

Middle School Students' Perceptions  
of Their School Counseling Program

by

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**ABSTRACT**

Students' perceptions of their school counseling program were examined in the study. The research study assessed the frequency of the students' use of their school counseling program, their knowledge of the program, and what services the students utilized from their school counseling program. The survey was given to middle school students in Minnesota during the fall of 2007. Thirty-nine eighth grade students participated in the study.

In previous research, developing a trusting relationship between students and counselors was found important for a school counseling program to be effective (Kayser & West, 1991). This study addresses two research questions; What do students believe the responsibilities of a school counselor consist of? And what counseling services are students utilizing from their school counseling program?

The current research study has shown that many of the students who participated in the study reported that they had never utilized any of the services provided to them by their school counselor. Of the students who had utilized school counseling services, the majority of the students visited their school counselor to make schedule changes.

Recommendations for further research and for school counselors were also addressed.

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## Chapter I: Introduction

There are many possible roles that school counselors may be asked to take on as part of their job. Because this field of work is relatively new and can vary greatly from school to school, it is common for people to be unaware of exactly what the job duties of a school counselor are. Many years ago it was assumed that school counselors spent a majority of their time relaxing in their offices and handing out college applications. According to the American School Counselor Association, "Professional school counselors serve a vital role in maximizing student achievement. Incorporating leadership, advocacy and collaboration, professional school counselors promote equity and access to opportunities and rigorous educational experiences for all students" (American School Counselor Association, 2005 n.p.). In recent years, school counselors have begun to prove to parents, students, and other faculty how important and beneficial their role is in the school. However, an important factor is if the students feel satisfied with what the school guidance program offers them.

Developing statewide comprehensive school counseling programs is becoming more popular among the states now that the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) implemented a model for designing school counseling curriculum (ASCA, 2005). However, there are still sixteen states which have not implemented a statewide comprehensive program; Minnesota is one of them. According to the ASCA (2006) website, Minnesota does not mandate school counseling at any grade level. Minnesota is also ranked second to last regarding ratio of students to the school counselor. During the 2004-2005 school year, Minnesota had 795 students per school counselor. The recommended ratio by ASCA is 250:1. The student-to-school counselor ratio that



Minnesota holds is going to make it extremely difficult to provide an effective guidance program to all of their students. The average school counselor in Minnesota has over three times the recommended students and therefore their odds of helping each student greatly diminish.

In order to have an effective guidance program it is important to have a low ratio of students-to-counselors. "To achieve maximum program effectiveness, the American School Counselor Association recommends a counselor-to-student ratio of 1:250." (ASCA, 2005). However, many students in Minnesota, because of the high ratio of students-to-counselors, may not be receiving adequate counseling services. Many of the students may go through middle school or high school without knowing who their counselor was. Many times this is out of the students' and counselors' control. This is unfortunate, because the students may have benefited from college preparation or individual and group counseling and were not even aware it was available to them. It is also important to provide a developmental program that is helpful and readily available to all of the students. To make guidance available to all of the students, it is important for counselors to make sure they do not take on many other duties in the school, other than what their job description entails. "ASCA recommends school counselors spend a majority of their time in direct service to students" (ASCA, 2005, p. 56). This is especially important in schools with high numbers of students and low numbers of counselors. There are times when guidance counselors are not able to run effective programs because they find themselves overworked and too busy with other administrative duties to adequately perform their job with helping the students; unless it involves crisis situations (Guiffrida, 2002). Although helping in a crisis situation is

extremely important, it is most beneficial to the students if counselors provide a readily available guidance curriculum to them. As long as the students feel they have a place or person they can go to on a regular basis for help or guidance, the school counseling program will help them grow and develop in a safe place. This may happen through classroom, individual, or group guidance. The ASCA National Model (2005) suggested that school counselors devote eighty percent of their time to direct services to the students, and the other twenty percent should be spent in program management. In a middle school setting, it is suggested that the school counselors will spend 30-40% of their time on responsive services with the students and tending to their individual needs at that time, and also 25-35% of their time is spent doing guidance curriculum. These percentages are suggestions and are designed to be programmatic and not counselor specific. It is important for counselors to allocate times based on the program priorities and needs of the particular school population. It is imperative that school counselors record how much time is being spent on counseling versus non-counseling activities throughout the year in order to present data to the administrators on the importance of devoting as much time as possible to school counseling related activities (ASCA, 2005).

