). The model was created in 2003, was updated in both 2005 and 2012, and has provided the school counseling professional with a unified vision, voice, and identity in regards to the school counselors' roles (ASCA, 2012; Gysbers & Henderson, 2012).

Many scholars have reported positive outcomes related to comprehensive school counseling program implementation. For example, Wilkerson, Pérusse, and Hughes (2013) found that

elementary schools designated as fully implemented ASCA Model Programs had higher standardized English and Language Arts and Math scores than those schools without the designation. Similarly, other scholars have associated comprehensive school counseling program implementation with higher student achievement scores (Sink, Akos, Turnbull, & Mvududu, 2008; Sink & Stroh, 2003). In a similar vein, Hatch, Poynton, and Pérusse (2015) reported that the increased national emphasis on comprehensive school counseling programs over the last decade has positively impacted school counselors' related beliefs and priorities.

The ASCA National Model and a Multi-Tiered System of Supports

School counselors are crucial in students' learning and social development and are invested in early interventions that are at the root of comprehensive school counseling programs (Ryan et al., 2011). MTSS aligns with the ASCA National Model's chief inputs of advocacy, collaboration, systemic change, prevention, intervention and the use of data. Thus, both the ASCA National Model (2012) and MTSS are inherently connected given their overlapping foci (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Overlap and similarities between a multi-tiered system of supports and comprehensive school counseling programs

Overlap exists between these two frameworks, especially prominent when school counselors take on roles as supporters, interveners and facilitators in offering indirect as well as direct services (Ockerman et al., 2012; Ziomek-Daigle & Heckman, under review). In the role as supporters, school counselors share data related to interventions, discuss needs assessment data and increase awareness regarding equity gaps that may be present at the school (Ockerman et al., 2012). School counselors are interveners and facilitators as active members of RTI teams who provide behavioral interventions and services and, through progress monitoring, collect and review data and make recommendations (Ockerman et al., 2012; Ziomek-Daigle & Heckman, under review).

The ASCA National Model (2012) provides the necessary components for comprehensive school

counseling programs grounded in student data and based on student academic, career, social and emotional development. The model includes four components: foundation, delivery, management, and accountability. Next, we discuss the integration of a multi-tiered system of supports into the four components of the model.

Foundation. Establishing the program's foundation is the initial step in building a comprehensive school counseling program (ASCA, 2012). As programs are developed, school counselors should examine their own personal beliefs about their role with students. Program mission and vision statements should also be created, using measurable language. Additionally, student competencies in the academic, career, social and emotional domains are reflected in comprehensive programs along with school counselors' ethical decision making and professional practice. School counselors' program visions and goals should reflect priorities also highlighted in the school's multi-tiered framework (Goodman-Scott et al., 2016). For example, Goodman-Scott et al. (2016) suggested school counselors' vision and mission statements should represent school and district current trends and goals, such as PBIS delivery and implementation.

Delivery. The delivery component of the framework identifies the types of services that school counselors directly offer students such as classroom guidance programming and core curriculum (Ziomek-Daigle, 2015), individual student planning, small group and individual counseling, consultation, and referral (ASCA, 2012). Many approaches used within a multi-tiered system of supports also can be utilized within the delivery system of school counseling programs, such as prevention activities (e.g., teaching schoolwide expectations in classroom guidance programming) and interventions (e.g., check in/check out; Goodman-Scott et al., 2016; Goodman-Scott et al., under review; Ziomek-Daigle & Heckman, under review). Further, school counselors can integrate more intensive interventions for students with multiple, complex needs, including wraparound services (Shepard et al., 2013).

Accountability and Management. Accountability and management are at the root of any comprehensive school counseling program, as data is collected, analyzed and reported, identifying how students are different as a result of the program (ASCA, 2012). Further, school counselors utilize a variety of tools and assessments to gather evidence of program and school counselor effectiveness (ASCA, 2012). Data generated from a multi-tiered system of supports, such as student achievement and behavior, are continuously collected and reviewed to determine student needs and intervention effectiveness. School counselors can use this data from a multi-tiered system of supports to determine student and school needs and create curriculum, small group and closing-the-gap action plans accordingly (Goodman-Scott et al., 2016). After implementing interventions, school counselors can measure the impact of their interventions on the desired student outcomes including attendance, office referrals and grades, thus determining their effectiveness and impact through the use of result reports. MTSS overlaps with comprehensive school counseling programs; thus, the two can be integrated to strengthen both. The following section discusses the commonalities between MTSS and comprehensive school counseling programs.

Commonalities Between a Multi-Tiered System of Supports and Comprehensive School Counseling Programs

Several similarities exist between MTSS and comprehensive school counseling programs (see Figure 1). Similarities include utilizing collaboration and coordinated services; efficiently using the school counselors' time through tiered supports; collecting and reviewing student and school data; using evidence-based practices; developing culturally responsive interventions that close achievement gaps; promoting prevention and intervention for students through a tiered continuum;

and facilitating schoolwide systemic change and a positive school climate. First, both frameworks have established leadership teams that guide program design and implementation, represent the stakeholders within the building and offer support in program development and accessing resources. Next, tiered approaches provide school counselors time to address whole-school needs while also providing services to and advocating on behalf of students in crisis or with significant needs. Thus, using tiered approaches may assist school counselors directly and indirectly serve students. Ongoing progress monitoring through continuous data collection keeps MTSS and comprehensive school counseling programs focused and stakeholders informed, which may lead to greater stakeholder awareness and support for school counseling initiatives. Similarly, the use of evidence-based practices, recommended by MTSS and comprehensive school counseling, offers students quality, empirically-backed academic and behavioral services across all three tiers. A successful MTSS also allows school counselors to address achievement gaps and increase equitable practices by strengthening social supports for students in the classroom, school building and community who present with challenging behavior. A case study illustrating the role of school counselors as interveners, facilitators and supporters of integrating both MTSS and comprehensive school counseling programs follows.

Case Study

Example Middle School (EMS) is located in a suburban setting with approximately 700 students across sixth, seventh and eighth grades; 25% of students come from households considered economically disadvantaged. The majority of students identify as Caucasian (45%) or African American (30%). RTI has been implemented in EMS for approximately seven years, while PBIS has been implemented for four years. The school administration consists of one principal and three assistant principals (APs), and the school counseling department includes three school counselors with a school counselor to student ratio of 1:233. Each grade level is assigned one AP and one school counselor.

The grade levels each meet bi-weekly to discuss academic planning and share information regarding students (both concerns and accomplishments). The EMS student support team is an interdisciplinary team that meets to create and discuss academic and behavioral interventions and related progress for students demonstrating consistent academic and behavioral challenges that were not successfully addressed by the grade-level Tier 1 meetings. The student support team is facilitated by a teacher and attended by the grade-level AP and school counselor as well as the school psychologists. Parents of the reviewed student also are invited. In addition, EMS has a PBIS team comprised of representatives from all grade levels and specialties, including one school counselor; parents and students are represented on the PBIS team. The school counselor and AP together oversee the PBIS data collection and analysis. Lastly, the school counseling team meets weekly and over the last seven years has developed a comprehensive school counseling program based on the ASCA National Model. All school counselors at EMS have essential roles in the program implementation.

Tier One

The school counselors act as supporters, interveners and facilitators in Tier 1. As supporters, EMS school counselors attend all regular grade-level meetings and provide background information on students as appropriate. As interveners, school counselors collaborate and consult with teachers on their instruction and curriculum as well as teachers' monitoring and screening of all students to identify those with elevated academic and behavioral needs. For example, at the most recent seventh-grade-level meeting, the school counselor reviewed grade-level office discipline referrals,

attendance records and teachers' anecdotal feedback. The grade-level team expressed concern about a student, Elena, who had several absences and office discipline referrals in the last month. The seventh-grade school counselor provided non-confidential background information on Elena to the grade-level team members.

The school counselor on the PBIS team holds a number of additional roles as supporter. First, the counselor provides information on school climate generated by the comprehensive school counseling program, including both anecdotal observations and data-driven findings. The school counselor also assists the PBIS team in developing a common school language and protocols (i.e., school expectations: Be Responsible, Be Respectful, Be Safe), schoolwide and individual acknowledgements for students and staff, and discipline procedures (i.e., the office discipline referral process). In the role as facilitator, the school counselors assist the PBIS team as they plan schoolwide pep rallies to further teach the school expectations, acknowledge students, classes and staff with certain achievements (e.g., the homeroom with the lowest office discipline referrals per quarter; staff who distributed the highest number of school tickets). As an intervener, all school counselors teach the PBIS-generated school expectations during their regular monthly classroom lessons and engage in student acknowledgements (e.g., distributing EMS tickets for positive behaviors). Intervener roles also include school counselors engaging in student advising and schoolwide programming, such as teaching students and staff the bullying prevention strategies from *Expect Respect*, an evidence-based bully prevention program (Stiller, Nese, Tomlanovich, Horner, & Ross, 2013). Additionally, in roles as interveners, school counselors deliver a social skills curriculum to students during weekly homeroom advisory periods or through regular guidance lessons (Ziomek-Daigle, 2015). Further, school counselors collaborate with school psychologists to engage in universal mental health screening for student depression and anxiety and provide evidence-based classroom lessons to all students to promote positive mental health, as interveners (Donohue et al., 2016).

The school counseling program holds advisory team meetings quarterly. Members include all school counselors, a student and parent representative, a general education teacher from all grade levels, the PBIS coach, the AP who reviews PBIS data and one special education teacher. At the end of each year, the advisory team reviews a number of data points, including the comprehensive school counseling program goals from the previous year and related outcomes and results reports, schoolwide PBIS behavioral data, RTI instructional and behavioral data, and the school data profile. Next, the advisory team makes goals for the subsequent year based on data-determined needs. Then, based on the advisory team's recommendations, the school counselors create closing-the-gap action plans and goals for the next year (i.e., SMART goals,). School counselors present the results of their advisory team meetings, action plans, SMART goals, and results reports to the administrative team (principal and APs), as well as the PBIS team, RTI team and whole school faculty.

Tiers Two and Three

When providing Tier 2 and 3 supports and services, the EMS school counselors engage in supporter, interventionist and facilitator roles. To follow up from the grade-level meetings, the EMS school counselors act as interveners by consulting and collaborating with teachers individually regarding evidence-based academic and behavioral interventions for struggling students as well as teachers' classroom management. As part of the PBIS team, the school counselor acts as a supporter by discussing schoolwide behavioral trends, students with elevated office discipline referrals, and students who are otherwise considered at risk (e.g., absences, class failures, poor standardized and

benchmark tests) and recommending interventions. One intervention may be referral to the student support team.

In a role as supporter, school counselors attend the student support team meetings and, along with this team, recommend increasingly individualized evidence-based student academic and behavioral interventions and monitor students' progress at subsequent meetings. Tier 3 interventions are greater in duration and intensity than Tier 2 and have greater individualization. The student support team works together to identify students in need of Tier 2 or Tier 3 interventions, facilitates service implementation and decides to decrease and end interventions due to students maintaining positive progress. The student support team recommends interventions which may include individual or small group counseling and function-based behavioral mentoring interventions such as *Check In, Check Out* and *Check & Connect* (Baker & Ryan, 2014). As interveners, school counselors often provide counseling and mentoring or coordinate other staff and community members' involvement in mentoring programs. In addition, the school counselor may be trained to use the *Check & Connect* program and continuously review attendance, behavioral and academic data (i.e., check) and provide interventions (i.e., connect) to a small caseload of students who are being served through Tier 2 and 3 services. As facilitators, school counselors also may develop and access a list of health care providers so that students and families participate in a seamless referral process. In this role, counselors also may coordinate quarterly interdisciplinary meetings for a few students whose needs are complex and who receive community-based agency assistance. Some examples of interdisciplinary collaborative team members include: school counselors, mental health counselors, psychologists, nurses, probation officers and case workers. Lastly, the EMS school counselors, acting as interveners and facilitators, analyze the results of the universal mental health screener for depression and anxiety.

In regards to student Elena, the seventh-grade school counselor and grade-level team agreed that the school counselor would meet with Elena individually to gather additional background information on her absences and office discipline referrals. When Elena did not improve over the subsequent two-week period, more intensive and continued interventions were discussed with the grade-level team, including a referral to the student support team. After review by the student support team, Elena began *Check & Connect* with the school counselor, and the school counselor maintained communication with Elena's mother and stepfather, teachers and members of the student support team.

Conclusion

ASCA (2014) recommends that school counselors can implement MTSS in alignment with facilitating a comprehensive school counseling program. Further, several scholars have contended that school counselors can be leaders in MTSS, incorporating these duties into aspects of a comprehensive school counseling program (Cressey, Whitcomb, McGilvray-Rivet, Morrison, & Shander-Reynolds, 2014; Goodman-Scott et al., 2016). As described in this article, MTSS and comprehensive school counseling programs share many overlapping characteristics, and school counselors may act as leaders in both, vacillating between the roles of supporter, intervener and facilitator (Ockerman et al., 2012; Ziomek-Daigle & Heckman, under review). In implementing both frameworks, school counselors are able to focus on student achievement and behavior, as well as collaboration, data collection, evidence-based practices and social justice advocacy, to close achievement and equity gaps. Additionally, school counselors can utilize the existing MTSS in the schools to enhance, expand and challenge their own comprehensive programs and present new,

relevant and critical research and practical implications to the field. Goodman-Scott et al. (2016) suggested that aligning both frameworks may be a strategy to advocate at local and national levels for the school counseling field and comprehensive school counseling program implementation. Presenting school counseling programs in this manner also can increase stakeholder involvement, access additional resources and increase job stability. Focusing on the overlap between MTSS and comprehensive school counseling programs leads to a data-driven, evidence-based focus on improving school climate, as well as student equity, access, and academic and behavioral success, meeting the needs of students across all three tiers.

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Needs and Contradictions of a Changing Field: Evidence From a National Response to Intervention Implementation Study

Eva Patrikakou, Melissa S. Ockerman, Amy Feiker Hollenbeck

As a result of the Response to Intervention (RTI) mandate in schools across many states, school counselors are well-positioned to take a leadership role. The present research study examines how school counselors across the nation perceived their training and knowledge of RTI, as well as their confidence in its implementation. Results indicate that while the majority of school counselors reported positive beliefs about RTI, they had limited confidence in their preparedness to perform certain RTI-related responsibilities, including collecting and analyzing data to determine intervention effectiveness and collaboration through teamwork. These perceived areas of deficiency point to a significant discrepancy with the American School Counselor Association National Model's components and themes. Through building skills and capacity for leadership, school counselors can spearhead schoolwide teams to create and evaluate the effectiveness of culturally relevant and evidence-based interventions. School counselors and school counselor educators must use a multi-tiered system of supports as an opportunity to advance the field.

Keywords: collaboration, multi-tiered system of supports, Response to Intervention, school counselors, school counselor educators

The climate of accountability in today's public schools requires all professionals to utilize data to inform decisions in the context of their practice, and the school counselor is no exception. Broader, statewide mandates such as Response to Intervention (RTI) have put additional pressure on school professionals, raising questions regarding practitioners' preparedness to effectively utilize data to inform practice and collaborate with peers to support the needs of struggling students. The aim of this study is to examine school counselors' beliefs, perceived level of preparedness and practices regarding RTI nationwide, specifically in states where this model has been implemented.

The reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 2004 and the subsequent 2008 regulations incentivized RTI, a multi-tiered system of academic and behavioral supports for struggling students (Zirkel & Thomas, 2010). In each tier of instruction, student needs and interventions are determined through ongoing data collection and analysis. To explicate, the general education environment comprises Tier 1 of RTI, with the integration of research-based practices, universal screening and differentiated small group instruction. If a child is not successful in this environment, he or she is targeted for Tier 2 intervention, small group instruction paired with ongoing progress monitoring. A continued lack of responsiveness moves the student to Tier 3, a more intensive level of intervention and progress monitoring, with possible referral for special education services (Fuchs, Mock, Morgan, & Young, 2003; National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 2005; Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003). Thus, when determining whether a student has a specific learning disability (SLD) in an RTI framework, there should be a significant body of data in regards to a child's response to intervention to inform the eligibility process (Hauerwas, Brown, & Scott, 2013; Zirkel & Thomas, 2010).

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RTI has become increasingly commonplace in states across the nation since the 2004 IDEA reauthorization (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004). Review of the Web sites of 50 state departments of education indicated that 17 states require RTI in the process of identifying whether a student has an SLD, and 45 states have guidance documents to support the implementation of RTI (Hauerwas et al., 2013). In addition, Berkeley, Bender, Peaster, and Saunders (2009) found that 14 of 15 states required RTI to address both academic and behavioral domains. In a 2010 review of state laws and special education guidelines, Zirkel and Thomas noted that eight states required universal screening for academic and behavioral needs, while 23 recommended academic and behavioral screening. Thus, in some states the academic supports of RTI are specifically linked with the behavioral supports and interventions of Positive Behavioral Intervention Supports (PBIS).

PBIS is a multi-tiered, data-based system of support for students with emotional and behavioral needs that incorporates ongoing assessments and data-based decision making, professional development in research-based practices, and provision of tiered intervention for students who need additional assistance (Sugai & Horner, 2006). Both RTI and PBIS share the premise that educational outcomes can be improved for all by integrating research-based practices in the general education environment (Fairbanks, Sugai, Guardino, & Lathrop, 2007; Hollenbeck, 2007; Sadler & Sugai, 2009; Sugai & Horner, 2009), and thus they are commonly combined in schoolwide frameworks. A multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) is a comprehensive academic and behavioral model that integrates both RTI and PBIS (Averill & Rinaldi, 2011).

As with any significant educational reform, RTI/MTSS has a high likelihood to change professional practices. For example, social workers have been urged to recognize the importance of evidence-based decisions and data collection when working with the social-emotional concerns of students (Harrison & Harrison, 2014) and to increase their collaborative practices (Avant, 2014). General educators, special educators and reading specialists in Pennsylvania indicated an increase in collaborative practices after RTI implementation (Bean & Lillenstein, 2012). Sullivan and Long (2010) reported that a survey of school psychologists found those who were actively involved with RTI spent a higher percentage of time (25%) implementing academic interventions, in comparison to those practitioners who were not actively involved and reported less than 5% of their time spent on academic interventions. While there is an emerging body of research into the effects of RTI on the professional practice of school counselors within a handful of states (Betters-Bubon & Ratas, 2015; Luck & Webb, 2009; Miller, 2008; Ockerman, Patrikakou, & Hollenbeck, 2015; Ryan, Kaffenberger & Caroll, 2011), there has yet to be a study of school counselors' beliefs and perceptions of readiness to implement RTI across a national stage, or the impact of RTI upon school counselors' professional practice.

In this article, we first review relevant literature focused on the changing role of the school counselor in relation to RTI/MTSS. Second, we present a nationwide study regarding school counselor perceptions, preparedness and professional practice in states mandating RTI or MTSS. Finally, we discuss implications for school counselor training and preparation and provide recommendations for future research and practice.

The Changing Role of the School Counselor in Multi-Tiered Frameworks

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) recently revised its position statement on RTI, adding MTSS (2014). ASCA specifically outlined how all components of a comprehensive developmental school counseling program (foundation, delivery, management and accountability) align with

a multi-tiered continuum and underscored school counselors' pivotal role with data. To that end, school counselors must aid in data analysis to help identify students in need, evaluate counseling interventions to determine efficacy, and assist school staff in selecting evidence-based academic and behavioral strategies for students (ASCA, 2014; Ockerman, Mason, & Hollenbeck, 2012).

