2020

School Counselors' Perceptions of Grade Reporting Practices as Data for Student Advocacy

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SCHOOL COUNSELORS' PERCEPTIONS OF GRADE REPORTING PRACTICES AS DATA FOR STUDENT ADVOCACY

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

to the faculty of the

DEPARTMENT OFADMINISTRATIVE AND INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

of

THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
at
ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY
New York
by
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Date Submitted February 20, 2020 Date Approved February 20, 2020

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ABSTRACT

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For over one hundred years, students' academic progress has been reported in the form of grades. Throughout this time, many studies have examined teachers' grading practices and have repeatedly revealed a lack of consistency in the factors teachers include when determining student grades. While grades are often interpreted as the degree to which a student has mastered curriculum standards, dozens of studies have revealed that teachers commonly include a combination of cognitive and non-cognitive factors leaving students, parents, and school officials unclear as to what grades are actually communicating. School counselors rely heavily on grades as an indication of student learning and achievement, but unreliable and inconsistent grades often falsely represent student abilities. As a result, critical decisions including, but not limited to, scholarships, financial aid, college admissions, honors classes, and remedial classes can be impacted. While many studies have examined factors teachers include in grade reporting, no studies have examined school counselors' perceptions of grade reporting practices.

The purpose of this study was to examine school counselors' perceptions of the primary purpose for grading and whether significant differences exist between middle school and high school counselors' perceptions of factors teachers consider when

assigning student grades. In this study, 148 middle school and high school counselors within the United States completed an online survey. *T*-test results indicated significant differences between the degree to which middle school and high school counselors perceived "communication" to be the primary purpose of grading. Chi square analyses revealed significant differences between middle school and high school counselors in the areas of established school-wide policies regarding uniform assessments, benchmarks for grading, and attendance as factors included in grade reporting. Frequency distributions revealed 91.2% of school counselors never received preservice or in-service training in grading and/or assessment. In addition, the majority of school counselors reported a lack of school-wide policies in the categories, methods, and/or weights teachers may or may not consider when determining students' grades. Implications on practice, recommendations for future practice, and recommendations for future research are provided.

DEDICATION

To my parents, Barry and Sheila Segal, there are no words that can express how grateful I am for you for teaching me the value of education, hard work, and dedication. Dad, I miss you every minute of every day… I am everything I am because you loved me. You continue to be my strength and guidance. Mom, you are the strongest woman in the world, an inspiration and the most incredible role model. I am lucky to be your daughter. Thank you for teaching me, loving me, and for being my mom.

To my children, Matthew and Jessica, I could not be more proud of you. Thank you for putting up with me having my laptop at the ballfield for the past few years, for understanding when I spent the days and nights at the computer, and for helping me learn statistics. I hope I taught you the value of education- that it is a gift and a power that can never be taken away. Always reach for the stars and know that you can do anything you set your mind to do. I am grateful and lucky to be your mother.

To my love, Eric, I don't even know how to begin to thank you for your love and support throughout this journey. You have been my rock, my voice of reason, and my editor. Thank you for encouraging me to begin this endeavor and for holding my hand each step of the way, no matter how overwhelmed I became. I truly don't think I could have gotten through these last few years without you. I love you, and I look forward to the rest of our lives together (as Dr. and Dr.).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A very special thank you to my dissertation mentor, Dr. Mary Ellen Freeley, who has been a support since the first day of this journey. I appreciate the encouragement and guidance you offered every step of the way. To Dr. Stephen Kotok and Dr. Seohkee Cho, thank you being part of my dissertation committee, for supporting my research, and for showing me that statistics do not have to be scary.

To my fellow cohort mamas, Margaret Dunne and Sheena Jacob, we were crazy to begin this endeavor, but, somehow, we got through it together. Margaret, our Sunday Panera marathons kept us on track and helped me focus on "one thing at a time." Sheena, our morning phone calls helped to keep me focused on our goal and to process our busy lives. To Zach Boyt, thank you for your support, for your check-ins, and for always being available to help with my statistical challenges.

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Introduction

In 2000, Robert Marzano stated, "Grades are so imprecise that they are almost meaningless" (p. 1). Student grade reports are an important component in educating and guiding learners (Campbell, 2012). The grades students earn contribute to small and large life decisions, yet "grades have long been identified by those in the measurement community as prime examples of unreliable measurement" (Guskey, Swan, & Jung, 2011, p. 53). Jung and Guskey (2011) reported, "Despite the many changes in education over the past century, grading and reporting practices have essentially remained the same" (p. 32). Students' grades are assumed to reflect what they have learned, but inconsistencies occur leading to inequities for today's learners (Campbell, 2012).

School districts set policies and procedures, but actual grading remains in the control of teachers who ultimately apply their own values and judgments on what constitutes student achievement and proper behavior (Mehring, Parks, Walker, & Banikowski, 1991). "Assessment is perceived differently by different people. Some look at it as the evaluation of students' learning; others look at it as accountability for resources, and others perceive it as program review; it can be all or any combination of all" (Rosenbaum, 1994). When individual teachers within schools and districts do not agree on a uniform grading philosophy, they perpetuate inconsistency throughout the program (Guskey & Jung, 2012; Marzano, 2010).

There is much frustration and confusion with traditional grading practices documented in the research (Beatty, 2013). For example, parents and students may be satisfied with a letter grade of a B but have no idea if the student has actually mastered

the learning standards (Spencer, 2012). Grades in their current form become inconsistent and dependent upon the personality traits and grading style of the teacher (Shippy, Washer, & Perrin, 2013). Traditional grading is often an average of a student's overall points based on practice and assessment, and the data can be, and often is, completely skewed if a student receives a zero score for failing to complete an assignment (Urich, 2012). Wormeli (2013) further illustrates that traditional grades cannot be trusted because they include environmental factors and student comparisons making them inconsistent and ineffective in helping students grow. Such inconsistencies have led many to perceive grading as a distinctly idiosyncratic process that remains highly subjective and often unfair to students.

There is notable variance in teachers' perception and interpretation regarding the meaning and purpose of grades; they consider achievement and nonachievement factors differently (Brookhart, 1994; Maloley, 2008; Guskey, 2011; Imperial, 2011). Grades mean different things to different teachers and are, consequently, not a reliable source of information to students, parents, other teachers, or administrators (Roorda, 2008; Stiggins, 2001). Teachers often define each of the contributing factors in calculating a grade individually and weigh them differently than their counterparts across the hall (McMillan, Myran, & Workman, 2002; Roorda, 2008; Stiggins, 2001). The dependability of any report card grade always depends of the quality of the evidence on which it is based (Brookhart, et. al., 2019).

The variance between honor roll distinction versus failing grades is not just the result of aptitude or effort, but also the result of inconsistencies in teachers' or administrators' philosophies and practices in scoring and reporting grades (O'Connor,

2009). Craig (2011) reported that many teachers view failing grades as a punitive tool assigned to students who demonstrate a lack of effort to learn. Teachers may often think that a failing grade will motivate students to improve their learning on the subject matter; however, there are no studies to support this belief (Craig, 2011). "Traditional report cards do not build a student's belief in his or her own ability to learn content, lack the ability to create a sense of self-efficacy, and will ultimately result in a decreased motivation to continue striving to learn" (Craig, 2011, p. 44).

School counselors have the responsibility of analyzing grade-point averages in relationship to achievement, advisement and appraisal for academic planning, and interpreting student records to effectively advocate for their students (ASCA, 2018). School counselors continuously rely on report card grades to guide students, parents, teachers, and administrators in making critical decisions. These may include whether or not students are promoted from one grade level to the next, who might be enrolled in advanced or remedial classes, and which students should be considered for honor roll status, special education services, and college or university admissions (Brookhart, 1994; Brookhart & Nitko, 2008; Imperial, 2011).

Purpose of the Study

School counselors are often omitted from efforts to improve student achievement (ASCA, 2006). School counselors have been excluded in educational reform literature, yet they are in a unique position to exert a powerful influence (Stone & Clark, 2001). Many studies have been conducted examining teachers' grade reporting practices, teachers' perceptions of grading, and principals' perceptions of grade reporting practices

(Imperial, 2011; Guskey & Link, 2019; Cross & Frary, 1999; Liu, 2008; Wiles, 2013; Akins, 2016), but a gap in the literature has been found in relation to school counselors' perceptions of grade reporting practices.

The purpose of this non-experimental, cross sectional, quantitative study was to examine the impact of traditional grade reporting practices on school counselors as they advocate for their students. Specifically, this research focused on school counselors' perceptions of the purpose of grades and perceptions of grade reporting practices teachers consider when assigning student grades.

Conceptual Framework

Ultimately, grade reports should reflect what students have learned and not how well students can adhere to the teachers' rules (Jung & Guskey, 2011). As emphasis on educational standards and performance-based assessments has increased, the practices of grading and reporting student learning have gained attention (Guskey, 2001). Thomas Guskey (1996, 2001) provided a framework highlighting key criteria intended to guide teachers in reporting accurate and consistent criterion referenced reports of student achievement. The framework was derived from the following five areas of grade reporting that researchers agreed are necessary:

- Grading and reporting are not essential to instruction.
- No one method of grading and reporting serves all purposes well.
- Grading and reporting will always involve a degree of subjectivity.
- Grades have some value as rewards, but no value as punishments.

- Grading and reporting should always be done in reference to learning criteria, never "on the curve."

Guskey identified *process criteria*, *product criteria*, and *progress criteria* as three categories teachers should consider that separate the process of learning from the final product of student achievement to provide a clear report of student achievement. This distinction makes it possible for teachers to note overall student progress even when a student's achievement might remain below grade level.

Product criteria describe what students know and are able to do at a specific point in time. When teachers use product criteria to report student learning, grades are based exclusively on the students' demonstrated content mastery toward the targeted learning standards.

Process criteria relates to the path students take to learn the material being assessed. It can include non-cognitive factors such as effort, behavior, homework, work habits, attendance, class participation, extra credit, and behavior. When process criteria are included in a report of student learning that is intended to assess content mastery, the validity of the grade becomes threatened.

Progress criteria demonstrate the growth students make in a given amount of time. Progress criteria focuses on the gains students achieve as opposed to where the students are at a designated point in time. When progress criteria are included in a summative report of student learning, it also threatens the validity of the grade.

Measurement experts agree that when teachers use product criteria exclusively in determining students' grades, the report of student learning is less subjective and a more accurate report of student learning (O'Connor, 1999). Grades should be a consistent,

valid, and fair report of students' progress toward achieving their learning goals (Muñoz & Guskey, 2015).

Significance of the Study

Grade reports at the end of a semester or unit do "little more than show for whom the initial instruction was or was not appropriate" (Guskey, 2001, p. 10). Grades have limited value as guides for planning the academic and career futures of students (Thorndike, 1997), yet school counselors and college admissions counselors rely on them as accurate representations of students' achievements (Allen, 2005). Students, parents, other teachers, school counselors, school officials, post-secondary educational institutions, and potential employers use grades as a basis in decision-making (Nikto, 2011). It is essential for teachers to assign grades with utmost care and to maintain their validity (Nikto, 2001).

Since grades are a major selection criterion in the college and university admission process, students with high grades get admitted to colleges and universities of their choice and often receive scholarships and tuition assistance (Chiekem, 2015). It is very difficult for students to get admitted to some schools if their grades are not sufficient. Therefore, invalid grades that understate the students' knowledge may prevent students with suitable ability in their pursuit of certain educational or career opportunities (Chiekem, 2015).

A recent survey by the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC, 2019) revealed that of the various factors considered in admission, by far, the top four factors were:

(a) total secondary Grade Point Average (GPA),

(b) admissions test scores,

(c) rigor of curriculum, and

(d) recalculated core subject GPA.

High school grade point average of an A at one high school can translate into very different performance from an A at another high school, diminishing the validity and fairness of high school grade point average as a predictor of college performance (Willingham, 2005). "What is clear from examining the role of high school grades and rigor of coursework in admissions is the great deal of manipulation (e.g., recalculation, comparative analysis) and background information (e.g., high school profile, average test scores at the high school) required to make the information meaningful and useful" (Mattern, Shaw, & Kobrin, 2011, p. 643).

School counselors are charged with using grades to guide decisions on behalf of students (ASCA, 2018). With the inconsistency and unreliability of grade reporting practices, this study contributes to existing literature by examining school counselors' perception of grades because grades have been proven unreliable, and school counselors use grades as data in their student advocacy.

Research Questions

This study examined the impact of school level on school counselors' perceptions of grade reporting practices.

The following research questions guided the study:

Research Question 1: Are there significant differences between middle school and high school counselors' perceptions of the purpose of grades?

Research Question 2: Are there significant differences between middle and high school counselors' perceptions of academic standards?

Research Question 3: Are there significant differences between middle school and high school counselors' perceptions of factors included in grades?

Research Question 4: To what extent are various counselors' characteristics associated with level of education and training on grading and assessment?

Null Hypothesis

$H_0$1: There are no significant differences between middle school and high school counselors' perceptions of the purpose of grades.

$H_0$2: There are no significant differences between middle school and high school counselors' perceptions of academic standards.

$H_0$3: There are no significant differences between middle school and high school counselors' perceptions of factors included in grades.

$H_0$4: There are no significant associations between various school counselors' characteristics and level of education and training on grading and assessment.

Data Analysis

Research Question 1: An independent samples *t*-test was conducted to determine if significant differences exist between school counselors' perceptions of the primary purpose for grading when considering school level (middle school, high school) as the independent variable and perception of purpose for grading (communication, provide information for self-evaluation, select students for programs, motivation, behavior modification, program evaluation) as the dependent variables.

Research Question 2: A chi square test of independence was conducted to determine if significant differences in school counselors' perceptions of grading exist when considering school level (middle school, high school) as the independent variable and perception of academic standards (statement of purpose, content and skills standards, established benchmarks) as the dependent variables.

Research Question 3: A chi square test of independence was conducted to determine if significant differences in school counselors' perceptions of grading exist when considering academic level (middle school, high school) as the independent variable and perception of factors considered in grading (established categories, weights, methods, grading scale, uniform assessments, attendance) as the dependent variables.

Research Question 4: A chi square test for independence was conducted to determine if significant differences exist between in school counselors level of training on grading and assessment when considering years' experience (*1-10 years*, *11- 20 years*, *and 21 + years*) as the independent variables and training/education on the topic of grading and assessment (preservice formal education, in-service training to faculty on grading, in-service training to faculty on assessment) as dependent variables.

Participants

Certified school counselors currently employed as a school counselor in a middle school or a high school in the United States served as the study participants. While certification requirements vary slightly by state, a Master's Degree in school counseling is required in each state (ASCA, 2019). Therefore, all research participants:

(a) were currently employed as a middle school and/or high school counselor in the United States,

(b) held a Master's Degree in School Counseling as the minimum level of education, and

(c) held state certification in school counseling.

School counselors at all levels provide academic, social, and emotional support to students (ASCA, 2019). Middle school and high school counselors assess students' abilities, interests, and achievement to help them make decisions about their futures. Variations exist between academic level and delivery of the academic support (ASCA, 2019). High school counselors support students as they transition into adulthood, postsecondary education, and the world of employment. They advise students in making concrete decisions relating to high-stakes testing, the challenges of college admissions, the scholarship and financial aid application process, and entrance into a competitive job market (ASCA, 2019).

In middle school, counselors support students as they transition from childhood to adolescence. School counselors help students explore a variety of interests as they begin to connect their learning in the classroom to its practical application in life and work

(ASCA, 2019). At the middle level, counselors work with students to identify academic and social/emotional needs and provide any necessary interventions. Middle school counselors are an essential member of a team who can work to remove barriers to learning and assist students in developing skills and behaviors critical for academic achievement (ASCA, 2019).

