Examining the Role and Practices of High School Counselors in Helping Students Make Career Transitions

Jiaqi Li, Wei-Cheng Joseph Mau, and Susan Bray

High school counselors are in a unique position to promote college and career readiness for all students; yet, we know little about the role and practices of school counselors overall; what the goals most emphasized in high school counseling programs are; and how they help students make the transition from middle school to high school, from high school to work, and from high school to college. The researchers investigated these questions using a nationally representative survey. Participants in this study were 852 lead high school counselors from the High School Longitudinal Study of 2009-2013 (U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, and National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). A descriptive analysis was used to examine the transitional counseling activities between public and private high school counselors. This analysis revealed differences in how public and private high school counselors assisted students with transitions. Findings also revealed that self-reported goals of high school counselors were closely associated with several features (e.g., foundation, delivery) outlined in the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model (ASCA, 2003, 2012). Further, our study paved the way for more comprehensive research on the role of high school counselors in the area of career development. Implications for research and practice are discussed.

Keywords: high school counselor, college and career readiness, student transition

Helping high school (HS) students make a smooth transition to college or work has been a policy priority for school personnel (Lapan, Poynton, Marcotte, Marland, & Milam, 2017; Obama, 2015). In 2014, in the United States, nearly 2.9 million students aged 16 to 24 graduated from HS (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). Of these students, nearly two million enrolled in 4-year colleges, whereas 31.6% transitioned directly into the labor force (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). Out of all the interested parties (e.g., administrators, teachers, staff, parents), school counselors are uniquely positioned to support students’ successful transition from middle school (MS) to HS as well as from HS to college, or the workforce. The role of HS counselors has been redefined by numerous educational reforms (e.g., A Blueprint for Reform [U.S. Department of Education, 2010] or No Child Left Behind of 2001 [2002]) and various new models and standards (e.g., American School Counselor Association [ASCA] National Model [ASCA, 2003, 2012] or ASCA National Standards for Students [ASCA, 2004]).

This redefined role and the current models now require that professional school counselors play a vital role in helping all students achieve academic, career, and personal/social success. However, there is scant evidence of how HS counselors have implemented the new reforms, models, and standards to help students to achieve their goals during a career transition (McKillip, Rawls, & Barry, 2012). Therefore, our study used a nationally representative sample of lead HS counselors to examine the practices that HS counselors have undertaken to help students make successful transitions.

High School Counselor Roles

As defined by ASCA (2015a), professional school counselor refers to educators who are either certified or licensed with a minimum of a master’s degree in school counseling. Professional school counselors usually seek employment in elementary, middle/junior high, and high schools and address the needs of all students through a comprehensive school-counseling program (Dahir & Stone, 2012).

School counselors are charged with the management of the student outcome-based comprehensive school counseling program, which is focused on teaching life competencies to students (ASCA, 2012). School counselors using the ASCA (2003, 2012) national model create vision and mission statements that align with the vision and mission of the school. The service delivery that school counselors use should align with the mission and vision and have measurable outcomes (ASCA, 2015a). School counselors may receive guidance in the establishment of an effective school counseling program from the ASCA Mindsets and Behaviors for Student Success: College-and-Career Readiness Standards for Every Student (Mindsets & Behaviors Standards; ASCA, 2014). The Mindsets & Behaviors Standards
(ASCA, 2014) describe for the school counselor "knowledge, skills, and attitudes students need to acquire in order to achieve academic success, college and career readiness, and social/emotional development" (p. 1). The Mindsets & Behavior Standards are organized in three broad domains: academic, career, and social/emotional development, and school counselors operationalize the Mindsets & Behavior Standards by selecting specific competencies that reflect the vision, mission, and goals of the comprehensive school counseling program and that align with the school’s academic mission. In addition, when setting goals for the comprehensive school counseling program, school counselors must consider other student standards from their state and district.

The school counselor provides services to the students, the parents, the school staff, and the community (ASCA, 2012). The services provided include direct student service, which includes the school counseling core curriculum, individual student planning, and responsive services, as well as indirect service (ASCA, 2015a). The school counseling core curriculum includes structured lessons that provide students with the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary for student development (ASCA, 2012). The school counselor systematically delivers the core curriculum to all students in collaboration with the other professional educators in the building. School counselors also coordinate activities on a systemic basis to assist students with achieving their personal goals and developing college and career plans (ASCA, 2015a). College and career planning and readiness activities comprise a great deal of the activities in individual student planning. These individual planning services may be provided in classrooms, small or large groups, or even in individual settings. The final component of direct student service, responsive services, meets students’ individual and immediate needs and concerns. Responsive services may include individual or small group counseling, or crisis services (ASCA, 2015a). A school counselor’s indirect services are services provided to students that include interactions and collaboration with others. Indirect services may include referrals, consultation, and collaboration with parents, teachers, other educators, and community organizations (ASCA, 2015a).