There were some notable efforts to promote school counselor involvement in this educational mandate prior to the publication of the ASCA MTSS position statement, including research conducted by the RTI Action Network (2009), which highlighted how innovative school counselors in three Western states (i.e., Colorado, Oklahoma and Wyoming) integrated their counseling services within an RTI framework. Zambrano, Castro-Villarreal, and Sullivan (2012) noted synergies between school counselors and school psychologists and called for increased collaboration to optimize services for students. Moreover, Ockerman and colleagues (2012) suggested the pairing of comprehensive developmental school counseling programs with RTI has the potential to effectively serve all students, particularly those historically underserved, and to advance the position of the school counselor as a transformational leader. Moreover, the authors called for more robust research regarding the role of the school counselor and evidence-based practices using MTSS.

As such, Ockerman et al. (2015) investigated how school counselors in a Midwestern state perceived their training and knowledge of RTI and thus their confidence in implementation. Results indicated that the majority of school counselors had little confidence in their ability to employ essential roles, including the following: increasing parental involvement, engaging in collaborative practices, and using data to make decisions about student interventions. Overall, having knowledgeable, positive building leaders such as school principal, assistant principals, and deans, in conjunction with a firm understanding of specific school counselor roles and responsibilities, predicted having favorable views of RTI as a means to improve students' academic and behavioral outcomes. Concomitant with these findings, Betters-Bubon and Ratas (2015) reported that school counselors in a neighboring Midwestern state experienced both positive outcomes (e.g., positive school climate, enhanced perception of the school counselor and increased teacher involvement) and barriers to success (e.g., increased record keeping, lack of training and buy-in, and lack of time to use data effectively) as a result of MTSS implementation. The authors also found that strong administrative support was associated with affirmative perceptions of MTSS, corroborating the findings of Ockerman et al. (2015). Finally, Bookard (2015) surveyed 35 elementary school counselors in North Carolina, all of whom were designated as RTI chairperson within their schools. School counselors reported a decreased amount of time to complete core school counseling responsibilities due to an increased demand to organize, communicate and coordinate logistics on behalf of the RTI team. However, these counselors reported increases in their self-efficacy to perform multiple counseling duties and perceived RTI as having a positive impact on student achievement.

While these efforts at understanding the impact of RTI/MTSS on the roles and responsibilities of school counselors should be lauded, they remain focused on the state level and therefore may be generalizable only to a particular state or region. Thus, there is an urgent need for research examining school counselors' preparedness and experiences with RTI/MTSS nationwide, especially in states where this model has been implemented. The present study investigates school counselors' beliefs, perceived level of preparedness, and practice regarding RTI. Specifically, the following research questions were investigated: (1) What are school counselors' beliefs regarding RTI? (2) How prepared do school counselors feel regarding their training on the various implementation aspects of RTI? (3) What roles and responsibilities of school counselors changed due to the RTI implementation? (4) Is attitude toward RTI predicted by factors including demographics, as well as perceived confidence with various aspects of RTI?

Method

Participants

Members of ASCA participated in this study by completing a survey. Participants were randomly selected from each of the 15 states that were reported as implementing RTI fully or partly at the time of this study's construction (Zirkel, 2014). Specifically, participants were targeted in the following states: Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Louisiana, Maine, New Mexico, New York, Rhode Island, West Virginia and Wisconsin.

In looking at the characteristics of survey respondents, 99% indicated they were currently practicing, with 96% employed full-time. Eighty-two percent were between 31 and 60 years old, and 85% were female. Ninety-two percent reported working in public school settings. Twenty-seven percent indicated working in an elementary setting, 14% in an elementary-middle school, 19% in a middle school, and 35% in a high school. A total of 81% indicated six years or more of practice as a school counselor, with 73% indicating six years or more since their last degree conferral (see Table 1 for demographic information).

Table 1

Participant Demographics

	Percent
Currently Practicing	99
Full-time employment	96
Age	
25 or under	1
26–30	8
31–40	33
41–60	49
Over 60	9
Sex	
Female	85
Male	15
School Setting	
Public	92
Charter	3
Private	5
School Population	
Elementary	27
Elementary/Middle	14
Middle School	19
Middle/High School	4
High School	35
K–12	1

Years in Practice	
1–5 years	19
6–10 years	36
11–15 years	19
16+ years	26
Years Since Final Degree	
1–5 years	27
6–10 years	34
11–15 years	17
16+ years	22

Measures

The survey was originally developed for a statewide investigation of school-based professionals in response to RTI (Hollenbeck & Patrikakou, 2014), which was then adapted specifically for school counselors and administered in the same Midwestern state (Ockerman et al., 2015). It is important to note that survey items align with the ASCA National Model (2003, 2005, 2012). Specifically, questions paralleled the four ASCA model quadrants (foundation, delivery, management and accountability) and their four surrounding themes (advocacy, collaboration, leadership and systemic change). For example, survey questions, such as perceived preparedness for counseling interventions at each tier, represented the delivery component, and items about data collection and data management systems were representative of the accountability component. Themes also were assessed through survey questions, including items addressing leadership responsibilities and effective teamwork within the RTI framework (see Table 2 for scales and specific ASCA quadrants and themes). The purpose of the survey was to illuminate school counselors' participation in RTI, as well as their underlying beliefs and attitudes, with the goal of providing insight into changing professional practices and future preparation needs.

The survey was comprised of five parts. The first section addressed demographics (e.g., *age, employment status, years in the field*). The second section involved questions regarding RTI training and implementation (e.g., *How many professional development sessions have you received in relation to RTI? What year did your school implement an RTI framework?*). The third section contained 14 Likert-type items asking participants about their perceived level of preparation toward specific aspects of RTI (e.g., *underlying rationale, counseling interventions for Tier 1, schoolwide data management systems for documentation and tier decision making*). The fourth part included 14 Likert-type questions measuring participants' beliefs and practices (e.g., *RTI is the best option to support struggling learners; RTI is a vehicle for promoting culturally responsive practices*). Lastly, the fifth section addressed changes to school counselors' responsibilities due to RTI via seven yes-no questions, such as *I am now involved in data collection and/or data management in support of RTI decisions.* In addition, an open-ended question encouraged participants to share any additional thoughts on RTI and its implementation.

Procedure

The authors obtained a list of members from ASCA who had noted that they wished to receive ASCA-approved, research-related mailings. Participants were then randomly selected from each of the 15 states that were reported as implementing RTI fully or partly (Zirkel, 2014). Surveys were mailed to those randomly selected participants along with a self-addressed, prepaid return envelope. No incentives were provided for returned surveys. From 2,477 surveys mailed, 528 were returned, for a 21.3% return rate, higher than other online surveys (Cochrane & Laux, 2008; Sullivan, Long, & Kucera, 2011).

Scales

For the purpose of this study's analyses, eight scales were used. These scales were constructed and tested in two previous research studies, and tests of internal consistency have yielded consistently robust results with high reliability coefficients (Hollenbeck & Patrikakou, 2014; Ockerman et al., 2015). The scales' original construction was based on an extensive literature review of RTI and its implementation to incorporate all pertinent aspects of MTSS. The survey underwent a piloting phase prior to being utilized in prior research studies to address construct and content validity. During the pilot phase, in addition to experts in the field, items also were reviewed by 80 school-based professionals who provided specific feedback (Hollenbeck & Patrikakou, 2014).

As a measure of internal consistency, Cronbach's Alpha (α) was computed for each of the eight scales (scale items and reliability coefficients are reported in Table 2). For scales with more than two items, Cronbach's α was calculated with and without each of the scale's items to determine whether dropping an item would increase the scale's internal consistency. There was no occasion in which the deletion of an item increased the α coefficient; therefore, no changes were made to the scales. Alpha coefficients ranged from .75 to .94. The use of a similar survey on a different population also obtained strong coefficients (Ockerman et al., 2015), indicating the robustness of the instrument across populations.

Table 2

Scale Items and Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients

Variables	Items	Cronbach's α
RTI Background Information (2)*	- Historical overview - Underlying rationale	.80
Responsibilities and benefits (2)	- Anticipated benefits - Roles and responsibilities within the tiered model	.75
Tier service delivery model (2) (ASCA Model - Delivery Component)	- Tier service delivery model (general) - Tier service delivery model (specific to one's school)	.87
Counseling interventions (3) (ASCA Model - Delivery Component)	- for Tier 1 - for Tier 2 - for Tier 3	.94
Data collection, management, and implementation (3) (ASCA Model - Accountability Component)	- Collecting and analyzing outcome data to determine effectiveness of RTI interventions - Schoolwide data management systems for documentation and decision making about students who need supportive services within RTI - Assuming leadership in RTI implementation	.89
Collaborative practices (2) (ASCA Model - Collaboration Component)	- Effective teamwork in RTI implementation - Informing and involving parents within an RTI framework	.86

| School building leadership and RTI competence (4) (ASCA Model - Leadership Theme) | - Principal describes RTI in a positive manner
- Principal seems highly knowledgeable about RTI
- Other building-level leaders highly knowledgeable about RTI
- RTI concerns and challenges are addressed in a positive manner within my school | .86 |
| RTI viewed as beneficial (7) | - RTI is the best option to support struggling learners and students with social-emotional concerns
- RTI is the best option to support students with social-emotional concerns
- RTI can improve the outcomes for all students
- RTI can improve the behavior outcomes for all students
- RTI can inform the process of identifying students with learning disabilities (LD)
- RTI data are sufficient in determining whether or not a student has an LD
- RTI is a vehicle of promoting culturally responsive practices within my school | .84 |

* *Number of items*

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were generated to address the first three research questions, while a simultaneous liner least squares regression model was tested to address the fourth question. Variance Inflation Factors (VIF) were calculated to test for multicollinearity in relation to the regression model. All VIFs were under 4, well below the 10 threshold that is used as a rule of thumb to raise concerns regarding multicollinearity (O'Brien, 2007; Stevens, 1992). Additionally, White's (1980) heteroscedasticity test was performed to determine whether the error term in the regression model had constant variance, to avoid using biased standard errors that would lead to invalid inference. Since White's test indicated the existence of heteroscedasticity ($\chi^2 = 164.13$; p < .01), the regression model was estimated with White's correction for the standard errors.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Research question 1: What are school counselors' beliefs regarding RTI? Sixty-three percent of the respondents agreed and 13% strongly agreed with the statement that RTI can improve the academic outcomes of all students. Fewer participants indicated that RTI can improve the behavioral outcomes for all students (53% agreed and 9% strongly agreed). Seventy-five percent of participants agreed or strongly agreed that RTI is the best option to support struggling learners, while only 49% agreed or strongly agreed that RTI is the best option to support students with social and emotional concerns. Only half of the respondents (54%) agreed or strongly agreed that RTI is a vehicle of promoting culturally responsive practices. The majority of participants agreed or strongly agreed that their school principal described RTI in a positive manner, but only 57% reported that they viewed their principal as highly knowledgeable about RTI. The same percentage of respondents (57%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that building leaders in general seemed knowledgeable,

whereas only 46% agreed with the statement that the majority of their colleagues were in favor of RTI. While the striking majority of participants viewed RTI as informing the process of identifying students with learning disabilities (88%), only 26% agreed with the statement that RTI data are sufficient in determining whether or not a student has a learning disability (see Table 3).

Table 3

RTI Beliefs and Practices

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
	Percent			
RTI is the best option to support struggling learners	3	22	66	9
RTI is the best option to support students with social-emotional concerns	6	45	44	5
RTI can improve academic outcomes for all students	2	22	63	13
RTI can improve behavioral outcomes for all students	3	35	53	9
RTI can inform the process of identifying students with learning disabilities	3	9	71	17
RTI data are sufficient in determining whether or not a student has a learning disability	16	58	23	3
RTI is a vehicle for promoting culturally responsive practices	5	41	49	5
My principal describes RTI in a positive manner	5	18	62	15
My principal seems highly knowledgeable about RTI	12	31	43	14
Our building-level leaders seem highly knowledgeable about RTI	10	33	45	12
RTI concerns and challenges are addressed in a positive manner	8	30	55	7
The majority of colleagues are in favor of an RTI framework	9	45	43	3
RTI is viewed as a collaborative endeavor among school professionals in my school	8	33	51	8
There are building-wide supports for collaboration within my school (e.g., common planning time, teams, etc.)	11	21	51	17

Research question 2: How prepared do school counselors feel regarding their training on the various implementation aspects of RTI? The top three aspects in which participants felt either adequately or expertly prepared are as follows: understanding the tiered service delivery model in general (69%), counseling interventions for Tier 1 (68%), and the anticipated benefits of RTI (66%). The bottom three aspects of RTI in which respondents felt adequately or expertly prepared include the following: the historical background of RTI (29%), schoolwide data management systems for documentation and decisions (36%), and collecting and analyzing data to determine effectiveness of RTI interventions (42%; see Table 4 for detailed percentages).

Table 4

Perceived Preparedness on Different Aspects of RTI

	Not Prepared	Somewhat Prepared	Adequately Prepared	Expertly Prepared
Historical overview of RTI	36	35	26	3
Underlying rationale of RTI	9	30	53	8
Anticipated benefits of RTI	8	27	56	10
Tiered service delivery model - general	6	25	54	15
Tiered service delivery model – school specific	11	30	44	15
Role and responsibilities within the tiered model	14	29	41	16
Counseling interventions for Tier 1	12	20	44	24
Counseling interventions for Tier 2	13	25	43	19
Counseling interventions for Tier 3	13	26	41	21
Collecting and analyzing data to determine effectiveness of RTI interventions	23	35	34	8
Schoolwide data management systems for documentation & decision making	26	38	27	9
Informing and involving parents within an RTI framework	21	34	34	11
Effective teamwork in RTI framework	16	33	38	13
Assuming leadership in RTI implementation	27	30	30	13

Research question 3: What roles and responsibilities of school counselors changed due to the RTI implementation? The majority of respondents (55%) reported that their responsibilities have changed due to RTI. The top two new roles and responsibilities in which respondents identified as now being directly involved are as follows: collaborate with colleagues as part of an RTI team (52%) and involvement in data collection and data management in support of RTI (41%). The two responsibilities reported as least changed were directly providing Tier 1 academic services (14%) and assuming increased special education responsibilities (3%; Table 5 includes reported changes in various roles and responsibilities).

Table 5

Changes in Roles and Responsibilities

	Percent
Directly provide Tier 1 academic services	14
Directly provide Tier 1 behavioral services	23
Directly provide Tier 2 and/or Tier 3 academic interventions	19
Directly provide Tier 2 and/or Tier 3 behavioral interventions	30
Involved in data collection and/or data management in support of RTI	41
Collaborate with colleagues as part of an RTI team	52
Train others about RTI practices within my school or district	21
Increased special education responsibilities	3

Regression Analysis

Research question 4: Is attitude toward RTI predicted by factors including demographics, as well as perceived confidence with various aspects of RTI? The full regression model accounted for 26% of the variance in perception of RTI as a beneficial change. In order to estimate the effect size for this analysis, Cohen's f^2 was calculated $f^2 = \frac{R^2}{1 - R^2}$. The effect size was found to be equal to Cohen's (1988) convention for a large effect ($f^2 = .35$). As Cohen (1988) noted, effect size indicates "the degree to which the phenomenon is present in the population" (p. 9). In addition to the effect size, the Precision Efficacy Analysis for Regression method was used to test the appropriateness of the sample size, since regression analysis is used for prediction (Brooks & Barcikowski, 1999). The minimum size required was calculated at 101; therefore, with 528 observations, the sample size is appropriate for this analysis.

Two variables were statistically significant at the p <. 001 level: perceived leadership competence ($\beta = .26$) and understanding the specific roles, responsibilities and benefits of RTI ($\beta = .25$). In other

words, if school counselors (a) perceived building-level leaders as knowledgeable and positively pre-disposed to RTI, and (b) were confident about understanding their roles and responsibilities within an RTI model, as well as the anticipated benefits of the RTI framework, they were more likely to view RTI as a vehicle to drive improvements in academic and behavioral outcomes for all students. Table 6 includes standardized coefficients (β), unstandardized coefficients (B), and standard errors (SE) for all variables in the model.

Table 6

Estimated Coefficients of Full Model With White's Correction for Standard Errors

Variable Name	B	SE B	β
Age	-.081	.033	-.138
Sex	-.064	.058	-.052
Ethnicity	-.133	.063	-.096
Total years in practice	-.020	.029	-.046
Years since final degree conferral	.219	.026	.045
Number of RTI trainings received	-.029	.026	-.061
Year of RTI implementation	-.044	.035	-.060
Leadership competence	.183	.035	.261**
RTI background information	.012	.023	.028
Data collection and management	.080	.050	.145
Tier service model delivery	-.069	.050	-.107
Counseling interventions	-.006	.034	-.012
Collaborative practices	.042	.050	.075
Responsibilities and benefits	.165	.056	.253*

F 9.056**
R^2 .26
Adjusted R^2 .23

* $p < .01$; ** $p < .001$

These results provided a descriptive picture of school counselors' beliefs and practices regarding RTI/MTSS, as well as their level of perceived preparedness to complete tasks inherent in a multi-tiered framework of student support. For example, school counselors indicated they were directly

involved in schoolwide data management systems for documentation and decisions; however, the majority (64%) reported they were either not prepared or somewhat prepared (26% and 38%, respectively) to fulfill such a role. Likewise, although 52% of practitioners reported that they are now required to collaborate with colleagues as part of an RTI team, 49% of them indicated that they were either not prepared (16%) or somewhat prepared (33%) to engage in effective teamwork within an RTI model. In addition, results from the regression analysis indicated the importance of role clarity and educational leadership, with school counselors having a more positive view of RTI if they themselves had a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities within the RTI framework, and also when they considered school leaders to be positive and knowledgeable about this initiative.

Discussion

The integration of RTI into districts and schools has influenced professional practices, including the work of the school counselor. Study participants indicated the ways in which their roles and responsibilities have changed under RTI, as well as their beliefs and perceptions of preparedness to work in a multi-tiered framework. Data analysis highlights a number of needs and incongruities for the field of school counseling. We address these contradictions and highlight their represented needs in relation to pre-service and in-service preparation.

Contradictions: Disability Identification
The results of this study suggest noteworthy contradictions that merit further exploration. First, many school counselors believe that RTI is the best option to support struggling learners and that RTI is a vehicle for identifying students with SLD. Yet, only a quarter of participants agreed that data garnered through RTI is *sufficient* for learning disability determination. We postulate this incongruence may be the result of an ongoing debate between school professionals regarding the process of identifying students with SLD (McKenzie, 2009; Reschly, 2003; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2002). Historically, the process of SLD identification involved standardized testing to determine if there was a significant discrepancy between a student's intelligence (as measured by standardized IQ tests) and levels of achievement (as measured by standardized achievement tests). However, many researchers and practitioners have objected to this method, citing the rapid increase in the identification of SLD since 1975 (Vaughn, Linan-Thompson, & Hickman, 2003) and the cultural and racial biases still inherent in IQ testing, leading to the over-representation of minorities in special education classrooms (Francis, Fletcher, & Morris, 2003). In addition, this method is perceived as "wait to fail" diagnostics, since a significant discrepancy between IQ and achievement is not typically established until grade three or higher, past the crucial early intervention window (Mellard, Deshler, & Barth, 2004). This contentious discourse is reflected in varying state regulations, with some allowing for discrepancy testing (e.g., Illinois and Idaho) while others legally forbid its use (e.g., Colorado and Indiana; Zirkel & Thomas, 2010). Thus, participants' responses might be reflective of the lack of consensus in relation to best practice in identifying students with SLD.