Instrument

The School Counselor Survey on Grading (Appendix B) was used to collect quantitative data from middle school and high school counselors from across the United States. The instrument was originally developed to measure school administrators' perception of grade reporting (Imperial, 2011). Permission was granted to adapt the survey to measure the perceptions of school counselors (Appendix C). The 30 survey questions were designed based on the work of Thomas Guskey, Ken O'Connor, Richard Stiggins, Robert Marzano, and Susan Brookhart. Adaptations made to the survey included replacing the words *administrator*, *principal*, and *assistant principal* with *school counselor*. In addition, for each question that required a *yes* or *no* response, a third choice, *not sure*, was added. SurveyMonkey web-based software was the platform used to anonymously collect data from October 2019 – November 2019. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 26 software.

Procedures

Invitations to participate in the study were distributed through emails and social media. Email addresses were obtained from The School Counseling Analysis,

Leadership, and Evaluation (SCALE) Research Center, which is part of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA). Email invitations included a link to the School Counselor Survey on Grading online survey. Participants' responses were anonymous with no ability for the researcher to identify respondents.

In addition to emails, the researcher posted the recruitment letter (Appendix D) and survey link on three ASCA online forums: (a) Middle Level Forum, (b) High School Forum, and (c) Open Forum. The recruitment letter was also posted on three Facebook pages: (a) The Standards Based Learning and Grading, (b) Caught in the Middle School Counselors, and (c) High School Counselor Connection.

Definition of Terms

Achievement: The extent to which students master instructional objectives (Pilcher, 1994).

Assessment: The process of eliciting, gathering, and interpreting evidence of student learning to describe student learning and/or inform educational decisions (Brookhart, Stiggins, McTighe, & William, 2019).

Categories: The different types of evidence (e.g., quiz, test, etc.) or the different learning standards around which teachers organize their grade books (O'Connor, 2007).

Feedback: Information provided by teachers to students for the students to use to inform their progress toward meeting learning objectives and the next steps that need to be taken toward obtaining mastery (Brookhart, 2008).

Formative Assessment: Frequent and ongoing ways to check students' progress toward mastery (Wormeli, 2018).

Grading Practice: The ways teachers use information from assessments and other sources of information to determine and report students' grades, whether on papers, unit tests, or semester reports (Brookhart, et al, 2019).

Perceptions: Beliefs, attitudes, and understandings- ranging from awareness and recognition to deeper meaning- that can be characterized by having value and even emotional components (Brookhart, et al, 2019).

Reliability: Grading is considered reliable when another teacher with the same information comes to a similar decision regarding student achievement on that test (Ebel & Frisbie, 1991, p. 76).

Standards: Learning goals that describe what students should know and be able to do based upon local, state, or federal requirements (Pelligrino, Chudowsky, & Glaser, 2001).

Standards Based Grading: A philosophy of reporting learning goals separate from behaviors (Townsley, 2017).

Summative Assessment: Completed after the learning experiences and usually requires students to demonstrate mastery of all the essential understandings (Wormeli, 2018).

Traditional Grading: A philosophy of grading students utilizing a mix of assessments, effort, extra credit, and other non-academic behaviors to calculate a final course grade (O'Connor, 2002).

Validity: Grading is considered valid when (a) it measures what is stated will be measured and (b) that measurement is accurate (Carey, 1988, p. 76; Ebel & Frisbie, 1991, p.100).

The following chapter will provide an examination of existing literature relating to grade reporting practices and the role of school counselors, including history and

recommendations for providing student equity. It will examine the impact of traditional grading practices on school counselors' student advocacy.

Chapter 2
Review of Related Literature

This chapter will investigate literature relevant to several aspects of this study. The evolution of school counseling will be discussed including the present role and responsibilities of the school counselor as they relate to the use of grades as data. In addition, issues relating to the purpose of grading, issues surrounding grading practices, and inconsistencies in grade reporting will be discussed to shape a discussion that focuses on the impact they have on school counselors' student advocacy.

Historical Perspective of School Counseling

Since its inception in the early 1900s, counseling in school has evolved from vocational counselor to school counselor, which involves advocating for and addressing the academic, social, and emotional needs of students. School counselors of today support all students in applying academic achievement strategies, managing emotions, applying interpersonal skills, and planning for post-secondary options including higher education, military, and the work force. (ASCA, 2019). When vocational counseling was first initiated in the early 1900s, its intent was to help students transition from school to work, and it emphasized an appropriate client occupational placement match (Super, 1955).

With the rise of immigration to the United States and the advances brought by the Industrial Revolution, demands were placed on schools to address new vocational needs

and social reform (Bailey, 2012). In 1916, Harvard University introduced its first vocational courses to formally train vocational counselors (Picchioni, 1980). Around the same time, educational reformer and progressive theorist John Dewey published *Democracy and Education* (1916), which challenged the purpose of schools. Dewey's view of school as "a social institution that teaches students how to live in the community" provided an awareness to the social and emotional needs of students. Dewey stated, "… students become intellectually autonomous and willing to trust [their] judgement; being responsible for one's own actions; using knowledge, …all the while seeking better solutions to social and personal problems" (Hamilton & Saylor, 1969, p.3). Dewey challenged educators to be aware of the "interests and motivations of children as well as the environment from which they come" (Picchioni, 1980, p. 42).

Although *Democracy and Education* brought awareness to social and emotional needs of students in 1913, it wasn't until the 1940s that counselors began to address the emotional needs of students in school (Herr & Erford, 2011). This expanding role of school counselors was thought to be, in part, the influence of psychoanalyst Carl Rogers whose humanistic counseling theory was increasing in popularity (Herr & Erford, 2011). This shift allowed school counselors to focus on developing a student-counselor relationship and away from solely giving advice and performing administrative work (Herr & Erford, 2011).

The term *guidance counselor* was established in the 1950s (Lambie & Williamson, 2003). The role of the guidance counselor was to give advice, schedule students, and work with students on a mostly individual basis (Lambie & Williamson,

2003). Guidance counselors had the responsibility of identifying and selecting students for specific programs.

The ever-evolving role changed yet again in the 1980s establishing a new focus. Prevention efforts such as substance abuse and dropout prevention lead to an increased focus on career and technology in schools (Herr & Erford, 2011). In 1983, the National Commission of Excellence in Education published *A Nation at Risk,* which reported a declining achievement among students throughout the United States. A result of *A Nation at Risk* was increased accountability and testing in schools (Lambie & Williamson, 2013).

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) mandated an increased focus on standards-based education and testing as well as increased accountability. The purpose of the NCLB was to ensure that all children had access to fair, equal, and significant opportunities to obtain a high-quality education and to reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and state academic assessments (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, 2002). Schools were being held accountable for student achievement.

To meet NCLB requirements, school counselors took on new responsibilities including monitoring students' success rates and attendance rates, as well as an increase in their testing duties and heightened academic focus (Taylor & Davis, 2004). These additional responsibilities often came at the expense of meeting the social and emotional needs of students (Taylor & Davis, 2004). ASCA concern intensified regarding the emotional and social needs of the students stating, "the efforts of (NCLB) ignored the

emotional, physical, social and economic barriers that can inhibit student success, and this is where school counselors make a difference (Taylor & Davis, 2004, p.32)."

At the same time NCLB was steering focus toward academic achievement, the mental health needs of adolescents were growing. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) conducted a study from 2005- 2009 to examine the rate of mental health across the United States. The study examined adults and youth age 12-17 from each state within the United States. Data were collected through in person interviews whereby the interviewer visited each participant's home and asked questions that involved topics such as the use of tobacco, alcohol, marijuana, cocaine, crack cocaine, heroin, hallucinogens, inhalants, pain relievers, tranquilizers, stimulants, and sedatives. Additional questions included mental health topics such as psychological distress and its impact on daily living, past mental health treatment, suicidal thoughts and behaviors, history of school based mental health support, as well as time spent in juvenile detention, prison, or jail.

Results indicated that 2.9 million youths aged 12-17 (12.2 %) received treatment or counseling for problems with emotions or behavior in a specialty mental health setting, including inpatient or outpatient care, within the past 12 months of the study (National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2010). The most likely reason for receiving services was feeling depressed (47.6 %), followed by having problems with home or family (30.5 %), breaking rules and "acting out" (25.0 %), feeling very afraid or tense (21.0 %), thinking about or attempting suicide (20.8 %), having trouble controlling anger (18.3 %), and having problems at school (17.9 %).

These rising mental health needs of students, along with the increased accountability for academic achievement, increased the demands placed on school counselors. In the 1900s, school counselors were primarily vocational counselors who focused on job placement. Around the 1950s, guidance counselors began to address the emotional needs of students as they provided vocational, academic, and college guidance. In the 1980s, school counselors evolved to support prevention initiatives addressing the peak in substance abuse as well as the emotional, vocational, academic, and college counseling that was already being provided. The 2000s extended awareness to the mental health needs of students enhancing the role of school counselor yet again.

In 2017, NCLB was replaced with Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). ESSA placed a greater emphasis on social emotional learning (SEL) as means of improving academics. As a result of these evolutions, today the role of the school counselor includes providing vocational, academic, and college counseling; emotional counseling; implementing prevention interventions; and addressing, often significant, mental health needs; all while supporting students, teachers, administrators, and parents in the goal of maximizing student achievement.

To meet the ever-increasing demands, ASCA recommends a student-to-counselor ratio which should not to exceed 250:1. However, the average United States student-to-counselor is currently 442:1 (ASCA, 2017). With these extensive ratios, legitimate questions exist as to how effective school counselors can be at implementing ESSA demands. High student caseloads can impede a school counselor's ability to fully support each student. Dunbar (2010) identified that humans have the capacity to maintain a maximum of approximately 150 individual relationships. High caseloads may

limit a school counselor's ability to have face-to-face conversations with teachers about student learning, thereby forcing that school counselor to rely more heavily on quantitative data, such as grades, when making decisions including a student's placement in accelerated courses, remedial courses, awarding honors, and college recommendations. The ultimate question is whether the quantitative data, including grades, supplies an accurate representation upon which a school counselor can make effective decisions.

Historical Perspective of Grading

Grading in America's schools date back to the 1780s at Yale University. The early assessment practice consisted of using descriptive adjectives to illustrate student performance (Smallwood, 1935). Early examinations were evaluated, considered for approval, and responded to orally or in writing. The written summative examinations were public showings of learning with a professor, or before a panel of examiners, similar to a modern dissertation defense (Lahey, 2015).

In 1785, Yale began using a system that may have been the most identifiable predecessor to the current grading system which provided students with feedback using a four-point scale (Marzano, 2000). The primary purpose of the scale was to provide feedback to students regarding their academic progress and achievement. According to Durm (1993), documentation after 1813 shows a variety of attempts to evaluate and grade students using the following four classifications:

(a) first in their respective classes,

(b) orderly, correct, and attentive,

(c) made very little improvement, or

(d) learned little or nothing.

Student feedback relating to each of these classifications was recorded on paper providing the first report cards focused on student attentiveness and preparedness without mention of academic achievement (Durm,1993).

By the 1830s, Harvard University began to use a 4-point scale, and by the 1850s had transitioned to a "more precise" 100-point scale (Smallwood, 1935). In 1869, Harvard faculty voted to no longer include student conduct in academic measurement and decided to base grades solely on academic achievement. "Gentlemanly behavior" would now be reported separately (Smallwood, 1935).

Prior to 1850, grading and reporting were almost unknown in United States schools (Guskey, 2013). Most elementary and secondary schools grouped students of all ages and backgrounds together with one teacher in a one-room schoolhouse, and few students were educated beyond the elementary level (Guskey, 2013). The teacher commonly reported students' learning progress orally to parents during visits to students' homes. (Guskey, 2013). Until 1880, reporting was in a narrative format and simply listed the skills and concepts that each student had mastered (O'Connor, 2010).

The A-F grading system was first introduced in 1897 at Mount Holyoke College and became widely used in public schools as enrollment rapidly increased (Winner, 1921). The A-F system allowed teachers to more efficiently assess student learning; however, it triggered debates surrounding potential teacher bias in grading (Starch & Elliott, 1913). In 1912, Daniel Starch and Edward Charles Elliott noticed the inconsistencies within grades and the influence that grades could have. They recognized that grades were being used for decisions, such as "promotion, retardation, elimination, and admission to higher institutions" (p. 442).

Starch and Elliott were the first to formally challenge the reliability and accuracy of grades by examining the grading practices of 147 high school English teachers. A review of the grades calculated amongst the 147 teachers demonstrated scores of one student's essay ranging from 64% - 98%, while scores on a second paper ranged from 50% - 97%. Starch and Elliott later replicated the study to evaluate the grades of geometry assignments and found an even wider range of scores. They found that while some teachers deducted full points for wrong answers, others gave students varying amounts of partial credit for the same work. Furthermore, others considered neatness, form, and spelling in the grades they assigned (Starch & Elliott, 1913). Starch and Elliott concluded the study to be "...classic demonstrations of the instability of judgments based on presumably absolute standards" (Ebel & Frisbie, 1991, p. 247).

Recognizing the unreliability of grading practices, a proposal was made in 1928 to base grades solely upon academic achievement. Elementary schools continued to use narrative reporting for student performance, while high school teachers began to use percentages and other similar markings to communicate achievement (Kirschenbaum, Simon, & Napier, 1971). Almost 100 years later, the same inconsistencies perpetuate in modern day practices (Imperial, 2011; Guskey & Link, 2019; Cross & Frary, 1999; Liu, 2008; Wiles, 2013). "Today's system of classroom grading is at least 100 years old and has little to no research to support its continuation" (Marzano, 2000).

Purpose of Grades

Marzano (2000) stated that the most important purpose for grades is to provide information or feedback to students and parents, and academic achievement is the

primary factor on which grades should be based. Stiggins (2001) contends that report card grades must be an accurate communication of students' achievement and not for other purposes such as to motivate students or to control behavior, which can invalidate the communication. Grades are supposed to be a summary evaluation that is used to make immediate and important decisions, such as skipping some courses, taking remedial courses, as well as making long range career plans (Gage and Berliner, 1992). Grade reports should clearly and accurately identify students' strengths and areas for growth and should inform decisions regarding future class placement, retention/promotion, and admission (Munoz & Guskey, 2015). Frisbie and Waltman (1992) identified six purposes for grading:

(a) to communicate the achievement status of students to parents or others,

(b) to provide information for student self-evaluation,

(c) to identify certain pathways or instruction in education,

(d) to provide learning motivation and incentives for students,

(e) to evaluate the effectiveness of instructional programs, and

(f) to provide evidence of student effort or inappropriate accountability.

Imperial (2011) examined the grading purposes, practices, and values of 486 Catholic high school teachers and 50 school administrators from 33 schools in California, Nevada, and Hawaii. Data were collected using the researcher developed Teacher Survey on Grading for teachers and the Administrator Survey on Grading for school administrators. A thematic analysis of school documents was conducted to examine each school's grading policies and to determine if a school-wide policy on grading existed.

Analysis revealed that most Catholic high schools did not have an established school-wide policy on grading. When teachers were asked for their primary purpose for grading, 74% of teachers reported, "to communicate a student's achievement" as the primary purpose. Most school administrators (91.8%) reported the primary purpose for grading to be "to communicate a student's achievement to the student, parents, school officials, and others."

Although frequency distributions revealed that teachers reported communication as the primary purpose for grading, non-cognitive process factors, such as participation (71%), effort (57%), improvement (55%), observations (49%), work habits (40%), neatness (31%), behavior (30%), and attendance (22%), were included when calculating students' grades. Teachers' grading practices "vary substantially, both in the evidence they choose to use and in the methods by which that evidence is combined" (Imperial, 2011).

Non-Cognitive Factors Used in Grade Reporting

"It's common place for teachers to award extra points for bringing in tissue boxes, completing extra credit assignments, returning permission slips, contributing canned food to the food drive, and so on" (Erickson, 2001, p. 66). Grading systems that allow these practices do not accurately reflect what students have learned (Erickson, 2011). "It would appear that grades are measures of how well a student lives up to the teacher's expectation of what a good student is rather than measures of academic achievement by the student" (Lambating, & Allen, 2002).