In a middle school setting, developmental guidance often consists of the introduction to career counseling. It is a strong component of the guidance program and is a crucial point in a high school student's life when they need advice and guidance on what to do with their lives post-high school. It is important to give them guidance before they enter into high school so that the students are aware of what classes they should take in order to be able to graduate. There are many students who are discouraged with their academic performance, and they are convinced that school does not have any effect on

their future, especially if they do not plan on going to college. This may be a factor in high drop out rates among high school students. As a school counselor, making the connection between what the students are learning in school to the world of work outside of school is critical for these students (Levi & Ziegler, 1993).

Middle school is also a time in students' lives when peer influence is extraordinary. At this time in one's life it is important to belong to a social group and to feel accepted among peers. Because of the strong desire to be accepted, adolescents are faced with pressures regarding at-risk behavior. It is important for school counselors to have a safe and welcoming environment for these students. While exploring their boundaries and experiencing more freedom, it is helpful for them to have an authoritative figure they feel comfortable going to for guidance when they are faced with difficult decisions. Many times the home life for students is not ideal, and creating strong relationships with their counselor may be their only form of positive adult attention.

#### *Statement of the Problem*

Students' awareness of their school counseling program is important to their educational process. Knowing what resources are available to them and how to receive them may benefit their progress in school. Little information exists regarding students' perspective of their counseling program.

Determining Minnesota students' perceptions of the responsibility and knowledge of their school counseling program in the fall of 2007 through a survey, will give a better understanding of the effectiveness of the school guidance program. Knowing the students' perceptions will also influence the dynamics of the program.

### *Research Questions*

Two main questions this study intends to answer:

1. What do students believe the responsibilities of a school counselor consist of?
2. What counseling services are students utilizing from their school counseling program?

### *Assumptions of the Study*

It was assumed that the students put much thought into the survey and were honest in completing it. It is also assumed that the participants understood the questions on the survey. Results of this study only apply to those students who completed the survey and cannot be generalized to all of the students in the school.

### *Definition of Terms*

The following term is defined in order to better understand the content provided in this study:

*Comprehensive School Counseling Program.* A developmental, comprehensive, and preventative program designed to assist all students, from pre-k through twelfth grade in the domains of academic, personal/social, and career development.

### *Limitations of the Study*

One limitation may be a sampling bias. Those students who returned the consent forms and completed the surveys may be higher achieving students in the school. The students who participated in the study also may not match the majority of the student body ethnicity and gender distribution. Another limitation is that the data collected were self-reported. Therefore, the data may not be accurate depending on the honesty of the students participating in the survey.

## Chapter II: Literature Review

This chapter will focus on the many different people and aspects that contribute to having an effective counseling program in middle schools. Teachers, students, and parents each have roles that influence the counseling program which will be discussed, along with their perceptions of how effective the school counselors and their programs are.

### *Elements of Comprehensive School Counseling Programs*

The American School Counseling Association (ASCA, 2005) provides a model with four elements that should be prevalent in a school counseling program. These four elements are foundation, delivery systems, management systems, and accountability.

Foundation is the beliefs, theory, and principles regarding how all students may benefit from a school counseling program. A school counseling program's mission will describe the programs intention and what is envisioned for each student. It must also support their school's mission statement.

Delivery systems are the many services that a school counseling program provides to the students. There are four components which help deliver these services to the students. Guidance curriculum provides structured classroom lessons to the students in a developmental manor. Individual student planning assists students in achieving their personal goals and making plans for the future. Responsive services are designed to meet the immediate needs of the students through many forms of counseling. Systems support focuses on professional development and maintaining a successful school counseling program.

Management systems include the variety of ways school counselors manage and spend their time. It is important that a school counselor provide a program plan to their administrator as to what responsibilities they are responsible for during the school year. Along with providing a list of responsibilities it is also important to provide information on how those duties will be distributed throughout the academic year.