The HS counselor is a vital resource person for secondary school students during their late adolescent years (Rosenbaum, Miller, & Krei, 1996). For instance, the counselor’s role in high schools includes assisting students with the successful transition to adulthood, providing for the social/emotional needs of students, and offering assistance to school administration (MacAllum, Glover, Queen, & Riggs, 2007). More specifically, McKillip et al. (2012) summarized the role of HS counselors in three defined contexts: (a) the social context: organize the counseling program for college preparation, collaborate with other staff and teachers, and provide school resources for college readiness; (b) the family context: provide crucial assistance for students who lack information and resources in the college preparatory process; and (c) the student context: meet each student’s needs during the college preparatory process. The HS counselor’s role often is dictated by expectations from policy makers, administrators, students, and parents. For example, educational policy makers are calling for a decrease in the HS dropout rate, as well as an increase in the HS graduation rate (Obama, 2009, 2015). Second, school administrators expect school counselors to perform tasks such as designing a master schedule for all students and managing all the school’s testing programs (e.g., American College Testing [ACT]; Wright, 2012). Likewise, HS students, teachers, parents, and administrators might have wide-ranging expectations of their school counselor. These expectations might include providing information on topics such as mental health counseling services, knowledge of achievement tests, and career advising (ASCA, 2015b; Shi, Liu, & Leuwerke, 2014). Lastly, most parents want HS counselors to help their children gain admission into a good college and to receive a lucrative scholarship or financial aid package (Wright, 2012).

Middle School to High School Transition

Moving from the middle grades to HS is a critical juncture for students. The Southern Regional Education Board (2002) describes the MS to HS transition as challenging and unwieldy. McKee and Caldarella (2016) reported that the student’s successful or unsuccessful navigation of the MS to HS transition is a key predictor of HS success and dropout. Factors making the transition more difficult include higher achievement expectations, decreased supports, and a less personalized environment in HS (Barber & Olsen, 2004; McKee & Caldarella, 2016).

Difficulties in making the transition might result in the student developing a negative perception of the school environment and a decline in the student’s grades (Akos & Galassi, 2004; McKee & Caldarella, 2016; Uvaas & McKevitt, 2013). Furthermore, a student’s unsuccessful transition to HS can
result in a significant decline in school attendance (Benner & Wang, 2014), high dropout rates (Turner, 2007), behavior problems (Jerald, 2006), social issues (Maute & Brough, 2002), and low achievement (Isakson & Jarvis, 1999). Akos and Galassi (2004) noted three important areas of concern that most eighth-grade students express: (a) academic concerns (e.g., increased homework, difficulty of classes); (b) procedural concerns (e.g., manage the complexities of high school); and (c) social concerns (e.g., relationships with peers and adults). However, researchers found that students who make a smooth transition to high school in each of these areas of concern can make a successful transition into high school (Uvaas & McKeveit, 2013).

High School to College and Career Transition

College and career readiness enables students successfully to complete their postsecondary education or to enter the job market (ASCA, 2012). As such, HS counselors play a vital role in preparing students for college and career readiness. HS students might rely heavily on their school counselor’s guidance and support for college and career preparation (Farmer-Hinton, 2008; Goyette, 2008). Researchers have identified key academic factors in the successful transition of HS students to secondary education or the labor force that includes college and career readiness (Venezia & Jaeger, 2013). The 2010 Public Agenda study led to the conclusion that when students believed that the counselor had made an effort to get to know them, the students had better college and career outcomes than did students who believed that they were just another face in the crowd (Public Agenda, 2010). It is worth noting that only 47% of students in the national sample believed that they had received this personalized attention (Public Agenda, 2010). Lapan (2013) concluded that these results might be due to the low implementation rate (i.e., 50%) of comprehensive school counseling programs across the nation. Moreover, Lapan, Gysbers, and Kayson (2006) reported that lower student-to-counselor ratios predict higher student success, especially in high-poverty schools.