Furthermore, the majority of surveyed school counselors believed RTI can improve academic outcomes, but were less inclined to believe that RTI can improve behavioral outcomes, and were even less convinced that RTI is the best option to support students with social-emotional concerns. When RTI was originally referenced in the 2004 IDEA reauthorization (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004), it was promoted with an academic focus as an alternative or supportive means of identifying students with learning disabilities. There was no reference in the law to identifying students with emotional or behavioral disabilities, nor was there reference to a system of supports for social-emotional and behavioral needs. However, the natural alignment of the tiered frameworks of RTI with PBIS encouraged some states to mandate a multi-tiered system of supports

(Averill & Rinaldi, 2011). It is important to note that while some states, such as Wisconsin, require a comprehensive MTSS framework, this is not true of all states (Berkeley et al., 2009). Therefore, school counselors' unease with the use of RTI in support of students with social-emotional concerns is again reflective of a greater debate in the field in regards to the role of RTI or MTSS in supporting all students and informing disability identification. These contradictions point to a need for increased awareness and dialogue about the processes of disability identification within the profession of school counseling. With clear understanding and background knowledge, school counselors will be better prepared to advocate for fair and unbiased methods of disability identification, thereby helping to reduce the disproportionate disability identification of students of color.

Contradictions: Changing Responsibilities and Levels of Preparation

Two significant gaps were apparent in relation to school counselors' RTI-related roles and their levels of confidence in regards to these changing responsibilities: School counselors felt underprepared to foster collaboration, as well as to use data to inform their practices and make decisions about students.

Collaborative practices. Beginning with collaboration, as aligned with Ockerman and colleagues' (2015) statewide findings, an overwhelming majority of participants reported they are now required to engage more in collaborative practices as a result of RTI implementation. However, many respondents did not believe other school professionals viewed RTI as favorable or as a collaborative endeavor, and over a third of respondents believed there were not building-wide supports for collaborative efforts (e.g., common planning time, teams). Additionally, about half of the respondents reported that they were not adequately prepared for teamwork. Yet, collaboration is at the core of the school counseling profession. Specifically, the ASCA National Model (2012) emphasized the importance of collaboration by including it as one of its four main themes, and several components of the ASCA National Model (e.g., advisory council, annual agreements) are only achievable through collaborative relationships. Moreover, the Transformed School Counseling Initiative (TSCI) cited teaming and collaboration as necessary components for a school counselor's ability to create sustained systemic change (Martin, 2002; Sears, 1999). Thus, school counselors need to find pathways to build community and create a culture of shared responsibility, not only to benefit students but to be efficient and effective in their jobs.

This finding also signals counselor educators to better prepare pre-service school counselors to work in school climates viewed as divisive or individualistic and to cultivate the requisite skill sets to do so. Bolstering communication, facilitation and conflict-resolution skills, school counselors can be trained to help school teams unite around the broader goals of ensuring the academic, emotional and behavioral success of all students. Leveraging these unique skill sets, they can improve the efficacy of RTI teams and ensure they remain integral to the process.

Schoolwide data management systems for documentation and decision making. Although scholars within the school counseling profession have emphasized the importance of evidence-based research for over a decade (Dimmitt, Carey & Hatch, 2007; Whiston, 2001, 2002) and the need for school counselor accountability was discussed as early as the 1920s (Gysbers, 2004), school counselors still indicated they felt inadequately prepared to work with data to drive decisions or analyze data in meaningful ways. Similarly, an overwhelming majority of respondents in this survey indicated a lack of preparedness for schoolwide data management and reported not feeling adequately trained to analyze outcome data to determine effectiveness of RTI interventions. Yet, many reported that their roles have changed to involve data collection and data management in support of RTI. This discrepancy points to an urgent need for both pre-service and in-service professional training around the use of

data, as it is central to RTI and many educational reforms. School counselors must be well-prepared to understand the utility of data rather than be stymied by it. If school counselors are to play a pivotal role in dismantling the achievement gap, which is now an ethical obligation (ASCA, 2010) rather than a laudable goal, they must be able to critically analyze data to ensure all students are served equitably. Moreover, if school counselors are active members of the RTI team, as many indicated in this survey that they are, they must be able to determine how their efforts are helping or thwarting a young person's ability to succeed. While RTI may or may not be a welcome mandate in schools, school counselors can leverage its emphasis on data collection and management to ensure students are receiving evidence-based interventions (Ockerman et al., 2012). The inability to do so not only jeopardizes school counselors' job security, but also shortchanges their students.

Fortunately, there are several resources that school counselors and counselor educators can employ to meet this dire need. Hatch's recent text, *The Use of Data in School Counseling* (2014), centers on this subject and complements other publications including Kaffenberger and Young's *Making Data Work* (2013), and Dimmitt et al.'s seminal text, *Evidence-Based School Counseling: Making a Difference With Data-Driven Practices* (2007). School counselors also can advocate for evidence-based small and large group counseling interventions, including *Second Step: Skills for Social and Academic Success* (Committee for Children, 2010) and *Student Success Skills* (Brigman & Webb, 2007). School counselors and counselor educators can hone and refine their data skills by attending the annual Evidence-Based National School Counseling Conference and becoming familiar with the burgeoning research conducted at the Ronald H. Frederickson Center for School Counseling Outcome Research and Evaluation. Moreover, counselor educators need to ensure this topic is discussed and evaluated in both their core school counseling and clinical courses so as to best prepare future school counselors to be accountable and data savvy (Hatch, 2014; Studer & Diambra, 2016).

Needs: Defining Roles and Leadership Opportunities

School counselors were most likely to view RTI as a means of positively impacting academic and behavioral outcomes for all students when they (a) had leaders who were knowledgeable and positive about RTI; and (b) were clear about their own roles and responsibilities, as well as the anticipated benefits of the model. These results support findings from state-level surveys of RTI preparedness and beliefs across both school counselors and school psychologists (Hollenbeck & Patrikakou, 2014; Ockerman et al., 2015). Thus, school counselors should work to ensure role clarity and consider how best to utilize their skills and knowledge in support of change.

There are several ways in which school counselors can leverage their unique skill sets to optimize their collaborative relationships with school administration and staff. This may involve meeting with the principal to discuss roles and responsibilities, advocating for a leadership role in relation to collaborative practices or data-based decision making, and working with parents to ensure they are engaged and informed. School counselors also can better define their roles in relation to RTI by documenting these duties in their annual agreement (ASCA, 2012). By working collaboratively with school personnel to harness their strengths and create common goals, school counselors can build capacity and thereby increase their ability to reach more students. Additionally, school counselors should work with their building leaders to create professional development aimed at increasing staff knowledge about RTI in positive, proactive ways. As such, school staff can begin to view school counselors as leaders within this area and collaborative partners for creating systemic change.

School counselor educators also must infuse leadership competence and role clarity within their coursework and evaluate pre-service students' understanding and aptitudes as requisites for advancing into the profession (Chen-Hayes, Ockerman, & Mason, 2014). Introductory and foundational

school counseling courses should emphasize the school counselors' role, including appropriate and inappropriate tasks (ASCA, 2012). Moreover, field-based practicum and internship courses should require practically-based experiential activities that build leadership and advocacy capacity through data collection and analysis. All graduating school counselors should be required to measure the impact of their work and its contributions to the betterment of students, schools and communities. In such, state standards for the preparation of school counselors should reflect an emphasis on this pivotal skill set.

Limitations and Future Directions

The aim of the present study was to examine school counselors' beliefs, perceived levels of preparedness and practices regarding RTI in states where this model has been implemented. Inherent in the self-reporting through survey research is the credibility of such reports. As Paulhus and Vazire (2007) noted, "even when respondents are doing their best to be forthright and insightful, their self-reports are subject to various sources of inaccuracy" (p. 228). Participants may have exaggerated or under-reported their lack of preparedness and confidence. In addition, respondents also might have inaccurately remembered their trainings and preparation, therefore imprecisely reporting it in their responses.

While results provided a descriptive picture of perceived preparedness and its impact on the degree to which school counselors viewed RTI as beneficial, this study did not investigate possible indirect and total effects that can offer a fuller picture of influences. Future studies should apply structural equation modeling to explore direct, indirect and total effects, and therefore provide further implications for practice. Additionally, given the developmental differences between elementary, middle and high school students, the focus of school counselors' involvement in RTI implementation may vary at the different grades. Future studies should examine whether differences exist in the way RTI is viewed by practitioners serving at various school levels so that training can be customized based on specific needs. Lastly, data for this study were collected by surveying school counselors in the 15 states that were reported as implementing RTI fully or partly. It would be beneficial to survey practitioners in states where future implementation of MTSS has been planned so that proactive and well-informed steps can be taken to better prepare school counselors for the effective implementation of such frameworks.

There are significant areas of opportunity in MTSS for school counselors. School counselors have the cultivated abilities to lead, advocate and partner with their peers, which can be foundational in the design, implementation and evaluation of MTSS systems. The school counselor is positioned to lead with a vision of creating culturally relevant and evidence-based interventions aimed at reducing the achievement gap. Therefore, school counselor educators must be producers (not just consumers) of data to assist their students in making informed, culturally responsive decisions to support academic, social and emotional learning for all students. Major educational reforms such as RTI should serve as a welcome motivation for improved practice and professional advancement. Politically aware and comprehensively trained school counselors can leverage such educational mandates to access necessary resources and become the innovators and path-charters of their profession.

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The ASCA Model and a Multi-Tiered System of Supports: A Framework to Support Students of Color With Problem Behavior

Christopher T. Belser, M. Ann Shillingford, J. Richelle Joe

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model and a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) both provide frameworks for systematically solving problems in schools, including student behavior concerns. The authors outline a model that integrates overlapping elements of the National Model and MTSS as a support for marginalized students of color exhibiting problem behaviors. Individually, the frameworks employ data-driven decision making as well as prevention services for all students and intervention services for at-risk students. Thus, the integrated model allows schools to provide objective alternatives to exclusionary disciplinary actions (e.g., suspensions and expulsions) that are being assigned to students of color at a disproportionate rate. The manuscript outlines the steps within the integrated model and provides implications for school counselors and counselor educators.

Keywords: ASCA National Model, multi-tiered system of supports, school counselors, marginalized students, students of color

Educational disparities are well documented for students of color in the United States (Delpit, 2006; Ford & Moore, 2013; U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], 2014). Today's students of color are facing lower graduation rates, overuse of exclusionary disciplinary action, overrepresentation in exceptional education programming and school policies that negatively impact students of color rather than support them (Moore, Henfield, & Owens, 2008; USDOE, 2014; R. Palmer & Maramba, 2010; Toldson & Lewis, 2012). School discipline policies based on a framework of zero tolerance have not reduced suspensions or expulsions as initially intended. Instead, these policies have resulted in more students being excluded from the classroom due to reactive disciplinary action (Skiba, 2014). Bernstein (2014) posited that these policies are increasing the educational achievement gap and negatively impacting the development of students of color. What then can be done as an alternative to or as a measure to prevent exclusionary disciplinary actions such as suspensions and expulsions?

A multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) is a systematic data-driven program designed to address academic concerns and problem behavior by utilizing both prevention and intervention strategies (Sugai & Horner, 2009). Specific to behavior-related concerns, MTSS programs offer a structured method for providing both universal and individual support for students and present data-driven alternatives to suspension and expulsion. School counselors are uniquely positioned to play a critical role in the implementation of such programs due to their training in data analysis, program development and direct service delivery. Moreover, MTSS programs align well with the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model (2012a).

The ASCA National Model has themes of social justice, advocacy and systemic change infused throughout, as comprehensive school counseling programs are designed to remove barriers to

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student success and help students reach their potential in the areas of academic, career, social and emotional development (ASCA, 2012a). With these themes in mind, integrating the National Model with the objective and data-driven framework of MTSS may offer one solution for systemic educational disparities such as the school-to-prison pipeline. The purpose of this article is to describe a model for integrating elements of the ASCA National Model within the MTSS framework. The authors will describe steps involved in the process and will provide context for how such an intervention can specifically benefit students of color.

The School-to-Prison Pipeline

More than 6.8 million individuals were under supervision of the adult correctional system in the United States at the end of 2014, a rate of 1 in 36 adults (Kaeble, Glaze, Tsoutis, & Minton, 2015). Of those under correctional supervision, over 1.5 million were held in state and federal correctional facilities (Carson, 2015). Although these numbers mark a slight decrease in the correctional population since 2007 (Kaeble et al., 2015), the American incarceration rate has quadrupled since the 1970s (Travis, Western, & Redburn, 2014). The growth of incarceration in the United States over the past four decades has largely affected the Black and Latino communities, both of which are disproportionately represented among individuals involved with the correctional system (Carson, 2015). Scholars in multiple academic disciplines have linked American drug policy and enforcement with mass incarceration of primarily individuals of color (Alexander, 2010; Travis et al., 2014). In education, however, a parallel cause has contributed to the expansion of the correctional system in the United States. Increasingly punitive discipline policies marked by *zero tolerance* approaches have created a pipeline from schools to prisons where exclusion from the educational environment and criminalization of student misbehavior contribute to school dropout and involvement with the juvenile justice system (Fowler, 2011).

The effects of this school-to-prison pipeline have been particularly detrimental for students of color, who are disproportionately suspended, expelled or otherwise excluded from the academic setting. Starting in preschool, Black children are suspended at a higher rate than their White counterparts (USDOE, 2014). Whereas 5% of White students are suspended, three times as many Black students are suspended on average (USDOE, 2014). Additionally, American Indian and Native-Alaskan students, who are less than 1% of the population in American schools, account for 2% of out-of-school suspensions and 3% of expulsions. Both gender and disability intersect with race and ethnicity, resulting in disproportionate suspensions of boys and girls of color and students with disabilities (USDOE, 2014). Among students with disabilities, those with emotional-behavioral disorders are most likely to experience academic exclusion and to experience such exclusion multiple times (Bowman-Perrott et al., 2011). Double minority status can increase the likelihood of exclusion, such as with Black males who are consistently over-identified in special education (Artiles, Harry, Reschly, & Chinn, 2002; Bowman-Perrott et al., 2011; Ferri & Connor, 2005).

Similar disparities exist among the rates of arrests and referrals to law enforcement for Black students and students with disabilities. Although only 16% of the student population, Black students account for 31% of school-related arrests and 27% of referrals to law enforcement (USDOE, 2014). Similarly, students with disabilities, which comprise about 12% of the student population, represent 25% of students arrested or referred to law enforcement (USDOE, 2014). School-related arrests and referrals to law enforcement can place students at risk for future involvement with the juvenile justice system and ultimately prison. Carmichael, Whitten, and Voloudakis's (2005) investigation of minority overrepresentation in the juvenile justice system of Texas indicated that students with a disciplinary history were more likely to be involved with juvenile justice. Although this was the case for youth in all categories of race and ethnicity, both Latino and Black youth had more frequent contact with

the justice system than White youth (Carmichael et al., 2005). Demonstrating the cumulative effect of involvement with the juvenile system, Natsuaki, Ge, and Wenk's (2008) longitudinal study of young male offenders identified age of first arrest as an indicator of criminal trajectory with a younger age producing a steeper cumulative trajectory. Additionally, for those first arrested early during their adolescent years, the pace at which they committed criminal offenses was not slowed by completion of high school (Natsuaki et al., 2008). Hence, when school discipline policies result in the exclusion of students from the educational setting and involvement with law enforcement, students are likely to be involved with the justice system as juveniles and adults (Natsuaki et al., 2008; USDOE, 2014; Wiesner, Kim, & Capaldi, 2010).

The American School Counselor Association National Model

ASCA developed a National Model (2012a) in order to provide school counselors with clear guidelines on how to meet the needs of all students. The ASCA National Model boasts a comprehensive, data-driven approach to meeting the needs of students and focuses on addressing students' academic, personal, social and career needs. The model is driven by a key question: "How are students different as a result of what school counselors do?" Considering the data presented on the school-to-prison pipeline, this question is significant in ensuring that school counselors are providing students of color with the necessary support systems in order to foster more positive academic and social outcomes.

The National Model highlighted a collaborative approach centered on incorporating the efforts of teachers, administrators, families and other stakeholders in developing a comprehensive school counseling program. With school counselors at the helm, the model provided a new vision for the profession and emphasized school counselor accountability, leadership, advocacy, collaboration and systemic change (ASCA, 2012a). That is, the focus shifted to elevating the function of the school counseling program to align more readily with the mission of the school at large.

As a result of this new vision, school counseling programs have been able to observe significant improvements in students' academic as well as social performance. For instance, L. Palmer and Erford (2012) found increases in high school attendance and graduation trends as the school counseling program implementation was increased. L. Palmer and Erford also reported positive changes in the academic performance of high school students, particularly improvements on Maryland State Assessment English and algebra scores. These results suggested optimistic influences of utilizing a comprehensive school counseling program as promoted by the National Model. Similarly, Carey and Dimmitt (2012) reported positive associations between the delivery of the comprehensive school counseling program and student performance; most specifically, rates of student suspensions and other disciplinary actions decreased, attendance increased, and math and reading proficiency improved. Dimmit and Wilkerson (2012) found that minority students were less likely to have access to comprehensive school counseling programs in their schools but noted correlations between an increase in counseling services and improved attendance, a decrease in suspensions, and a drop in reports of bullying. Similarly, Lapan, Whitcomb, and Aleman (2012) noted that schools with low counselor-to-student ratios and fully implemented ASCA Model programming had lower rates of suspension and fewer discipline issues.

Although much has been written on the benefits of school counselors addressing academic, personal, social and career development of students, there appears to be a paucity of research studies focused on the topic of college and career readiness of students of color. In terms of recommendations for school counselors and career development, Mayes and Hines (2014) discussed the need for more culturally sensitive and gendered approaches to college and career readiness for gifted Black females,

including assisting these students in navigating through systemic and even social challenges that they may face. Similarly, Belser (2015) highlighted the impact that the school-to-prison pipeline has on career opportunities later in life for adolescent males of color. Considering the challenges that students face, especially those from marginalized populations, as well as the significant benefits of data-driven comprehensive school counseling programs, it seems appropriate that school counselors utilize the National Model as the foundation for stimulating more positive student outcomes.

Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)

Initially framed as Response to Intervention (RTI), the implementation of MTSS resulted from federal education initiatives after the 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA), which called for more alignment between this policy and the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 (Sugai & Horner, 2009). MTSS programs in schools are designed to provide a more systematic, data-driven and equitable approach to solving academic and behavioral issues with students. Within such programs, students are divided into three tiered categories based on the level of risk and need: (a) Tier 1 represents students who are in the general education population and who are thriving, (b) Tier 2 represents students who need slightly more intensive intervention that can be delivered both individually or in a small group setting, and (c) Tier 3 represents students who need intensive individualized interventions (Ockerman, Mason, & Hollenbeck, 2012). The process involves universal screening or testing, intervention implementation and progress monitoring.

To combat problem behaviors, MTSS is often linked to Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) as an additional source of support for students. These programs have shown to reduce office disciplinary referrals and increase attendance (Freeman et al., 2016). Moreover, Horner, Sugai, and Anderson (2010) determined that PBIS programs are associated with reductions in problem behaviors, improved perception of school safety and improved academic results. Banks and Obiakor (2015) provided strategies for implementing culturally responsive positive behavior supports in schools, noting that doing so can reduce the marginalization of minority students and foster a safe and supportive school climate. With outcomes such as these, PBIS and MTSS programs have become known as best practices (Horner et al., 2010).