Accountability is how the counseling program is able to display the effectiveness of their program. Evaluating a counseling program will provide helpful information on what is working effectively and what may need improvement in order to provide the best available program for the students. Assessing the school counseling program will also determine if the program is in alignment with the American School Counseling Association's National Model.

#### *Partners in School Counseling Programs*

Teachers play an important role in the success of school counseling programs. Counselors are often teaching guidance lessons during a classroom teacher's originally structured lesson time. Also, counselors many times take students out of class for counseling purposes, which may interfere with classroom lessons. Because of this, it is helpful if the teachers are accommodating in order to effectively run a counseling program. If a teacher is willing to work along side the counseling professionals, they tend to notice the many benefits of school counseling. "Secondary school teachers continue to believe that the school counseling and guidance program does make a positive contribution to the instructional program of the school" (Gibson, 1990, p.248). Support from the staff in the school is extremely important in ensuring that the guidance program continues to flourish. Oftentimes in middle schools, counselors will provide

guidance lessons to the teachers so that they are able to assist the counselors and teach their class some guidance lessons. Support from all staff members helps to make for an effective guidance program that reaches all students.

Teachers and other staff often contribute to the guidance program. It is important to gain their perspective on how well the guidance program is run. Catenell, Jouhert, Levitov, and Murray (1987) conducted a study to evaluate a high school counseling program. Outside sources had been brought in to conduct the study and they interviewed the members of the counseling center, teachers, and other administrative staff. Of those who participated in the survey, they all agreed that the purpose of the counseling program was to provide students with counseling and academic guidance. There was a criticism that the students were only using the counseling center to avoid going to class or taking tests (Catenell et al., 1987). It is important to learn how other members of the school view the counseling program so that a school counselor knows how effective he/she is being perceived. With this study, having the staff members agree upon the purpose of the counseling center was good because they recognized the benefits it holds for the students. As for the teachers being concerned about the students going to the counseling center for reasons other than guidance, it was important for the counselor to review with the student who was participating in the program and reassure the teachers that it was benefiting the students.

Another study was conducted by Beesley (2004) to determine teachers' perceptions of school counselor effectiveness. A survey was given to 300 K-12 teachers to collect information regarding teacher satisfaction with the school counseling program. The results of this study showed that 67% of the teachers surveyed were somewhat to

extremely satisfied with the counseling program and services provided in their school. Thirty-three percent of the teachers responded that they were somewhat to extremely dissatisfied with the counseling program. To determine the satisfaction rates across the grade levels, an analysis of variance was conducted which revealed that elementary counselors were considerably more satisfied with their school counseling program and services than were the middle and high school teachers. The teachers were also able to provide suggestions for improvement for the counseling program. The top four areas they felt needed the most improvement were career counseling, college preparation, community referrals and public relations. These areas for suggested improvement would occur more often in middle and high schools, which may explain why satisfaction levels were much higher in the elementary schools (Beesley, 2004).

Consultation between a teacher and counselor can be extremely helpful when working with and helping students. Teachers spend the majority of their day with these students and oftentimes know them better than anyone else in the school (Amatea & Clark, 2004). Therefore, if teachers are willing to consult with the school counselors they may collaborate their expert knowledge to benefit the students. Not only do counselors find this beneficial, but teachers do as well. During a study regarding teachers' perceptions of school counseling, it was found that, "The theme that emerged most frequently discussed by teachers was that of counselor-teacher communication, collaboration, and teamwork" (Amatea & Clark, 2004, p.134). If counselors take the time to work with students who have emotional and behavioral problems, then the teacher does not have to which gives him/her more time to spend teaching or preparing lessons.



Teachers and counselors ultimately should have the same goal in mind when working with their students. They should be fully committed to help the student to the best of their ability so that the students can achieve to their highest level possible. They should also be willing to advocate for the students if need be. If teachers and counselors are aware of this commitment that they both hold; they should grasp a better understanding of each others roles (Ginter & Scalise, 1990). One of the biggest struggles that counselors face today in regards to the way teachers and administrators perceive them is the negative ways they were perceived many years ago. Counselors were known to not communicate with the other faculty and sit in their office all day with little connection to the students and faculty. Consequently, counselors today are constantly finding themselves proving to others the importance of their role in the school and trying to diminish the perceived notion of laziness.