Students’ assessment results are also a key factor in a successful transition (e.g., grade point average [GPA], ACT scores). Furthermore, researchers have noted that key nonacademic factors (e.g., family support, career planning) also predict student achievement of college and career success (Goyette, 2008). Of all factors, college and career readiness often is considered as the essential component of college success (Conley, 2010). However, Conley (2014) noted a lack of assessments to determine college and career readiness by assessing such skills as setting career goals, supporting career aspirations, and acquiring the determination to succeed.

On the other hand, the ASCA and the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) set high standards (e.g., ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success: K-12 College- and Career-readiness Standards for Every Student; ASCA, 2014) and provide models (e.g., ASCA National Model; ASCA, 2003) that stress the importance of the role of the school counselor in preparing students for college and career readiness. Specifically, school counselors not only provide information, tools, and perspectives to students, parents, and schools, but also serve as leaders and advocates to guide students’ career aspirations and planning (ASCA, 2014). Moreover, school counselors provide comprehensive programs to help students make a successful transition from HS to either a postsecondary education or immediately to enter a career (Conley, 2010, 2014).

The College Board (2010) also identified a comprehensive and systemic approach for school counselors to inspire students and to prepare them for college and career success. This approach consists of eight components (e.g., college aspirations, academic planning for college and career readiness, enrichment, and extracurricular engagement) across Grades K-12 (College Board, 2010). By implementing these eight components, school counselors provide information, tools, and perspective to parents, students, schools, and their communities that build college and career readiness for all students (College Board, 2010).

As stated previously, researchers (MacAllum et al., 2007; McKillip et al., 2012) have examined the role and responsibilities of HS counselors as well as the applicable standards and ethical codes. Accordingly, further exploration of how HS counselors meet these expectations in their career activities is extremely necessary. Moreover, as calls for counselor accountability increase, there is a need for research on the HS counselor’s role in different school types and settings (Sink, 2009).
Overview of Present Study

Guided by the ASCA (2012) national model, this study aimed to examine the role and practices of HS counselors as social agents who can prepare students for educational and vocational transitions. Although there is an increasing amount of research on the function of HS counselors who work to deliver services to support all students in their college and career readiness, the literature remains limited by small sample sizes, or has not been longitudinal in nature. Furthermore, current research lacks an investigation of how public and private high school counselors support students through the transition from HS to college and career and how counselors help them make informed decisions about college and careers. That is, in a general way, the purpose of this research study was to contribute to a growing body of literature concerning the implementation of ASCA (2003, 2012) national model in school counseling programs and the responsibilities of HS counselors across the United States, in a way that is particularly needed (by examining transitional counseling activities and goals by school type and setting). School administrators, teachers, counselors, and researchers should benefit from this study because it delineates goals of HS counseling programs and transitional counseling supports of HS counselors on students during this period of schooling.

To answer Mckillip et al.’s (2012) call for more research to understand the effectiveness of school counselors at preparing students for college and career success, we designed the current study to address the following research questions:

1. What goals are most emphasized in HS counseling programs?
   a. What is the difference in goals emphasized between different school types (i.e., public vs. private)?
   b. What is the difference in goals emphasized among different school settings (i.e., city, suburb, town, rural)?

2. What do HS counselors do to support students in making the transition from MS to HS?
   a. What is the difference in transitional counseling activities between different school types (i.e., public vs. private)?
   b. What is the difference in transitional counseling activities among different school settings (i.e., city, suburb, town, rural)?

3. What do HS counselors do to assist students in making the transition from HS to work?
   a. What is the difference in transitional counseling activities between different school types (i.e., public vs. private)?
   b. What is the difference in transitional counseling activities among different school settings (i.e., city, suburb, town, rural)?

4. What do HS counselors do to assist students in making the transition from HS to college?
   a. What is the difference in transitional counseling activities between different school types (i.e., public vs. private)?
   b. What is the difference in transitional counseling activities among different school settings (i.e., city, suburb, town, rural)?

We hypothesized that differences in transitional counseling activities would exist between school types (i.e., public vs. private) and among school settings (i.e., city, suburb, town, rural). Specifically, we hypothesized that public high schools would have higher levels of direct student services (i.e., finding financial aid for college, organizing students’ campus visits).

