A National Study of School Counselors' Perceptions about Grade Retention

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Abstract

This study measured ASCA school counselors' perceptions about grade retention including how involved they were in grade retention decisions. Counselors viewed parental involvement as essential to students' possible retention and counselors desired a more involved role in decision making about students' retention. Secondary and elementary counselors perceived the threat of retention differently, and secondary counselors believed the decision for retention to be made by the teacher alone as more appropriate than elementary counselors.

Keywords: grade retention, school counselors' perceptions, at-risk students

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Grade retention, requiring students to repeat a grade because they have not mastered proficient standards, is an historical debate in K-12 education (Bali, Anagnostopoulos, & Roberts, 2005; Dombek & Connor, 2012; Tingle, Schoeneberger, & Algozzine, 2012). For professional school counselors, grade retention is an issue of special importance due to their role as student advocates and collaborative leaders, especially with consideration of issues that may lead to social injustices and decreased student psychological well-being (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2012; Boom, Hopkins Dunn, & Page, 2010). However, school counselors' beliefs, perceptions, and actual decision making roles related to grade retention are an undervalued line of research with limited exposure in the national scene (Mason & McMahon, 2009; White & Kelly, 2010). The purpose of this study is to fill this gap by attempting to understand grade retention through the lens of professional school counselors, a group of school stakeholders who hold promise to influence grade retention decisions in an effective manner with possible long range effects on dropout prevention (Mason & McMahon, 2009; White & Kelly, 2010).

Background

Educators' beliefs about grade retention are important to understand because most retention decisions are school initiated; however, past perception studies have viewed retention through the eyes of teachers or principals (Cannon & Lipscomb, 2011; Larson & Akmal, 2007; Penfield, 2010; Range, Yonke, & Young, 2011) and to a lesser extent, school psychologists (Schnurr, Kundert, & Nickerson, 2009). One often overlooked group of educational stakeholders (The Education Trust, 2012) are school counselors who lead, advocate, and collaborate with other educators, families as well as community members to focus on equity, social justice, and

advocacy for systemic change (National Office for School Counselor Advocacy [NOSCA], 2012). School counselors' unique knowledge and skills can make a significant impact in achieving a school's mission and supporting students for a meaningful life (ASCA, 2012). As a result, it makes sense to include school counselors in supporting retained students (Bryan, Day-Vines, Griffin, & Moore-Thomas, 2012; Ziomek-Daigle, 2010), collaborating regarding the use of grade retention (Mason & McMahon, 2009), and in making key decisions about how retention might impact students' future success (White & Kelly, 2010).

Grade Retention

Empirical research findings surrounding grade retention as an effective intervention for struggling students are not conclusive. Proponents of grade retention argue that social promotion, advancing low-performing students to the next grade, does students a disservice by placing them in classrooms in which they doomed to struggle (Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007; Penfield, 2010). Yet, numerous researchers argue grade retention negatively impacts students' cognitive growth (Burkam, LoGerfo, Ready, & Lee, 2007; Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007), undermines students' psychological well-being (Boom et al., 2010; Doll, Spies, & Champion, 2012), and accelerates the chance they will drop out of school (Alexander, Entwisle, & Dauber, 2003; Jimerson, Anderson, & Whipple, 2002; Mason & McMahon, 2009; White & Kelly, 2010).

However, in response to federal and state legislative actions that demand student academic success or resultant loss of resources, educators continue to administer grade retention in an attempt to close student achievement gaps. Reacting to increased demands nationwide for demonstrated student learning, some state and federal policymakers view grade retention, especially at the third grade, as critical for future student success (Hughes, Chen, Thoemmes, & Kwok, 2010). A primary argument against retention with an eye on test results `is that retained

students may show temporary academic growth, especially as demonstrated on high stakes tests, yet this growth is not sustained (Alexander et al., 2003; Jimerson et al., 2002; Jimerson, Pletcher, & Kerr, 2005). Conversely, others argue grade retention assists students in not only passing state assessments, but also improves their reading and math scores longitudinally (Greene & Winters, 2009; Hughes et al., 2010; Lorence & Dworkin, 2006; McCombs, Kirby, & Mariano, 2009; Schwerdt & West, 2012).