Not only do teachers and students have expectations of the school counseling program, but parents do as well. Oftentimes parents would like to help guide their child; however, they may not have the necessary tools to do so. Especially, when students are in middle school and beginning to gain more freedom from their parents, it may be difficult for them to look to their parents for advice or confide in them. Career guidance is something that parents often seek the counselor for in helping their child choose the path that is best for their child when choosing classes in high school and post secondary. Frequently, parents will gain incite from the counselor to make sure they are on the same path and not giving contradicting information or advice to the student. Parents will look to the counselor for information regarding college admissions strategies they otherwise may not have thought of.

Advising from school counselors is potentially one of the earliest interventions outside of the student's family. School counselors have the opportunity to work with parents and students regarding postsecondary planning even before the student typically would receive recruitment information from colleges. (Chapman & DeMasi, 1991, p. 268)

In a study testing parents' perceptions of the effectiveness of school counselors in college advising and academic counseling, college advising was perceived to be the most frequent student-to-counselor contact (Chapman, & DeMasi, 1991). However, the parents in this study overestimated how often their child sought academic counseling and college advising and also overestimated their own influence in initiating counseling. These parents gave low ratings to the school counselors for overall effectiveness and were not very satisfied with the work done by the counselor. This study provides an example of how counselors still need to advocate the work that they do and provide data to the parents representing the positive differences they make in the students' lives. Otherwise studies are going to continue to show misconceptions of the work done by school counselors.

#### *Student Participation and Perspectives*

Perhaps one of the most important expectations that school counselors should have is to make sure the students are satisfied with the work they have done and are pleased with what the counseling program offers them. A school counselor can only do so much in order to get the students to pursue the activities and programs the school counseling program offers to them; it ultimately is in the students' hand to commit to individual, group, and/or classroom guidance. A study conducted in Illinois surveyed

high school seniors to find out their perceptions that inhibit the initiation of counseling. The strongest response from the students as to why they did not pursue counseling was because they did not feel comfortable telling things to a stranger. The second most frequent response was that the students were afraid that the counselor would pass information along to other people (Kayser & West, 1991). The results of this study show two very important aspects of being a counselor and an advocate for the students. First, counselors need to make themselves present throughout the school so that students become familiar with them. It is also important to try and form a trusting relationship with the students so that they do not think of the counselor as a stranger, but instead, someone who they know and trust. Developing a relationship with a student the first year they enter the school would be ideal so that they can continue to gain trust in the counselor throughout their years in school. Secondly, it is extremely important for a school counselor to inform the students of their rules of confidentiality and continue to remind them so they do not feel threatened and scared to disclose personal information. Knowing the students' perceptions is very helpful in improving the guidance program to best suit the students' needs and help them continue their academic, career, and personal/social growth and development.

Being aware of the needs of students is one way to ensure success in a school counseling program. A study was conducted to examine elementary students' perceptions of their transition from elementary school to middle school. The students were in fifth grade, and they were asked to write down what questions and concerns they had regarding the transition from elementary to middle school and to indicate if they were aware of whom to go when they needed help with the transition. Most of the questions

that resulted from the research were regarding rules and procedures for the middle school that are different than elementary school. The two predominant concerns the students portrayed were concerns about the older students and concerns about homework. The students also reported that the individuals who would help them with the transition were friends, parents and teachers (Akos, 2002). Although counselors often times do the majority of transition work with the students, the students were not aware of this. It is important for counselors to help provide transition services to the students because the students' peers and parents may not be aware of the accurate information regarding the transition process. Transitioning from elementary school to middle school is often a difficult process for students, and therefore school counselors need to take a proactive role in providing information and guidance to the students to help better prepare them. As early as elementary school, students' knowledge of their counseling program is lacking. This means counselors need to begin advocating their position and actively seeking out students so the students become more aware of what a school counseling program can provide to them.