"Some instructors deliberately use high grades as rewards and low grades as punishments for behavior unrelated to the attainment of instructional objectives" (Ebel & Frisbie, 1991, p. 247). Grading can frequently include a combination of effort and behavior components (Brookhart, 2011). Taken together, these issues inevitably lead to a misinterpretation on the part of parents and students. A student might have received an overall letter grade of B not because he/she had a solid grasp of the learning standard, but because he/she was well behaved in class, participated in all discussions, and turned assignments on time (Wormeli, 2018). Similarly, a student may have received a percentage score of 62 not because he/she failed to demonstrate content mastery, but because he/she received a zero for tardiness on assignments or for disruptive class behavior (Wormeli, 2018). "Factors unrelated to student achievement of standards – such as behavioral infractions, unexcused absences, cheating, late or missing work" can cause grades to be skewed lower than what the student has mastered (Erickson, 2011 p. 67).

In 1994, Cross and Frary (1999) examined the grading practices of 310 middle and high school teachers across varying academic subjects and 7,367 middle and high school students in a single school system in Virginia. Cross and Frary developed two surveys for this study. The teacher survey asked participants to describe their grading practices and opinions regarding assessment and grading through 54 forced-choice items. The student survey was comprised of 51 forced-choice items which asked students to report the importance their teachers placed on various grading factors, as well as their satisfaction with the grading practiced used by their teachers. Frequency distributions from both surveys revealed that teachers variously combined achievement, effort, behavior, improvement, and attitudes to assign grades and reported that ideal grading

should include noncognitive factors. Most teachers agreed that effort, conduct, and achievement should be reported separately from academic achievement; however, actual grading practices included a variety of non-cognitive factors.

Aronson (2008) employed a case study methodology to examine how teachers' perceptions of student behavior influenced their grading practices. Survey data were collected from 168 middle school and high school teachers from one suburban district in New York State. Results concluded that 85% of teachers included student behavior as a factor that influenced their grade calculations during formative assessments, and 81% of the time when they made summative judgments. In this study, Aronson highlighted that "school counselors, mental health professionals, nurses, and library media specialists were excluded from the study since they do not assign grades" (p. 41).

Guskey and Link (2019) examined the grading practices of 943 teachers from a Southeastern state in the United States. Participants' experience teaching grades K-12 ranged from 1-21 or more years. At the time of the study, all participants worked in schools that were described as either urban or suburban with 14.1% to 92% of the student population coming from economically disadvantaged homes. In total, 2,023 teachers from 5 school districts were sent an invitation to participate in the study via an email that contained a direct link to the survey. The *Teachers' Grading Practices Survey* (TGPS), which was developed by Guskey and Link, was validated and utilized in this study. During pilot testing, the TGPS proved reliable with an internal reliability (α) of .87. The TGPS contains 17 self-selected response items to gather teachers' demographic data, employment information, and the cognitive and non-cognitive factors they include when determining students' grades. The study used a multivariate regression analysis to test

the significance between years' teaching experience and grade level (independent variables) and weights attached to the 20 different factors in grading (dependent variables). In their study, a large sample size resulted in $\alpha < .001$ which was applied for all tests of statistical significance. Results showed that teachers at each grade level varied considerably in the weights they assigned to different factors in grading. Overall, non-cognitive factors accounted for 10%- 20% of students' grades. Guskey and Link explained that while that may appear to only be a modest proportion, when traditional grading practices use a 100-point scale with 65% or better as a "passing" rate, the 10% - 20% can be much more impactful. Data also revealed that as the student grade level increased, weights assigned to cognitive factors increased. Additionally, results showed no statistically significant correlation between teachers' years' experience and weighting.

Non-cognitive factors included in grading was further confirmed in a 2008 study conducted by Liu (2008). Liu developed and validated the Teachers' Perceptions of Grading Practices (TPGP) survey to examine differences between the grading practices of middle school teachers and high school teachers within the United States. In total, 107 teachers from a state in the Northeast participated in this study by completing an anonymous online survey. Chi square analyses of data revealed that middle school teachers and high school teachers do not significantly differ in the factors included in grading (e.g., tests/quizzes, effort, ability, attendance, participation). More than 90% of teachers in the study reported including effort when determining student grades; over 60% of teachers included student ability, attendance and participation; and more than 40% included classroom behavior.

Inconsistent Grading Practices

O'Connor (2009) stated that when using grades to make decisions, such as college admissions, consistency is necessary. In many cases, a teacher designs his or her own grading criteria with little or no process of checking the reliability between teachers (Butler Shay, 2004). A student who receives a letter grade of A in a course in one classroom may not have demonstrated the same content mastery as a student who receives an A in the same course in different classroom (Rauchenberg, 2014). One teacher's criteria for assigning a letter grade of A might be equivalent to another teacher's criteria for assigning a letter grade of B or even lower (Marzano & Heflebower, 2011). When individual schools and districts do not agree on a uniform grading philosophy, they perpetuate inconsistency throughout the program (Guskey & Jung, 2012; Marzano, 2010).

Webster (2011) conducted a mixed methods study in a suburban Northwest school district to examine teacher leaders and the context and circumstances of high school grading practices. The researcher collected data from teachers and teacher leaders through survey responses, semi structured interviews, focus group sessions, and document review of district grades, policy and procedures. In total, 42 high school teachers completed the survey; eight teacher leaders participated in interviews, and six teacher leaders joined the focus group. Analysis through the constant comparison data analysis method revealed an awareness of inconsistent combination of factors teachers include in grading practices. Teacher leaders reported a lack of training and support for grading, frustration with the inconsistencies that exist within their school regarding

grading, that they struggle with grading, and a desire to have a more consistent grading system.

Despite the inconsistencies of grades, they are "the primary indicator of how well students perform in school" (Guskey & Link, 2019). School counselors are one example of educators who, as Guskey and Link (2019) report, "rely heavily on grades to make important decisions about students including grade promotion, honor roll status, class placement, support services, scholarships and university admissions" (p.2).

School Counselors and Data

Counselors use grades to recommend courses, to assist students with course selections, and to determine college and employment options (Airasian, 1994). Counselors rely on grades as data to guide individual student appraisal, advisement, and planning (ASCA, 2012). Grades remain a basis for counselors to help students develop immediate and long-range plans. Counselors advise students to "make decisions for future plans based on academic, career, and social/emotional data" (ASCA 2012, p. 32). Both appraisal and advisement are critical components of a school counselor's role in Tier 2 of the Response to Intervention (RTI) process (Cook, 2016). School counselors use data to understand student needs and to remove systemic barriers; they ensure all students have opportunities to develop academic goals at all grade levels reflecting their abilities and academic interests and can access appropriate rigorous, relevant coursework and experiences (ASCA, 2017). Cutting edge models of school counseling practice emphasize the importance of using both collaboration and data to efficiently and

effectively create such educational contexts (Bowers & Hatch, 2002; Fields & Hines, 2000; House & Hayes, 2002).

Implications for School Counselors

School counselors are members of the faculty who are relied upon to provide behavioral and academic interventions (Cook, 2016). Given the wide variety of duties and responsibilities placed on them, (ASCA, 2005), school counselors are in a prime position to support academic achievement (Carrell & Hoekstra, 2014). With the advent of standards-based educational reform, educators and counselors are increasingly being held accountable for creating school contexts where all students can be academically successful (Dimmit, 2003). School counselors use data from their schools to enhance opportunities for all students including identifying potential students for Advanced Placement courses and to identify students who are in needed of academic supports (Lapan & Harrington, 2010). "For school counselors, grading systems and practices can encourage or discourage student motivation and success, as well as help or hinder the transition to post-high-school study" (Coussens-Martin, 2019). In fact, "Every educator, specialist, school counselor, and school psychologist must accept responsibility for helping all students succeed" (Ockerman, Mason, and Hollenbeck, 2012, p. 15).

Reliability, Validity, and Advocacy

When an individual teacher assesses student performance, there are reliability issues surrounding the extent to which there is consistency between the teachers in their application of marking criteria within courses taught and within departments (Butler

Shay, 2004). The issues of reliability and validity are considered the most fundamental principles relating to classroom measurement (Gallagher, 1998). Educators must ensure that grading and reporting always meet the criteria for validity and reliability in order to be fair and useful (Muñoz & Guskey, 2015).

Certain teacher grading practices, such as including class participation, behavior, and attendance in a grade, intended to assess content mastery threaten the validity of the grade. The sole purpose of grades is to accurately communicate the level of achievement a student has reached in relation to course standards (Allen, 2005). If grades are not valid, they do not communicate the truth about a student's learning (Allen, 2005).

Grades and Post-Secondary Education

"As the college degree is becoming essential, college tuition is skyrocketing" (Rapp, 2005 p. 16). Students who receive artificially higher grades than other students with similar ability, content knowledge, and environment may have an advantage in college admissions (Rauschenberg, 2014). School counselors are in the position to guide students and their families as they seek financial support in the form of grants, scholarships, and/or financial aid.

In a study by Kelly Rapp (2005), the alignment between the factors that influence scholarship award decisions at universities and the high school counselors' understanding of grading practices were examined. One hundred twenty-two high school counselors and 18 college admissions counselors from Kansas and neighboring states were randomly selected to participate in this quantitative research study. Rapp developed a 14-question survey instrument to measure perception of the importance of academic factors including

grades, standardized test scores, and non-academic factors, such as extracurricular participation and state residency, in awarding merit-based scholarships to students. Participants reported their level of agreement with statements regarding scholarship criterion in the Likert style questionnaire and were asked to agree or disagree with statements regarding scholarship-awarding practices. Demographic information was collected for each respondent. Upon collecting data, researchers coded survey responses into three domains:

(a) personal qualities (school and community involvement, interview, essay, letters of recommendation, leadership activities);

(b) chance variables (alumni connections, ethnicity, state residency, academic major); and

(c) academics (GPA, ACT/SAT score, class rank, state assessment scores).

Data were analyzed through frequency distributions, and independent samples *t*-tests (Rapp, 2005). Results indicated that academics (GPA and ACT/SAT score) were considered significantly more than the chance variables or personal qualities. Admissions counselors assigned more weight to ACT/SAT scores as compared with GPA, class rank, and state assessment scores. Conversely, while high school counselors also reported academics as the most significantly impactful variable, they targeted GPA as more important than the ACT/SAT score. High school counselors expressed concern that too much emphasis had been placed upon GPA and SAT/ACT scores, and not enough emphasis was placed on other factors such as the level of rigor in a student's schedule. The study further demonstrated the impact grades have on college scholarship

awards, and, consequently, students' access to higher education. Both school counselors and college admissions counselors recognized the importance of grades in the college admissions process, only strengthening the importance of reliable and valid grade reporting practices.

High school grades play an important role in college admissions. "The primary purpose of secondary level grades and reports is to communicate student achievement" so that informed decisions can be made about the student's future" (Bailey & McTighe, 1996, p. 120). When grades are inconsistent, it is difficult, if not impossible, for students, parents, and administrators to understand what is being communicated (Imperial, 2011). College admissions decisions often rest heavily on a student's GPA (Rauschenberg, 2014). The variability in grading practices and the inconsistent application of criteria threaten the reliability of grades (Brookhart, Guskey, Bowers, McMillan, Smith, & Welsh, 2016).

Each year, millions of new college students begin higher education while lacking the necessary academic skills to perform at the college level (Chen, 2016). The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) conducted a longitudinal study by following United States high school graduates from the class of 2011. Data showed the 6-year graduation rate for first-time, full-time undergraduate students who began seeking a bachelor's degree at 4-year degree-granting institutions in fall 2011 overall was 60 percent. In another study released in 2017, 70% of U.S. high school graduates immediately enrolled in two-year and four-year colleges (McFarland, Cui, Rathbun, & Holmes, 2018). Out of these students, 40% who enrolled in four-year colleges were

required to complete remedial classes, and 70% of the students who enrolled in two-year colleges were mandated to complete remedial classes (NCES, 2018).

Significance of the Study

As leaders, school counselors must have the disposition to challenge the status quo while staying deeply connected to the members of the school community (Marzano, Walters, & McNulty, 2005). A key strategy in serving the needs of the school community is to connect the school counseling program to school-wide initiatives (Lopez & Mason, 2017). School counselors work collaboratively with stakeholders to ensure equity, access, and academic success of all students (ASCA, 2019). School counselors work collaboratively as part of a leadership team of administrators, teachers, and parents and share responsibility and power with their professional colleagues (Lapan & Harrington, 2010).

Throughout history grades have been the primary form of feedback for students and parents (Jung & Guskey, 2011; Spencer, 2012). Student feedback is an important link in student learning and for over a century has been in the form of letter grades (Townsley, 2013). Traditional grade reports are commonly calculated by averaging all the scores of one student and assigning a letter based on the percentage (Beatty, 2013). Traditional grades are familiar and anticipated by parents, students, and educators. It is assumed that a student who earned an A letter grade met all the expectations of the class, while a student who earned an F letter grade failed to meet expectations (Wormeli, 2018). Variations in teachers' grading practices reduce the reliability of grades as communications of students' levels of learning, and they diminish the dependability of

grades to guide adjustments in instruction that address individual students' learning needs (O'Connor, 2002; Stiggins, 2001).

With strong evidence of inconsistent grade reporting practices throughout the United States, more schools are implementing standards-based grading as they move toward grade reform. (Iamarino, 2014). Educators and counselors are increasingly being held accountable for creating school contexts where all students can be academically successful (Dimmit, 2003).

Standards for school counselors as determined by the ASCA (2016), include

(a) the use of data to determine needed interventions, which are then delivered to help close the information, attainment, achievement and opportunity gaps;
(b) consults to support student achievement and success;
(c) identifying gaps in achievement, attendance, discipline, opportunity and resources;
(d) partnering with others to advocate for student achievement and educational equity and opportunities, and
(e) reviewing, disaggregating, and interpreting student achievement, attendance and discipline data to identify and implement interventions as needed.

Reliable grades are necessary for these tasks to effectively take place.

At the time of this study, there had been no research conducted that examined school counselors' comprehension, understanding, or perceptions of factors teachers consider when assigning grades thereby creating a gap in the literature. In fact, school

counselors had been purposefully excluded from studies (Aronson, 2008). School counselors interpret grades daily and use grades to inform important decisions for their students' futures (Gage and Berliner, 1992). This study will begin to fill the gap in existing literature by examining school counselors' perceptions of grade reporting practices as data for student advocacy.

Summary

This chapter provided a comprehensive examination of research related to traditional grading practices and how school counselors used grades in their student advocacy and served as a foundation for the four research questions that guided this study. The following chapter, Chapter 3, outlines the methods that were used to examine school counselors' perceptions of grade reporting practices as data for student advocacy.

Chapter 3
Methodology

This chapter describes the methods and procedures employed in this study. The research questions, research design sample, data collection procedures, instrumentation, and methods for data analysis are presented.

Research Questions

The purpose of this non-experimental, quantitative, cross sectional study was to fill a gap in existing literature by examining school counselors' perceptions of grade reporting practices as data for student advocacy. It is understood that while grades were initially intended to provide feedback to students on their academic achievements, 100 years of research has demonstrated that teachers include a combination of cognitive and non-cognitive factors in determining student grades (Cross & Frary, 1999; Liu, 2008; Grimes, 2010; Imperial, 2011; Guskey & Link, 2019). The variability that exists within grade reporting makes it difficult for students, parents, teachers, administrators, and school counselors to interpret the meaning of a grade. This inconsistency can prohibit a counselor from understanding the true strengths and weaknesses of their students as they rely on grades to guide decisions.

The following research questions guided the study:

Research Question 1: Are there significant differences between middle school and high school counselors' perceptions of the purpose of grades?

Research Question 2: Are there significant differences between the middle school and high school counselors' perceptions of academic standards included in grading?

Research Question 3: Are there significant differences between middle school and high school counselors' perceptions of factors considered in grading?

Research Question 4: To what extent are various counselors' characteristics associated with level of education and training on grading and assessment?

Null Hypothesis

$H_0$1: There are no significant differences between middle school and high school counselors' perceptions of the purpose of grades.

$H_0$2: There are no significant differences between middle school and high school counselors' perceptions of academic standards included in grading.

$H_0$3: There are no significant differences between middle school and high school counselors' perceptions of factors considered in grading?

$H_0$4: There are no significant associations between various school counselors' characteristics and level of education and training on grading and assessment.