Fourteen states now require third grade students to be retained if they are not proficient on the state's reading assessment (Webley, 2012). Altogether, about 447,000 students were retained in 2009 with retention rates the highest in first grade, while moderate rates of retention exist in grades 2, 3, 7, and 8 (Warren & Saliba, 2012). These retentions come at a high price as the United States spends billions of dollars annually on students who are retained (Allen, Chen, Willson, & Hughes, 2009; Dombek & Connor, 2012; Reutzel, Smith, & Fawson, 2005; Webley, 2012).

Social Justice

Historically of major societal concern are the disparities associated with retention (Bryan, et al., 2012). Retained students share similar demographic factors including most being: (a) male, (b) minority, (c) from low socioeconomic backgrounds, (d) small for their age, (e) young for their grade, and (f) often with limited English proficiency (Bowman-Perrott, Herrera, & Murry, 2010; Burkam et al., 2007; Graue & Diperna, 2000; Jimerson, Carlson, Rotert, Egeland, & Sroufe, 1997; Larson & Akmal, 2007; Tingle et al., 2012; Wu, West, & Hughes, 2008). Alarmingly, special education students with learning disabilities are retained at a higher rate than students who are low-performing but promoted (Nagaoka & Roderick, 2004). Such pervasive disproportionality associated with retention is of great concern to school counselors who

advocate for the fair treatment and success of all students, regardless of demographic characteristics (ASCA, 2012).

Practitioners report they retain students for a variety of concerns (Bonvin, Bless, & Schuepach, 2008) with the primary reasons being poor academic performance in reading or math and immaturity (Brophy, 2006; Burkam et al., 2007; Dombek & Connor, 2012; Nagaoka & Roderick, 2004; Picklo & Christenson, 2005; Range et al., 2011). Beckford (2010) claimed retention is an early intervention and an effective step to reduce inequality and help students progress, especially for students from disadvantaged households. Martin (2010) argued the use of grade retention continues because it is a simple intervention, and educators may not take time to use past retention research findings to influence their beliefs about grade retention which is worrisome because "the attitude of the teacher significantly predetermines the decision for promotion or retention" (Bonvin et al., 2008, p. 15). Simply stated, the attitudes of educators, including school counselors, about at-risk students matter when considering grade retention and equity issues.

Grade Retention and Socio-emotional Outcomes

According to Doll et al. (2012), "students' school success is integrally related to their psychological well-being" (p. 45). Improving students' academic self-concept, developing students' positive attitudes about self, and assisting students in acquiring positive attributes associated with knowledge of self underlies students' enhanced psychological well-being (ASCA, 2004; Johnson & Perkins, 2009). With professional school counselors supporting the academic, career, and social/emotional development of K-12 students, counselors are crucial in collaborative decision making with other stakeholders about grade retention and follow-up support (ASCA, 2012; Boom et al., 2010). Because the focus of this study centers on school

counselors' attitudes, roles, and understanding about grade retention, it is essential to consider the nexus between grade retention and students' socio-emotional outcomes. Similar to the research concerning grade retention and students' academic development, results are not conclusive (Allen et al., 2009; Bonvin et al., 2008; McCombs et al., 2009).

For example, Hong and Yu (2008) found kindergarten retention led to higher levels of self competence, increased kindergartner interest in academic learning, and did not alienate retained students from their promoted peer group. Similarly, Gleason, Kwok, and Hughes (2007) concluded that retained first grade student peer acceptance increased when compared to low-performing but promoted peers. The authors attributed this to the fact that retained students, in the lowest elementary grades, were now in class with younger, less-experienced peers who perceived them as socially competent. McCombs et al. (2009) reported retention did not have negative effects on students' sense of school belonging, and retained students reported a greater sense of school connectedness than low performing but promoted students. Additionally, retained students had no negative effects concerning self-confidence in math or reading. Bonvin et al. (2008) found grade retention improved the social acceptance, academic self-concept, and school attitudes of second grade retainees, but these improvements diminished across time.