Teachers, parents, and students all play an important role in the development and progression of a school counseling program. However, ultimately it is the counseling department's responsibility to be proactive in working collaboratively with teachers and parents and also making themselves well known to the students by providing guidance and counseling services to them. This is something that needs to improve so that these individuals become more aware of what services are provided by a school counseling program. In regards to the decline in research and awareness, we need to turn to our students and strongly consider what their perception of a school counseling program is.

### Chapter III: Methodology

This chapter will include a depiction of how the subjects were selected, a brief description of the subjects and a description of the instrumentation used. Following that will be the data collection and analysis procedures and the limitations of the method, sample and procedures.

#### *Subject Selection and Description*

The subject selection included middle school students in an urban school district in the Midwest. The selection consisted of all eighth grade students at one middle school. Eighth graders were chosen because most of them have been in the same school for three years and therefore they will be most familiar with the counseling program in their middle school. All eighth grade students were invited to take the survey. Of the 175 eighth graders, 39 returned consent forms and completed the survey. The consent forms and surveys were handed out to the students in their math classes. The forms were also collected from the students in their math class by the researcher.

#### *Instrumentation*

The survey (Appendix A) distributed had six items assessing the students' use and knowledge of their school counseling program. The survey provided the students options to choose from about how many times they have visited their counselor, what they visited their counselor for, and what they believe the school counseling service includes. The survey also asked the sex of the student, if they have ever visited the counselor and if they are aware of what their guidance program provides to them. The survey provided a greater understanding of how the middle school students perceive their school's guidance

program and what services of the guidance program, if any, they utilize. This instrument was developed for this particular study, and was not piloted.

#### *Data Collection Procedures*

Parent/Guardian and student consent forms (Appendix B) were sent home with all of the eighth grade students at a middle school in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The consent form was used to gain permission for the students to participate in completing the surveys. Once the consent forms were returned, surveys were distributed to those students who were granted permission to participate.

#### *Data Analysis*

Nominal and ordinal scales of measurement was used for this survey. Responses were analyzed in the form of percentage and frequency.

#### *Limitations*

One limitation may be a sampling bias. Those students who returned the consent forms and completed the surveys may be higher achieving students in the school. The students who participated in the study also may not match the majority of the student body ethnicity and gender distribution. Another limitation is that the data collected were self-reported. Therefore, the data may not be accurate depending on the honesty of the students participating in the survey.

#### *Summary*

By conducting this study, I hoped to gain knowledge about school counseling programs used in Minnesota. I also wanted to discover students' attitudes towards the counseling programs used in their school and if/when they use it. I projected that by surveying eighth grade students, they would have been in the same school long enough to

be well-informed about their counseling program and have experienced the positive aspects of it to provide sufficient results from the survey.

## Chapter IV: Results

This chapter will discuss the demographics of the students who participated in the study and will also analyze each item that was addressed on the survey the participants completed. The chapter will conclude with examining the research questions that were addressed and how the items on the survey attended to those questions.

The purpose of this study was to determine middle school students' perceptions of their school counseling program. Data were collected through a survey, which was given to eighth grade students. The survey consisted of six questions regarding the frequency of students' use of their school counseling program and what services they believe their counseling program provides and what services they have used. The students were given a list of responses to choose from with each question. The six questions will be addressed in order, in an item analysis, in this chapter.

### *Demographics*

A total of thirty-nine ( $n = 39$ ) eighth grade students participated in the study. Thirteen ( $n = 13$ ) males and twenty-six ( $n = 26$ ) females. This compares with the grade level population of eighty-six ( $n = 86$ ) males and ninety ( $n = 90$ ) female. The students were not asked to reveal any racial or ethnic information about them on the survey. However, the eighth grade student body consists of 43 African American male students and 44 African American female students; 22 Caucasian males and 16 Caucasian females; 3 Hispanic males and 3 Hispanic females; 1 American Indian male and 3 American Indian females; 17 Asian/Pacific Islander males and 24 Asian/Pacific Islander females.