Method

Participants

The data utilized in this study were from the High School Longitudinal Study (HSLS:09) of 2009-2013 provided by the U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Science (IES), and National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). NCES collected data in the fall of 2009 and in the spring of 2012 (U.S. Department of Education, IES, NCES, 2016). First, a stratified random sampling and school recruitment resulted in the identification of 1,889 eligible schools. A total of 944 of these schools participated in the study, resulting in a 55.5% (weighted) or 50% (unweighted) response rate. In the second stage of sampling, the lead counselors from the 944 schools were invited to participate by NCES. Overall, 852 lead counselors participated in this survey. The total unweighted response rate for the
school counselor survey was 90.3%. One percent, or 10 counselors, refused to complete the survey. The remaining 82 school counselors (8.7%) never responded to the request to complete the survey.

The HSLS is the fifth in a series of NCES longitudinal studies. All of the studies monitor a national sample of young people in transition from their HS experiences throughout their postsecondary years. The transitions of interest in the study included students’ pursuit of further education, participation in the work force, and establishing other adult roles.

The counselor questionnaire sought information about school programs and practices, as well as relevant activities that assist with the transition of students from MS to HS, and from HS to college or work. The lead counselor or the counselor who was the most knowledgeable about the transition from MS to HS, HS to college, and high school to career, provided the questionnaire responses about counseling practices at each school sampled.

Variables

The dependent variables used by the authors in this study from HSLS survey items were (a) counseling program goals, (b) MS to HS transition, (c) transition to work, and (d) transition to college. The authors discuss each of the dependent variables in the following sections.

Counseling program goals. The survey item, “which one of the following goals does your school’s counseling program emphasize the most? would you say...,” had four response options: (a) helping students plan and prepare for their work roles after HS, (b) helping students with personal growth and development, (c) helping students plan and prepare for postsecondary schooling, and (d) helping students improve their achievement in high school. The percentage of counselors who responded to each option was computed to provide data regarding counseling program goals.

MS to HS transition. This variable was measured via a survey item asking respondents to indicate in which ways do counselors assist students in the transition from MS to HS measured the variable. The respondents were asked to check all the response options that represented six different types of transition work (see Table 1). The percentage of counselors who responded to each type of transition task was computed. Bonferroni correction; HS = high school, MS = middle school, reps = representatives

Transition to work. Transition to work was measured via a question asking the lead counselor to indicate the ways in which the school assists students with the transition from MS to work. The lead counselor could check all of the scenarios that represented 15 different types of transition activities (see Table 1). The percentage of counselors who responded to each type of transition task was computed.

Transition to college. Transition to college was measured via a question asking which of the steps that counselors take to assist students with the transition from HS to college. The lead counselor could check all the scenarios that represented six different types of transition activities (see Table 1). The percentage of counselors who responded to each type of transition tasks was computed.

Independent variables. The independent variables selected for this study were (a) the school type (public vs. private) and (b) the school location (city, suburban, town, or rural setting).

Data Analysis

The mean and standard deviation of the percentage of responses were computed for all response options pertaining to each item on the survey (see Table 1). A series of chi-square analyses was conducted to examine differences in responses by school type and location. Bonferroni corrections were used to set the familywise alpha levels. The analyses were based on weighted samples created to adjust for the over-sampling bias, and the observations were redistributed to represent the distribution in the population. This was undertaken via the following formula: Normalized weight = [sample weight] * [sample n / population N (sum of weights)].
Results

Research Questions 1: What are the goals most emphasized in HS counseling program?

As illustrated in Table 2, approximately one half of HS counselors (51.3%) reported that helping students prepare for postsecondary schooling is the most important goal of their counseling programs. Their second most reported goal was helping students to improve their achievement levels in HS (31.2%). Helping students with personal growth and development was the third most reported goal (14.6%), with helping students prepare for work roles after HS being the least reported of the four goals (2.9%).

Two chi-square tests were conducted to examine the difference in goals emphasized as a function of school type and school setting. Across the four counselor goals, HS counselors reported that there was a statistically significant difference as a function of school type ($\chi^2[3] = 38.12, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.21$). A higher percentage of private and catholic schools (70.9%) emphasized postsecondary schooling than did public schools (46.8%), whereas a greater percentage of public school (35.5%) emphasized improving academic achievement than did private and catholic schools (12.0%). In contrast, a slightly higher percentage of public school counselors (3.2%) than did private school counselors (1.9%) emphasized the goal of helping students prepare for work roles after HS, whereas a slightly smaller percentage of public school counselors (14.5%) than did private school counselors (15.5%) emphasized the goal of helping students with personal development.