Conversely, often cited meta-analyses found retained students scored lower than promoted peers on various socio-emotional outcomes, had stronger negative attitudes toward school, and displayed more behavior problems that culminated in premature dropout (Holmes, 1989; White & Kelly, 2010). Additionally, Martin (2010) found that retention negatively affected the academic self-concept, motivation, and general self-esteem of high school students.

Demanet and Houtte (2012) identified that grade retention was related to school misconduct and that both retained and promoted students who attended schools in which a larger

percentage of the total school population had been retained were more likely to misbehave. Finally, the connection between grade retention, socio-emotional outcomes, and dropping out of school provides consistent evidence that any follow-up intervention with retainees does little to support their emotional needs (Alexander et al., 2003; Griffith, Lloyd, Lane, & Tankersely, 2010; Janosz, LeBlanc, Boulerice, & Tremblay, 1997; Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007; Jimerson et al., 2002; Penfield, 2010; Rumberger & Larson, 1998; Silberglitt, Jimerson, Burns, & Appelton, 2006; White & Kelly, 2010). For example, Quiroga, Janosz, Lyons, and Morin (2012) reported retained seventh grade students who were also depressed were 7.26 times more likely to drop out of school than those who had only been retained but were not depressed. Quiroga et al. (2012) attributed this positive association between grade retention, depression, and dropping out of school by stating:

> It may be that children who face academic failure and grade retention feel confused about their situation and interpret grade retention as a punishment for their lack of success; they could also begin to doubt their own ability and give up on their schooling. (p. 752)

School Counselors and Retention Decisions

A common theme found when studying educators' perceptions about grade retention is their beliefs that retention should occur earlier, rather than later, in a child's educational career. Silberglitt et al. (2006) argued grade retention in the elementary grades rather than the secondary grades holds an intuitive appeal for educators because it is viewed as a "preventative measure" (p. 135). Additionally, educators often cite immaturity issues as a reason to use grade retention (Range et al., 2011) making it more likely to be used in the elementary grades rather than the secondary grades. However, there is a paucity of literature regarding what school counselors believe about grade retention, when it should occur and their involvement in retention decisions.

Acknowledging various decision making junctures and timelines in a student's progression, this study differentiates school counselors' views based on elementary or secondary grade level responsibilities.

Methods

The study followed a descriptive format and used an online survey to measure respondents' attitudes. Two questions guided our inquiry:

1. What are school counselors' general perceptions about grade retention and how do those perceptions differ based on elementary and secondary school counselor responsibilities?

2. How involved are school counselors in grade retention decisions? How does their ideal involvement differ from their actual involvement in these decisions?

Participants

A random sample was drawn from members of the American School Counseling Association (ASCA) who were practicing school counselors at the elementary and secondary levels across the United States (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). As a result, an email invitation was sent to 2929 school counselors. Of those, 338 counselors responded to the survey, a response rate of 12%.

Of the counselors who responded to the survey, 53 (16.7%) were male while 244 (83.3%) were female. Average years of school counseling experience for participants were 11.35 years, and counselors reported the average number of students in their school districts was 18,731 students. One hundred seventy three secondary school counselors (middle, junior high, or high school) responded to the survey, while 157 respondents reported they worked at the elementary level. Finally, 244 (83.3%) respondents stated grade retention for low performing students was not mandatory in their school districts, while 49 (16.7%) stated grade retention was mandatory.

Instrument

The instrument used in the study was a survey based upon previous grade retention inquires (Kerr, 2007; Schnurr et al., 2009) and was designed to measure the perceptions of school counselors about two constructs: (a) their general attitudes and understanding about grade retention and (c) their perceived involvement in grade retention decisions. To establish internal reliability, Chronbach's Alpha coefficients were calculated on two sections of the survey: counselors' perceptions about grade retention (0.74) and counselors' perceptions about involvement in retention decisions (0.89).