### *Item Analysis*

The first item on the survey asked students, “Have You Ever Visited Your School’s Guidance Counselor?” Slightly over half of the students, at 54%, reported that they had visited their school counselor at some point throughout their years in middle school. Therefore, 46% of the students reported that they had never visited their school counselor in middle school.

Table 1

#### *How Many Times Students Visited Their School’s Guidance Counselor*

Frequency	Percentage of Students
1 – 2 Times	33%
3 – 4 Times	13%
4 – 5 Times	2%
5 – 6 Times	28%
7 – 10 Times	0%
10 + Times	2%

The highest responses to how many times the students have visited their school counselor were 1-2 times (33%) and 5-6 times (28%). The responses following those two were lower. Of the students who participated in the survey, none reported visiting their counselor 7-10 times.

When answering the second item the students were given the option of selecting more than one choice. However, many did not respond to this question because they previously reported they had never visited their school counselor. The most frequent response (44%) from the students was that they visited their counselor most often because of problems with their schedules. On the opposite spectrum, none of the students responded that they have visited their counselor regarding racial or family issues. The students were also given the option of selecting "other" and were asked to explain what other reasons they visited the counselor for. The responses included:

- (a) To talk about the ski trip.
- (b) To get help with an application for a job and scholarship information.
- (c) He asked for my help.
- (d) I wanted to complain about a teacher.

Table 2

*Reasons Students Visited Their School Counselor*

Reasons	Percentage of Students
Schedule Changes	44%
Personal Issues	13%
Family Issues	0%
Racial Issues	0%
School Issues	5%
Issues with Friends	2%
Other	13%

The next item on the survey asked the students if they were aware of the services provided by their school counseling program. The majority of the students (77%) reported that they were aware of the services provided to them by their school counseling program. Conversely, 23% of the students were not aware of the school counseling programs in their school.

Table 3

*Students' Perceptions of What Their School Counseling Program Services Include*

Services	Percentage of Students
Individual Counseling	77%
Scheduling	77%
Discipline Students	36%
Monitor Student's Academic Progress	38%
Give tests such as EXPLORE, CALT, etc...	56%
Teach Classroom Guidance Lessons	38%
Register Students for Classes	69%
Group Counseling	62%
Lunch/Recess Duty	41%
Sub for Teachers	18%

Students were allowed to check all responses they felt were relevant to this question. The two most frequent responses (77%) that the students chose for services their school counseling program provides were individual counseling and scheduling. Registering students for classes (69%), group counseling (62%), and giving tests (56%)

were also relatively frequent responses for the students. Fewer of the students felt as though subbing for teachers (18%) was a service provided by the counseling department.

### *Research Questions*

This study focused upon two research questions. The first research question was to determine what students believe the responsibilities of school counselors are. The sixth question on the survey addressed this question. The questions were analyzed in respect to the frequency and the percentage of responses. The most frequent responses to what students believed the responsibilities of the counselor consist of were individual counseling and scheduling duties.

The second research question asked what services the students utilize from their school counseling program. The fourth survey question addressed this. The majority of the students utilized their school counseling program when they needed to change their schedule or had questions regarding their schedule. However, according to the first item on the survey, many of the students did not utilize any of the services provided by their school counseling program.

## Chapter V: Discussion

This chapter will include a discussion and conclusions formed from the results of the study. This chapter will also conclude with the author's recommendations for further research on this topic.

### *Discussion and Conclusion*

The purpose of this study was to determine middle school students' perceptions of their school counseling program. It is important to gain the students' perspective because they are the ones who will utilize the program the most and also gain the most from using the services provided by the counseling program. Knowing if students are aware of the services offered to them will help in determining what aspects of the counseling program are effective.

One limitation may be a sampling bias. Those students who returned the consent forms and completed the surveys may be higher achieving students in the school. The students who participated in the study also may not match the majority of the student body ethnicity and gender distribution. Another limitation is that the data collected were self-reported. Therefore, the data may not be accurate depending on the honesty of the students participating in the survey.