Research Design

This study used quantitative design and survey methodology to address the research questions. Quantitative research focuses on the collection, investigation, and explanation of numerical data (Kitao, 1991). Data collected for this quantitative study was cross-sectional since data was collected at one point in time (Creswell, 2014). A survey instrument, School Counselors' Survey on Grading, was adapted from the

Administrators Survey on Grading (Imperial, 2011) to measures perceptions of the purpose of grades and the perceptions of grading practices teachers use when assigning students' grades. The School Counselor Survey on Grading includes questions that ask participants to report demographic data such as years' experience, educational attainment, academic level, employment status, and certification status. Surveys were administered in October 2019 – November 2019 through SurveyMonkey web-based software. IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26 software was used for all analyses.

Data Analysis

Research Question 1: An independent samples *t*-test was conducted to determine if there are statistically significant differences between school levels (middle school, high school) as the independent variable and purpose for grading (communication, provide information for self-evaluation, select students for programs, motivation, and behavior modification, program evaluation) as the dependent variable. Level of significance was set at .05.

Research Question 2: A chi square test of independence was used to determine if there are statistically significant differences between school levels (middle school, high school) as the independent variable and perception of academic standards (statement of purpose, content and skills standards, established benchmarks) as the dependent variable. Level of significance was set at .05. A chi square test of independence compares the frequencies observed to the frequencies expected by chance (Field, 2009). Each expected frequency should not be fewer than 5 (Field, 2005). To eliminate the possibility of error,

survey responses *no* and *not sure* were combined into a *no/not sure* response. This permitted the researcher to examine school counselors' perceptions of academic standards since both the *no* response and the *not sure* response indicate participants do not use knowledge of academic standards as they use grades as data. Data gathered from the *not sure* responses are reported in chapter 5.

Research Question 3: A chi square test of independence was conducted to determine if there are statistically significant differences between academic levels (middle school, high school) as the independent variable and perception of factors considered in grading (established categories, weights, methods, grading scale, uniform assessments, attendance) as the dependent variable. Level of significance was set at .05.

Research Question 4: Chi square tests of independence were conducted to determine if there were statistically significant differences between school counselors' years' experience (1-10 years, 11- 20 years, and 21 + years), educational attainment (Master's Degree, Master's Degree + up to 30 credits, Master's Degree + 31 or more credits), and years since educational attainment (within the last 10 years, 11 – 20 years, 21 + years ago) as the independent variables and training/education on the topic of grading and assessment (pre-service formal education, in-service training to faculty on grading, in-service training to faculty on assessment) as dependent variables. Level of significance was set at .05.

Sample and Population

The target population for this study was middle school and high school counselors within the United States. This study employed a purposeful sample to obtain participants. A purposeful sample is a sample selected because the individuals have special qualifications of some sort or because of prior evidence of representation (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2017). This allowed the researcher to gain a more focused and in-depth understanding of the participants' knowledge and beliefs (Creswell, 2009). School counselors throughout the United States were invited to participate in the study via email and social media.

Demographic Information

In total, 246 school counselors from across the United States attempted the School Counselor Survey on Grading. In total, 148 of the initial respondents completed the survey, yielding a 78% completion rate. The survey began with three questions designed to determine eligibility for participation. Questions 22, 23, and 24 asked school counselors to indicate their years of experience, highest level of educational attainment, and academic level of employment.

School counselors were eligible to participate if they:

(a) held a school counselor certification,

(b) held a Master's Degree in school counseling, and

(c) were currently employed in a middle school or a high school in the United States.

Forty-four of the initial respondents were immediately disqualified. Table 3.1 includes frequency distributions regarding the certification status of all initial respondents. Respondents were asked to indicate their certification status with a *no* or *yes* response. Most initial respondents, 95.1% (n = 234), indicated they had state school counselor certification, while 4.9% (n = 12) indicated they did not have certification. The 12 participants who reported not holding certification were not eligible to participate in the study and were disqualified.

Table 3.1

Frequency of initial respondents who hold school counselor certification.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	12	4.9	4.9	4.9
	Yes	234	95.1	95.1	100.0
	Total	246	100.0	100.0	

Holding a Master's Degree in school counseling was a second requirement for participation. Initial respondents were asked to indicate if they held a Master's Degree in school counseling. Respondents answered this question with a *no* or *yes* response as indicated in Table 3.2. Of the 246 respondents, 96.3% (n = 237) reported that they had a Master's Degree in school counseling, while 3.7% (n = 9) did not. The respondents who indicated they did not have a Master's Degree in school counseling were not eligible to participate in the study and were disqualified.

Table 3.2

Frequency of Initial Respondents with a Master's Degree in School Counseling

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	9	3.7	3.7	3.7
Missing	Yes	237	96.3	96.3	100.0
Total		246	100.0		

The final criterion for participation in the study was to currently be employed as a middle school or a high school counselor in the United States. Initial respondents were asked to indicate if they were, at the time, employed as a school counselor within the United States with a *no* or *yes* response. Most initial respondents indicated that they were currently employed as a middle school or a high school counselor within the United States as indicated in Table 3.3. Out of the 246 initial respondents, 87.8% (n = 216) reported that they were currently employed as a middle school or high school counselor within the United States, while 12.2% (n = 30) were not employed as a middle school or a high school counselor within the United States. The 30 respondents who indicated they were not employed as school counselors were not eligible participate in the study and were disqualified.

Table 3.3

Frequency of initial respondents currently employed as a middle school or a high school counselor in the United States.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	30	12.2	12.2	12.2
	Yes	216	87.8	87.8	100.0
	Total	246	100.0	100.0	

Question 22 on the School Counselor Survey on Grading asked participants to indicate academic level of employment (middle school, high school). School counselors who were eligible to participate in the study answered this question. The largest percentage of participants indicated they were employed at the high school level 66.2% (n = 98), and the smallest percentage of participants indicated they were employed at the middle school level 33.8% (n = 50; Table 3.4). The School Counselor Survey on Grading included two academic levels.

Table 3.4

Frequency of Participants by Academic Level

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Middle School	50	33.8	33.8	33.8
	High School	98	66.2	66.2	100.0
	Total	148	100.0	100.0	

Question 23 on the School Counselor Survey on Grading asked survey participants (N = 148) to indicate their years of experience as a school counselor (*1– 10 years, 11 – 20 years, 21 + years*). School counselors who were eligible to participate in the study answered this question. The largest percentage of participants indicated that they have been school counselors for 1-10 years, 56.1% (n = 83); followed by 11-20 years, 23.6% (n = 35); and 21 + years, 20.3% (n = 30; Table 3.5). The School Counselors Survey on Grading included three levels for years' experience.

Table 3.5

Frequency of Participants by Years' Experience

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1-10 years	83	56.1	56.1	56.1
	11-20 years	35	23.6	23.6	79.7
	21 + years	30	20.3	20.3	100.0
	Total	148	100.0	100.0	

Question 24 on the School Counselor Survey on Grading asked participants to indicate their highest level of educational attainment (*Master's Degree, Master's Degree + up to 30 credits, Master's Degree + 31 credits or more*). School counselors who were eligible to participate in the study answered this question. The largest percentage of participants indicated that their highest level of education attainment is a Master's Degree, 37.8% (n = 56); followed by Master's Degree + up to 30 credits, 32.4% (n = 48); and Master's Degree + 31 credits or more, 29.8% (n = 44; Table 3.6). The School Counselor Survey on Grading included three levels for educational attainment.

Table 3.6

Frequency of Participants by Educational Attainment

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Master's Degree	56	37.8	37.8	37.8
	Master's Degree + up to 30 Credits	48	32.4	32.4	70.3
	Master's Degree + 31 Credits or More	44	29.8	29.8	100.0
	Total	148	100.0	100.0	

Instrument

The School Counselors Survey on Grading (Appendix B) is a 30-question survey used to measure perceptions of the primary purpose for grading and to measure the perceptions of factors teachers consider when determining student grades. The School Counselor Survey on Grading was originally developed as the Administrators' Survey on Grading (Imperial, 2011). With permission from the developer (Appendix C), the survey was adapted to measure school counselors' perceptions of grading and was used to collect data for this study. It is based on the works of researchers in the field including Thomas Guskey (1996; 2001; 2001a; 2007; 2009; 2011; 2013; 2015; 2019), Ken O'Connor (2002; 2007; 2009; 2010), Richard Stiggins (2001), Robert Marzano (2000; 2010), and Susan Brookhart (1991; 1994; 2008; 2011; 2016).

The Administrators' Survey on Grading was selected for use and adapted in this study because it allows participants to report their perceptions of grading practices used in their school to document student achievement as opposed to actual methods used to grade. Several instruments assess the grade reporting practices of teachers (Liu, 2008, Guskey & Link, 2019) making them inappropriate to use for this study since school counselors, like school administrators, do not assign grades. Instrument reliability was tested through a pilot study involving 20 school administrators, representing nine different schools. Participants completed the survey in a test round, and 15 of those 20 administrators completed the survey in a retest round (Imperial, 2011). Eighteen of the 30 questions (3, 6, 8, 10-21, 27, 28, and 30) were appropriate for the test-retest analysis. A point-biserial correlation (*r value*) was conducted to determine test-retest reliability. The

average point-biserial correlation for the 18 items in the survey was 0.818 (Imperial, 2011).

The purpose of the first survey question was to determine what school counselors believe to be the purpose of grades. This question challenged respondents to rank six statements in order from most important to least important. Seven questions required school counselors to report their perceptions of the grading practices used by teachers in their school. Twelve questions required forced choice responses of *no*, *yes*, or *not sure* regarding school wide policies that may or may not guide teachers' grading practices. For the final questions, respondents provided professional details including their highest level of educational attainment, academic level, and years' experience; they responded with *no*, *yes*, or *not sure* regarding whether or not they received formal training relating to assessment.

A common method of gathering content-related evidence of validity is to have someone look at the content and format of the instrument and judge whether it is appropriate (Fraenkel, et al., 2014, p. 151). A panel of seven school administrators, teachers, and educational consultants, who are experts or practitioners in grading, evaluated the survey questions for their face, content, and construct validity (Imperial, 2011). The validity panel was comprised of researches including Thomas Guskey (1996; 2001; 2001a; 2007; 2009; 2011; 2013; 2015; 2019), Jay McTighe, and Ken O'Connor (2002; 2007; 2009; 2010).

Procedures

Following Institutional Research Board approval (Appendix A), invitations to participate in the study were distributed through email addresses collected from The School Counseling Analysis, Leadership, and Evaluation (SCALE) Research Center. The SCALE Research Center facilitates and disseminates school counseling research that can be used to improve school counseling practice and to support and advocate for national, state, and local policy changes that promote high achievement for every student (SCALE, 2019). The researcher emailed the SCALE Research Center in July 2019 to gain access to their email listserv. All 424 school counselor emails were provided to the researcher in August 2019.

The recruitment letter (Appendix D) was emailed to the 424 school counselors and resent one week later. In addition to emails, the researcher used social media to recruit school counselor participants. The recruitment letter and link to the survey was posted on three Facebook pages (a) The Standards Based Learning and Grading, (b) Caught in the Middle School Counselors, and (c) High School Counselor Connection. Caught in the Middle School Counselors is a closed group, meaning that access is obtained through an application process, and it has a total of 17,186 members. Administrative approval was needed to post the recruitment letter and was posted only one time. Approval for a repost was not granted. The High School Counselor Connection group is also a closed group of 6,900 members. Approval to post the recruitment letter was not required. The recruitment letter was posted in October 2019 and a second time in November 2019. The Standards Based Learning and Grading group is a public group comprised of 7,700 members at the time of the study. Since it is

a public group, there is no application process to join. It is not a requirement to be a school counselor to have access to these groups. The recruitment letter was posted one time.

Participants provided informed consent through the SurveyMonkey online data collection system as they entered the survey. All participants remained anonymous with no ability for the researcher to gather identity. All data was kept on the Survey Monkey server with a password-protected account. Subjects' privacy and data remains confidential and guarded through SurveyMonkey software. SurveyMonkey survey responses were sent over a secure and encrypted connection. The researcher turned on the option for anonymous responses and turned off the option to track IP addresses to ensure anonymity. Once data were collected, they were uploaded to IBM SPSS version 26 for analysis.

Summary

Chapter 3 described the design and methodology for this study. It outlined the procedures taken for data collection that would allow the study to be replicated by another researcher, including how the instrument was used and how data was collected, recorded, and protected. Chapter 4 will provide analyses of data.

Chapter 4
Results

The purpose of this quantitative research study was to examine school counselors' perceptions of the primary purpose of grades as well as and their perceptions of grade reporting practices. Data from a national population of school counselors was collected to examine differences in perceptions between middle school and high school counselors from across the United States; both were examined in regard to content and skill standards, school-wide grading policies, and grade reporting practices. A second purpose was to examine differences between school counselors' characteristics (grade level, years' experience, educational attainment) and perceptions of grading purposes, school-wide policies on grading, and factors teachers consider when determining students' grades. Demographic data were collected, as well as school counselors' academic training and school level.

The data for this study were gathered from the School Counselors' Survey for Grading, a 30-question online survey. Randomly selected middle school and high school counselors from across the United States completed the survey. A total of 246 school counselors began the survey, and 148 eligible counselors completed the survey. The survey was developed by Peter Imperial (2011) and was based on the work of Thomas Guskey, Ken O'Connor, Richard Stiggins, Robert Marzano, and Susan Brookhart (Imperial, 2011). The survey was initially designed to uncover the practices and policies school administrators implement in their schools, to uncover their primary purposes for grading, and methods used to communicate students' grades to students, parents, school officials, and others. The survey developer granted permission to modify the instrument to measure school counselors' perceptions of grading. The modifications included

replacing the word *administrator* with *school counselor* and adding a *not sure* response option to each *yes* or *no* response. SPSS version 26 software was used to conduct independent samples *t*-tests, chi-square analysis, and descriptive statistics. Level of significance was set at .05 for all analyses. The procedures used to examine each research question will be described in the following paragraphs.

Research Question 1

Are there significant differences between middle school counselors' and high school counselors' perceptions of the purpose of grades?

Descriptive statistics, means, standard deviations, and independent samples *t*-tests were used to address the first research question. Level of significance was set at .05. The first survey question asked school counselors to rank in order (*1 = most important – 6 = least important*) their perceptions of the primary purpose for grading. The means, standard deviations, percent, and frequency response for question were examined in Table 4.1. An independent samples *t*-test was conducted to determine if the differences between middle school and high school counselors' perceptions of the purpose of grades were statistically significant (Table 4.3).

Frequency distributions revealed 78% of school counselors perceive "communicating a student's achievement status to the student, parents, school officials, and others" to be the primary purpose for grading (Table 4.1). An independent samples *t*-test was conducted to determine if there are significant differences between group means (middle school/high school). Results indicated that while both middle school counselors and high school counselors believe the primary purpose of grades to be

to "communicate a student's achievement status to the student, parents, school officials, and others," significantly more high school counselors (M = 1.28, SD = .863) than middle school counselors (M = 1.70, SD = 1.329) ranked communication as primary, t (145) = 2.320, p = .022 (Table 4.2; Chart 1). These results indicate that more high school counselors perceive the primary purpose for grading to be communicating students' achievement than do middle school counselors.

School counselors ranked "to provide information that a student can use for self-evaluation" as the second most important purpose for grading, with 46.2% of participants ranking it as second (Table 4.1). While school counselors agreed on this ranking, 50% of high school counselors raked self-evaluation as second, and 38.8% of middle school counselors ranked it second (Table 4.2). An independent samples t-test was conducted to determine if these differences are statistically significant. Results indicated that the difference between the means of middle school counselors (M = 2.94, SD = 1.420) and high school counselors (M = 2.81, SD = 1.292), when ranking "to provide information that a student can use for self-evaluation" were not statistically significant, t (143) = .538, p = .591 Table 4.3).