The first section of the survey consisted of 15 Likert scaled items (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3-uncertain, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree) designed to measure the attitudes of school counselors concerning general statements about grade retention. Drawing upon extensive literature, items included in this section centered on the characteristics (immaturity, struggles in reading/math, and poor attendance) of students typically retained.

The second section of the survey asked school counselors to rate their involvement (1=never involved, 2=sometimes involved, 3=often involved, 4=almost always involved) in various points within the decision making process concerning grade retention. School counselors were given the opportunity to rate their *actual* involvement in retention decisions and their *ideal* involvement. The third section of the survey collected pertinent demographic data about the counselors and concluded with an open-ended question for which counselors could provide additional insights into their roles when making student retention decisions.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed both descriptively and inferentially and included frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. Inferential statistics included independent sample *t*-

tests, paired samples *t*-tests, and effect sizes. Researchers structurally coded (Namey, Guest, Thairu & Johnson, 2008) the responses to the open-ended items. Coding was done individually and then collaboratively until 100% agreement was reached (Hatch, 2002).

Results

School counselors were asked to rate their overall perceptions about grade retention using 15 Likert-scaled items (scale ranged from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree) in section one of the survey. A MANOVA was conducted to examine differences between elementary and secondary counselors' responses to the 15 items as a group. The MANOVA revealed a significant effect of counselor level on perceptions of grade retention, using Wilks' Lambda (Λ=6.05. p<.001). Using a Bonferroni adjustment (.05/15), follow-up independent samples t-tests showed that elementary and secondary counselors reported significantly different perceptions on four of the 15 items. However, overall the elementary and secondary counselors demonstrated many similarities in the perceptions. Table 1 displays the means, standard deviations, t-test results, and effect sizes. Effect sizes were calculated using Cohen's D (Cohen, 1988).

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, t-tests, and Effect Sizes of Counselors' Perceptions about Grade Retention

Statement	Elementary	Secondary		
	M (SD)	*M (SD)*	*t*(*p*)	ES
Retaining student in the primary grades is less traumatic than in the intermediate grades	3.84 (1.16)	3.64 (1.06)	1.67 (*p*=0.096)	0.09
Immature students benefit from retention	3.20 (0.99)	3.20 (0.91)	0.20 (*p*=0.984)	0
Students with no preschool are candidates for retention	2.29 (0.91)	2.53 (1.00)	2.27 (*p*=0.024)	0.12
The threat of retention makes students work harder*	1.96 (0.83)	2.61 (1.02)	6.52 (*p*<0.001)	0.33
The decision to retain students should be made solely by the teacher*	1.35 (0.51)	1.62 (0.61)	4.40 (*p*<0.001)	0.23
Retention does not have a detrimental impact on students' achievement	2.64 (0.96)	2.73 (0.87)	0.94 (*p*=0.349)	0.05
Retention does not promote behavior problems	2.66 (0.91)	2.72 (0.91)	0.66 (*p*=0.506)	0.03
Retention does not have a detrimental impact on students' self concept	3.22 (1.00)	3.39 (0.93)	1.61 (*p*=0.109)	0.09
Retention does not increase the chance students will drop out	3.09 (1.18)	3.07 (1.05)	0.20 (*p*=0.843)	0.01
Retention reduces the range of academic levels in classrooms*	2.33 (0.79)	2.62 (0.87)	3.17 (*p*=0.002)	0.17
Students with excessive absences should be retained	2.56 (1.02)	2.84 (0.94)	2.68 (*p*=0.008)	0.14
Students who are retained should be referred for special education	2.35 (1.02)	2.37 (1.01)	0.16 (*p*=0.877)	0.01
Students should always be retained	1.96 (0.75)	1.97 (0.87)	0.63 (*p*=0.950)	0.01
The success of retention is dependent on parental involvement	4.03 (0.94)	4.11 (0.80)	0.78 (*p*=0.436)	0.05
Schools should have a policy to retain students who are not on grade level*	2.41 (1.05)	3.05 (1.03)	5.60(*p*<0.0001)	0.29

Note: Scale ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree); * indicates a significant difference at the 0.003 (.05/15) level.