Several authors have noted the overlapping elements of MTSS and the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2012a; Martens & Andreen, 2013; Ockerman et al., 2012). As both frameworks have yielded positive outcomes with the general population and minority students, it would appear that a coordinated approach would be beneficial for schools. However, existing discussions of how to integrate the two have not been comprehensive in their discussion or have not addressed the potential impact on students of color. In this manuscript, the authors have sought to provide a solution to this problem.

Putting MTSS and Comprehensive School Counseling Programs Into Practice

Integrating the ASCA National Model with MTSS involves strategic data-driven planning and decision making. The process begins with collecting baseline data on students via screening scales and surveys and then analyzing this data to group students into tiers based on indicated level of risk. A more objective approach driven by data could especially benefit students of color, who have historically been subject to disproportionate and—at times—unfair discipline policies (Hoffman, 2012). Once students have been placed in one of three MTSS tier groups, the decision-making team and school counselors can generate appropriate prevention and intervention strategies that fit with each tier and with students' needs. The process is cyclical, as progress-monitoring data is collected

periodically to determine future steps. Figure 1 outlines the process from start to finish, and the sections that follow will further highlight the phases of the process. In addition, the authors will address how these steps can affect students of color.
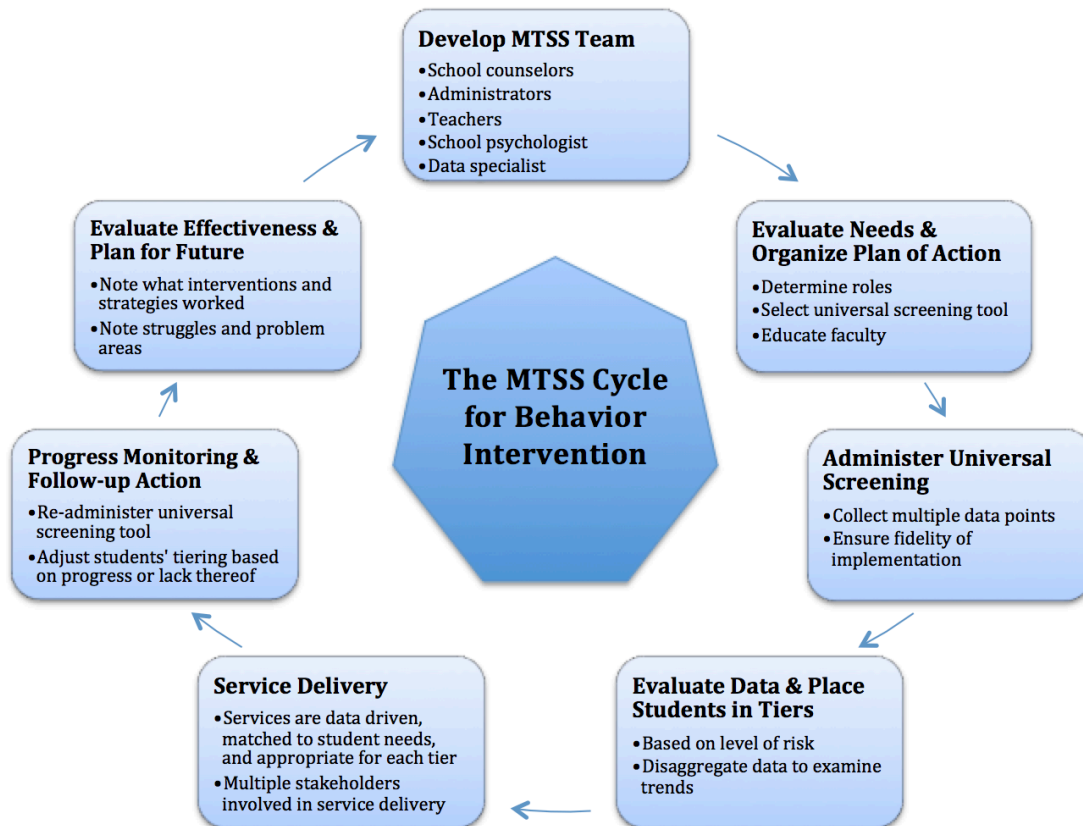
Develop MTSS Team
- School counselors
- Administrators
- Teachers
- School psychologist
- Data specialist

Evaluate Effectiveness & Plan for Future
- Note what interventions and strategies worked
- Note struggles and problem areas

Evaluate Needs & Organize Plan of Action
- Determine roles
- Select universal screening tool
- Educate faculty

The MTSS Cycle for Behavior Intervention

Progress Monitoring & Follow-up Action
- Re-administer universal screening tool
- Adjust students' tiering based on progress or lack thereof

Administer Universal Screening
- Collect multiple data points
- Ensure fidelity of implementation

Service Delivery
- Services are data driven, matched to student needs, and appropriate for each tier
- Multiple stakeholders involved in service delivery

Evaluate Data & Place Students in Tiers
- Based on level of risk
- Disaggregate data to examine trends

Figure 1. The MTSS Cycle for Behavior Intervention

Team Development and Planning

The process of providing MTSS services is not a job for a single person; rather, a team of stakeholders (e.g., school counselors, administrators, teachers) must be involved in planning, enacting and evaluating the services and interventions utilized. With the integration of the ASCA National Model within MTSS, school counselors can utilize elements of the model, such as the Advisory Council and the Annual Agreement, to aid in the planning process (ASCA, 2012a). Each member of the team provides a unique role, from direct service delivery to data management. School counselors should be mindful of their numerous other duties within the school and only take the lead on program components that are appropriate and directly relate to the role of school counselors in schools (ASCA, 2014; Ockerman et al., 2012).

In the planning phase, the team should examine preliminary discipline-related data to gauge what types of universal supports might be necessary; within this conversation, understanding the school's demographic data is crucial so the team can account for potential culture-bound concerns that may need to be addressed during the MTSS process. Additionally, the team should determine what instrument will be used for universal screening, a process that will be discussed in more detail in the next section. Once the team has a preliminary plan of action, including a timeline of key events,

this information should be presented to the entire school faculty to provide a rationale for the services and procedural information to boost fidelity of implementation, especially with program elements implemented schoolwide like universal screening.

Universal Screening

Data collection through universal assessment is a necessary step to the MTSS process (Harn, Basaraba, Chard, & Fritz, 2015; von der Embse, Pendergast, Kilgus, & Eklund, 2015). School counselors often rely on referrals from teachers, parents and students to match students with interventions; however, integrating a universal screening approach to comprehensive school counseling programs can help mitigate students falling through the cracks (Ockerman et al., 2012). Universal screening involves all students being evaluated using one instrument, such as the Student Risk Screening Scale (SRSS; Drummond, 1994), which allows a decision-making team to categorize students based on level of risk for the respective issue. Cheney and Yong (2014) noted that a universal screening instrument should be time efficient for teachers to complete and should be both valid and reliable; they further noted that the purpose of such a screening tool is to identify which students warrant interventions beyond Tier 1 supports (i.e., Tier 2 and 3 interventions).

Various instruments exist for universal screening of behavior or emotional risk (Lane, Kalberg, et al., 2011). The SRSS (Drummond, 1994) is one freely available screening instrument that allows teachers to rate an entire class of students quickly on seven behavioral or social subscales. This tool fits well into an MTSS framework as the scoring places students into a category of low, moderate, or high levels of risk (Lane et al., 2015); in addition, researchers have established validity and reliability for the SRSS at the elementary (Lane et al., 2012), middle (Lane, Oakes, Carter, Lambert, & Jenkins, 2013), and high school levels (Lane, Oakes, et al., 2011), as well as in urban elementary schools (Ennis, Lane, & Oakes, 2012). Other universal screening instruments that support the MTSS framework for behavior-related concerns include the Behavioral and Emotional Screening System (BESS; Kamphaus & Reynolds, 2007), the Systematic Screening for Behavioral Disorders (SSBD; Walker & Severson, 1992), and the Social, Academic, and Emotional Behavioral Risk Screener (SAEBRS; von der Embse et al., 2015).

Procedurally, the process of conducting a universal screening at a school would need to be driven by a collaborative faculty team with heavy administrative support. Carter, Carter, Johnson, and Pool (2012) described steps that educators took at one school to identify students for Tier 2 and 3 interventions and beyond. Within their process, faculty members would complete the screening instrument on a class of students whom they see regularly (e.g., a homeroom class). Ideally, multiple faculty members would complete the instrument on a single class to provide multiple data points on each student as a means of reducing teacher bias; in such an instance, the scores could be averaged together. Once the screening process is complete, the MTSS team (or whatever team has been assembled for this purpose) can view the compiled data to identify at-risk students. The faculty team can then sort and view this data easily by students' scores on the instrument to reveal which students are most at risk based on the assessment. The final step in this process is to place students within one of the three MTSS tiers based on the results of the universal screening instrument. After this process is complete, the school counselors and the team can design interventions for students at each level. The faculty team may find it useful to consult other school discipline data points (e.g., office disciplinary referrals and suspensions) as additional baseline measures for students identified as needing Tier 2 or Tier 3 interventions. However, the team should keep in mind that these disciplinary actions have historically been applied to students of color, particularly Black males, at a disproportionate rate; thus, these data points may not be in line with the goal of using a more objective measurement strategy (Hoffman, 2012).

Tiering and Intervention

Whereas school counselors can be an integral part of the universal screening process, they can also be a driving force with direct service delivery for students at all three MTSS tiers (Ockerman et al., 2012). The ASCA National Model (2012a) highlighted the overlapping nature of the model's direct student services component to the three tiers of the MTSS model. The following sections will highlight the connections between the three MTSS tiers and the levels of service delivery within comprehensive school counseling programs; moreover, the authors will convey strategies and interventions that may be especially helpful for students of color facing social and behavioral concerns.

Tier 1. Tier 1 instruction or intervention takes place in the general education environment and is presented universally to students (Harn et al., 2015). Two programs commonly used at this level are PBIS and Social-Emotional Learning (Cook et al., 2015). However, Ockerman et al. (2012) noted that some elements of comprehensive school counseling programs (e.g., schoolwide interventions, large group interventions and the counseling core curriculum) fall within the first tier, as they are designed to target all or most students. For example, school counselors can partner with administrators and teachers to develop or adopt a data-driven PBIS program that integrates classroom lessons (e.g., character education) and schoolwide programming (e.g., an anti-bullying rally or positive behavior reward events). Additionally, school counselors can align their counseling curriculum with the goals of the MTSS or PBIS program and create lessons or units that support these goals. Potential topics for these lessons or units include social skills, conflict resolution, respecting diversity and differences in others, and managing one's anger. School counselors can gather needs assessment data from students, teachers, parents and other stakeholders to determine which topics may be of most benefit to students. Tier 1 interventions are designed to effectively serve approximately 80–85% of students (Martens & Andreen, 2013).

Tier 2. Tier 2 interventions are enacted for students whose needs are not being met by Tier 1 services and may include a variety of interventions such as the following: (a) targeted interventions, (b) group interventions, and (c) individualized interventions for less problematic behaviors (Newcomer, Freeman, & Barrett, 2013). School counselors may be involved with any or all of these types of interventions but are more likely to provide direct services to students through small group interventions and individualized interventions for minor problem behaviors. The MTSS decision-making team should evaluate data from the universal screening process to determine which students may need a Tier 2 support and what type of intervention that should be. For example, after the first author compiled data from the SRSS at his middle school, he and his team evaluated the scores of students who fell in the moderate risk range to determine what interventions (e.g., small group counseling, behavior contract, Check-in/Check-out) would be appropriate for each student. Unlike Tier 1 supports, Tier 2 interventions should not be one-size-fits-all, but driven by the needs of each unique student.

Small group counseling. As students of color have been subject to disproportionate use of exclusionary disciplinary actions (e.g., in-school or out-of-school suspensions), school counselors and the decision-making team should utilize Tier 2 interventions that promote alternatives to suspension and help re-engage students with prosocial behaviors. Group counseling interventions can be more psychoeducational in nature (e.g., anger management, social skills development, conflict resolution, problem solving) or can be geared more toward personal growth and exploration of students' feelings and concerns about everyday problems (Gladding, 2016). Regardless of the type of group, school counselors should foster an environment where students can openly express themselves and simultaneously work on an individual goal. Safety, trust and universality within the group may be especially helpful for marginalized students, as they can often feel disenfranchised from the school

environment because of exclusionary discipline practices (Caton, 2012; Gladding, 2016).

Individualized interventions. Some students are not appropriate for counseling groups or their presenting issues do not warrant a group intervention. For these students, an individual approach to Tier 2 interventions is necessary. Two commonly used strategies are Check-in/Check-out and behavior contracts. Check-in/Check-out is a structured method for providing students with feedback regarding their behavior with higher frequency (Crone, Hawken, & Horner, 2010). With this strategy, students "check-in" with a designated faculty member in the morning as a source of encouragement and non-contingent attention, receive a behavior report card that is carried with them throughout their day for teachers to record feedback, and "check-out" with the same faculty member at the end of the day to evaluate progress and possibly receive a reward. The report card can then be taken home to parents as a form of home–school collaboration (Maggin, Zurheide, Pickett, & Baillie, 2015). Check-in/check-out has been shown to be an intervention that successfully prevents escalation of student behavior and reduces disciplinary referrals (Maggin et al., 2015; Martens & Andreen, 2013). Moreover, it also helps students build a positive relationship with school staff members.

Behavior contracts have a similar approach but also take the form of a less intensive behavior intervention plan (BIP). With both approaches, the report card or behavior tracking form should be modified based on the developmental and behavioral needs of the student. The first author utilized an approach that integrated both of these interventions, and each identified student was matched with an adult with whom they had a trusting relationship who acted as their designated check-in/check-out person. Students receiving an individual intervention also may benefit from small group counseling as an additional support. If Tier 2 interventions are unsuccessful in mitigating students' problem behaviors, the team's attention should shift to Tier 3 interventions.

Tier 3. Tier 3 interventions are appropriate for students identified as highly at risk by the universal screening and students who have not responded positively to Tier 2 interventions. As with Tier 2 interventions, school counselors' roles with Tier 3 interventions may vary, ranging from a supporting or consultative role to directly delivering interventions. Counseling interventions at this level include individual counseling, one-on-one mentoring, or referrals to community agencies for more intensive services (Ockerman et al., 2012). School counselors should keep in mind that ASCA has identified providing long-term individual counseling as an inappropriate role for school counselors (ASCA, 2012a) due to time constraints and lack of resources. As such, referrals to community agencies may be most helpful in supporting students in need of more intensive one-on-one counseling services.

Behavior intervention plans are another Tier 3 strategy to mitigate more severe problem behaviors (Bohanon, McIntosh, & Goodman, 2015). Lo and Cartledge (2006) found that conducting functional behavioral assessments (FBAs) and creating BIPs was a successful intervention for reducing problem behaviors and increasing replacement behaviors in elementary-aged Black males. Whether through counseling intervention or intensive behavior support, structured Tier 3 interventions can provide alternatives to suspensions, which is especially helpful for students of color as previously discussed.

Progress Monitoring
The MTSS process does not end with universal screening or service delivery; the decision-making team must have a clear and systematic plan for monitoring student outcomes. Carter et al. (2012) recommended administering the universal screening tool at least twice during the school year to evaluate progress. By taking such action, the decision-making team can determine which students are responding well to interventions and which students are not. Those students responding well to Tier 2 or 3 interventions may be moved down to Tier 1, whereas those not responding well to

Tier 1 or 2 may be moved up a tier. Students not responding to Tier 3 interventions may warrant additional behavioral or psychological assessment to determine if further services are more appropriate (Ockerman et al., 2012). Progress monitoring also can provide clues about the efficacy of an intervention or the fidelity of its implementation. For example, if only one student in a class is responding to a Tier 1 intervention, the team may want to evaluate the delivery of that intervention for that class or consider an alternative intervention. A primary benefit of utilizing a data-driven progress monitoring approach is that it allows for objective decision making based on data, rather than subjective decision making that may be influenced by bias.

Implications for School Counselors

In line with the ASCA National Model (2012a), school counselors are called to be advocates and agents of systemic change in their schools. Part of this calling includes implementing comprehensive school counseling programs that address inequities within the school and provide programming to address the achievement gap. As has been discussed previously, integrating MTSS and the National Model can be especially helpful for students of color who have historically been subject to bias within discipline policies and procedures, resulting in disproportionate rates of disciplinary action. School counselors acting as advocates and agents of change should be proactive in analyzing school data to determine whether these inequities are at play and must be vocal about the need to solve these problems if they do exist at their schools (ASCA, 2012b).

As such, school counselors should ensure that they are versed in best practices such as MTSS that have been shown to positively impact racial and cultural inequities. However, school counselors cannot solve the problem alone. The other two themes of the ASCA National Model (2012a)—leadership, and collaboration and teaming—are also critically important if school counselors are to implement such programs. With training in data analysis, program development and direct service implementation, school counselors are uniquely positioned to take on leadership roles with regard to MTSS programming. However, they also should recognize their roles as collaborators and team members for program elements that do not directly fall within the role of school counselors (Ockerman et al., 2012).

Implications for Counselor Educators and Researchers

As stakeholders charged with training the next generation of school counselors, counselor educators must remain versed in newer topics within school counseling and education. Although PBIS has been around since 1997, MTSS is still a relatively new concept, especially when integrated with the ASCA National Model. School counselor educators should ensure that coursework prepares future school counselors to engage in such programming. More specifically, school counselor preparation courses should include discussion and application of MTSS, data analysis, program evaluation, behavior interventions and other concepts that are vital to coordinating ASCA Model programming. At the same time, counselor educators also must empower graduate students to become advocates for marginalized students at their future schools and for themselves as professionals. Because there is little research available that evaluates the integration of MTSS and ASCA Model programming, it is imperative that school counselors and counselor educators collaborate to conduct such research.

Conclusion

Research on the school-to-prison pipeline has demonstrated an unfortunate link between the criminal justice system and K–12 disproportionate disciplinary practices faced by students of

color. An integrated system including a multi-tiered system of supports and the ASCA (2012a) National Model has been introduced in this manuscript to address disciplinary concerns in a more systemically balanced manner. MTSS and the ASCA National Model utilize a similar data-driven structured approach to solving issues related to academic and behavioral concerns. When integrated, the overlapping elements of each framework can provide an avenue for addressing key concerns for students of color exhibiting problem behaviors. Rather than relying on disciplinary procedures that may result in students being excluded from class, an approach integrating frameworks of prevention and intervention can provide a much-needed alternative. The framework provided herein details steps that school counselors and other educators can take to address the school-to-prison pipeline. In order to best support marginalized students, school counselors must heed the call to leadership, advocacy, collaboration and systemic change given by the National Model; moreover, joining forces with other educators through collaborative efforts such as MTSS can only strengthen the effort to best support the success of all students.

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Success For All? The Role of the School Counselor in Creating and Sustaining Culturally Responsive Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports Programs

Jennifer Betters-Bubon, Todd Brunner, Avery Kansteiner

Successful implementation of Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) programs should include culturally responsive practices to reduce disproportionality in school discipline referrals and create effective learning environments for all students. Sustaining culturally responsive PBIS programs requires attention to student demographics and the cultural context of a particular school. Recent PBIS research has lacked focus on sustainability and cultural responsiveness within implementation. This case study examines how one school team (principal, school counselors, school psychologist and teachers) infused culturally responsive practices within the PBIS program to meet student social, behavioral and emotional needs in a diverse elementary school. The examination of sustaining the PBIS program over a 5-year period focuses on data sources and interventions that build socially just practices and supports, as well as the role the school counselor plays in the process. Suggestions for school counseling practice also are provided.