Students' knowledge of their school counseling program is one way to ensure the students are aware of what counseling services are provided to them in school. In this study, the majority of the students, 77%, reported that they were aware of what services their school counseling program provides to them. However, the same percentage of students, 77%, also felt as though scheduling was a service that the counseling program provides to them. Over half the students (54%) who participated in the study responded

that they had visited their school counselor, and 44% of those students had visited the counselor for a scheduling related issue. Although the counselor at their school must take on some of the scheduling duties, according to the American School Counselor Association National Model, registering students for classes and making schedule changes is noted as an inappropriate activity for School Counselors (ASCA, 2005). Eliminating clerical duties such as scheduling would leave more time for a counselor to focus on the career, academic and personal/social needs of the students.

A large number of participants in this study also reported that a service from the school counseling program is to administer aptitude and achievement tests. Again, the ASCA model reports that administering those types of tests are inappropriate duties for a school counselor. One thing a counselor should do regarding aptitude and achievement tests would be to interpret them and discuss the results with the students, but the administering portion of the test should be done by another staff member (ASCA, 2005).

Another service that the students reported their school counseling program provided was helping with lunch and recess duty. Almost half (41%) of the students reported that lunch and recess duty is something their counseling program provides to them. Although, this may be true at the school the students attend; lunch and recess duty is not an appropriate job duty for a counselor.

During the middle school years it is important for a counselor to create a balance between classroom guidance, individual/group counseling, student planning, and program maintenance (ASCA, 2005). The students in this study were much more familiar and aware that the counseling program provided individual and group counseling to them. A high percentage of students (77%) reported that the counseling program provided

individual counseling to them. Although the majority of these students did not report seeing the counselor for individual counseling, they were still aware that it was provided to them.

Many (62%) of the students also stated that group counseling was a service their school counseling program provided to them, but again few reported ever utilizing that service. Even though very few the participants may have utilized the counselor for individual or group counseling it is still important that they were aware that it was available to them if they had wanted to seek it out.

The ASCA model suggests that counselors spend 25-35% of their time on classroom guidance lessons. Guidance lessons are very beneficial during the middle school years as the students are transitioning from elementary school to high school. However, very few (38%) of the students reported that guidance lessons were a service provided to them by their school counseling program. Given the urban demographics of the school, it may be difficult for the counselor to provide these services with the high population and high student-to-counselor ratio. However, consistently providing classroom guidance as a service in a highly populated school is one way to make a connection with all students. Making even one connection with every student can help create awareness of the school counseling program that the students may not have otherwise known existed.

### *Recommendations*

There is very little research on students' perceptions of their school counseling program. Therefore, further research on this topic would be beneficial because it is important to gain many students' perspectives in order to achieve a high quality school

counseling program. A recommendation for further research would be to survey a larger population in order to gain a wider variety of students' views and experiences. Another recommendation for further research would be to survey students in elementary school and also high school to gain different grade levels experience with the counseling program. Many times students are reluctant to visit their school counselor because they are unsure of what the rules of confidentiality are and they may not have established a good relationship with their counselor. Consequently, further research on this topic could include student responses on why they did not visit the counselor and if they were not reluctant about visiting their counselor, what they would like to see their counselor about. Another recommendation for further research may be to compare student responses in urban schools with student responses in rural schools. Urban schools are often times more populated and therefore the student-to-counselor ratio may be considerably higher than in a rural school which is less populated. Determining if population plays a role in which school counseling services students receive most often may be helpful to counselors who work in highly populated schools so they may be able to design their program in ways which will reach all students.

This study illustrated the importance of knowing students' perceptions of a school counseling program. It can help greatly in determining if it is being beneficial for them or not. Many of the students in this study reported that they knew what a school counseling program was but their results showed they were misled on what the roles of a counseling program consist of. A recommendation for school counselors would be to be a strong advocate for your counseling program and provide information to the students on what services are available to them.



Students can benefit greatly from the services provided to them in school by their school counseling program. However, in order for this to occur the students must be well informed of what services are available to them. It is also important for the School Counselor to establish a good relationship with the students so that they feel comfortable seeking out the School Counselor. An important aspect of improving any school counseling program is to decrease the student-to-counselor ratio so more students are able to benefit from the services which are provided to them.