Table 1

Percentages of Participation in Transitional Counseling Activities by School Type and Setting

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<td>Takes other steps to assist with HS to college transition</td>
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<td>49</td>
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<td>49</td>
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<td>37</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>.11</td>
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</table>

*Note. *statistically significant after the family-wise

Across the four counselor goals, there was no statistically significant difference in counseling goals as a function of school setting ($\chi^2[9] = 13.15, p = .16, \eta^2 = 0.08$). Distributions of percentages on goals emphasized by school setting are in Table 2.

**Research Question 2:** How do HS counselors help students make the transition from MS to HS?

The results are depicted in Table 1. Presenting HS course and registration information to MS students and their parents was the most reported activity (80%) that HS counselors undertook to help students make transitions from MS to HS. Additionally, there were more than one half of HS counselors working with MS counselors to help students transition to HS (58%), meeting with eighth graders to select ninth-grade courses (54%), and using a placement policy to assign students to Grade 9 courses (52%). Only 2% of HS counselors performed no actions to help MS students transition to HS.

Twelve chi-square tests were conducted to examine the difference in what HS counselors did to help students transition from MS to HS as a function of school type and school setting. Of the 12 tests, six tests examined the difference by school type (see Research Question 2a) and six tests examined the difference by school setting (see Research Question 2b) using Bonferroni corrections ($\alpha = 0.05/6 = .008$). Results indicated several statistically significant differences between school types: there were more public HS counselors (84%) than private HS counselors (54%) presenting HS course/registration information to MS student parents ($\chi^2[1] = 49.54, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.26$); more public HS counselors (86%) than private HS counselors (47%) presenting HS course/registration information to MS students ($\chi^2[1] = 87.56, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.34$); more public HS counselors (66%) than private HS counselors (15%) meeting with MS counselors to assist students effectively with the transition to HS ($\chi^2[1] = 94.03, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.35$); and fewer public HS counselors (2%) than private HS counselor (6%) identifying that they did not help students transition to HS ($\chi^2[1] = 7.45, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.1$). HS counselors in suburban (61%), rural (65%), and town (63%) areas
spent more time in meeting with MS counselors to assist with student transition than did HS counselors (48%) in city areas ($X^2[3] = 14.06, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.14$). All of these effect sizes were large.

Research Question 3: How do HS counselors help students make the transition from HS to work?

As illustrated in Table 1, HS counselors offered a variety of activities to help students transition from HS to work, including computerized career information services (77%), tests for career planning purposes (72%), and career awareness activities (63%). In addition, more than one half (56%) of HS counselors facilitated school and classroom presentations from local employers, and exploratory work experience programs. In contrast, less than one half of HS counselors offered programs such as job shadowing (49%), internships with local employers (48%), vocational-oriented assemblies and speakers in classes (47%), job site visits or field trips (46%), career information units in subject-matter courses (44%), non-computerized career information services (39%), career guides or skill assessments (35%), and job fairs (31%). An even smaller percentage (3%) of HS counselors did not help students transition to work.

Fourteen chi-square tests were conducted to examine the difference by school type (see Research Question 3a) and 14 tests were conducted to examine the difference by school setting (see Research Question 3b). Bonferroni corrections were used to set the familywise alpha levels ($\alpha = .004$). There were statistically significant differences in how HS counselors helped students make the transition to work as a function of school type and school setting. In Table 1, there were more public HS counselors than private HS counselors offering computerized career information resources ($X^2[1] = 67.17, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.27$), tests for career planning purposes ($X^2[1] = 11.09, p < .01, \eta^2 = 0.12$), career awareness activities ($X^2[1] = 15.87, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.14$), school or classroom presentations by local employers ($X^2[1] = 23.68, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.17$), exploratory work experience programs ($X^2[1] = 132.88, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.4$), job shadowing ($X^2[1] = 34.70, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.20$), internships with local employers ($X^2[1] = 52.03, p < .01, \eta^2 = 0.24$), vocational oriented assemblies and speakers in classes ($X^2[1] = 31.19, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.19$), job site visits or field trip ($X^2[1] = 25.88, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.18$), career information units in subject-matter courses ($X^2[1] = 16.68, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.14$), non-computerized career information resources ($X^2[1] = 9.42, p < .002, \eta^2 = 0.11$), career guides or skill assessments ($X^2[1] = 7.89, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.1$), job fair ($X^2[1] = 31.57, p < .01, \eta^2 = 0.19$), and even not assisting students with transition from HS to work ($X^2[1] = 70.9, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.29$). Additionally, there were more HS school counselors in town areas (64%), than ones in city (45%) suburban (45%), and rural (53%) areas offering job shadowing ($X^2[3] = 4.44, p < .002, \eta^2 = 0.13$). All of these effect sizes were large.