Keywords: **school counselor, Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), culturally responsive practices, case study, in-school discipline**

In 1957, Horace Mann stated, "Education, then, beyond all other devices of human origin, is a great equalizer of conditions of men" (p. 87). Public education was designed to bridge the inequalities of society such that experiences in schools could ensure all individuals have the opportunity to excel in school and in life. This tenet has been challenged in recent years as the achievement and opportunity gaps in our schools continue to grow. A disproportionate number of youth from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are not succeeding and may be excluded from public school (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). In 2012, for example, African American students were 3.5 times more likely than their Caucasian peers to be suspended (U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, 2014). African American, Latino, and Native American students receive harsher punishments for more subjective reasons such as disrespect, insubordination or excessive noise (Losen & Gillespie, 2012). Further, data from the National Center on Educational Statistics show that while the gap is narrowing slightly, African American youth lag behind their Caucasian peers an average of 23–26 points in math and 21–26 points in reading assessments (Vanneman, Hamilton, Baldwin Anderson, & Rahman, 2009).

To close these achievement gaps and disparities in discipline practices, important research has linked schoolwide behavior programs and student achievement and engagement outcomes (Lassen, Steele, & Sailor, 2006; Luiselli, Putnam, Handler, & Feinberg, 2005). A recent focus has included schoolwide behavior programs that are multi-tiered in nature, including Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) programs. PBIS programs integrate research-based practice within a three-tier approach, including those at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of prevention and intervention. This multi-tiered system of supports has been supported by the American School Coun-

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selor Association (ASCA; 2014) and cited as evidence-based practices that have potential in closing the achievement gap (Benner, Kutash, Nelson, & Fisher, 2013). Recent research has focused on how to implement PBIS in culturally responsive ways (Bal, Kozleski, Schrader, Rodriguez, & Pelton, 2014; Greflund, McIntosh, Mercer, & May, 2014) to better impact disproportionality in discipline outcomes that exist in schools today.

School counselors with extensive training in data-informed student intervention and school-level systemic change can play integral roles in PBIS implementation and can serve as leaders in the process (Cressey, Whitcomb, McGilvray-Rivet, Morrison, & Shander-Reynolds, 2014; Goodman-Scott, 2014). Goodman-Scott, Betters-Bubon, and Donohue (2015) noted that PBIS programs can be integrated with comprehensive school counseling programs to enhance the role of the school counselor and better improve student outcomes. With knowledge of cultural diversity (Schulz, Hurt, & Lindo, 2014) and data-focused interventions to close the achievement gap (Hatch, 2013), school counselors are poised to ensure that these programs are implemented in ways that combat disproportionality. While literature exists on culturally responsive PBIS (Fallon, O'Keeffe, & Sugai, 2012) and the school counselor's role in PBIS (Goodman-Scott, 2014), there does not exist research examining the school counselor's role implementing culturally responsive PBIS programs, despite their role as multiculturally competent advocates for student equity. This article extends existing research on culturally responsive PBIS by examining longitudinal data from one elementary school that intentionally engaged in culturally responsive practices within PBIS implementation, highlighting the leadership role of the school counselor. To better understand these potential relationships, we will first provide an overview of PBIS. Second, we will provide an overview of research linking PBIS to culturally responsive practice, focusing on how PBIS can combat disproportionality. Finally, we describe the case study in light of Vincent, Randall, Cartledge, Tobin and Swain-Bradway's (2011) paper that outlines the main tenets of effective culturally responsive PBIS implementation.

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS)

PBIS is an educational program initiative that has great promise in helping schools promote positive behavior and engaged students. Grounded in the theory of applied behavior analysis, PBIS includes the application of a tiered system of support to change and improve behavior among students (Sugai & Horner, 2006). At the primary level (Tier 1) is the establishment of preventative systems of support, including the formation of schoolwide expectations and monitoring student behavioral data. The secondary level (Tier 2) includes the use of systematic and intensive behavior strategies for at-risk students, while the tertiary level (Tier 3) incorporates wraparound interventions for youth and families in crisis. At all levels of implementation, PBIS includes the use of evidence-based behavioral practices and formal and ongoing data-based decision making within schools (Sugai & Horner, 2006).

Next, PBIS includes a focus on four key elements: outcomes, practices, systems and data use (Horner, Sugai, Todd, & Lewis-Palmer, 2005). Student outcomes are at the foundation of any PBIS program, including behavior and academic success for students within a safe school environment. Practices include the use of evidence-based curricula, instructional practices, rewards, and contingencies that ultimately impact both teacher instruction and student behavior. Systems include an emphasis on sustained school change, including staffing, policy and training that impact how and what is done in any given school. Finally, data focuses on the continued use of school data to monitor program effectiveness. Data often used within PBIS studies includes academic achievement, school safety and behavioral indicators. Members of the PBIS team regularly analyze this data, which also is used to make subsequent decisions regarding both system and practice change.

In theory and practice, PBIS should facilitate a school environment that is more likely to promote feelings of safety and positive relationships as well as more effective teaching and learning. Recent randomized, controlled studies of PBIS implementation in elementary schools demonstrated the improved use of PBIS practices were related to feelings of safety and reading assessment results (Horner et al., 2009). In addition, schools that undertook specific schoolwide trainings were more positive and friendly than schools that did not (Bradshaw, Koth, Thornton, & Leaf, 2009). At the same time, the overall success of PBIS programs has come into question with the continued problem of disproportionality and perceived lack of cultural relevance.

Culturally Responsive Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports

Disproportionality

The question remains how and whether PBIS programs provide the same level of success for students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Recent researchers examined the relationship between PBIS implementation and disproportionality in discipline referrals that resulted in school removal of students. In an examination of a national sample of 364 elementary and middle schools engaged in PBIS implementation for one year, Skiba et al. (2011) noted that in comparison to Caucasian peers, African American students were overrepresented in referrals to the office and Hispanic students were underrepresented in elementary and overrepresented in middle schools. In addition, both groups of students were more likely to be suspended for offenses than their Caucasian peers. Other researchers have noted PBIS may reduce overall problem behavior as measured by the total number of office discipline referrals (ODRs), but disparities in discipline for students from minority cultures continue (Kaufman et al., 2010). Vincent, Swain-Bradway, Tobin, and May (2011) noted that the discipline gaps between Caucasian and African American students were smaller in schools implementing PBIS than those not implementing PBIS.

Integrating Culture in PBIS Programs

Recent articles have focused on further defining the nature of culture within PBIS systems. According to Fallon et al. (2012), "*culturally and contextually relevant* is used to describe and consider the unique variables, characteristics, and learning histories of students, educators, families, and community members involved in the implementation of PBIS" (p. 210). Sugai, O'Keeffe, and Fallon (2011) examined this definition in the context of behavioral analytic theory, positing that cultural miscommunications can occur when the behavior of one person (e.g., a teacher) serves as an antecedent for the behavior of another (e.g., a student). Individuals with different cultural learning histories may interpret the same behavior in different ways. For example, staff members may perceive walking as either strolling or strutting, which may be considered inappropriate in different classroom contexts. Fraczek (2010) found that without proper consideration of culture, PBIS programs could take a *White* approach, with teachers treating cultural differences among students as deficiencies rather than assets.

Culture and context, then, must be considered when planning, developing and teaching important PBIS concepts. Sugai et al. (2011) provided specific suggestions across different elements in implementation (e.g., provide opportunities for faculty to learn about cultural norms, develop lessons that are appropriate across cultural groups). Utley, Kozleski, Smith, and Draper (2002) recommended examining social behaviors from a cultural perspective (e.g., communication styles, interactional styles with adults, peers) within PBIS. Additional multicultural practices include the intentional engagement of families in the policies and expectations, particularly with diverse, urban youth. Bal, Thorius, and Kozleski (2012) extended these ideas with culturally responsive PBIS *learning labs* that include ongoing discussions of culture with a variety of school stakeholders (e.g., parents, staff, administration, students).

The few studies that have examined outcomes of culturally responsive PBIS programs demonstrate potential positive outcomes. Greflund et al. (2014) found no disproportionality for Aboriginal students in a diverse sample of K–8 students from British Columbia, due in part to the incorporation of Aboriginal values, language and voice in PBIS implementation (McIntosh, Moniz, Craft, Golby, & Steinwand-Deschambeault, 2014). Citing data from a number of schools in Illinois, Eber, Upreti, and Rose (2010) noted that engaging in difficult conversations and building relationships between students and staff, along with integrating data-based decision-making into the fabric of school discipline, led to positive outcomes for ethnic minority youth.

Vincent, Randall, et al. (2011) situate the integration of cultural responsiveness within key features of PBIS implementation, including data, practices, systems and outcomes (Figure 1). Only through culturally responsive practices and conversations can PBIS achieve intended outcomes. For example, while PBIS proposes that behavioral expectations are taught in an effort to increase behavioral success for all students, in a diverse school setting, these expectations would need to be taught in ways reflective of the cultural backgrounds of students. This case study will explore ways in which PBIS programs can include intentional integration of culturally responsive practices.

Case Study

Due to the lack of research in culturally responsive PBIS, this case study provides a model of culturally responsive practices within PBIS implementation. It situates PBIS implementation within the conceptual model of Vincent, Randall, et al. (2011), who suggest culturally responsive approaches serve as mediators between PBIS programs and desired outcomes (Figure 1). Specifically, culturally relevant PBIS programs will include systems emphasizing staff cultural knowledge and self-awareness, outcomes focusing on cultural equity, and data use that supports culturally valid decision making along with practices grounded in cultural validation and support (Figure 1). For example, to support culturally relevant staff behavior, schools must provide opportunities for staff to explore their own cultural awareness. Likewise, use of evidence-based practices must be grounded in knowledge and understanding of student cultural identities. Following a brief overview of the general PBIS implementation process, we outline specific culturally responsive practices as outlined by Vincent, Randall, et al. (2011).

Setting and Participants

This case study focuses on one elementary school (grades K–5) located in a suburb of a mid-sized Midwestern town from 2009–2014. The suburb had a population of approximately 10,000 residents. Median household income in 2009 was $75,000. The school district had approximately 4,900 students drawn from the suburb itself and a suburb located 10 miles away. The target school, one of 11 in the district, had an enrollment of approximately 500 students. A substantial shift in student population occurred during the first year of implementation due to redistricting. A population of approximately 130 Spanish-speaking bilingual students was transferred to the school in 2008, shifting the student demographics to 60% Caucasian, 28% Hispanic, 9% African American and 2% Asian American. Approximately 40% of students received free and reduced lunch at the time of observance.

Procedures

Given that the first author was engaged in PBIS implementation first as a school counselor and later as a consultant while the other authors are currently engaged in PBIS implementation, this article uses a participatory action research framework (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). Action research includes a planning and reflective process that is linked to action, all of which are influenced by an understand-
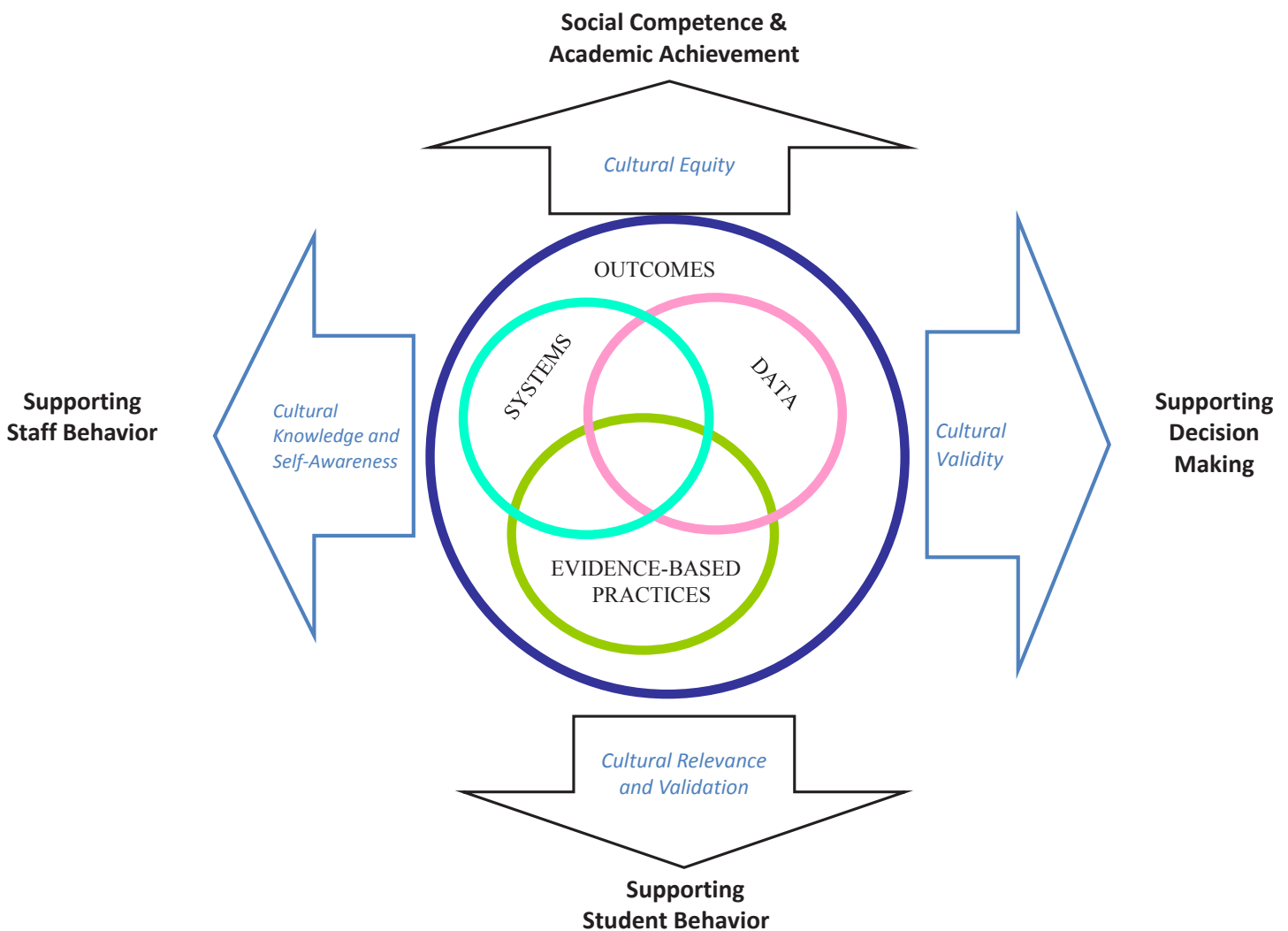
Figure 1. Integrating Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support and Culturally Responsive Practices. Reprinted from "Toward a Conceptual Integration of Cultural Responsiveness and Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support," by C. G. Vincent, C. Randall,, G. Cartledge, T. J. Tobin, and J. Swain-Bradway, 2011, *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, *13*, 219–229. Copyright 2011 by Sage Publishing. Reprinted with permission.

ing of history, culture and local context (Baum, MacDougall, & Smith, 2006). Thus, the article includes a description of PBIS planning and action stages along with the reflective process that was involved in culturally responsive PBIS implementation.

Within the action research framework, data were used, including ODRs as a fidelity measure of PBIS. ODRs are a reliable and valid indicator of overall school climate levels (Irvin et al., 2006) and are commonly used in PBIS analysis. The PBIS Self-Assessment Survey (SAS) was used for initial and annual assessment of implementation quality of behavior support systems in the school. This online survey, completed by a cross-section of school staff, examines the "current status" and "need for improvement" of four behavior support systems: (a) schoolwide discipline systems, (b) non-classroom management systems (e.g., cafeteria, hallway, playground), (c) classroom management systems, and (d) systems for individual students engaging in chronic problem behaviors. Results give an overall implementation level as it pertains to PBIS, with 80% indicating full implementation (Sugai, Horner, Lewis-Palmer, & Todd, 2005).

Planning: PBIS Implementation

PBIS within this school grew out of immediate concerns regarding the number of ODRs. For example, during 2006–2007, the school had 573 discipline referrals and an enrollment of 314 students. As a result of this situation, during 2007–2008 and 2008–2009 the school implemented a schoolwide goal that included the creation and implementation of a multi-component plan for integrating new students with a goal of a 50% reduction in discipline referrals. Two additional school goals focused on math and reading development. All certified staff were required to attend monthly meetings focusing on one of the goals, and results were communicated yearly to the site council, the governing body of the school and the school board.

The PBIS team formed in 2009–2010 as a way to coordinate and organize the many interventions that were attempted through the prior 2 years of work. The school counselor organized and led a summer PBIS training that included a cross-section of 25 staff members prior to the beginning of the school year.

Action: PBIS Implementation

Leadership team. At the core of the PBIS implementation process was the leadership team. The school counselor led the team along with coaches who focused on core areas of PBIS (e.g., systems, acknowledgements). The team varied in number between 15 and 25 and included a representative group of the school staff, such as classroom teachers, special teachers (e.g., music), educational assistants, special education teachers, student support staff (e.g., psychologist, social worker) and the principal. The team met on a monthly basis to discuss data, student behavior and acknowledgement. Because PBIS had not been adopted district-wide, the school hired a PBIS consultant to train and meet with the team coaches to ensure fidelity.

Behavioral expectations. The leadership team spent a considerable amount of time determining four behavioral expectations for the school at a summer workshop. The discussion included the meaning of such words as "respect" as well as the types of behaviors that would be universally expected by parents and teachers from different backgrounds. The four expectations: Be Safe, Be Kind & Respectful, Be a Problem-Solver and Be Responsible became the cornerstone behavioral expectations for the school. The team planned teacher training regarding the newly developed expectations as well as community gatherings to teach the expectations to students and families. Within this process, the school counselor played an integral role, organizing the gatherings and using expertise in social and emotional development to write the behavioral lessons known as *Cool Tools*. In subsequent years, the school counselor provided trainings to all new staff on PBIS.

Defining procedures. Along with expectations, the team delineated behaviors that would be handled in the classroom versus in the office (e.g., a t-chart delineating the discipline infractions that office and teaching staff respond to on a day-to-day basis). Not only were the processes outlined on paper, they were discussed in monthly staff meetings and meetings with student services staff and administration and educational assistants. For example, student services staff, including the school counselor, met with grade-level teachers each month to discuss student needs. This served as a way to reinforce key PBIS procedures. Similarly, the educational assistants who supervise students in the lunchroom, at recess and in the hallways were included as important team members through monthly meetings. These meetings, along with the monthly PBIS meeting, allowed for continuous conversation around student behavior and adult response.