"Motivate students to learn" was ranked as school counselors' third most important purpose for grading with 27.1% of school counselors ranking it third (Table 4.1). Results showed that 22.9% of middle school counselors considered it third most important, and 25% considered it fourth most important. Twenty-nine percent of high school counselors ranked motivation as third most important, and 32.3% ranked it as fourth most important (Table 4.1).

An independent samples *t*-test was conducted to determine if the observed differences between middle school counselors and high school counselors ranking of "motivate students to learn" were statistically significant. Results indicated that there were no significant differences between the means of middle school counselors (M = 3.56, SD = 1.457) and high school counselors (M = 3.75, SD = 1.265) when ranking "to motivate students to learn" as a purpose for grading, t (142) = -.796, p = .427 (Table 4.3).

"To select, identify, or group a student for certain educational paths/programs" also was school counselors' third highest ranked purpose with 25% of all school counselors ranking it third (Table 4.1). Thirty percent of middle school counselors ranked "to select, identify, or group a student for certain educational paths/programs" as third most important and 51% ranked it fourth or below. Results for high school counselors were similar with 22.1% of ranking this purpose as third most important and 60% ranking it fourth most important or below (Table 4.2).

An independent samples *t*-test was conducted to determine if these differences are statistically significant. Results indicated no statistically significant differences between the means of middle school counselors (M = 4.06, SD = 1.420) and high school counselors (M = 4.29, SD = 1.494) when ranking "to select, identify, or group a student for certain educational paths/programs" as a purpose for grading, t (142) = -.904, p = .368 (Table 4.3).

"To modify student behavior" was the lowest ranked perceived purpose for grading by school counselors with 60% of respondents ranking it fifth or sixth in importance (Table 4.1). Sixty-seven percent of middle school counselor respondents ranked "to modify student behavior" as fifth or sixth least important. High school

counselors had similar results with 56.3% ranking the purpose "to modify student behavior" either fifth or sixth in importance (Table 4.1).

An independent samples *t*-test was conducted to determine if these slight differences between middle school counselors' and high school counselors' perceptions are statistically significant. Results indicated no significant differences exist between the means of middle school counselors ($M = 4.90$, $SD = 1.503$) and high school counselors ($M = 5.11$, $SD = 1.272$) when ranking "to modify student behavior" as a purpose for grading, $t\ (143) = -.911$, $p = .364$ (Table 4.3) ranking it as the least important factor teachers consider when determining student grades.

"To evaluate the effectiveness of instructional program(s)" was also among the two lowest ranked purposes for grading by school counselors with 46% of respondents ranking it fifth or sixth in importance (Table 4.1). Fifty percent of middle school counselor respondents ranked "to evaluate the effectiveness of instructional program(s)" as fifth or sixth in importance. High school counselors had similar results with 43.6% ranking the purpose "to evaluate the effectiveness of instructional program(s)" fifth or sixth in importance (Table 4.1).

An independent samples *t*-test was conducted to determine if the differences between middle school and high school counselors' perceptions of "to evaluate the effectiveness of instructional program(s)" as a purpose of grades is statistically significant. Results indicated that there were no statistically significant differences between the means of middle school counselors ($M = 4.28$, $SD = 1.727$) and high school counselors ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 1.692$) when ranking "to evaluate the effectiveness of instructional program(s)" as a purpose for grading, $t\ (144) = .346$, $p = .730$ (Table 4.3).

Table 4.1

Frequency Distribution of School Counselors' Ranking of Perceptions of Grading Purposes

Purpose	Rank of Importance					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
"communicate a student's achievement status to the student, parents, school officials, and others."	78.2% (115)	14.3% (21)	1.4% (2)	2.7% (4)	-	3.4% (5)
"provide information that a student can use for self-evaluation.	6.9% (10)	46.2% (67)	22.1% (32)	11.7% (17)	6.9% (10)	4.8% (7)
"select, identify, or group a student for certain educational paths/programs."	1.4% (2)	9.7% (14)	25.0% (36)	22.9% (33)	18.8% (27)	15.3% (22)
"motivate students to learn."	4.2% (6)	13.9% (20)	27.1% (39)	29.9% (43)	17.4% (25)	4.2% (6)
"modify student behavior."	1.4% (2)	2.1% (3)	13.1% (19)	12.4% (18)	27.6% (40)	32.4% (47)
"evaluate the effectiveness of instructional program(s)."	7.5% (11)	13.7% (20)	11.6% (17)	17.1% (25)	21.2% (31)	24.7% (36)

N = 148

Table 4.2

Descriptive Statistics for School Counselors' Ranking of Perceptions of Grading Purposes by Academic Level

Purpose	Academic Level	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*SE*
"communicate a student's achievement status to the student, parents, school officials, and others."	Middle School	50	1.70	1.329	.188
	High School	97	1.28	.863	.088
"provide information that a student can use for self-evaluation."	Middle School	49	2.94	1.420	.203
	High School	96	2.81	1.292	.132
"select, identify, or group a student for certain educational paths/programs."	Middle School	49	4.06	1.420	.203
	High School	95	4.29	1.494	.153
"motivate students to learn."	Middle School	48	3.56	1.457	.210
	High School	96	3.75	1.265	.129
"modify student behavior."	Middle School	49	4.90	1.503	.215
	High School	96	5.11	1.272	.130
"evaluate the effectiveness of instructional program(s)."	Middle School	50	4.28	1.727	.244
	High School	96	4.18	1.692	.173

N = 148

Table 4.3

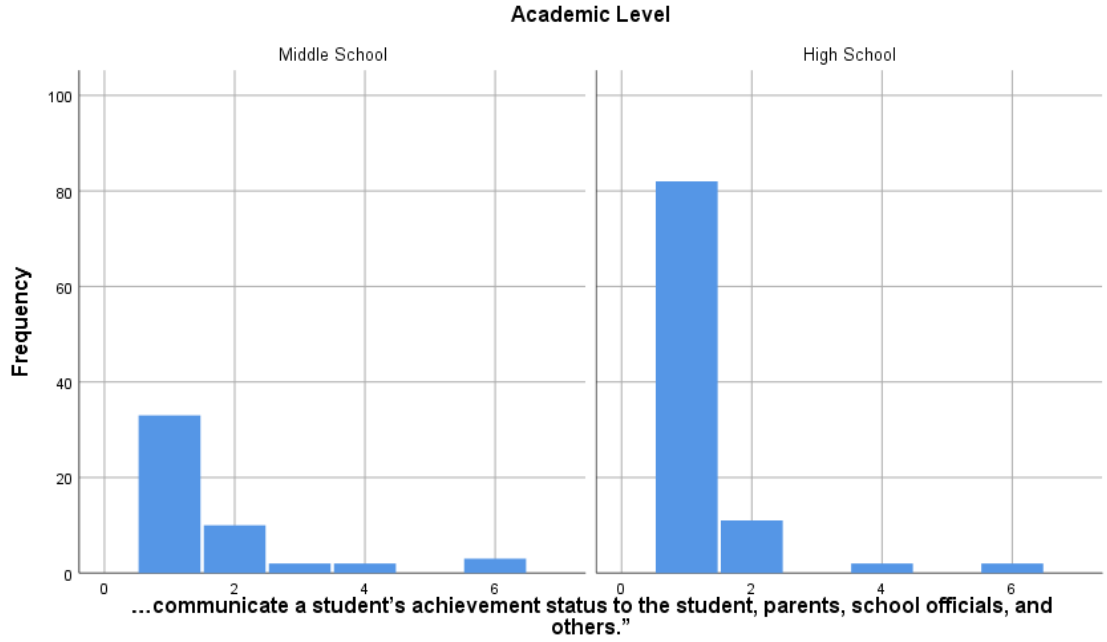
Independent Samples t-Test of Primary Purpose for Grading by Academic Level

		t-test for Equality of Means				
Purpose		*t*	*df*	Sig. (2-tailed)	*MD*	*SD*
"communicate a student's achievement status to the student, parents, school officials, and others."	Equal variances assumed	2.320	145	.022*	.422	.182
	Equal variances not assumed	2.034	70.913	.046	.422	.207
"provide information that a student can use for self-evaluation."	Equal variances assumed	.538	143	.591	.126	.235
	Equal variances not assumed	.522	89.096	.603	.126	.242
"select, identify, or group a student for certain educational paths/programs."	Equal variances assumed	-.904	142	.368	.234	.258
	Equal variances not assumed	-.918	101.527	.361	.234	.254
"motivate students to learn."	Equal variances assumed	-.796	142	.427	.187	.235
	Equal variances not assumed	-.760	83.236	.450	.187	.247
…modify student behavior."	Equal variances assumed	-.911	143	.364	.217	.238
	Equal variances not assumed	-.863	83.837	.391	-.217	.251
"evaluate the effectiveness of instructional program(s)."	Equal variances assumed	.346	144	.730	.103	.297
	Equal variances not assumed	.344	97.673	.732	.103	.299

* $p < .05$

Chart 1

Differences Between Middle School and High School Counselors' Primary Purpose for Grading



Statistically significant differences were found between middle school counselors and high school counselors when examining the degree to which each group perceived "to communicate a student's achievement status to the student, parents, school officials, and others" to be the primary purpose for grading. Implications on school counselors' and student advocacy will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Research Question 2

Are there significant differences between middle school counselors' and high school counselors' perceptions of academic standards included in grading practices?

Both middle school counselors and high school counselors were asked to respond to questions (survey questions 12-14) to measure school counselors' perceptions and understanding of the school wide content and skill standards established by their school. School counselor survey data indicated that 76% of middle school counselors and 73.5% of school counselors support students in a school with established school-wide content and skills standards in each area that guide teachers as they evaluate and assign grades to their students (Table 4.4).

Only school counselors who reported that their school had established school-wide content and skills standard in each subject answered survey questions 13 and 14. Results of item 13 revealed 81.6% of middle school counselors and 73.6% of high school counselors reported working in schools where teachers are required to assess and grade students' achievement of the established school-wide standards.

A chi square test of independence examined the relationship between school counselors' academic level (middle school, high school) and perceptions of a school-wide content and skill standard for each subject (*no, yes, not sure*). Results indicated the differences between middle school counselors' and high school counselors' perceptions of school-wide content and skill standards for each subject were not statistically significant x^2 (1, N = 148) = .111, p = .739 (Table 4.4), which revealed that academic level is not a factor in school counselors' perceptions of school-wide content and skill standards for each subject.

Table 4.4

Chi-square Analysis of School Counselors' Perceptions of School Wide Content and Skill Standards by Academic Level

			Does your school have school-wide content and skills standards in each subject area?				
			No Not/Sure	Yes	Total	x^2	*p*
Academic Level	Middle School	Count	12	38	50	.111	.739
		Expected Count	12.8	37.2	50.0		
		% within Academic Level	24.0%	76.0%	100.0%		
		% of Total	8.1%	25.7%	33.8%		
	High School	Count	26	72	98		
		Expected Count	25.2	72.8	98.0		
		% within Academic Level	26.5%	73.5%	100.0%		
		% of Total	17.6%	48.6%	66.2%		
Total		Count	38	110	148		
		Expected Count	38.0	110.0	148.0		
		% within Academic Level	25.7%	74.3%	100.0%		
		% of Total	25.7%	74.3%	100.0%		

Survey question 13 was answered by the 110 school counselors who answered *yes* to question 12, which acknowledged that their schools have school-wide content and skill standards for each subject. School counselors were asked to indicate if teachers in their school are required to assess and grade students' achievement of those standards (*no, yes, not sure*). Results revealed 76.4% of school counselors support students in a school where teachers are required to assess and grade students' achievement of those standards.

A chi square test of independence examined the relationship between academic level (middle school, high school) and school counselors' perceptions of established school-wide policy requiring teachers to grade and assess students' achievement of those standards (*no, yes, not sure*). Results indicated that middle school and high school counselors' perceptions of an established policy requiring teachers to assess students' achievement of established learning standards were not statistically significant, x^2 (1, N = 110) = .875, p = .350 (Table 4.5), which revealed that academic level is not a factor in school counselors' perceptions of their schools' grading students achievement of progress towards standards.

Table 4.5

Chi Square Analysis of School Counselors' Perceptions of a School-Wide Policy Requiring Teachers to Grade and Assess Student Achievement of Learning Standards by Academic Level

			Are teachers in your school required to assess and grade students' achievement of those standards?				
			No/Not Sure	Yes	Total	x^2	p
Academic Level	Middle School	Count	7	31	38	.875	.350
		Expected Count	9.0	29.0	38.0		
		% within Academic Level	18.4%	81.6%	100.0%		
		% of Total	6.4%	28.2%	34.5%		
	High School	Count	19	53	72		
		Expected Count	17.0	55.0	72.0		

(Table 4.5 continues)

(Table 4.5 continued)

	% within Academic Level	26.4%	73.6%	100.0%
	% of Total	17.3%	48.2%	65.5%
Total	Count	26	84	110
	Expected Count	26.0	84.0	110.0
	% within Academic Level	23.6%	76.4%	100.0%
	% of Total	23.6%	76.4%	100.0%

Survey question 14 was answered by the 110 school counselors who answered *yes* to question 12, which acknowledged that their schools have school-wide content and skill standards for each subject. School counselors were asked to specify if their school has established benchmarks (e.g., rubrics) for assessing students' achievement of each learning standard by answering *no*, *yes*, or *not sure*. Results of this question revealed 78.9% of middle school counselors and 59.7% of high school counselors support students in schools where established benchmarks guide teachers as they assess students' achievement of each learning standard.

A chi square test of independence examined the relationship between academic level (middle school, high school) and school counselors' perceptions of established benchmarks (*no*, *yes*, *not sure*). Results indicated that middle school and high school counselors perceptions' of established benchmarks for grading were statistically significant, x^2 (1, N = 110) = 4.118, p = .042, revealing that significantly more middle school counselors support students in schools with established benchmarks (e.g., rubrics) for assessing students' achievement of each learning standard (Table 4.6).

Table 4.6

Chi-square Analysis of School Counselors' Perceptions of Established Benchmarks by Academic Level

			Has your school established benchmarks (e.g., rubrics) for assessing students' achievement of each learning standard?				
			No/Not Sure	Yes	Total	x^2	*p*
Academic Level	Middle School	Count	8	30	38	4.118	.042*
		Expected Count	12.8	25.0	38.0		
		% within Academic Level	21.1%	78.9%	100.0%		
		% of Total	7.3%	27.3%	34.5%		
	High School	Count	29	43	72		
		Expected Count	24.2	47.8	72.0		
		% within Academic Level	40.3%	59.7%	100.0%		
		% of Total	26.4%	39.1%	65.5%		
Total		Count	37	73	110		
		Expected Count	37.0	73.0	110.0		
		% within Academic Level	33.6%	66.4%	100.0%		
		% of Total	33.6%	66.4%	100.0%		

*$p < .05$

Question 10 asked school counselors to indicate if their school has an official purpose for grading (*no*, *yes*, *not sure)*. Overall, 24.3% of school counselors reported their school has an official purpose for grading. A chi square test of independence examined the relationship between academic level (middle school, high school) and

school counselors' perceptions of an official statement of purpose for grading in their school (*no*, *yes*, *not sure*). Results indicated that middle school and high school counselors were not significantly different in their perceptions of a school-wide official purpose for grading, x^2 (1, N = 148) = .004, p = .948 (Table 4.7), which revealed that academic level is not a factor in school counselors' perceptions of their schools official grading purpose.

Table 4.7

Chi-square Analysis of School Counselors' Perceptions of Official Purpose for Grading by Academic Level

			Does your school have an official statement of purpose for grading?				
			No/Not Sure	Yes	Total	x^2	p
Academic Level	Middle School	Count	38	12	50	.004	.948
		Expected Count	37.8	12.2	50.0		
		% within Academic Level	76.0%	24.0%	100.0%		
		% of Total	25.7%	8.1%	33.8%		
	High School	Count	74	24	98		
		Expected Count	74.2	23.8	98.0		
		% within Academic Level	75.5%	24.5%	100.0%		
		% of Total	50.0%	16.2%	66.2%		
Total		Count	112	36	148		
		Expected Count	112.0	36.0	148.0		
		% within Academic Level	75.7%	24.3%	100.0%		
		% of Total	75.7%	24.3%	100.0%		

Research Question 3

Are there significant differences between middle school and high school counselors' perceptions of factors included in grades?