Both elementary and secondary school counselors agreed with the following two reasons for retention: *retaining students in the primary grades is less traumatic than the intermediate grades* (Elementary M=3.85, Secondary M=3.64), and *the success of retention is dependent upon parental involvement* (Elementary M=4.03, Secondary M=4.11). For the remaining 12 items, both groups of counselors disagreed or were uncertain about these as reasons for retaining students.

When comparing elementary and secondary school counselors responses on these 15 items, secondary counselors agreed significantly more than elementary counselors on four items. These items included *the threat of retention makes students work harder*, *the decision to retain should be made solely by the teacher*, *retention reduces the range of academic levels in the classroom*, and *schools should have a policy to retain students who are not on grade level*. However, even though the means of elementary and secondary counselors on these four items were significantly different, almost all of the means (except for secondary counselors' perceptions of having a policy to retain students, M=3.05) were less than three, indicating that the counselors did not agree with these reasons for retention. Secondary counselors are noticeably in agreement more than elementary counselors that *the threat of retention makes students work harder*, based on a medium effect size. The other three effect sizes were in the small range.

School counselors were asked to rate how involved they were in grade retention decisions at various points within the decision making process. School counselors were given the opportunity to rate their *actual* involvement in retention decisions and their *ideal* involvement (1=never involved, 2=sometimes involved, 3=often involved, 4=almost always involved). Paired samples *t*-tests showed that counselors reported significantly different perceptions on all eight

items, with ideal ratings greater than actual ratings in each case. Table 2 displays the means, standard deviations, t-test results, and effect sizes. Effect sizes were calculated using Cohen's D (Cohen, 1988) and the significance level for paired samples *t*-tests was 0.05.

Table 2
Counselors' Perceptions of Actual and Ideal Involvement in Grade Retention Decisions

Statement	*M (SD)*	t(*p*)	ES
Involved in grade retention decisions at my school* Actual Ideal	 2.67 (1.17) 3.36 (0.91)	11.98 (*p*<0.001)	0.31
Advise on the emotional development of students in danger of retention* Actual Ideal	 2.73 (1.04) 3.47 (0.75)	13.79 (*p*<0.001)	0.38
Consult with teachers of students who may be retained* Actual Ideal	 2.92 (1.06) 3.52 (0.76)	12.06 (*p*<0.001)	0.31
Consult with parents of students who may be retained* Actual Ideal	 2.80 (1.04) 3.51 (0.76)	14.17 (*p*<0.001)	0.36
Make recommendations about the future outcomes for students who may be retained* Actual Ideal	 2.50 (1.00) 3.10 (0.92)	12.35 (*p*<0.001)	0.30
Administer standardized assessments to students who may be retained* Actual Ideal	 1.47 (0.88) 1.86 (1.01)	7.97 (*p*<0.001)	0.20
Develop programs to increase the academic achievement for students who may be retained* Actual Ideal	 2.08 (0.89) 2.78 (0.92)	15.91 (*p*<0.001)	0.36
Contribute to the school's intervention services for students who may be retained* Actual Ideal	 2.97 (0.95) 3.47 (0.73)	11.72 (*p*<0.001)	0.28

Note: Scale ranges from 1 (never) to 4 (almost always); * indicates a significant difference at the 0.05 level

In sum, on seven of the eight items, counselors' *ideal* role was to be more involved in grade retention decision (M>2.50). The statement which counselors rated as not ideal was administering standardized assessment to students who may be retained (M=1.86). On all eight statements, counselors' perceptions of their *ideal* involvement were significantly greater than their perceptions of *actual* involvement, indicating that counselors desired a more active role in grade retention decisions. Six statements had effect sizes in the medium range (ES≥.3) indicating counselors' desire to be more involved in grade retention decisions. The other two effect sizes were small.