Research Question 4: How do HS counselors help students make the transition from HS to college?

The majority of HS counselors performed a variety of tasks to help their students transition from HS to college. These activities were consistent with their counseling program’s goals and how the counselors allocated their times. The most common activities reported by HS counselors were the following: consulting with postsecondary representatives about requirements/qualifications (96%), holding information sessions on the transition to college for students/parents (96%), assisting students with finding financial aid for college (95%), holding or participating in college fairs (93%), organizing student visits to different colleges (67%), and taking other steps to help with the high school to college transition (38%).

As illustrated by the effect sizes shown in Table 1, there was little or no practical difference in how HS counselors help students make the transition to postsecondary education as a function of school setting or school type. Effect sizes of school type ranged from .02 to .1, whereas effect sizes of school setting ranged from .05 to .11.

Six chi-square tests were conducted to examine the difference in school type (see Research Question 3a) while other six tests were conducted to examine the difference in school setting (see Research Question 3b). Bonferroni corrections were used to set the familywise alpha levels ($\alpha = .008$).
Results indicated that there were two statistically significant differences by school type. First, there were more public HS counselors (96%) than private HS counselors (90%) assisting students with finding financial aid (X²[1] = 7.79, p < .005, η² = 0.10). Second, there were fewer public HS counselors (34%) than private HS counselors (49%) taking other steps to assist with HS to college transition (X²[1] = 12.42, p < .001, η² = 0.12). In contrast, there were no statistically significant differences by school type in terms of consulting with postsecondary representatives about requirements (X² [1] = .827, p > .008, η² = 0.03), holding information session on transition to college for students/parents (X² [1] = .89, p > .008, η² = 0.03), holding or participating in college fairs (X² [1] = 2.46, p > .008, η² = 0.02), and organizing student visits to colleges (X² [1] = 4.43, p > .008, η² = 0.07).

Similarly, there were no statistically significant differences by school setting in regard to consulting with postsecondary representatives about requirement (X²[3] = 3.76, p > .008, η² = 0.07), holding info session on transition to college for students/parents (X²[3] = 5.72, p > .008, η² = 0.08), assisting students with financial aid (X²[3] = 9.65, p > .008, η² = 0.11), holding or participating in college fairs (X²[3] = 4.53, p > .008, η² = 0.07), organizing student visits to colleges (X²[3] = 1.82, p > .008, η² = 0.05), and taking other steps (X²[3] = 10.41, p > .008, η² = 0.11).

Discussion

This study sought to advance our understanding of what professional HS counselors have undertaken to help their students make successful transitions at various educational stages considering the applicable educational standards and models (e.g., ASCA National Model; ASCA, 2003) implemented in the last decade. The results indicated that the self-reported goals of lead HS counselors were closely associated with several features (e.g., foundation, delivery) outlined in the ASCA (2012) National Model. Consistent with the previous research on practices of school counselors (Hatch & Chen-Hayes, 2008), this study suggests that transformed school counseling programs are now an integral part of the total educational program of schools. As expected, we found that HS counseling programs were making huge contributions to the learning and development of all students based on the ASCA (2012) National Model. Notably, lead HS counselors in the survey reported beliefs and goals that support student development in the academic, career, and personal or social domain established by ASCA (2004) National Standards for Students. In particular, HS counselors reported spending a significant amount of their time directing services with students such as course registration and selection (80%), collaborating with MS counselors (60%), and assisting in student career planning (72%).

In addition, the unique role of the HS counselor required the counselors to put special emphasis on student transitioning (school to school, school to work, and school to postsecondary education). Consistent with Wood and Winston’s (2007) study on accountability for school counselors, our study indicated that HS counselor’s time is allocated to curriculum, action plans, and self-perception. As indicated by the study results, the majority of HS counselors spent their time consulting with families and schools, helping students find financial aid for college, and organizing students’ campus visits.