Middle school and high school counselors were asked to respond to survey items 15-20 which revealed their perceptions of established school wide policies for determining students' grades. Survey question 15 asked respondents to indicate if their school identifies categories teachers may or may not consider when determining student grades. Results showed 26% of middle school counselors and 32% of high school counselors are in schools that identify categories teachers may or may not include in determining student grades.

A chi square test of independence examined the relationship between academic level (middle school, high school) and school counselors' perceptions of an established school-wide policy indicating categories teachers may or may not consider when assigning student grades (*no*, *yes*, *not sure*). Results indicated the difference between middle school and high school counselors' perceptions of established school-wide policy, which indicated that categories teachers may or may not consider when assigning student grades were not statistically significant, x^2 (1, N = 148) = .693, p = .405, (Table 4.8), revealing that school level is not a factor in school counselors' perceptions of established school-wide policy indicating categories teachers may or may not consider when assigning student grades.

Table 4.8

Chi-square Analysis of School Counselors' Perceptions of Established Categories for Grading by Academic Level

			Does your school identify what CATEGORIES teachers may or may not consider in determining a student's final grade?				
			No/Not Sure	Yes	Total	x^2	*p*
Academic Level	Middle School	Count	37	13	50	.693	.405
		Expected Count	34.8	15.2	50.0		
		% within Academic Level	74.0%	26.0%	100.0%		
		% of Total	25.0%	8.8%	33.8%		
	High School	Count	66	32	98		
		Expected Count	68.2	29.8	98.0		
		% within Academic Level	67.3%	32.7%	100.0%		
		% of Total	44.6%	21.6%	66.2%		
Total		Count	103	45	148		
		Expected Count	103.0	45.0	148.0		
		% within Academic Level	69.6%	30.4%	100.0%		
		% of Total	69.6%	30.4%	100.0%		

Survey question 16 asked school counselors if their school has established school-wide policy identifying weights teachers might place on different elements in determining a student's final grade. A chi square test of independence was conducted to examine the relationship between academic level (middle school, high school) and school

counselors' perceptions of an established school-wide policy identifying the weights teachers may or may not consider when assigning student grades (*no*, *yes*, *not sure*). Results indicated 46% of middle school counselors and 41.8% of high school counselors indicated their school has an established school-wide policy identifying weights teachers may or may not consider in determining a student's final grade. These differences were not statistically significant, x^2 (1, N = 148) = .234, p = .629 (Table 4.9), which revealed that school level is not a factor in school counselors' perceptions of an established school-policy identifying the weights teachers may consider when assigning student grades.

Table 4.9

Chi-square Analysis of School Counselors' Perceptions of School-Wide Policy for Weighting by Academic Level

			Does your school identify what WEIGHTS teachers may place on different elements in determining a student's final grade?				
			No/Not Sure	Yes	Total	x^2	p
Academic Level	Middle School	Count	27	23	50	.234	.629
		Expected Count	28.4	21.6	50.0		
		% within Academic Level	54.0%	46.0%	100.0%		
		% of Total	18.2%	15.5%	33.8%		
	High School	Count	57	41	98		

(Table 4.9 continues)

(Table 4.9 continued)

	Expected Count	55.6	42.4	98.0
	% within Academic Level	58.2%	41.8%	100.0%
	% of Total	38.5%	27.7%	66.2%
Total	Count	84	64	148
	Expected Count	84.0	64.0	148.0
	% within Academic Level	56.8%	43.2%	100.0%
	% of Total	56.8%	43.2%	100.0%

Survey question 17 asked school counselors to indicate whether their school identifies the methods teachers may or may not consider when determining student grades. A chi square test of independence examined the relationship between academic level (middle school, high school) and school counselors' perceptions of an established school-wide policy identifying the methods teachers may or may not consider when assigning student grades (*no*, *yes*, *not sure*). Results indicated that the differences between middle school and high school counselors' perceptions of methods used in grading were not statistically significant, x^2 (1, N = 148) = 2.323, p = .128 (Table 4.10), which revealed that school level is not a factor in school counselors' perceptions of an established school-wide policy identifying the methods teachers may or may not consider when assigning student grades.

Table 4.10

Chi-square Analysis of School Counselors' Perceptions of School-Wide Policies for Methods for Grading by Academic Level

			Does your school identify METHODS teachers may use to determine a student's final grade?				
			No/Not Sure	Yes	Total	x^2	*p*
Academic Level	Middle School	Count	23	27	50	2.323	.128
		Expected Count	27.4	22.6	50.0		
		% within Academic Level	46.0%	54.0%	100.0%		
		% of Total	15.5%	18.2%	33.8%		
	High School	Count	58	40	98		
		Expected Count	53.6	44.4	98.0		
		% within Academic Level	59.2%	40.8%	100.0%		
		% of Total	39.2%	27.0%	66.2%		
Total		Count	81	67	148		
		Expected Count	81.0	67.0	148.0		
		% within Academic Level	54.7%	45.3%	100.0%		
		% of Total	54.7%	45.3%	100.0%		

Survey item 18 was designed to examine school counselors' perceptions of an established school-wide grading scale with standardized grade equivalent cut-offs (e.g., 90-100=A, 80-89=B, 70-79=C, 60-69=D, 50-59=F). A chi square test of independence was conducted to examine the relationship between academic level (middle school, high

school) and school counselors' perceptions of an established school-wide grading scale that guide teachers in assigning student grades (*no*, *yes*, *not sure*). Results indicated that the differences between middle school and high school counselors' perceptions of an established school-wide grading scale were not statistically significant, x^2 (1, N = 148) = .026, p = .872 (Table 4.11), which suggested that academic level is not a factor in school counselors' perceptions of established school-wide grading scales.

Table 4.11

Chi-square Analysis of School Counselors' Perceptions of School-Wide Grading Scale by Academic Level

			Does your school have a school-wide grading scale with standardized grade equivalent cut-offs (e.g., 90-100=A, 80-89=B, 70-79=C, 60-69=D, 50-59=F)?				
			No/Not Sure	Yes	Total	x^2	p
Academic Level	Middle School	Count	5	45	50	.026	.872
		Expected Count	4.7	45.3	50.0		
		% within Academic Level	10.0%	90.0%	100.0%		
		% of Total	3.4%	30.4%	33.8%		
	High School	Count	9	89	98		
		Expected Count	9.3	88.7	98.0		
		% within Academic Level	9.2%	90.8%	100.0%		

(Table 4.11 continues)

(Table 4.11 continued)

	% of Total	6.1%	60.1%	66.2%
Total	Count	14	134	148
	Expected Count	14.0	134.0	148.0
	% within Academic Level	9.5%	90.5%	100.0%
	% of Total	9.5%	90.5%	100.0%

Item 19 was only answered by school counselors who responded *yes* to item 18, which indicated that their school has an established school-wide grading scale with standardized grade-equivalent cut-offs. Question 19 asked school counselors to report if the range for the grade that indicates failure (e.g., F) is larger than the range for other grades. A chi square test of independence was conducted to examine the differences between school counselors' academic level (middle school, high school) and school counselors' perceptions of the range that indicates failure (*no*, *yes*, *not sure*). Results indicated the differences between middle school and high school counselors were not statistically significant, x^2 (1, N = 147) = .817, p = .366 (Table 4.12), which revealed that school level is not a factor in school counselors' perceptions of a school-wide grading scale with standardized grade-equivalent cut-offs.

Table 4.12

Chi-Square Analysis of School Counselors' Perceptions of Failure Range by Academic Level

			Is the range for the grade that indicates failure (e.g., F) larger than the range for other grades?				
			No/Not Sure	Yes	Total	x^2	*p*
Academic Level	Middle School	Count	11	38	49	.817	.366
		Expected Count	9.0	40.0	49.0		
		% within Academic Level	22.4%	77.6%	100.0%		
		% of Total	7.5%	25.9%	33.3%		
	High School	Count	16	82	98		
		Expected Count	18.0	80.0	98.0		
		% within Academic Level	16.3%	83.7%	100.0%		
		% of Total	10.9%	55.8%	66.7%		
Total		Count	27	120	147		
		Expected Count	27.0	120.0	147.0		
		% within Academic Level	18.4%	81.6%	100.0%		
		% of Total	18.4%	81.6%	100.0%		

Survey question 21 measured school counselors' perceptions of an established school-wide minimum attendance policy all students must satisfy in order to pass a class, regardless of the student's content mastery. A chi square test of independence examined the relationship between academic level (middle school, high school) and school counselors' perceptions of an established school-wide minimum attendance policy in (*no*,

yes, *not sure*). Results indicated the difference between middle school and high school counselors' perceptions of a uniform attendance policy was statistically significant, x^2 (1, N = 147) = 8.017, p = .005 (Table 4.13). Significantly more high school counselors than middle school counselors reported their school to have a minimum attendance requirement that students must meet in order to pass each class regardless of content mastery. This suggests that school level is a factor in the establishment of uniform minimum attendance policies.

Table 4.13

Chi-square Analysis of School Counselors' Perceptions of Minimum Attendance Policy by Academic Level

			Does your school have minimum attendance requirements students must meet in order to pass each course?				
			No/Not Sure	Yes	Total	x^2	p
Academic Level	Middle School	Count	40	9	49	8.017	.005*
		Expected Count	32.3	16.7	49.0		
		% within Academic Level	81.6%	18.4%	100.0%		
		% of Total	27.2%	6.1%	33.3%		
	High School	Count	57	41	98		
		Expected Count	64.7	33.3	98.0		
		% within Academic Level	58.2%	41.8%	100.0%		

(Table 4.13 continues)

(Table 4.13 continued)

	% of Total	38.8%	27.9%	66.7%
Total	Count	97	50	147
	Expected Count	97.0	50.0	147.0
	% within Academic Level	66.0%	34.0%	100.0%
	% of Total	66.0%	34.0%	100.0%

*p < .05

A chi square test of independence examined the relationship between academic level (middle school, high school) and school counselors' perceptions of established uniform assessments for courses that are have multiple sections taught by multiple teachers. Question 20 examined the grading consistency among teachers who conduct the same course in the school by asking school counselors to indicate if uniform assessments are administered as part of a regular assessment program in courses that are taught by multiple teachers (*no, yes, not sure*). Results indicated statistically significant differences between middle school counselors' and high school counselors' perceptions of an established uniform assessment policy when a course has multiple sections taught by multiple teachers, x^2 (1, N = 147) = 3.963, p = .047 (Table 4.14). These findings revealed that significantly more middle school counselors reported their school to have uniform assessments as part of the regular assessment program when multiple teachers teach the same course.

Table 4.14

Chi-square Analysis of School Counselors' Perceptions of Uniform Assessments by Academic Level

			In courses that have multiple sections taught by multiple teachers, are uniform assessments administered as part of the regular assessment program?				
			No/Not Sure	Yes	Total	x^2	*p*
Academic Level	Middle School	Count	21	28	49	3.063	.047*
		Expected Count	26.7	22.3	49.0		
		% within Academic Level	42.9%	57.1%	100.0%		
		% of Total	14.3%	19.0%	33.3%		
	High School	Count	59	39	98		
		Expected Count	53.3	44.7	98.0		
		% within Academic Level	60.2%	39.8%	100.0%		
		% of Total	40.1%	26.5%	66.7%		
Total		Count	80	67	147		
		Expected Count	80.0	67.0	147.0		
		% within Academic Level	54.4%	45.6%	100.0%		
		% of Total	54.4%	45.6%	100.0%		

*$p < .05$

Statistically significant findings were revealed in the differences between middle school counselors' and high school counselors' perceptions of a minimum attendance

policy that students must meet in order to pass a course regardless of content mastery. Significantly more high school counselors reported such a policy. In addition, statistically significant differences between middle school counselors' and high school counselors' were uncovered regarding the administration of uniform assessments for courses with multiple sections taught by multiple teachers. Significantly more middle school counselors than high school counselors perceived their school to administer uniform assessments for courses with multiple sections taught by multiple teachers. Implications on school counselor practice and student advocacy will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Research Question 4

To what extent are various counselor characteristics associated with school counselors' level of training on grading and assessment?

Chi square tests for independence were conducted to examine differences between school counselors' years' experience (*1-10 years, 11-20, years, 21+ years*) and, educational attainment (*Master's Degree, Master's Degree + up to 30 credits, Master's Degree + 31 or more credits*), and years since educational attainment (*within the last 10 years, 11– 20 years, 20 + years*) as the independent variables and training/education on the topic of grading and assessment (pre-service formal education, in-service training on grading for faculty, in-service training on assessment for faculty) as dependent variables. Level of significance was set at .05.

Survey question 22 asked school counselors to indicate for how many years they have been a school counselor (*1-10 years, 11-20 years, 21 + years*). A chi square test for independence measured differences between school counselors' years of experience (*1-10 years, 11-20 years, 21 + years*) and whether or not their school trained the faculty in the practice of grading as part of its professional development program (*no, not sure, yes*). Results indicated the differences between school counselors' years of experience and whether or not their school trained the faculty in the practice of grading as part of its professional development program were not statistically significant, x^2 (2, 148) = .978, p = .613 (Table 4.15). These data suggest that school counselors' years' experience was not a factor in whether or not professional development in the area of grading was offered to faculty in their school.

Table 4.15

Chi-Square Analysis of School Counselors' Formal Education in Grading by Years Since Educational Attainment

			Has your school trained its faculty in the practice of GRADING as part of its professional development program?				
			No/Not Sure	Yes	Total	x^2	p
Years' Experience'	1-10 years	Count	63	20	83	.978	.613
		Expected Count	61.1	21.9	83.0		

(Table 4.15 continues)

(Table 4.15 continued)

		% within Years' Experience	75.9%	24.1%	100.0%
		% of Total	42.6%	13.5%	56.1%
	11-20 years	Count	26	9	35
		Expected Count	25.8	9.2	35.0
		% within Years' Experience	74.3%	25.7%	100.0%
		% of Total	17.6%	6.1%	23.6%
	21+ years	Count	20	10	30
		Expected Count	22.1	7.9	30.0
		% within Years' Experience	66.7%	33.3%	100.0%
		% of Total	13.5%	6.8%	20.3%
Total		Count	109	39	148
		Expected Count	109.0	39.0	148.0
		% within Years' Experience	73.6%	26.4%	100.0%
		% of Total	73.6%	26.4%	100.0%

A chi square test for independence examined differences between school counselors' years' experience (*1-10 years, 11-20 years, 21 + years*) and whether or not their school trained faculty in the practice of assessment as part of its professional development program (*no, not sure, yes*). Results indicated the differences between school counselors' years' experience and whether or not their school trained its faculty in the practice of assessment as part of its professional development program were statistically significant, x^2 (2, 148) = 12.079, p = .002 (Table 4.16). These data revealed that school counselors who have more than 20 years' experience, reported a significantly higher rate of professional development training in the area of assessment as compared to school counselors who have fewer than 20 years' experience.

Table 4.16

Chi-Square Analysis of School Counselors' Professional Development Training on Assessment by Years' Experience

			Has your school trained its faculty in the practice of ASSESSMENT as part of its professional development program?				
			No/Not Sure	Yes	Total	x^2	*p*
Years' Experience	1-10 years	Count	47	36	83	12.079	.002*
		Expected Count	38.1	44.9	83.0		
		% within Years' Experience	56.6%	43.4%	100.0%		
		% of Total	31.8%	24.3%	56.1%		
	11-20 years	Count	15	20	35		
		Expected Count	16.1	18.9	35.0		
		% within Years' Experience	42.9%	57.1%	100.0%		
		% of Total	10.1%	13.5%	23.6%		
	21+ years	Count	6	24	30		
		Expected Count	13.8	16.2	30.0		
		% within Years' Experience	20.0%	80.0%	100.0%		
		% of Total	4.1%	16.2%	20.3%		
Total		Count	68	80	148		
		Expected Count	68.0	80.0	148.0		
		% within Years' Experience	45.9%	54.1%	100.0%		
		% of Total	45.9%	54.1%	100.0%		

*$p < .05$

Survey question 23 asked school counselors to indicate their highest level of education attained (*Master's Degree, Master's Degree + up to 30 Credits, Master's Degree + 31 Credits or more*). A chi square test for independence measured differences between school counselors' educational attainment, and whether or not their formal educational training included courses in grading (*no* or *yes*). Results indicated the differences between school counselors' years' experience and formal educational on grading were not statistically significant, x^2 (2, 148) = .353, p = .838 (Table 4.17). These data suggest that school counselors' educational attainment was not a factor in whether or not training in the area of grading was provided within their formal coursework.