In response to the open ended question as to their ideal and actual involvement in retention decision making, the majority of counselors indicated their involvement with a collaborative team decision regarding retention decisions, yet about 100 counselors stated that they were not involved at all indicating, "I often feel the counselor is left out of the loop." Meanwhile, 71 counselors specifically identified the administrators as the primary or final decision makers with statements such as, "It is evident that the administrator in each of my schools has been the deciding factor." And, often mentioned was, "Our school principal makes all the final decisions about retention." Another counselor stated, "It has been a lengthy process to educate our administrators what the role of a counselor is. I think counselors are often underutilized in the area of retention."

Meanwhile, the majority of counselors directly expressed a need for counselor involvement with statements such as, "I hope to be even more involved in retention in my school in the future." Another counselor offered, "No one at my school seems to realize the importance of my involvement in retention decisions." In addition, state legislation has caused a variety of changes in procedures across many states with one counselor predicting, "Now many more K-3

students may be retained. I don't know all the impacts this will have or how it will change my role in this critical decision making."

The advantages and benefits of collaborative decision making related to retention were brought forward by almost two thirds of the participants. Counselors noted that when a team is called together, counselors, social workers, nurses, and other educators can complement each other's perspectives along with the parents and administrators. A team can work together to create a "community of acceptance so the child does not suffer with negative comments." And, a team can create "consistent messages from all those involved with the child." Counselors emphasized that a team is able to act quite thoughtfully and "with discretion in the best interests on the child."

Other counselors identified a specific building team such as the RTI core team as effectively collaborating with parents, while "carefully considering a multitude of factors in making this important decision." Overall, counselors affirmed the need for themselves as counselors to team with other appropriate educators to support the student and parents in decision making together. While the vast majority of the counselors described the need for as much information as possible with all helpful team members involved (including the counselor), one counselor captured a seemingly crucial point inherently present throughout the responses, that "the student needs to be onboard with the decision too."

Discussion

The results of this study indicate many similarities between elementary and secondary school counselors in their perceptions regarding grade retention as an intervention to support student success. Similar to other grade retention inquires (Cannon & Lipscomb, 2011; Range, Holt, Pijanowski, & Young, 2012; Range et. al, 2011), counselors viewed parental involvement

as essential to a student's possible retention, supporting ASCA's Ethical Code (ASCA, 2010) and the stated priority for teaming with parents and families. However, teachers may hesitate to reveal details to parents or others about struggling students in their classrooms. Without strong alliances and respectful interactions, teachers may believe they will be deemed as instructionally ineffective. However, counselors who create a nonjudgmental culture may be able to set the stage for comfortable consultation among educators and parents.

Concurring with practitioners in other studies (Range et al. 2012; Range et. al, 2011; Witmer, Hoffman, & Nottis, 2004), elementary and secondary counselors also agree that retention in the elementary schools is less traumatic and harmful than retention at the secondary level. Counselors may think that for a myriad of reasons involving emotional immaturity, impeded physical skill development, and academic progress, early elementary retention can be beneficial. In addition, by secondary level, counselors may realize that retaking a class for academic reasons, rather than full grade retention, can occur as a logical consequence that does not remove students from their circle of friends with resultant psychosocial harm to a student's self-concept.

Meanwhile, secondary and elementary counselors seem to perceive the threat of retention in quite a different light. Significantly more than elementary counselors, secondary counselors generally agreed that informing struggling students about the consequences of poor performance can result in the students working harder academically. This perception makes sense if the secondary counselors' frame of reference is the retaking of one course rather than full grade retention as in elementary school. Also, perhaps the counselors at the secondary level carry higher expectations for students to think and problem solve at a developmentally appropriate level in keeping with their chronological age. When school rules and policies are known,

students are expected to realize the outcomes of their behavior and make the "right" choices to avoid retention. Therefore, for secondary counselors, the threat of retention is simply part of logical consequences that are followed. However, elementary counselors may believe the threat of retention sounds punitive, potentially harmful to self-concept, and the opposite of the caring, classroom community that teachers often strive to create when they serve as the primary instructor for the majority of an elementary school day.