The current study also revealed important information on the current transition practices of HS counselors in both public and private schools. First, the results indicated that the most common HS counselor practice to assist students’ transition from MS to HS were collaborative efforts between MS and HS counselors. The second most common practice was acting on this collaboration, by using a personalized placement program tailored to the needs of individual HS students. Notably, the findings of collaboration efforts and the implementation placement program followed Uvaas and McKevitt’s (2013) recommendations for improving student transitions to HS, and met some of the requirements (e.g., program focus, direct student services) of the ASCA (2003, 2012) National Model. Second, another interesting finding is that there are significantly more public HS counselors (66%) than private HS counselors (16%) collaborating with MS counselors to assist students in the transition to HS. Future researchers thus could examine the reasons for this marked difference between public and private school
counselor activities. Third, the findings on the transition practices from HS to work are consistent with Mupinga and O’Connor’s (2013) study and the ASCA (2004) National Standards for Students on career development (e.g., career awareness, employment readiness, career information). Obviously, the current practices (e.g., computerized career information services, career awareness activities, field trips, career assessments, job fairs) reported in this study became much more diversified and computer-based than were those used in previous decades. Fourth, a greater percentage of public HS counselors than did private HS counselors reported helping to prepare students for work on all activities surveyed. It is possible that students from private high schools are more likely than are students from public schools to go to college because of their strong college-going cultures (and/or more affordable financially). As indicated by Mau and Bikos’s (2000) longitudinal study findings, students from private schools were more likely than were students from public schools to aspire to postsecondary education. Fifth, the current results show only minimal differences in how public and private HS counselors help students make the transition to postsecondary education. Both types of HS counselors reported that they placed their emphasis on the following activities: (a) consulting with postsecondary representatives, (b) holding information sessions on the transition to college for student and parents, (c) assisting students with finding financial aid for college, (d) holding or participating in college fairs, and (e) organizing student visits to colleges. Most of activities met counseling program goals as well as the ASCA (2004) National Standards for Students. It appears that both types of HS counselors implemented a wide variety of approaches in helping students become ready for, and succeed in, some form of postsecondary education. This study highlights major program activities initiated by lead HS counselors to assist in the transition to college, and paints a portrait of current trends in HS counseling program since the implementation of ASCA National Model several years ago.

Limitations of the Research and Recommendations for Future Research

The current study has several limitations to be addressed in future research. Findings from this study were drawn from self-report measures that might be susceptible to error due to the accurate memory recall of the participants. Furthermore, in this study, the researchers were unable to examine other relevant variables that could potentially influence the roles and practices of HS counselors, such as perspectives from students, school administrators, and parents, and other educational background and personality characteristics of counselors. Future researchers also may consider surveying students to obtain their perspective of the types of services received and the impact of counseling program activities in helping them make smooth career and postsecondary transitions. In addition, the present data cannot establish the impact that HS counselors also might have had on the low-income, underrepresented students. Researchers should extend the current findings to examine how school counseling programs could provide more support for college planning and transitions among these students. Moreover, this study included data available up to 2013 and, therefore, has limited ability to comment on recent changes in goals of HS counseling programs and transitional counseling activities. Finally, we have limited understanding concerning the reasons for the difference in transitional counseling activities between public and private HS counselors. Thus, further studies are needed to provide a deeper insight to these differences.

Practical Implications

Findings from the current study, which examined what tasks HS counselors are performing to assist students in making the transition from MS to HS, yield practical implications. The researchers found that, for the most part, HS counselors considered their most important goal to be to assist students with the transition to post-secondary education. The recent emphasis by educational administrators and policy makers on the importance of college and career readiness (Lapan et al., 2017; Obama, 2015) might indicate the reason for the importance of these activities to school counselors. The school counselors in
the current study begin the process of assisting students with the transition to post-secondary education during the MS to HS transition and continued emphasis on college and career planning in the counseling program throughout the HS years. The researchers found that HS counselors develop a wide range of programs and activities throughout the students’ HS years to assist with students’ transition to either post-secondary education or post-HS careers.

Conclusion
In sum, the results of our study confirmed the central hypothesis that there were numerous significant differences in transitional counseling activities existing between school types (i.e., public, private) and among school settings (i.e., city, suburb, town, rural). Our findings suggest that the self-reported goals of the current HS counselors were closely associated with several features (e.g., delivery) outlined in the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2012). By continuing to examine how professional school counselors support student development in the academic and career domain, we hope to contribute positively to ongoing school counselor practices as well as to training in counselor education programs.

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