Acknowledgements. Typically, PBIS programs provide a tangible, positive reinforcement system

to promote appropriate behavior. These systems should include immediate feedback systems, such as verbal praise or tickets given to students demonstrating school expectations that can be turned in for prizes (e.g., pencils), as well as long-term feedback systems (e.g., quarterly schoolwide celebrations). Many staff members expressed concern about implementing an extrinsically focused ticket system, noting that this may lead to decreased intrinsic motivation. As such, a formal acknowledgement system was not immediately integrated into the PBIS program in year one. In January, the counselor had conversations with educational assistants about piloting a positive reinforcement ticket program on the playground in response to data showing an increase in ODRs. The success, measured by teacher and educational assistant perception and ODR referrals on the playground, was almost immediate. This led to staff interest in using this ticket system as a form of acknowledgement and reinforcement. Conversations at staff meetings along with printed materials, describing in detail the purpose of acknowledgements, helped the school move forward with a formal "thumbs up" ticket plan that transcended the playground to include all areas of the school. The PBIS team included student voices in the acknowledgements and leadership of PBIS, with a team of fifth-grade students assisting in the development of PBIS acknowledgement ideas in year two and beyond.

Data analysis. Data on ODRs had been collected at this school for many years. The principal sent out monthly updates on the number of discipline referrals, including referrals broken down by ethnicity. The integration of PBIS meant that the data analysis became a focus of the monthly meetings. The school counselor became actively involved in data analysis, sharing monthly updates with staff members. School staff examined types of areas of problem behavior and created plans to respond. While this data often focused on ODRs, more qualitative data also was discussed. For example, the lunchroom became an area of focus when teachers and staff shared concerns about behavior and noise. The leadership team took the qualitative data and created strategies to increase positive behavior (e.g., re-teaching, positive acknowledgement plan, community assemblies).

Family outreach. From the start, the PBIS team informed parents of the purpose of PBIS and later more fully integrated the voices of parents in the planning processes. The school counselor wrote monthly newsletters while teachers encouraged students to share their acknowledgement tickets with parents so as to share the positives happening in the school. Additionally, the team created a home behavior matrix and a Web site where parents and families could obtain additional information on PBIS at the school.

Reflection: Culturally Responsive PBIS Integration

As the team engaged in PBIS implementation, multiple situations emerged that brought culture to the forefront. Table 1 outlines several ways in which the team intentionally integrated culturally responsive practices into the PBIS program, and additional examples are illustrated below.

Systems built on cultural knowledge and awareness. From the onset of PBIS implementation, the leadership team integrated aspects of culture and cultural responsiveness into the systems. First, the PBIS team was diverse and included many different voices (e.g., bus drivers, educational assistants, bilingual and monolingual classroom teachers, special education staff). The redistricting in the first year of PBIS and the resulting change in student population led to the PBIS team having intentional discussion of important topics involving whether the expectations were culturally relevant to all students, including the Spanish-speaking students.

Further, the leadership team engaged in conversations about their own cultural biases and knowledge to inform the practices implemented within PBIS. When a team member suggested staff

Table 1

CR-PBIS Elements by Category

Culturally Responsive Practices Support Student Behavior	Systems Supporting Culturally Responsive Staff Behavior
• All PBIS materials translated • Cool Tools based on beliefs (e.g., holidays) and include SIOP strategies; situated within a "culture of learning" • Mentoring relationship with Brothers United, a high school group of African American males, for students needing Tier 2 and 3 support • Culturally responsive acknowledgement system focused on community • Parent included on PBIS team; PBIS information shared via tweets and outreach at parent events • Student voice included in discussion on school climate and bus climate; included in problem solving process	• Local high school equity student group presented to our students and staff • Equity Committee expanded; led daylong diversity workshop for all staff • Nonviolent Crisis Intervention Team met monthly to review de-escalation strategies • Equity Team met monthly with three parents actively involved • PBIS team met with bus drivers, cafeteria staff for further training (e.g., PBIS, Nurtured Heat)
Data Supporting Culturally Valid Decision Making	**Culturally Equitable Student Outcomes**
• Examine disaggregated data monthly • Disaggregate data in new ways (e.g., SES) • Bus committee formed to discuss additional supports • Examine perception data through surveys of parents, staff and students regularly	• Emphasize interventions and teaching of expectations for new students • Added a bus route based on data • Multiple family outreach events offered (e.g., community connections fair, summer opportunities resource fair, Dia de Los Muertos event and Friendship Dance)

should teach the *top 10 manners* (e.g., table manners, eye contact) as part of the PBIS expectations, the team engaged in intentional conversation about whether the manners would be relevant to all students and parents. Ultimately, this team abandoned this idea due to the potential lack of cultural relevance. For example, the team discussed how eye contact during conversation may not be applicable to all families and students in the school. The principal encouraged staff learning and self-awareness that went beyond these conversations and scheduled subsequent trainings in the following years.

The team helped to create systems by which parents were informed and included in the PBIS process. For example, all information was sent to parents in multiple ways (e.g., translated) and parent voices were sought whenever possible. By year four, the leadership team included parents on the team and in year five, one of the school counselors started a Latino parent group.

The school counselor's role changed as a result of PBIS and resource allocation was specifically addressed through the budget process at site council in the spring. Because the counselor was charged with leading the school's PBIS efforts, the school increased the counselor full-time equivalent

(FTE) from .60 to 1.20 to support this goal, thus adding a part-time bilingual counselor early in the first year of implementation.

Practices grounded in cultural validation and support. The change in school population led to more intentional conversations of culture in teaching and learning, validating the backgrounds of students and families. First and foremost, the universal practices that staff engaged in focused on community and acceptance. For example, the school principal left time in the master schedule for all classroom teachers to implement *morning meetings*, as recommended by the *Responsive Classroom©* Approach (Kriete, 2002). Daily class meetings are in line with culturally relevant practice as they lead to teachers and students knowing each other in the creation of a classroom community (Bondy, Ross, Gallingane, & Hambacher, 2007).

As the team implemented culturally responsive PBIS, the school counselor, in consultation with bilingual teaching staff, integrated Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) strategies (Short, Fidelman, & Louguit, 2012) in the behavioral lessons. SIOP includes strategies in lessons that ensure that English language learners have the necessary background information to learn the material presented. As such, the team ensured that expectations were taught in culturally relevant ways. In addition, the teaching of expectations included recognition of the different backgrounds of students. For example, one of the behavioral lessons given to teachers close to winter break involved discussion of different student and staff beliefs that might be practiced over the break. *Being respectful* in this case transcended outside of traditional definitions of respect to include knowledge of others' beliefs. Further, discussions among the leadership team in year three acknowledged the lack of overarching student understanding of the school expectations. For example, staff was not engaging in larger discussions about why respect can lead to success in life. As such, the team integrated the all-encompassing theme "Be A Learner" and situated the teaching of all expectations under this framework. In this way, staff, students and families could discuss how this is relevant in school and life, thus reflecting the perspectives of students and families (Swain-Bradway, Loman, & Vincent, 2014).

The PBIS team, along with school staff, discussed the inclusion of an acknowledgement system with intention. Because of the aforementioned concern about extrinsic reinforcement in the form of tickets, acknowledgement tickets were often given to groups and classrooms of students. The PBIS team placed more value on group gathering of tickets than individual. For example, each classroom had a bucket in which to collect tickets. They would bring their tickets to community gatherings to meet schoolwide goals, which would result in schoolwide celebrations focused on learning and community. For example, students would be encouraged to take part in a pajama day or be given 20 minutes on a specific day to engage in a fun activity, such as Drop Everything and Draw. These activities served to reinforce the positive behavior displayed by students.

Data that led to culturally valid decision making. The leadership team regularly used data to in-form the practices taught and reinforced in the school. Total ODR data was collected each year and demonstrated decreases in overall number of referrals despite increasing enrollment (see Table 2). In addition, the school counselor regularly broke down data by grade level, socioeconomic status, race and location. This data was then discussed monthly at grade level meetings during which general problem solving could take place, whether focused on a specific student or group of students. Ad-ditionally, the data guided decisions at monthly PBIS leadership team meetings. The team regularly examined program fidelity. The SAS implementation average rose over the years, reaching fidelity of 84% in year three (see Table 3). Moreover, the PBIS leadership team used the SAS subscales to de-

termine program strengths and weaknesses. Subscales included how well school expectations were taught and defined, and presence of a reward (or acknowledgment) system, as well as a defined way of addressing student behavior violations and infractions. In addition, the SAS included items that measured how well the team monitored areas in the building, managed the team processes and were supported at the district level. All subscales increased over the years of implementation.

Table 2

Enrollment and ODRs by Year

Year	Enrollment	Total ODRs
08–09	346	264
09–10	473	268
10–11	498	248
11–12	495	300
12–13	509	371
13–14	523	380

Table 3

Self-Assessment Survey (SAS) Results by Year

Year	Expectations Defined	Expectations Taught	Reward System	Violations System	Monitoring	Management	District Support	Implementation Average
2009–10	98%	91%	63%	77%	90%	69%	79%	79%
2010–11	98%	91%	90%	75%	85%	71%	72%	78%
2011–12	97%	89%	84%	74%	92%	87%	85%	84%
2012–13	100%	91%	91%	75%	91%	84%	86%	84%
2013–14	100%	97%	94%	81%	93%	86%	86%	88%

ODR data comparing percentage enrollment to percentage of total ODRs demonstrated variability across the years (see Figure 2). ODR trends for Hispanic students shifted from over-representation to under-representation, whereas the gap for African American students went from 14% enrollment and 55% of total ODRs to a narrower gap of 7% enrollment and 31% of total ODRs. In meetings, the leadership team went beyond examination of percentages to determine which students were having difficulty. For example, during year five the team noted that students who had moved to the school in the previous year received a high percentage of total ODRs and accounted for many of the students needing Tier 2 and 3 supports. The team integrated interventions and behavioral teaching opportunities to assist new students in that transition.

In year four, a district focus on data led to the mandated formation of school equity teams at each school site. At this school, the team was comprised of 16 staff members and four parent and community members, and focused on school climate equity and parent and community outreach. This team met monthly, and in doing so disseminated climate surveys to students and staff, examined district-wide assessments to ensure cultural fairness and planned culture nights and parent orientation nights in the community.

Outcomes that demonstrate cultural equity. The more intentional focus on data disaggregation led to the ability of the PBIS leadership team to make equitable decisions. An example occurred in
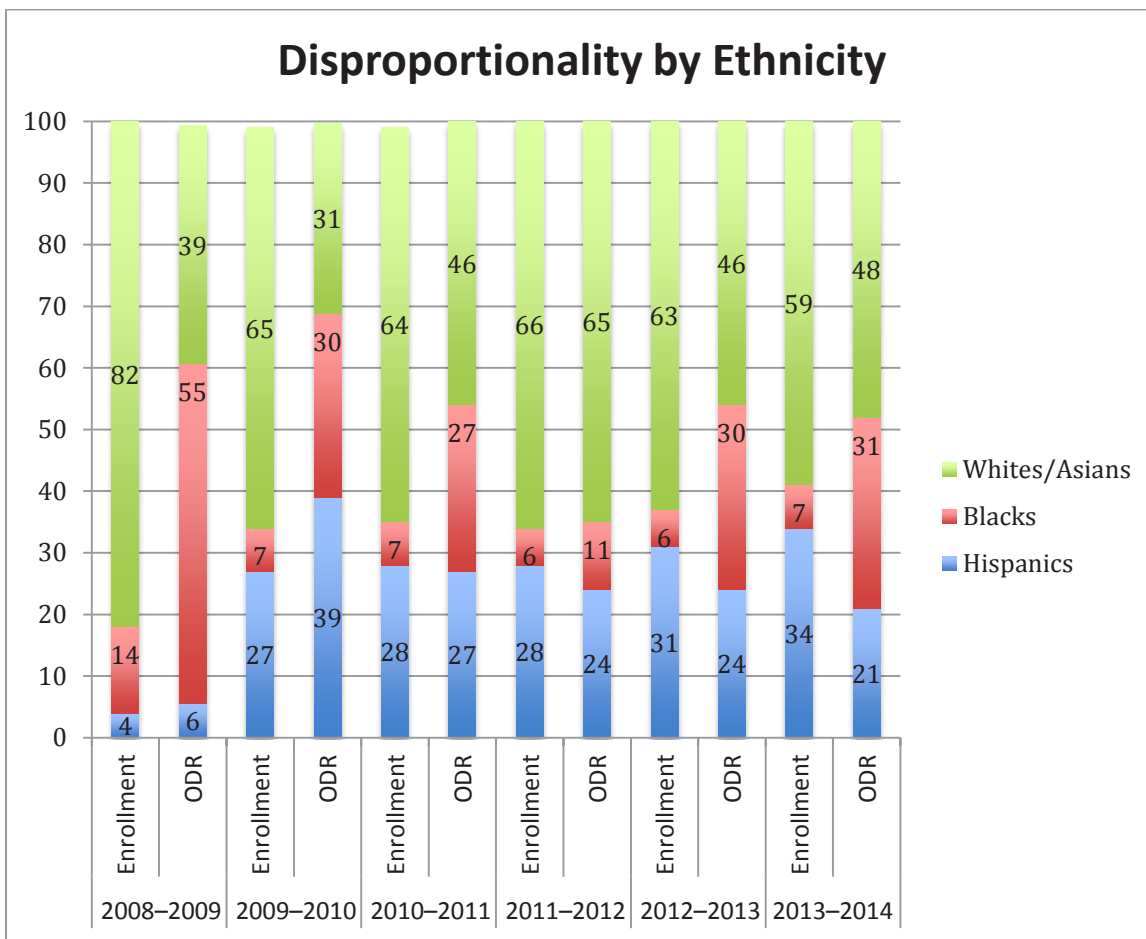
Figure 2. ODR by Ethnicity

the first year of PBIS implementation. At the start of 2009, the leadership team became concerned about behavior reported on one of the school buses. The contracted school bus driver was reporting, through written bus reports to the administration, a number of behavioral infractions on the rides to and from school. This bus included many students who received free and reduced lunch and were in racial and ethnic minority groups, traveling to and from an inner city neighborhood 10 miles away from the school. The principal worked with the general manager of the bus company and put interventions in place as part of PBIS, including meetings with the driver, principal, and translator in the cafeteria, and student–bus driver meetings, as well as letters to parents. It became apparent the problem was less about student behavior and more about equity—the bus was overcrowded. The principal shared concerns with the superintendent and the superintendent engaged in conversations with the bus company. Because the school as a whole had embraced PBIS and documenting data and steps to problem-solve, leaders at the district level were motivated to intervene. The district had funds and added a new bus route for students; bus referrals went down immediately.

Discussion

Research shows that PBIS is best implemented when considering the specific context of the school and needs of students and families (Fallon et al., 2012). The school in this case study demonstrated the intentional work that was needed to implement PBIS that was culturally responsive. The implementation of culturally responsive practices led to fewer behavioral reports for students from Hispanic backgrounds. Unfortunately, a disproportionate number of African American students received ODRs even after the implementation of culturally responsive PBIS, which is in line with previous

research (Skiba et al., 2011). Thus, the intentional integration of culturally responsive PBIS practices should go beyond the examination of disaggregated data to include conversations around equity, access and success for all. The PBIS team in this school started these conversations to determine why students might not be succeeding. Because of the systems in place, staff integrated additional teaching and learning opportunities for students who were new to the school. There is still more for the team to do to reduce disproportionate representation of African American students in ODR. To that end, the leadership team recently went through PBIS Tier 2 training and the school counselors are implementing check-in/check-out, a targeted intervention program for individual students (Todd, Campbell, Meyer, & Horner, 2008) and data-driven small groups. Future research should examine whether these approaches have an impact on overall ODR data and on the continued equity conversations happening among key stakeholders in the school.

Because the results of this action research case study focus on one school's efforts to engage in culturally responsive practice, the results should be interpreted with caution. The study is descriptive in nature and connections between the integration of culturally responsive PBIS elements and outcomes were not tested empirically. Future research should examine the relationship between intentional integration of culturally responsive PBIS components on school and student outcomes, to include outcomes beyond discipline referrals. Important work in this area is emerging and it will be imperative for school counselors to remain at the forefront of these initiatives to ensure PBIS practices take all students into consideration.

Currently, PBIS is implemented in thousands of schools in over 40 states. PBIS systems emphasize a shift from responding to problem behavior with exclusionary discipline to the use of instructional responses to problem behavior and corrective procedures to help students to identify and practice acceptable behavior instead of removing them from the classroom (McIntosh, Filter, Bennett, Ryan, & Sugai, 2010). While PBIS is an evidence-based intervention that should address disproportionality within discipline systems (Eber et al., 2010), this study and others have demonstrated that this is not always the case. As such, culture and context must be considered when planning, developing and implementing PBIS programs to make them more culturally responsive. In doing this important work, Swain-Bradway et al. (2014) recommended

> that school leaders systematically integrate the range of student cultural perspectives along with teacher cultural perspectives in creating disciplinary policies and practices that are non-discriminatory. The cultural mismatch between individual teachers and students may be mitigated by the systematic implementation of school-wide systems supporting culturally responsive practices within schools. (p. 4)

Equity can only be achieved when all students and student backgrounds are considered within systemic programs implemented in a school environment and when all possible reasons for the gaps in success, including the ever increasing needs of students, disproportionate access to resources and opportunities, and mandates made on the educational system as a whole, are considered.

Conclusion and Implications

With much at stake at the national, district, school and individual levels, school counselors can play a critical role in ensuring PBIS programs are implemented with fidelity and in culturally responsive ways. School counselors can use their knowledge and recommendations (McIntosh, Girvan, Horner, Smolkowski, & Sugai, 2014) to reduce this very real problem of disproportionality in discipline practices, including implementing culturally responsive PBIS, disaggregating data and imple-

menting accountability policies focused on discipline equity (Green et al., 2015; McIntosh, Barnes, Eliason, & Morris, 2014). Further, school counselors can use their expansive knowledge of data to extend the focus beyond just ODRs. Perception surveys focused on process rather than outcome data might be better at capturing change across time. For example, interviews with staff, parents and students examining school climate and social behavior can and should be examined within culturally responsive PBIS implementation. In that way, a clearer picture of student behavior, school climate, family perception and staff support might emerge. A recent national survey found school personnel to be supportive of the implementation of culturally and contextually responsive elements of PBIS (Fallon, O'Keeffe, Gage, & Sugai, 2015). School counselors can be champions in the process of encouraging culturally responsive practices within PBIS program implementation.

Schools play a privileged and strategic role in influencing social, emotional and academic outcomes for youth (Herman, Reinke, Parkin, Traylor, & Agarwal, 2009). School counselors can serve as leaders in conversations about equity and social justice as it pertains to student behavior and success in schools. Through continued conversations, intentional understanding of self and others, and targeted family involvement, school staff can ensure that education indeed continues to be the great equalizer for all.

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A Grant Project to Initiate School Counselors' Development of a Multi-Tiered System of Supports Based on Social-Emotional Data

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This article provides an overview of a grant project designed to create a district-wide elementary school counseling program with a strong data-based decision-making process. Project goals included building data literacy skills among school counselors and developing the infrastructure to efficiently collect important social-emotional indicators through a revised system for recording disciplinary infractions and a new research-based behavioral component for the district's standards-based report cards. This enhanced system for accessing and analyzing social-emotional indicators resulted in broad systemic changes in the district, including extending a number of grant initiatives to the middle and high school levels, restructuring data teams to adopt a multi-tiered system of supports, and establishing school counselors as leaders in data-driven discussions about student success.