Regarding the other differences between the responses of elementary and secondary counselors, secondary counselors perceive the decision for retention to be made by the teacher alone as more appropriate than do the elementary counselors. While, secondary counselors still did not agree that retention decisions can be made solely by the teacher, it could be that many may think of the teachers as a bit more independent in their day-to-day assessment and understanding of students' academic progress. Parallel to this finding is the idea that a retention policy is fitting, since a policy may lessen responsibility on any one educator or the school team, particularly if the outcome of the retention is student dropout.

Overall, most professional school counselors in this study indicated an understanding of the possible advantages and disadvantages about retention with a sense that early retention for immature students may be beneficial with family support. However, counselors overwhelmingly brought forward the perception that they are not actually involved in decision making about retention as much as they would prefer. Specifically, respondents believed they should be consulted regarding the emotional health and social ramifications for a student in danger of retention. As school counselors, psychosocial wellbeing is an area of expertise and being overlooked for a contribution regarding this factor may seem disrespectful to these counselors.

Connecting with parents is another area of concern identified by school counselors as a less than ideal situation. Respondents indicated that administrators often make the final decisions how to advise and consult with parents rather than depending upon a team of educators that includes counselors. Realizing that parents are exceptionally important to consult about struggling students and retention decisions, counselors may believe they can offer valuable support for engaging parents and enhancing collaboration.

While retention may be inevitable for some students, counselors next purported that follow-up and long term monitoring of students could be enhanced with their help. Counselors commented that retained students often become lost or overlooked in the system without a systematic follow-up. In addition, if academic progress were documented, the value of retention could be evaluated with an eye toward future decision making.

Implications for Practice

With a focus on wellness and prevention, school counseling programs are based on collaborative communication (ASCA, 2012). Before problems escalate, administrators, counselors, teachers, and parents can consult about possible support for struggling students. Resultant collaborative classroom and home interventions may lead to student improvement, success, and avoidance of retention. If interventions are not as effective as hoped, attitudes and support of caring, involved adults can prove uplifting to a retained student rather than discriminatory or judgmental. With a fresh start and can-do beliefs, instilled at home and school, a student may have a better opportunity to succeed with lessened negative side effects.

While advocating for a supportive means by which to assist students who are struggling, counselors can focus on implementing programs to offer follow-up support and monitor the progress of those who are retained. As part of their school counseling program, counselors are in

a unique position and possess the skills to support retained students' academic achievement and emotional welfare. Subsequent evaluation of student achievement, of those retained and those promoted despite being advised for retention, may inform policy and practice related to retention (Schnurr et al., 2009).

As ASCA continues to publicize the ASCA National Model® (ASCA, 2012) regarding the leadership of school counseling programs and the responsibilities of school counselors, the counselors themselves must move others away from the stereotypical view of counselors as quasi-administrators or mental health clinicians who only work with students who are seriously unbalanced. Counselors must protect the rights of all students, increase their work with the school's response to intervention model (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2012), and collaboratively work to create more appropriate interventions that make a difference in the classrooms for struggling students.

Counselors can build the bridge to join schools with parents and families. Counselors must be a safe, respectful person during interactions with all educators, parents, and community members. By acknowledging teacher concerns and understanding student struggles, a counselor can validate the rationale for a teacher to contact parents and begin classroom interventions complemented by home support. Counselors can help everyone move forward with dignity and a focus on supporting the student rather than worry about loss of face or negative judgments that may lead to student dropout (Ziomek-Daigle, 2010).

Conclusions

Considering the continuing demands of lawmakers and policy makers for successful outcomes demonstrated by high stakes testing, 14 states practice retention at this time, despite the lack of substantial empirical support. With minority race as a primary predictor for students'

“disciplinary referrals, and suspension and expulsion rates” (Bryan et al., 2011, p. 177), schools counselors as student advocates and change agents are crucial. Counselors must step in as viable team members for decision making to ensure fair treatment and nondiscrimination for struggling students. Counselors want to increase their involvement at the school level and certainly have the knowledge and skills to advocate regarding policy decisions at local and state levels.

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