Table 4.17

Chi-Square Analysis of School Counselors' Formal Education in Grading by Educational Attainment

			Did your formal educational training include any courses in grading?				
			No	Yes	Total	x^2	p
Educational Attainment	Master's Degree	Count	52	4	56	.353	.838
		Expected Count	51.1	4.9	56.0		
		% within Educational Attainment	92.9%	7.1%	100.0%		
		% of Total	35.1%	2.7%	37.8%		
	Master's Degree + up to 30 Credits	Count	43	5	48		
		Expected Count	43.8	4.2	48.0		

(Table 4.17 continues)

(Table 4.17 continued)

		% within Educational Attainment	89.6%	10.4%	100.0%
		% of Total	29.1%	3.4%	32.4%
	Master's Degree + 31 Credits or more	Count	40	4	44
		Expected Count	40.1	3.9	44.0
		% within Educational Attainment	90.9%	9.1%	100.0%
		% of Total	27.0%	2.7%	29.7%
Total		Count	135	13	148
		Expected Count	135.0	13.0	148.0
		% within Educational Attainment	91.2%	8.8%	100.0%
		% of Total	91.2%	8.8%	100.0%

Survey question 24 asked school counselors to indicate the years since they received their highest level of educational attainment (*1-10 years, 11-20 years, 21 + years*). A chi square test for independence examined differences between school counselors' years since educational attainment and whether or not their formal educational training included courses in grading (*no* or *yes*). Results indicated the differences between school counselors' years since educational attainment and formal educational training were not statistically significant, x^2 (2, 148) = .703, p = .704 (Table 4.18). These data suggest that school counselors' years since educational attainment were not a factor in whether or not courses on grading were provided within their formal coursework.

Table 4.18

Chi-Square Analysis of School Counselors' Formal Education in Grading by Years Since Educational Attainment

			Did your formal educational training include any courses in grading?				
			No	Yes	Total	x^2	*p*
Years Since Educational Attainment	1 - 10 years	Count	79	9	88	.703	.704
		Expected Count	80.3	7.7	88.0		
		% within Years Since Educational Attainment	89.8%	10.2%	100.0%		
		% of Total	53.4%	6.1%	59.5%		
	11 - 20 years	Count	34	2	36		
		Expected Count	32.8	3.2	36.0		
		% within Years Since Educational Attainment	94.4%	5.6%	100.0%		
		% of Total	23.0%	1.4%	24.3%		
	21 + years	Count	22	2	24		
		Expected Count	21.9	2.1	24.0		
		% within Years Since Educational Attainment	91.7%	8.3%	100.0%		
		% of Total	14.9%	1.4%	16.2%		
Total		Count	135	13	148		
		Expected Count	135.0	13.0	148.0		
		% within Years Since Educational Attainment	91.2%	8.8%	100.0%		
		% of Total	91.2%	8.8%	100.0%		

Chapter 5
Discussion

The intent of this study was to fill a gap in existing literature by examining school counselors' perceptions of grading practices as data for student advocacy. On a daily basis, school counselors use teacher generated grades to as data to guide important decisions including but not limited to academic placement (e.g., honors classes, AP classes, IB classes, remedial classes), award eligibility, which colleges to apply, scholarship eligibility. Over 100 years of research demonstrates inconsistency in grade reporting practices that make the meaning of grades unknown to all stakeholders. Teachers, administrators, parents, and students have been included in the research, but school counselors have not been examined.

This study sought to examine if there were statistically significant differences in perceptions of grade reporting practices between middle school counselors and high school counselors and to what extent various counselor characteristics were associated with these perceptions of grades. School counselor participants were recruited from October 2019 – November 2019 through social media groups, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) website, and email addresses obtained through The School Counseling Analysis, Leadership, and Evaluation (SCALE) Research Center. Data were gathered through an online survey using SurveyMonkey software and analyzed using IBM SPSS version 26 software. Descriptive statistics, frequency distributions, independent samples *t*-tests, and chi square analyses of independence were used to examine data that provided answers the following research questions:

Research Question 1: Are there significant differences between middle school counselors' and high school counselors' perceptions of the purpose of grades?

Research Question 2: Are there significant differences between middle school counselors' and high school counselors' perceptions of academic standards?

Research Question 3: Are there significant differences between middle school counselors' and high school counselors' perceptions of factors included in grades?

Research Question 4: To what extent are various counselor characteristics associated with level of education and training on grading and assessment?

This chapter includes the following sections: (a) Implications of Findings, (b) Ancillary Findings, (c) Limitation of the Study, (d) Recommendations for Future Research, and (e) Conclusion.

Implications of Findings

The first research question examined the differences between middle school counselors' and high school counselors' perceptions regarding the purpose for grading. Both middle school counselors and high school counselors expressed the primary purpose for reporting grades as a means to "communicate a student's achievement status to the student, parents, school officials, and others." This finding was consistent with the findings of previous research that examined teachers' and administrators' perceptions of the purpose for grades (Allen, 2005; Liu, 2008; Imperial, 2011, Guskey & Link, 2019) and aligned with the recommendations of educational researchers (Guskey, 1996, 2001). Marzano (2000) stated that the most important purpose for grades is to provide information or feedback to students and parents, with academic achievement being the

primary factor on which grades should be based. The sole purpose of grades should be to accurately communicate the level of achievement a student has reached in relation to course standards, and, ultimately, if grades are not valid, then they do not communicate the truth about a student's learning (Allen, 2005).

For research question 1, differences between group means *were* statistically significant. These data demonstrated significantly more high school counselors determined communication to be the primary purpose for grading as compared to middle school counselors. As has been discussed, furnished grades are supposed to be the summary evaluation used to make immediate and important decisions as well as to make long range career plans (Gage and Berliner, 1992). When middle school counselors and high school counselors differ in their perceptions of how assigned grades are communicating students' achievement, the transition from middle school to high school can be greatly impacted.

School counselors use grades as a measure of data to guide individual student appraisal, advisement, and planning (ASCA, 2012). As students transition from middle school to high school, middle school counselors place students into high school courses, including honors classes and remedial classes. Variation in perceptibility regarding the meaning of grades between middle school and high school counselors can make for muddled understanding of student abilities and requirements for certain classes. With a lack of clarity within grading standards, high school counselors can misinterpret the meaning of a middle school grade, potentially placing a student in an honors or remedial class when it is not appropriate. At the same time, middle school counselors can improperly recommend a course or support for a student based upon grades that may not

accurately express achievement about the students' learning. Students are served best when grades accurately reflect achievement.

The second research question examined the differences between middle school counselors' and high school counselors' perceptions of academic standards within their school and the degree to which teachers are required to assess students on those standards. Statistically significant differences between group means were revealed when examining perceptions of established benchmarks (e.g., rubrics) for assessing students' achievement of each learning standard. Significantly more middle school counselors reported teachers assess students according to established school-wide uniform benchmarks. Differences between group means were *not* statistically significant when measuring perceptions of established school-wide content and skill standards or when measuring perceptions of established school-wide policy requiring teachers to assess students according to content and skill standards.

Further examination of these data revealed that 75.1% of school counselors reported established school-wide content and skills standards within their school. Additionally, 49.3% of school counselors reported their school to have established school-wide benchmarks for grading and 12.8% of school counselors are not sure. School counselors have the responsibility of analyzing grade-point averages in relation to achievement, advisement and appraisal for academic planning, and interpreting student records to effectively advocate for their students (ASCA, 2018). The lack of school-wide policies on grading can make it difficult for school counselors to accurately analyze grades and understanding the meaning of grades. Consistent grading practices will allow school counselors, students, parents, teachers, and administrators to better understand what an

assigned grade represents. It will also enable teachers to effectively communicate a student's strengths, weaknesses, and areas of need. In the current system of traditional grading practices, if a student receives a grade of F in a class, it may not be due to academic weaknesses, but he/she may have received a zero for tardiness on assignments or for disruptive class behavior (Wormeli, 2018).

When the meaning of grades is not clear or consistent, school counselors may miss interventions that may be appropriate. For example, if a student earns 70 on assessments but receives a B in a class due to non-cognitive factors (behavior, effort, participation, attendance), the student may be overlooked for needed academic supports. School counselors have a key role in advocating for all students and working to enhance learning opportunities for all students (Herr, 2002). School counselors work collaboratively with teachers, parents, students, and other stakeholders, allowing them to assume leadership roles in school reform initiatives designed to enhance learning for all students (Herr, 2002).

The third research question examined differences between middle school counselors' and high school counselors' perceptions of factors teachers include when assigning student grades. Statistically significant differences between groups were revealed when school counselors reported whether or not their schools have a minimum attendance requirement that students must meet in order to pass each course (regardless of demonstrated content mastery). Significantly more high school counselors reported established attendance requirements that students must adhere to in order to receive a passing grade, regardless of content mastery. Even when a student achieved mastery toward the course standards, if he/she exceeded the amount of absences allowed, the

student couldn't pass the course. When attendance is included in a student report of learning, it is an example of process criteria threatening the validity of the grade (Guskey, 2001). This finding is also consistent with previous studies that examined teacher grade reporting practices (Imperial, 2011; Cross & Frary, 1999; Guskey & Link, 2019; Liu, 2008). School counselors use data to understand student needs and to remove systemic barriers to ensure all students have opportunity to develop academic goals at all grade levels reflecting their abilities and academic interests and can access appropriate rigorous, relevant coursework and experiences (ASCA, 2017). Attendance is another example of a non-cognitive measure that when included in grades, impede the understanding what is being communicated and school counselors may miss opportunities for student scholarships, awards, support services, and enrichment.

Statistically significant differences between groups were also uncovered regarding perceptions of uniform assessments (e.g., examinations, compositions, performances, portfolios, reports) in courses that have multiple sections taught by multiple teachers. Significantly more middle school counselors reported uniform assessments are regularly administered in their schools when the same courses have multiple sections taught by multiple teachers.

Research question 4 examined the extent to which various counselor characteristics are associated with level of training on grading and assessment. For this research question chi square tests of independence were conducted to compare differences between school counselors' years of experience (*1-10 years, 11-20 years, 21+ years*) as the independent variable and training/education on the topic of grading and assessment (pre-service formal education, in-service training on grading to faculty , in-

service training on assessment for faculty) Significant results were uncovered when examining differences between school counselors years of experience and in-service training on assessment for faculty assessment (Table 4.16). Eighty percent of school counselors with 21 or more years' experience reported receiving training on assessment as part of its school's professional development program. A recommendation for future research is to examine this finding to determine what factors influenced the discontinuation of school counselors training in the area of assessments over the past 20 years.

Ancillary Findings

When examining school-wide policies on grading, data revealed only 24.3% of counselors reported their school having official statement of purpose for grading. In addition, only 30.4% of school counselors are in schools with established categories teachers may consider in determining grades; 43.2% of counselors are in schools with established weights teachers may consider in determining student grades; 45.3% of school counselors are in schools with established methods teachers may use in determining student grades (Appendix B). This study uncovered that school counselors perceive the primary purpose for grades to be to "communicate a student's achievement status to the student, parents, school officials, and others." However, lack of established school-wide policies and purpose make it a challenge for school counselors and stakeholders to understand what students' grades are actually communicating.

School counselors rely on grades to guide students, parents, teachers and administrators in making decisions such as whether students are promoted from one

grade level to the next, enrollment in advanced or remedial classes determine honor roll status, special education services, and college or university admissions (Brookhart, 1994; Brookhart & Nitko, 2008; Imperial, 2011). Prior research showed school counselors who participated in professional development within the past 12 months were more likely to use data to identify barriers to student success (Kaffenberger & Young, 2018). However, study revealed only, 8.8% of school counselors ever received formal training grading. When asked if their school provided professional development on grading to staff, 48% of school counselors reported no professional development was provided, and 25.7% of school counselors reported they are not sure, which suggested that even if professional development was provided, school counselors were not included.

Limitations of the Study

There were several limitations to this study. From October 2019 – November 2019, the researcher selected a random sample of middle school and high school counselors from across the United States. During this time of year, high school counselors are often overwhelmed with supporting high school seniors through the rigorous and demanding college application process. Demands on high school counselors at that time included writing college recommendations, addressing concerns from students and parents, speaking with college admissions counselors, hosting college representative visits, participating in college fairs, and helping seniors choose which colleges to apply. Deadlines for Early Action applicants were November 1, 2019 and November 15, 2019, which could have impacted the number of school counselors who had time to participate in the study.

Another limitation to the study involved the design of the first survey question, which asked participants to rank in order of importance six purposes for reporting grades. Out of the initial 246 respondents, 202 were eligible to participate in the study, but 44 did not complete the first survey question and ultimately withdrew from the study. During the survey's development, several members of the Validity Panel suggested that the placement of this question might discourage participants from completing the survey due to the time and consideration it required. The question remained first in the survey since it allowed respondents to establish their own purpose for grading (Imperial, 2011). It is possible that this question limited the number of participants in this study.

A third limitation of this study was that results were limited to findings from the survey items. While important findings were revealed, a more in depth understanding of school counselors' perceptions could have been examined through a qualitative or mixed methods study. Interviews with school counselors and focus groups with school counselors from different academic levels could have provided a deeper understanding of how school counselors are able to use grades as data to advocate for their students when grades have proven to be unreliable and inconsistent. As such, it is a recommendation for future research.

Recommendation for Future Practice

Based upon the findings of this study, the following are recommendations for future practice:

(a) Counselor education programs should include courses on grading and assessment to provide pre-service school counselors with an

understanding of grading purpose, methodology, and factors contributing to valid and reliable grade reporting.

(b) School administrators should be informed of the results of this study and the significant impact of inconsistent and invalid grades on students and student advocacy.

(c) School administrators should include school counselors in professional development workshops on grading and assessment so they can be informed of school-wide policies and practice.

(d) School counselors should work with administration to promote consistency within their school thereby allowing grades to be understood with greater precision (ASCA, 2019). School counselors are in a position to provide leadership and to advocate for systemic change (McMahon, Mason, & Paisley, 2009). Clarity and consistency among administrators, teachers, and counselors are essential. When individual schools and districts do not agree on a uniform grading philosophy, they perpetuate inconsistency throughout the program (Guskey & Jung, 2012; Marzano, 2010).

(e) Schools need to lower student to counselor caseloads. Lower caseloads will allow school counselors to develop stronger relationships with students and have increased time to discuss students' academic strengths and weaknesses with teachers resulting in a decreased dependency on grades. Average United States school

counselor caseloads are 450:1 which is much higher than the ASCA recommendation of 250:1.

(f) Middle school counselors and high school counselors who work in the same school district should have a clear understanding of grading policies (or lack thereof) that exist between schools. This increased understanding can identify student needs with greater precision.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the findings of this study, several follow-up studies are recommended:

(a) This study should be replicated to examine differences between high school counselors' and college admissions counselors' perceptions of grade reporting practices as data for student advocacy.

(b) A qualitative study should be conducted to examine the factors school counselors consider when making high stakes decisions and recommendations on behalf of their students when traditional grades have been proven unreliable. Individual interviews and focus groups with school counselors from varied academic levels are recommended.

(c) Future studies should examine the impact of the significant differences that exist between the degree to which middle school and high school counselors perceive communication to be the primary purpose for grading.

(d) School district and building administrators should be studied to examine their perception of the role of the school counselor in relation

to grades and to determine why school counselors are often excluded from professional development when relating to grading and assessment.

(e) Future studies can further examine factors that contributed to the discontinuation of school counselors training in the area of assessments over the past 20 years.