Keywords: **school counseling, data-based decision making, multi-tiered system of supports, social–emotional, elementary school**

This article reports on an Elementary and Secondary School Counseling Program (ESSCP) grant project designed to build an elementary school counseling program in a district that previously had not employed school counselors at that level. The new school counseling program was organized around an innovative shift in the district's multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) model that expanded to integrate social-emotional and behavioral data with academic indicators. School counselors used the new social-emotional data to help answer the question of why students were struggling academically when scholastic deficiencies were not the primary cause. The grant project also focused on developing strong data literacy skills among elementary school counselors so they could serve as leaders in data-based discussions. These complementary grant goals transformed the data team process as school counselors, teachers and administrators began to use data to better understand the complex relationship between social-emotional factors and academic achievement. These practices resulted in systemic changes throughout the district as data-driven elements of the elementary school counseling program were adopted at the secondary level. The purpose of this article is to: (a) highlight the importance of engaging in data-based decision making regarding students' social-emotional needs in schools, (b) provide an overview of the specific elements that comprised the new MTSS model in the school district as a part of this grant-funded project, and (c) underscore the importance of building human capacity to enable school-based data teams to meaningfully integrate academic and social-emotional data to promote improved student outcomes. Limitations of this project, directions for future research and implications for school counselors also are discussed.

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School Counselors and Social-Emotional Data

School counselors are often advised to adopt a data-based decision-making model as part of their practice (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2012; Dimmitt, Carey, & Hatch, 2007). Accountability mandates require school counselors to use data to demonstrate the impact of their work and to link their interventions to academic achievement (Dahir & Stone, 2009: Isaacs, 2003; Sink & Stroh, 2003.) Moreover, data use also is central to the transformed model of school counseling, which positions school counselors as advocates in educational reform efforts such as closing the achievement gap and carrying out school improvement initiatives (Dahir, 2004; Hayes, Nelson, Tabin, Pearson, & Worthy, 2002; House & Hayes, 2002). However, institutional factors can limit the role of the school counselor in data-based decision making. Typically, data teams primarily (or even exclusively) consider academic indicators, and schools often lack the infrastructure to systematically collect the social-emotional data that more directly aligns with the work of the school counselor.

Accountability requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB; 2002) have strongly influenced schools' approaches to data-based decision making (Mandinach, Honey, & Light, 2006; Marsh, Pane, & Hamilton, 2006). The pressure to demonstrate adequate yearly progress (AYP) has prioritized state standardized tests scores and other academic benchmark assessments in data-driven discussions. A tremendous amount of achievement data were routinely collected and housed by school districts to fulfill reporting demands of NCLB; these data will continue to be gathered under the new Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA; 2015). School staff can access these data to guide instructional practices and measure student progress. However, these data are more directly linked to teachers' work with students and primarily measure academic achievement and cognitive ability (Heckman & Rubinstein, 2001).

The role of the school counselor encompasses not only students' academic achievement but also their social-emotional development (ASCA, 2012). Social-emotional and behavioral data are typically not collected in the same robust manner as academic achievement data and are often limited to office discipline referrals and attendance rates. These behaviors are poor proxies of student engagement and reveal little information about underlying issues that need to be addressed. Measures of motivation, perseverance, self-regulation and other factors that impact students' ability to achieve are not present in most school districts' data collection systems, rendering them absent also from data-driven discussions about student outcomes.

In addition, while NCLB articulated which data are considered the critical measures of academic achievement, a corresponding set of social-emotional data has not been clearly delineated. Despite growing recognition of the impact of non-cognitive factors on student achievement (Farrington et al., 2012), educators are often uncertain about which specific behaviors, attitudes and dispositions link to success in school and throughout life. Educational organizations such as The Partnership for 21st Century Skills; Collaboration for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL); and ASCA (2014) have suggested promoting specific mindsets, college and career-readiness skills, and prosocial behaviors, but consensus is lacking about which social-emotional or non-cognitive factors are integral to students' academic and social skill development.

The process of data-based decision making in schools has been shaped both by a prevailing belief concerning which data are important to examine and an existing infrastructure that constrains what data are routinely collected to those of a primarily academic nature. These factors also limit the role of the school counselor in data-based discussions about student achievement. With the end of the NCLB era and the ushering in of ESSA, all educators are being asked to address non-cognitive factors and be

accountable for showing gains in these areas in addition to academic areas.

A construct-based approach to school counseling. Squier, Nailor, and Carey (2014) extensively reviewed the educational and developmental psychology literature to determine what capabilities are strongly related to students' academic achievement and later success in life. The authors intentionally chose lines of research connected to student competencies in the academic, personal/social and career domains that comprise the school counseling ASCA (2012) National Model. Squier and colleagues (2014) established four overarching constructs that explicitly link to student success: (a) motivation, the forces that compel action and direct the behavior of individuals; (b) self-knowledge, the understanding that people have about their own abilities, values, preferences and skills and a necessary precondition for effective self-regulation; (c) self-direction, being able to identify one's own life directions, to make academic choices consistent with these directions and to connect classroom learning to life goals; and (d) relationships, the ability to establish and maintain productive, collaborative, social relationships with teachers and peers. These four constructs have been shown to be strongly associated with students' academic achievement and well-being; they also are considered to be malleable, receptive to intervention and within the range of expertise of school counselors (Bass, Lee, Wells, Carey, & Lee, 2015).

Multi-Tiered System of Supports

Use of MTSS is the recommended process for assessing and potentially intervening with an array of academic, behavioral and social-emotional issues while promoting schoolwide systems change (Lane, Menzies, Ennis, & Bezdek, 2013). An MTSS approach aligns closely with the ASCA (2012) National Standards and the work of school counselors in implementing prevention-based initiatives at a schoolwide level while providing more targeted intervention-based supports for students in need. It should be noted that MTSS is neither overly prescriptive nor rigid and has varying implementations and utility based on school districts' needs.

Schools use MTSS to approach issues within the student population in tiers and place students in such tiers in order to appropriately address their needs. For example, the primary tier refers to a universal intervention geared toward the general student body, whose members may not be faced with distinct difficulty, thereby focusing on prevention to reduce potential problems (Horner, Sugai, & Anderson, 2010). The secondary tier refers to interventions for at-risk students, which typically involve more small group-based and individual interventions for those students still demonstrating difficulty after receiving primary intervention and support (Horner et al., 2010). The tertiary tier refers to working with students who are faced with identified difficulties and have not responded efficiently to primary or secondary levels and are subsequently in need of significant school- and community-based supports (Horner et al., 2010).

An MTSS approach can be conceptualized as incorporating elements of Response to Intervention (RTI) and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS; Sugai & Horner, 2009). While RTI brings forth opportunities for preventative approaches and early intervention for students struggling with academic skills (Sandomierski, Kincaid, & Algozzine, 2007), MTSS incorporates a broader focus on both academic and social-emotional matters. Within the PBIS framework, the primary focus is on promoting consistent behavior expectations and systems of support to incentivize behaviors of all students within a school (Bohanon, Fenning, Eber, & Flannery, 2007). Both RTI and PBIS utilize MTSS, and specifically tiered intervention delivery, to accommodate the range of student needs. These frameworks are closely aligned in regards to their prevention foci, problem solving, implementation fidelity and data-based decision making (Sugai & Horner, 2009).

Elementary and Secondary School Counseling Program Grant

The ESSCP grant was established by the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) to provide funding for school districts that demonstrate "the greatest need for counseling services, propose the most innovative and promising approaches, and show the greatest potential for their approach to be replicated and disseminated" (Rentner & Price, 2014, p. 28). To be eligible, proposed projects must incorporate a preventative approach, and effectiveness must at least in part be measured by: (a) the reduction in school counselor-to-student ratios in the district, and (b) decreases in student discipline referrals (USDOE, 2015). Selected projects also must involve the collection, examination, and use of high-quality and timely data, including data on program participant outcomes, and improving instructional practices, policies, and student outcomes (Rentner & Price, 2014).

The current grant project was considered trailblazing in its approach to expanding the data-based decision-making process in the district through a number of initiatives, including the following: (a) identifying research-based social-emotional indicators that link to academic and behavioral school success; (b) creating a user-friendly system for routinely collecting data on these critical areas of student development; and (c) developing the data literacy skills of school counselors in order to ensure that this social-emotional data would continue to be gathered, analyzed and included in data-based discussions long after the grant project had concluded. The funds provided by the ESSCP grant to support these initiatives enhanced the existing RTI model enacted by the school district by integrating a wide range of data related to student development and thus allowed data team members to examine the relationship between social-emotional factors and academic achievement, conducive to a more effective and comprehensive MTSS approach. Through a sophisticated new data collection infrastructure, as well as school counselors' service in a leadership role, a nuanced and more targeted system of tiered supports emerged that allows the district to respond to a wide range of non-cognitive as well as cognitive issues.

Method

The grant project, formally entitled "An Asset Building Culture," consisted of four primary initiatives: (a) hiring school counselors in order to create more favorable counselor-to-student ratios, (b) reducing the number of disciplinary incidents, (c) establishing a robust system of strengths-based social-emotional data collection grounded in sound theory, and (d) building human capacity and the technological means to incorporate new social-emotional information in a formal data-based decision-making process. These initiatives would subsequently inform a continuum of cognitive and non-cognitive supports and services within an MTSS model. Ultimately, the goal was to create positive systemic change within the district in which school counselors serve as leaders in using data as a tool for supporting students' social-emotional, academic and behavioral development.

Setting and Participants

The project was conducted in an urban suburb with a population of approximately 30,000, located in the Northeast region of the United States. The district served nearly 3,000 students and had four elementary schools. More than half of the students were considered low-income and 43% did not speak English as their first language, with 52% identifying as Black/African American, 17% Asian-American, 15% White/Caucasian, 12% Hispanic/Latino/a, and 4% as Multiracial. The racial diversity represented in students was not reflected in its school staff, as more than 80% identified as White/Caucasian.

The school district was awarded the ESSCP grant in 2012. The grant team, comprised of school district leadership, Unique Potential Consulting (UPC), the Ronald H. Fredrickson Center for School Counseling Outcome Research and Evaluation (CSCORE), and Sebastian Management oversaw the grant project's objectives. UPC served as coordinator of the day-to-day operations of the grant project and provided coaching and professional development to the district's superintendent, elementary school principals and four grant school counselors. By allocating grant resources to this coordinator position, the project had an advocate for transformed school counseling practices who kept grant priorities in focus amidst other district initiatives. As evaluator of the grant, CSCORE collected quantitative and qualitative data to measure project outcomes and provided training in evidence-based practice to school counselors and district administrators.

Improving School Counselor-to-Student Ratios

The ASCA (2012) National Standards recommend a ratio of one school counselor to every 250 students, though the national average is actually well above these recommendations at nearly 1:500 (Carey & Dimmitt, 2012). Ample research suggests that school counselors have a positive impact on students' academic, social-emotional and behavioral outcomes (Lapan, Gysbers, & Petroski, 2001; Lapan, Gysbers, & Sun, 1997; Sink & Stroh, 2003; Webb, Brigman, & Campbell, 2005), with further research suggesting that these ratios matter a great deal in a school counseling program's overall effectiveness (Carrell & Carrell, 2006; Lapan, Whitcomb, & Aleman, 2012). Improving these ratios is especially impactful in high-poverty school districts (Lapan, Gysbers, Stanley, & Pierce, 2012).

Prior to the ESSCP grant, the district's elementary school staff did not include school counselors at all, resulting in very high mental health provider-to-student ratios. Hiring four school counselors at the beginning of the grant period brought the counselor caseload ratios down to 1:369. Because the district experienced economies of hiring, the grant team added a half-time school counselor in the 2013–2014 school year, further reducing the ratio of school counselor to student to 1:340 despite an increase in enrollment. Grant monies continued to fund each of the 4.5 school counseling positions in the subsequent two school years, strengthening the district's capacity to provide a broad range of services to students and maintain ratios more closely aligned with ASCA recommendations.

Office Discipline Referral Data

Office discipline referrals (ODR) offer a measure of both individual student behavior and school climate (Clonan, McDougal, Clark, & Davison, 2007; McIntosh, Frank, & Spaulding, 2010) and convey valuable information about students' social-emotional competencies. A primary requirement of the ESSCP grant was to reduce the number of disciplinary infractions in the district and to demonstrate this improvement through ODR data. The process of determining baseline discipline data revealed great variability in how these incidents were both defined and recorded across different schools. Collecting and using valid discipline data is essential for creating safe schools conducive to teaching and learning (USDOE, 2015), and systematic data collection offers useful information for "understanding and ameliorating individual student and school-wide disruptive behavior problems" (Rusby, Taylor, & Foster, 2007, p. 333). The grant team therefore established new protocols for collecting discipline data in the district's elementary schools, including creating a standardized ODR form that provided detailed information about the nature and frequency of disciplinary infractions. In addition, the district moved from a paper to an electronic system of recording these data.

The revised ODR form included a comprehensive list of disciplinary infractions that teachers considered high incidence behaviors in the elementary schools. The form was divided into three tiers to delineate progressive levels of severity. Level 1 infractions, such as "failure to obey classroom rules/procedures," were regarded as problematic behaviors to be managed within the classroom.

Documenting Level 1 infractions provided a data-based mechanism for teachers to record a student's behavioral challenges in the classroom, and this information could be used within an MTSS model to justify the need for additional support or special education services. Level 2 infractions were considered more serious and included behaviors such as "using obscene language/gestures or a repeated offense of the same Level 1 behavior." Teachers involved the assistance of other staff, such as another teacher or the school counselor, in handling Level 2 infractions. A list of classroom management and behavioral strategies also were listed on the ODR form, and teachers were asked to indicate any strategy they employed in addressing Level 1 or Level 2 problem behaviors. Infractions at Level 3 were recognized as major offenses and warranted involvement of the building principal. Level 3 infractions were further divided into two categories so that crisis incidents demanding immediate action and state reporting, such as "possession of a weapon" or "physical attack on a student or staff," were recorded separately. The ODR form also included name of staff making the referral, grade of student, date and time of disciplinary incident, location where infraction took place and administrative action taken. In addition, space was provided for teachers to write a brief narrative about events as they occurred, including possible motivation for observed behaviors. The ODR form was revised multiple times based on feedback from principals, teachers and school counselors and piloted during the second year of the grant project.

The Protective Factors Index

The ESSCP grant was launched at a time when district leadership was considering introducing a standards-based student report card. Standards-based report cards list specific skills and knowledge linked to learning standards in each academic subject, and classroom teachers assess a student's proficiency in each of these areas using a rating scale instead of traditional grades (Swan, Guskey, & Jung, 2014). This shift in practice for measuring academic performance provided an opportunity to create a district-wide system for assessing students' social-emotional development to inform a more elaborate MTSS framework. While most elementary-level report cards contain a section for behavior or deportment, these indicators may not systematically align with research on personal, social and emotional factors related to achievement and success. In addition, teachers are often asked to rate student behavior without reference to a rubric that would ensure the reliability and validity of these ratings (Squier et al., 2014). To ground the new behavioral component of the report card in the research base, the grant team used the aforementioned *Construct-Based Approach to School Counseling* (CBA; Squier et al., 2014).

Incorporation of CBA included the identification of four social-emotional constructs that correlate with academic achievement. The grant team broke these constructs down into 15 indicators, which they deemed *protective factors*. The Protective Factors Index (PFI) was created as the assessment instrument for systematically collecting social-emotional data. Furthermore, the grant team developed a number of specific and measurable competency indicators related to each construct (see Table 1). In addition to being informed by a strong research base, the grant team wanted to ensure that each indicator reflected competencies considered relevant by staff and families in the grant school district. A representative group of school counselors, teachers from each grade level, a teacher of English Language Learners, a special education teacher and the principals from each school reviewed the 15 original PFI items for developmental appropriateness and cultural sensitivity. The group expressed misgivings about two standards under the self-knowledge construct (i.e., "identifies personal feelings," and "identifies personal strengths and abilities"). There was concern that these behaviors involved attributes valued more by the dominant culture and that benchmarking students against what families might view as culturally specific standards was not fair. These items were therefore omitted from the pilot version, leaving a total of 13 items.

Once the final version was complete, teachers assessed students' social-emotional development on each of the PFI's indicators when grading report cards three times a year. In order to expand the consistency of the PFI and subsequently improve inter-rater reliability in data analysis, the grant team also created a scoring rubric to assist teachers in more accurately assigning ratings to these social-emotional indicators.

Creating a scoring rubric. In order to assist teachers in assessing the behaviors and attitudes that comprise the PFI within a developmental lens, the rubric was organized into three levels (K–1st, 2nd–3rd, and 4th–5th grades) to delineate the expected progression for each PFI indicator. The rubric lists specific, observable behaviors to help teachers determine whether a student was demonstrating age-appropriate skills in each domain. For example, descriptors to assess whether a kindergarten or first grade student "works collaboratively in groups of various sizes" included the descriptor "interacts appropriately with peers in group activities," and "contributes ideas in a group." Descriptors for second- and third-grade students included the same two behaviors as the earlier grades as well as "shows respect for others by listening to their ideas and opinions." For fourth- and fifth-grade students "agrees or disagrees with others in a respectful manner" was added to the rubric descriptors. The rubric helped to ensure greater accuracy and consistency in scoring behaviors across classrooms and to reduce subjectivity in teachers' ratings.

During the first year of the project, teachers requested a simple dichotomous response set for assessing PFI indicators (i.e., "struggling" or "on target"). After a successful year of piloting the new report card and accompanying rubric, teachers requested to move to a four-item response format: meets standard, progressing toward standard, emerging, and not meeting standard. The grant team expanded the original rubric, anchoring responses in degrees of support needed for a student to successfully demonstrate a behavior. Teachers were again provided concrete examples of student behavior within the rubric and were asked to assess if a student consistently and independently displayed the behavior or whether the student needed occasional, frequent or ongoing support to meet the standard.