A school counseling program can benefit every student in the school. However, the students must be well aware of who their school counselor is and what services are available to them. To ensure that the counseling program is reaching all students, it is important to continually seek the students' knowledge and perceptions of the school counseling program to determine the programs strengths and areas that may need to be improved in order to benefit each student.

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## Appendix A: Survey Instrument

### My Use of the School Counseling Program

Participating in this survey is voluntary. You may withdraw at any time.

Directions: Please mark (x) in the appropriate place.

1. Sex: Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_
2. Have you ever visited your school's guidance counselor? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
3. If you answered yes to question 2, about how many times have you visited your school's guidance counselor?  
 1-2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3-4 \_\_\_\_\_ 4-5 \_\_\_\_\_ 5-6 \_\_\_\_\_ 7-10 \_\_\_\_\_ 10 + \_\_\_\_\_
4. For what reason(s) did you visit your school counselor? You may check more than one.

Schedule Changes/Questions \_\_\_\_\_

Racial Issues \_\_\_\_\_

Personal Issues \_\_\_\_\_

School Issues \_\_\_\_\_

Family Issues \_\_\_\_\_

Issues with Friends \_\_\_\_\_

Other (please explain):  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

5. I am aware of the services provided by my school guidance program.  
 Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
6. In your opinion, school counseling program services include (check all that apply):

Individual Counseling \_\_\_\_\_

Group Counseling \_\_\_\_\_

Scheduling \_\_\_\_\_

Lunch/Recess Duty \_\_\_\_\_

Discipline Students \_\_\_\_\_

Sub for Teachers \_\_\_\_\_

Monitor students' academic progress \_\_\_\_\_

Give tests such as EXPLORE, CALT, etc... \_\_\_\_\_

Teach classroom guidance lessons (bullying, self-esteem etc...) \_\_\_\_\_

Register students for classes \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B: Consent Form

### **To the parent(s) or guardian(s) of an eighth grade student: Consent to Participate in University of Wisconsin-Stout Approved Research**

Dear Parent/Guardian:

My name is Katy Guth and I am a Graduate student in the Guidance and Counseling program at the University of Wisconsin-Stout. I am currently completing an internship at Anwatin Middle School in the Counseling Department.

While I am interning at Anwatin, I am also doing research on middle school students' perceptions of their guidance program. I am hoping to have your eighth grade son/daughter participate in helping me conduct this research. The eighth grade students will be given an anonymous survey to complete at school which should take about five minutes to complete. By doing this research I hope to find out how often students utilize their counseling program and to what extent. The students will also gain knowledge on what services are available to them.

By signing the attached consent form you will be giving your child permission to participate in this research and fill out a survey. I appreciate you time and your help in completing this research.

**Title:** Middle School Students' Perceptions of Their School Counseling Program

**Description:**

One objective of the proposed research will be to determine eighth grade students' perceptions and knowledge of their middle school counseling program. A second objective is to determine if the students' perceptions match what the counseling program provides to the students.

**Risks and Benefits:**

There are minimal risks involved for the students who participate in the research. A foreseeable risk is that the participants may feel uncomfortable answering questions pertaining to services they have used pertaining to their personal well-being. If this occurs, students may withdraw from completing the survey with no penalty. One benefit to the participants is that they will become more aware of what services their counseling program provides to them

**Time Commitment:**

It will take students approximately 5 minutes to fill out the survey. There will be no monetary compensation for participating in the survey.

**Confidentiality:**

Students will not be asked to provide any identifying information on the survey they complete and therefore the student will remain anonymous during the research. The collection and management of the surveys will be handled by the researcher to ensure confidentiality.

**Right to Withdraw:**

The students' participation is completely voluntary, there is no penalty for declining, and they may withdraw at anytime.

**IRB Approval:**

This study has been reviewed and approved by the University of Wisconsin-Stout's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has determined that this study meets the ethical obligations required by federal law and University policies. If you have questions or concerns regarding this study please contact the Investigator or Advisor. If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your child's rights as a research subject, please contact the IRB Administrator.

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**Statement of Consent:** I give consent for my child to participate in the survey.

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Signature:* Parent(s) or Guardian(s)

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Signature:* Student

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date*