Conclusion

This study expanded upon previous research by examining school counselors' perceptions of grade reporting as they use grades as data to advocate for their students. Prior to this research, studies examined teachers' and principals' perceptions of grade reporting practices (Cross & Frary, 1999; Liu, 2009; Imperial; 2011; Guskey & Link, 2019), but studies examining school counselors' perceptions have not been found. It is important for school counselors to have a full understanding of what a grade is communicating. Guskey (2001a) stated, "If the purpose of the report card is to communicate to parents the achievement status of students, then parents must understand the information on the report card and know how to use it." This is true for school counselors, as well.

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Appendix A

Institutional Research Board Approval

Federal Wide Assurance: FWA00009066

Oct 24, 2019 12:33 PM EDT

PI: Tracey Segal-Nachamie
CO-PI: Mary Ellen Freeley
Dept: Ed Admin & Instruc Leadership

Re: Initial - IRB-FY2020-210 School Counselors' Perceptions of Grade Reporting Practices as Data for Student Advocacy

Dear Tracey Segal-Nachamie:

The St John's University Institutional Review Board has rendered the decision below for School Counselors' Perceptions of Grade Reporting Practices as Data for Student Advocacy.

Decision: Exempt

Selected Category: Category 2.(i). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording).

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

Sincerely,

Raymond DiGiuseppe, PhD, ABPP
Chair, Institutional Review Board
Professor of Psychology
Marie Nitopi, Ed.D.
IRB Coordinator

Appendix B

School Counselor Survey on Grading

Do you currently hold school counselor certification?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	12	4.9	4.9	4.9
	Yes	234	95.1	95.1	100.0
	Total	246	100.0	100.0	

Do you currently hold a Master's Degree in school counseling?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	9	3.7	3.7	3.7
Missing	Yes	237	96.3	96.3	100.0
Total		246	100.0		

Are you currently employed as a middle school or a high school counselor in the United States?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	30	12.2	12.2	12.2
	Yes	216	87.8	87.8	100.0
	Total	246	100.0	100.0	

Question 1

"Teachers in your school report a student's summative grade in order to (rank in order)...."						
Purpose	Rank of Importance					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
"communicate a student's achievement status to the student, parents, school officials, and others."	78.2% (115)	14.3% (21)	1.4% (2)	2.7% (4)	-	3.4% (5)
"provide information that a student can use for self-evaluation.	6.9% (10)	46.2% (67)	22.1% (32)	11.7% (17)	6.9% (10)	4.8% (7)
"select, identify, or group a student for certain educational paths/programs."	1.4% (2)	9.7% (14)	25.0% (36)	22.9% (33)	18.8% (27)	15.3% (22)
"motivate students to learn."	4.2% (6)	13.9% (20)	27.1% (39)	29.9% (43)	17.4% (25)	4.2% (6)
"modify student behavior."	1.4% (2)	2.1% (3)	13.1% (19)	12.4% (18)	27.6% (40)	32.4% (47)
"evaluate the effectiveness of instructional program(s)."	7.5% (11)	13.7% (20)	11.6% (17)	17.1% (25)	21.2% (31)	24.7% (36)

Question 2

On official GRADE REPORTS your school sends home, how is each student's grade reported?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	A letter grade (A, B, C, D, or F) corresponding to a set of written descriptors for overall performance in a subject.	87	58.8	59.2	59.2
	A percentage grade based on a numerical scale with accompanying descriptors.	42	28.4	28.6	87.8
	A grade corresponding to a standardized performance rubric.	9	6.1	6.1	93.9
	A separate grade for each element of learning within each course (e.g., written expression, content knowledge, problem-s	2	1.4	1.4	95.2
	Teachers select comments from a standardized list of comments describing the student's performance.	5	3.4	3.4	98.6
	Not sure	2	1.4	1.4	100.0
	Total	147	99.3	100.0	
Missing	System	1	.7		
Total		148	100.0		

Question 3

Does your school require teachers to include comments to supplement the grade?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	97	65.5	65.5	65.5
	Yes	38	25.7	25.7	91.2
	Not sure	13	8.8	8.8	100.0
	Total	148	100.0	100.0	

Question 4

How are those comments determined by the teachers?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Teachers select comments from a predetermined bank of comments.	21	14.2	55.3	55.3
	Teachers compose their own comments.	3	2.0	7.9	63.2
	Teachers can both select comments from a bank of comments or compose their own for each student.	12	8.1	31.6	94.7
	Not sure	2	1.4	5.3	100.0
	Total	38	25.7	100.0	
Missing	System	110	74.3		
Total		148	100.0		

Question 5

In general, how frequently does your school officially communicate student achievement via grade reports to its students and parents?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Every month	20	13.5	13.6	13.6
	Every five weeks	59	39.9	40.1	53.7
	Every ten weeks	61	41.2	41.5	95.2
	Not sure	7	4.7	4.8	100.0
	Total	147	99.3	100.0	
Missing	System	1	.7		
Total		148	100.0		

Question 6

Does your school require teachers to use the same computer grade book?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	4	2.7	2.7	2.7
	Yes	143	96.6	96.6	99.3
	Not sure	1	.7	.7	100.0
	Total	148	100.0	100.0	

Question 7
Please identify the computer system your school uses.

Question 8

Does your school's computer grade book allow students and parents to see the student's grades at any time online?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	2	1.4	1.4	1.4
	Yes	140	94.6	98.6	100.0
	Total	142	95.9	100.0	
Missing	System	6	4.1		
Total		148	100.0		

Question 9

On your school's REPORT CARDS, how is each student's learning reported for each course?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	A letter grade (A, B, C, D, F) corresponding to a set of written descriptors for each grade.	83	56.1	56.5	56.5
	A grade based on a numerical scale with accompanying descriptors.	51	34.5	34.7	91.2
	A grade corresponding to a standardized performance rubric.	9	6.1	6.1	97.3
	A separate grade for separate elements of learning within each course (e.g., written expression, content knowledge, prob	3	2.0	2.0	99.3
	Comments selected from a standardized list of comments describing the student's performance.	1	.7	.7	100.0
	Total	147	99.3	100.0	
Missing	System	1	.7		
Total		148	100.0		

Question 10

Does your school have an official statement of purpose for grading?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	52	35.1	35.1	35.1
	Yes	36	24.3	24.3	59.5
	Not sure	60	40.5	40.5	100.0
	Total	148	100.0	100.0	

Question 11

Does your school's statement of purpose identify communicating ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT as the primary purpose for why grades are reported?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	4	2.7	11.1	11.1
	Yes	19	12.8	52.8	63.9
	Not sure	13	8.8	36.1	100.0
	Total	36	24.3	100.0	
Missing	System	112	75.7		
Total		148	100.0		

Question 12

Does your school have school-wide content and skills standards in each subject area?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	13	8.8	8.8	8.8
	Yes	110	74.3	74.3	83.1
	Not sure	25	16.9	16.9	100.0
	Total	148	100.0	100.0	

Question 13

Are teachers in your school required to assess and grade students' achievement of those standards?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	11	7.4	10.0	10.0
	Yes	84	56.8	76.4	86.4
	Not sure	15	10.1	13.6	100.0
	Total	110	74.3	100.0	
Missing	System	38	25.7		
Total		148	100.0		

Question 14

Has your school established benchmarks (e.g., rubrics) for assessing students' achievement of each learning standard?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	18	12.2	16.4	16.4
	Yes	73	49.3	66.4	82.7
	Not sure	19	12.8	17.3	100.0
	Total	110	74.3	100.0	
Missing	System	38	25.7		
Total		148	100.0		

Question 15

Does your school identify what CATEGORIES teachers may or may not consider in determining a student's final grade?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	48	32.4	32.4	32.4
	Yes	45	30.2	30.4	62.8
	Not sure	55	37.2	37.2	100.0
	Total	148	100.0	100.0	

Question 16

Does your school identify what WEIGHTS teachers may place on different elements in determining a student's final grade?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	66	44.6	44.6	44.6
	Yes	64	43.2	43.2	87.8
	Not sure	18	12.2	12.2	100.0
	Total	148	100.0	100.0	

Question 17

Does your school identify METHODS teachers may use to determine a student's final grade (e.g., averaging marks over a term, standard weighting of various elements)?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	50	33.8	33.8	33.8
	Yes	67	45.3	45.3	79.1
	Not sure	31	20.9	20.9	100.0
	Total	148	100.0	100.0	

Question 18

Does your school have a school-wide grading scale with standardized grade equivalent cut-offs (e.g., 90-100=A, 80-89=B, 70-79=C, 60-69=D, 50-59=F)?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	132	89.2	89.2	89.2
	No	13	8.8	8.8	98.0
	Not sure	3	2.0	2.0	100.0
	Total	148	100.0	100.0	

Question 19

Is the range for the grade that indicates failure (e.g., F) larger than the range for other grades?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	20	13.5	13.6	13.6
	Yes	120	81.1	81.6	95.2
	Not sure	7	4.7	4.8	100.0
	Total	147	99.3	100.0	
Missing	System	1	.7		
Total		148	100.0		

Question 20

In courses that have multiple sections taught by multiple teachers, are uniform assessments (e.g., examinations, compositions, performances, portfolios, reports) administered as part of the regular assessment program?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	42	28.4	28.6	28.6
	Yes	67	45.3	45.6	74.1
	Not sure	38	25.7	25.9	100.0
	Total	147	99.3	100.0	
Missing	System	1	.7		
Total		148	100.0		

Question 21

Does your school have minimum attendance requirements students must meet in order to pass each course?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	91	61.5	61.9	61.9
	Yes	50	33.8	34.0	95.9
	Not sure	6	4.1	4.1	100.0
	Total	147	99.3	100.0	
Missing	System	1	.7		
Total		148	100.0		

Question 22

For how long have you been a school counselor?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1-10 years	83	56.1	56.1	56.1
	11-20 years	35	23.6	23.6	79.7
	21-30 years	26	17.6	17.6	97.3
	30 + years	4	2.7	2.7	100.0
	Total	148	100.0	100.0	

Question 23

What is the highest level of formal education you have completed?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Master's Degree	56	37.8	37.8	37.8
	Master's Degree + up to 30 Credits	48	32.4	32.4	70.3
	Master's Degree + 30 - 60 Credits	39	26.4	26.4	96.6
	Doctoral Degree	5	3.4	3.4	100.0
	Total	148	100.0	100.0	

Question 24

How recently was your highest degree earned?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Within the last five years	52	35.1	35.1	35.1
	Between 6 and 10 years ago	36	24.3	24.3	59.5
	Between 11 and 15 years ago	16	10.8	10.8	70.3
	Between 16 and 20 years ago	20	13.5	13.5	83.8
	Between 21 and 25 years ago	16	10.8	10.8	94.6
	Between 26 and 30 years ago	6	4.1	4.1	98.6
	31 years ago, or more	2	1.4	1.4	100.0
	Total	148	100.0	100.0	

Question 25

Did your formal educational training include any courses in grading?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	135	91.2	91.2	91.2
	Yes	13	8.8	8.8	100.0
	Total	148	100.0	100.0	

Question 26

Has your school trained its faculty in the practice of GRADING as part of its professional development program?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	71	48.0	48.0	48.0
	Yes	39	26.4	26.4	74.3
	Not sure	38	25.7	25.7	100.0
	Total	148	100.0	100.0	

Question 27

When was this training administered to the faculty?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Within the last 5 years.	36	24.3	92.3	92.3
	Between 6 and 10 years ago.	3	2.0	7.7	100.0
	Total	39	26.4	100.0	
Missing	System	109	73.6		
Total		148	100.0		

Question 28

Has your school trained its faculty in the practice of ASSESSMENT as part of its professional development program?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	29	19.6	19.6	19.6
	Yes	80	54.1	54.1	73.6
	Not sure	39	26.4	26.4	100.0
	Total	148	100.0	100.0	

Question 29

When was this training administered to the faculty?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Fewer than 5 years ago	105	70.9	86.1	86.1
	Between 6 and 10 years ago	9	6.1	7.4	93.4
	More than 10 years ago	8	5.4	6.6	100.0
	Total	122	82.4	100.0	
Missing	System	26	17.6		
Total		148	100.0		

Question 30

Please mark your primary position as a school counselor.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Middle School	50	33.8	33.8	33.8
	High School	98	66.2	66.2	100.0
	Total	148	100.0	100.0	

Appendix C

Consent to Use and Adapt Survey

Dear Ms. Segal,

Congratulations on entering this phase of your doctoral work. I know how much work it requires when you are a full-time educator.

You certainly have my permission to use the instruments I developed. I am very interested in learning what you find out.

Good luck.

Pete Imperial

Dear Dr. Imperial,

….. I am asking for your permission to use your Administrators Survey on Grading with school counselors. If granted permission, I would adapt the survey by changing the word "Administrator" to "School Counselor". In addition, I would add additional demographic questions such as the type of school the participant works in (middle school, high school) and add a "not sure" option to the "yes/no" questions.

Tracey Segal

Dear Ms. Segal,

I like your new angle very much. You have my permission to use my survey for the purposes you explained.

Pete Imperial

Appendix D

Recruitment Letter

Fellow School Counselors,

I am excited to be among the first examine school counselors' perceptions of grade reporting practices. As school counselors, we interpret grades daily as we advocate for our students. A great deal of research has been conducted examining teachers, administrators, parents, and students' perceptions of grade reporting, but we, school counselors, have been left out…. until now.

If you are a current school counselor working in a high school or middle school in the United States, please consider taking 5 minutes to participate in my doctoral research study and answer a few questions regarding your perception of grading. As traditional grading practices are being reconsidered, I would like to contribute to existing literature by giving school counselors a voice in grade reform.

No identifying information (regarding you, your location, school, students) is requested or will be collected. Your identity will remain anonymous.

You are eligible to participate in the study if:

- You are certified as a School counselor
- Hold a Master's Degree in School Counseling
- Are currently employed as a middle school or high School counselor in the United States

If you would like to participate, please follow the link (it also provides additional information regarding the study):

Please feel free to contact me at tracey.segalnachamie17@my.stjohn.edu

Thank you in advance.

Sincerely,

Tracey Segal
Doctoral Candidate
St. John's University
Queens, New York

Appendix E

Letter of Consent

Dear Fellow School Counselor,

You are invited to participate in a research study to learn more about School Counselors' Perceptions of Grade Reporting Practices as Data for Student Advocacy. I, Tracey Segal, will be conducting this study as Primary Investigator through Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership in the School of Education, St. John's University, as part of my doctoral dissertation. Dr. Mary Ellen Freeley, St. John's University/Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership my faculty sponsor.

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to complete a 30-question survey about your perception of grade reporting practices (purpose for grading, factors included in grading, academic standards) including a few questions about your background (years' experience, degree attainment). Participation in this study will involve 10 minutes of your time to complete the survey. There are no known risks associated with your participation in this research beyond those in everyday life. Although you will receive no direct benefits, this research may help the investigator understand School counselors' perceptions of grade reporting practices better.

All responses are anonymous and collected through SurveyMonkey software. Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty. You have the right to skip or not answer any questions you prefer not to answer.

If there is anything about the study or your participation that is unclear or that you do not understand or if you have questions or wish to report a research-related problem, you may contact me directly at tracey.segalnachamie17@my.stjohns.edu or my faculty sponsor, Dr. Mary Ellen Freeley, at freeleym@stjohns.edu. For questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University's Human Subjects Review Board, St. John's University, 718-990-1440. This email serves as a copy of consent document to keep. Completion of the survey implies consent to participate.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Tracey Segal
Doctoral Candidate
St. John's University

Vita

Name	*Tracey Segal*
Baccalaureate Degree	*Bachelor of Science,* *Towson State University,* *Towson, Maryland* *Major: Health Science*
Date Graduated	*May 1994*
Other Degrees and Certificates	*Master of Science,* *Long Island University* *Brookville, New York* *Major: School Counseling*
Date Graduated	*May 1996*
	Advanced Graduate Certificate *Long Island University,* *Brookville, New York Major:* *Educational Administration*
Date Graduated	*May 2013*