Table 1

Summary of Primary Constructs and Indicators in the PFI

Primary Construct	Indicators
Motivation	Engages in class activities
	Demonstrates an eagerness to learn
	Demonstrates perseverance in completing tasks
Self-Knowledge	Identifies academic strengths and abilities
	Identifies things he/she is interested in learning
Self-Direction	Demonstrates the ability to self-regulate actions and emotions
	Demonstrates resilience after setbacks
	Makes productive use of classroom time
Relationships	Works collaboratively in groups of various sizes
	Seeks assistance when necessary
	Respects and accepts authority
	Forms respectful, equitable relationships with peers

Building Technological and Human Capacity

Developing a more comprehensive approach to using data requires that educators have access to meaningful and useful data (Poynton & Carey, 2006). Technology is a key component to establishing effective data use, and research has demonstrated that the state of computer systems can hinder this process in schools (Mandinach, 2012; Wayman, Jimerson, & Cho, 2012) and that easy, integrated and timely access to data facilitates the data-based decision-making process (Ikemoto & Marsh, 2007; Wayman, 2005). Staff at the grant site could readily access classroom grades, state test scores and other achievement data through the district's Student Information System (SIS). A primary objective of the grant project was to develop the infrastructure to support the same ease of access to important social-emotional indicators. The grant's technology consultant worked with the district to interface the PFI data recorded on the new report card with the district's SIS. Teachers, counselors and administrators could then view information about a student's engagement in class activities or perseverance in completing tasks in the same way they could examine a student's academic data. The technology consultant also wrote queries to extract PFI data from the SIS into user-friendly Excel reports so that school counselors could disaggregate the data by demographic variables such as gender, grade level or subsidized lunch status. Data also were aggregated at the classroom, grade or building level. The consultant then trained the school counselors to use Excel to illustrate on graphs the number of students struggling with specific PFI indicators (e.g., self-regulation, cooperation, motivation). These graphs could be organized by grade level, school site and individual students. Building strong technological capacity and functionality provides an essential foundation for effective data use. However, translating the wealth of data collected by schools into meaningful actions to support student success within an MTSS framework also requires building human capacity in data literacy skills (Ikemoto & Marsh, 2007; Mandinach, 2012; Wayman, 2005; Wayman & Stringfield, 2006). To build these competencies among school counselors, the grant team organized monthly professional development workshops in evidence-based practice, tiered interventions, data-based decision making, data analysis, and Excel charting and graphing. Counselors learned to extract the PFI data from the SIS, conduct simple analyses to determine what issues existed at various levels within the building, and create graphs to share with teachers and other educators at building-based data team meetings (see Figure 1).
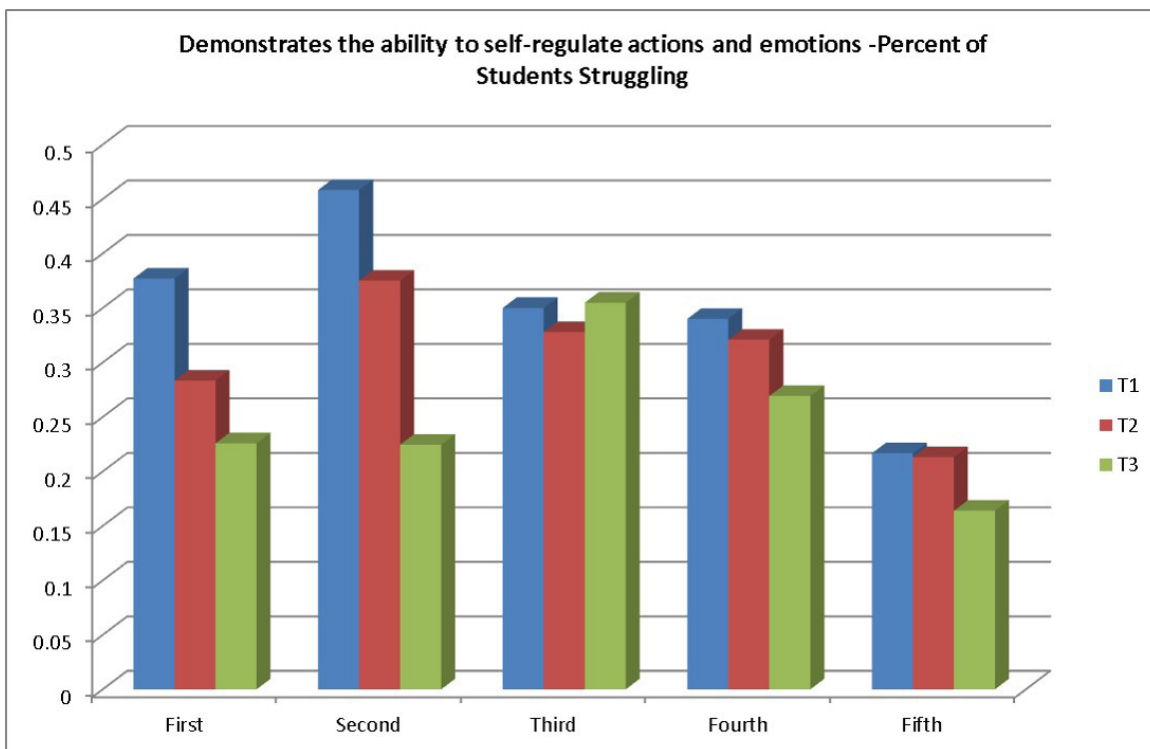

Figure 1. Sample of PFI data aggregated by a Single Indicator, Grade Level, and School Site

Results

The district's elementary schools had previously stored hard copies of disciplinary incident forms in the principal's office. This system did not support easy analysis of disciplinary data or examination of behavioral issues in the building. In the revised process, an administrative assistant electronically entered all information from the new ODR form into the school's SIS database. The electronic system allowed staff to quickly determine the total number of disciplinary infractions in the building over a given period, identify patterns in the data such as a spike in infractions immediately before vacations, and disaggregate the data to determine the frequency of different problem behaviors among various subgroups of students. This streamlined method of data collection also enabled staff to identify possible trends in disciplinary infractions. If data revealed issues such as disproportionality in the district, school counselors served as advocates in establishing more equitable protocols around discipline policies. Notably, the number of disciplinary infractions dropped significantly throughout the 3-year grant program.

Data collected from the PFI provided valuable information to all stakeholders about students' social-emotional competency development. Because teachers observe behavior and peer interactions every day, their perspective provides a keen understanding of whether a student is able to put into practice each of the indicators listed. In addition, since teachers rate students on the PFI multiple times each year through the district's electronic report cards, educators throughout the building had access to real-time data about behavioral issues impacting individuals or groups of students. The school counseling program, which prior to this grant project had not been established, consistently reviewed these data, generated charts to determine where gaps existed in social-emotional or academic skill areas and focused their weekly classroom guidance lessons on teaching these competencies. Subsequent report card data were also analyzed to evaluate the impact of counseling lessons on students' skill development.

Data Teams and a Multi-Tiered System of Supports

Prior to the district's ESSCP award, data teams were operating at each elementary school and were led by the building principal. Student names were only considered for data team discussion if a teacher completed a referral form indicating a student was struggling academically in the classroom. These forms, often inconsistently completed and comprised largely of teachers' perceptions about academic performance, served as the principal mechanism for identifying at-risk students. The only other information frequently reviewed by data teams were standardized test scores, classroom grades and serious behavioral infractions. Interventions to support students were almost exclusively academic in nature.

The grant team collaborated with staff to restructure data teams to include social-emotional data analysis. Data teams were then able to expand their RTI approach to a more expansive MTSS framework to include multi-tiered counseling interventions in addition to existing academic interventions. School counselors created graphs and charts of PFI, ODR and attendance data to illustrate such trends as common behavioral issues across grade levels or attendance patterns during certain days of the week or times of year. Data team members reviewed these graphs to identify gaps in social-emotional, behavioral or academic skill areas. Meetings shifted from an almost exclusive focus on academic data to considering multiple sources of achievement, demographic, behavioral and social-emotional variables. As teams explored the relationship across different types of data, a greater understanding began to emerge about how social-emotional factors, such as those included in the PFI, impact academic achievement. The charge of the data teams became deciding which tiered interventions (universal, targeted and intensive) were indicated to promote the development

of academic competencies as well as of the protective factors to support school success for every student.

School Counselors' Contributions to a Multi-Tiered System of Supports

Access to accurate and real-time data about student behaviors enabled school counselors to more effectively develop tiered interventions for students and environments in need of support. The PFI data were collected three times a year at the close of each marking period. Behavioral data gathered through the revised ODR form were updated in the SIS weekly. Attendance data at the elementary school sites were available daily. Access to these real-time data allowed school counselors to continuously monitor students' social-emotional and academic progress. It also enabled counselors to easily evaluate whether their interventions were creating the desired impact. In this continuous process of data-based decision-making, the same set of data indicators, examined at different points throughout the school year, informed school counselors' decisions about which interventions were needed and also served as outcome data to evaluate interventions at each tier.

Schoolwide, Tier 1 interventions included delivery of *success classes* to all students. School counselors developed a developmental guidance curriculum with 10 lessons per grade grounded in the evidence-based programs *zones of regulation* (Kuypers, n.d.) and *second step* (Low, Cook, Smolkowski, & Buntain-Ricklefs, 2015), with weekly lesson content guided by areas of improvement demonstrated in the PFI data and behavioral data represented in discipline referrals. In addition, a school counseling program "Expo" was held at the end of each year, and parents and guardians were invited to the school to see artifacts generated by students in *success class*. Additional schoolwide interventions included the *character trait of the month* project, focused on the development of positive qualities such as respect, honesty and courage, and a parent newsletter sent out by the counseling department explaining what could be done at home to enhance the development of social-emotional competencies (i.e., informing parents and guardians of the character trait of the month, suggesting a "conversation starter" about current classroom activities, and recommending related books to read with their children).

Students who were struggling academically and for whom PFI and ODR data indicated a need for additional behavioral support and social-emotional competency instruction received Tier 2 services through small group counseling sessions. School counselors facilitated groups on topics related to PFI indicators such as self-regulation, resilience and motivation throughout the year. The school counselors used discipline data, often in combination with report card indicators reflecting students' social-emotional competencies, to determine membership in targeted small group counseling sessions and continued participation in this targeted intervention. Subsequent ODR data was reviewed to evaluate changes in students pre- to post-intervention, as these data have been demonstrated to be sensitive measures of the impact of schoolwide interventions (Irvin, Tobin, Sprague, Sugai, & Vincent, 2004; Rusby et al., 2007). School counselors also created progress monitoring tools to assess social skill development during a group cycle. As with academically focused tiered instruction, teachers were asked to briefly rate student growth so that small group instruction could be modified in a continuous formative assessment process.

The continuum of counseling services also included development of a Summer Boot Camp Transition Program. School counselors collected quantitative and qualitative survey data from sixth graders in the district about their experience in moving from elementary to middle school, which indicated that some students were anxious about this transition and wanted more support and information about the process. To proactively address these common issues, the school counselors created a series of four week-long summer boot camps that were free of charge and open to all district

fifth graders. Classroom lessons and group activities for the camp were drawn from the evidence-based curricula Student Success Skills (Webb & Brigman, 2006), WhyTry (Bird, 2010) and The Real Game (Barry, n.d.) and covered topics critical to success in middle school such as perseverance, organizational skills and study strategies.

Finally, PFI, ODR and standards-based report card data also guided decisions about Tier 3 interventions. School counselors developed Behavior Improvement Plans (BIPs) for students in need of intensive behavioral support in the classroom. They also coordinated with special education or other mental health professionals when referrals were warranted.

Positive Systemic Change

The grant initiatives resulted in definitive progress and positive systemic changes throughout the district. A new policy was established which mandated that counseling groups be formed based on issues identified in the data and no longer simply by teacher request or anecdotal evidence. This more objective approach to determining which students were in need of Tier 2 social-emotional interventions ensured that students with a documented need for additional assistance received these services.

At the beginning of the grant period, the district had been declared "underperforming" by state rankings and was mandated to write an annual Accelerated Improvement Plan (AIP). Throughout the 3-year grant cycle, a number of elements from the grant project were embedded in the AIP including: (a) revising K–5 report cards to use a standards-based system, (b) integration of the PFI within the new report cards, (c) designing and delivering a developmental guidance curriculum for grades K–5, (d) collaborating with building principals to incorporate social-emotional data into data team meetings, and (e) developing tiered strategies to better address the social-emotional needs of struggling students. Officials from the State Department of Education who monitored the AIP expressed their belief that these initiatives contributed to the district's overall improvement and began to send other struggling school systems to the grant district to learn specifically about their data-based MTSS approach and the school counselors' role in it.

Ultimately, the success of the grant within the district can perhaps best be measured by two key administrative decisions made when grant funding ended: (a) the decision to retain the school counselors, as teachers and administrators now saw these professionals—who had not been employed at the district before the grant—as indispensable to student success; and (b) the decision to hire UPC (who had worked as project coordinator for the grant) to work to support the expansion of the grant initiatives to the middle school and high school over the next several years. At the time of this article's publication, work was underway to identify means to collect social-emotional data at the middle and high school levels so that their multi-tiered system of supports can be as robust as that at the elementary level.

Discussion and Implications for School Counselors

Data-based decision making has become an essential component of educational practice (Mandinach, 2012). The implementation of NCLB and standards-based education have created strong pressure for schools to demonstrate improved student performance through state test scores (Ikemoto & Marsh, 2007; Marsh et al., 2006). These data often become the primary consideration of data-driven discussions as schools strive to meet state and federal requirements. Data use has the potential, however, to be more than simply a response to meeting accountability demands. The data-based decision-making process can be transformed when multiple forms of data are viewed from different

professional perspectives to better describe the factors and contexts that influence student success (Mandinach, 2012). Fortunately, the new ESSA legislation stresses the importance of considering non-academic data to foster a broader vision of student success. Clearly describing what is happening for an individual or to groups of students requires "a body of relevant data, with each individual data element imparting a complementary piece of the puzzle" (National Forum on Education Statistics, 2012, p. 9).

An integrative approach to data-based decision making requires the technological capacity to organize data into user-friendly formats. It also may necessitate the collection of data beyond the scope of what is traditionally stored in district's information systems (Poynton & Carey, 2006). Behavior in the classroom occurs within the broader context of a student's life and developing interventions to support student success requires collecting data that reflect this context (National Forum on Education Statistics, 2012). Creating a data collection infrastructure that allows those who observe students on a daily basis (e.g., teachers) to rate social-emotional competency attainment in addition to academic competency attainment on a regular basis is a complex undertaking, but one that has very promising potential. When educators triangulate data by using multiple types and sources of data, the relationship between academic outcomes and social-emotional factors is better understood and reliance on a single data point, such as academic scores, is reduced (Marsh et al., 2006).

The grant team developed a number of initiatives designed not only to fulfill requirements of the ESSCP award, but also to create systemic changes around the culture of data use and continuum of tiered supports in the district. Each individual grant initiative aimed to improve a particular aspect of data-based decision making: incorporating research-based social-emotional indicators into the elementary school report cards, creating the infrastructure for easy and timely access to these data, developing new protocols for collecting discipline data, and building the data literacy skills of school counselors. The combined effect of each of these initiatives was a restructuring of building-based data teams that operated from a strong MTSS; these included the following: (a) coordination of schoolwide prevention efforts and systems, (b) universal screening and progress monitoring, (c) selection and use of evidence-based practices, (d) professional development that targets evidence-based practice, (e) evaluating outcomes using data-based decision making, and (f) leadership commitment from administrators and school-based teams that supports schoolwide implementation (Harn, Basaraba, Chard, & Fritz, 2015; Kame'enui, Good, & Harn, 2005; Sugai & Horner, 2009).

Notably, the grant project integrated an academic, behavioral, and social-emotional focus in the gathering of data, examined how specific behaviors and social-emotional skills impacted student achievement, and subsequently selected targeted interventions to build the competencies needed for school success. Although the majority of research and scholarly discussion has focused on using data-based decision-making models for academic concerns, researchers have proposed a similar model for social-emotional and behavioral problems (Eber, Sugai, Smith, & Scott, 2002; Fairbanks, Sugai, Guardino, & Lathrop, 2007; Gresham, 1991; Sugai, Horner, & Lewis, 2009). Though currently the majority of schools are operating these schoolwide efforts independently (McIntosh, Bohanan, & Goodman, 2010), there is a growing call for the holistic approach MTSS offers due to the known interaction of academic, behavioral and social-emotional issues in students who struggle (McIntosh, Horner, Chard, Boland, & Good, 2006).

The grant project's approach to adopting MTSS was also unique in the pivotal role of school counselors in the data-based decision-making process. The role of the school counselor is infrequently defined in the RTI literature (Gruman & Hoelzen, 2011) or in educational reform agendas (Dahir,

2004). School counselors have sometimes been seen as resistant to using data (Young & Kaffenberger, 2011). However, school counselors work at the intersection of the academic and social-emotional domains (ASCA, 2012) and support student development across these areas. School counselors, previously not represented on the building data teams, have now become data leaders in these schools. Because data-based decision making has focused largely on academic achievement, data use may have been seen as the charge of the classroom teacher. Through grant-based professional development workshops, the counselors developed competencies in organizing, analyzing and graphing data. These new skills have enabled the school counselors to lead data-based conversations, develop progress monitoring tools and create results reports for administrators and the school committee. Using data routinely collected through the SIS provides an efficient and timely access to not only determine which interventions are needed, but also to evaluate the impact of the schoolwide counseling curriculum, targeted small groups and other activities.

This mode of data collection represents a change from the pre/posttest method commonly employed by school counselors. Pre/posttests may provide information about whether students learned the content of a specific lesson but do not show whether students are applying these skills, attitudes or beliefs in their lives. School counselors can contribute unique insights to the data team process by going a step further and helping to determine the underlying causes for a student's misbehavior or poor academic performance. Incorporating social-emotional indicators into data-based discussions may make the process feel more relevant to the work of the school counselor. In fact, many of the words used to describe this more comprehensive approach to data (e.g., relationships, linking, connecting, inclusion and contextualizing) sound more from the counseling lexicon than from a statistics textbook.

The overarching goal of this pilot project was to create a meaningful data-based decision-making process to promote an MTSS model based on academic and social-emotional data. Therefore, the success of this project contributes ideas as to not only what non-academic data can be analyzed, but also how to go about collecting, analyzing and incorporating findings into the planning around a continuum of supports to foster student success. Using research-based constructs, redesigning report cards, developing rubrics, identifying professional development needs, and developing human technological capacity to manage and interpret data are feasible and effective strategies to support achievement. Ultimately, discussions shifted from examining symptoms of an issue—such as disciplinary infractions, low grades and test scores, or poor attendance—to trying to unearth the underlying causes for student issues and how the school could support growth with a variety of academic and social-emotional tiered supports.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The grant project was not designed or implemented as an experimental study; therefore, we cannot know with certainty whether the implementation of the grant initiatives and subsequent positive outcomes share a causal relationship. Furthermore, we cannot yet know which specific elements of the grant project brought about the most positive change, or whether some elements may have been superfluous, as outcomes have been viewed as a comprehensive result of all grant-related activities. Future research involving an experimental study in which: (a) outcomes are compared to similar schools that did not received grant-funded resources; and (b) there are outcomes measures in place for each grant initiative, is recommended. Moreover, additional studies that expand these efforts to students and schools in different regions, grade levels and with a higher number of participants also is suggested.

Although the PFI is a promising new instrument for the measurement of positive social-emotional

behaviors in the classroom, further research is necessary to validate its use as a universal brief screener. Bass and colleagues (2015) conducted a confirmatory factor analysis with the PFI using data gathered during the present grant project, which resulted in a three factor measurement model rather than four as hypothesized. These findings warrant further exploration with additional populations of students to determine whether they will be replicated. The PFI also relies on teacher observation, which occurs consistently at the elementary school level; therefore, it would be valuable to study its use in upper grades (i.e., middle school and high school) to verify whether the PFI is still a reliable and valid instrument in settings where teachers experience less face-to-face time with each individual student throughout the school day.

Finally, it bears noting that the research base is still emerging around social-emotional learning and which competencies best link to school success. There is not even consensus within the scholarly community on how to refer to these constructs (e.g., non-cognitive factors, non-academic skills, soft skills, grit). Further research will be necessary to determine which social-emotional learning theory or theories exhibit applicability in school settings, and the development of assessment instrumentation based on a CBA in particular is still in its early stages.

Conclusion

The ESSCP grant offered by the USDOE provides funding to establish and improve school counseling programs in high-needs school districts. The current grant project was implemented at four elementary sites in a diverse school district in an urban suburb of the Northeastern United States. Specific grant initiatives included the hiring of four full-time and one part-time school counselor in order to reduce the student-to-counselor ratio. The office discipline referral process was restructured to include greater specificity and objectivity, and the PFI was developed in order to provide an assessment tool of social-emotional competencies in the classroom. School counselors also were provided training in how to collect, analyze and include social-emotional data in the data-based decision-making process. Subsequently, the combination of a new school counseling program and data on discipline and social-emotional competencies along with existing academic data resulted in a much-improved MTSS model in the district, providing a continuum of supports for students' needs. The study sheds light on the value of providing school counseling at the elementary level and the importance of data literacy and advocacy as a major tenet of these positions. As ESSCP grants are awarded based on their potential for replication and dissemination, the initiatives described in this manuscript represent innovative practices that hold tremendous promise at a national level.

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