

2015

# Parents' Perceptions of and Experiences with School Counselors

Robyn Jean Emde  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Counselor Education & Supervision

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Robyn Emde

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2015

Abstract

Parents' Perceptions of and Experiences with Professional School Counselors

by

Robyn Jean Emde

MS, Bethel College, 2002

BS, North Central University, 1990

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Counselor Education Supervision

Walden University

June 2015

## Abstract

Research has found that parents may feel isolated from their children's schools due to their own problematic educational experiences or their lack of understanding their children's school experiences. Current literature explores stakeholders' perceptions of school counselors but lacks specific context from a parental perspective. Validating parents' perceptions of and experiences with school counselors enhances students' academic success by providing insight about what motivates parents to invest in their children's schools and how school counselors influence parental involvement. Utilizing key concepts related to the importance of parental involvement for student success, this qualitative study focused on the experiences and perceptions of parents regarding their children's high school counselors. Criterion and snowball sampling was used to recruit 8 parents from 5 different high schools across the Midwestern United States. Interview data were analyzed through clustering and horizontalization processes, revealing 4 specific themes: *student benefits*, in which school counselors directly supported students; *parents feeling empowered*, in which school counselors validated concerns and empowered parents; *school counselor providing interpersonal environment*, where students believed school counselors cared about them as individuals and strove for their success; and *informed school counselor*, where school counselors capitalized on their expertise and professional experience for the direct benefit of students. These emerging themes strengthen existing research and provide current and future school counselors with insight into building and maintaining collaborative relationships with parents, including advocacy efforts to increase student success.

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## Dedication

I have to remind myself that some birds are not meant to be caged. Their feathers are just too bright, and when they fly away, the part of you that knows it was a sin to lock them up does rejoice.

*The Shawshank Redemption* (Darabont, 1994)

This work is dedicated to my parents, Jerry and Gloria Emde. Throughout my life you reminded me that I did not need to remain caged, but could fly. Even though neither of you attended college, you made education and learning a priority in my life. The countless number of selfless acts that you both demonstrated in order for this dream to be a reality inspires me to pass on your love for education and flying to others. You are my heroes and I could not be more grateful that Jesus gave me the privilege of two such amazing people to call parents.

I am grateful for the many friends and colleagues that have encouraged me on this journey. Dr. Sue Schaeffer and Dr. Don Amidon I am grateful that your support and confidence in me ignited the passion for further education. May Sisson I am blessed to have your investment. Jeff Beam your gift of technical help was priceless. Thank you for always answering your phone. Clint Limoges you paved the way for the rest of us to not only complete the journey, but to enjoy it while doing it. I am forever grateful for your kindness and inspiration. Mitch Veldkamp, our Friday after school coffee chats inspired me to continue to find excellence in the field of school counseling. Your heart for the important aspects of school counseling (the students) helps me to continue in a profession that is often thankless. Thank you for the privilege of calling you my friend.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction of the Study

### **Introduction**

The responsibility to educate and ensure student success has been a driving force of the school counseling profession since its origin (Pope, 2009). According to Epstein and Van Voorhis (2012), the school counselor is a key stakeholder in the successful educational experience of students. One factor that contributes to student success is experiencing a sense of connection with adults within a school, and students finding the relationship with their school counselors beneficial. According to Shepard et al. (2012), students' positive relationships with school counselors and other school staff lead to students' connectedness with school and enhanced investment in their own educational process and inevitably to high levels of academic success. School connectedness is defined as "the belief by students that adults in the school care about their learning as well as about them as individuals" (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009, p. 3). Knowing that adults care provides students with security that they are valued by the adults in the school.

In addition to school counselors being stakeholders in students' education, students' own self efficacy can be a reflection on their perceptions of their school counselors (Zarei, Shokrpour, Nasin, & Kafipour, 2012). Self-efficacy is the extent that a student believes in his or her own abilities to accomplish goals and complete tasks. When students demonstrate self-efficacy, the improved sense of self has the potential to translate in higher test scores, the desire for college, and the subsequent ability to

compete successfully in a global marketplace (Zarei et al., 2012). When students demonstrate self-efficacy, their perceptions of their school counselor can be affected.

Parental involvement is another factor that contributes to a successful educational experience for students (Griffin & Galassi, 2010; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Parental involvement is defined as parents advocating for mentoring, tutoring, academic, and cultural enrichment and college success programs (Bryan & Henry, 2012). No matter what type of involvement is implemented, collaboration between parents and school counselors is vital to student success (Griffin & Galassi, 2010).

Although parental involvement is essential, parents' perceptions toward school counselors have been minimally explored (Gillilian, 2006). My qualitative study adds to the research base by exploring parents' perceptions of their relationships with school counselors and factors of that relationship that enhance student success. In addition, I explored how parents experienced and perceived school counselors as a part of the essential connectedness in school for their children. Understanding parents' experiences with and perceptions of school counselors has the potential to validate school counselors' activities and stimulate a renewed investment in the school by stakeholders (Zarei et al., 2012). Understanding what works well from the parents' perspectives assists school counselors in doing more of what works well and focusing less on what is nonessential to student success (Zarei et al., 2012).

In Chapter 1 of this research study, I highlight the foundation of school counseling and the role of school counselors. In addition, this chapter includes a brief synopsis of current literature that identifies the gap in the research that this study



addressed. I present the problem statement, purpose statement, initial research questions, and concepts that drive the study, along with research that justifies the approach to this study. I also present key terms with their definitions, along with a discussion of assumptions and limitations. I conclude the chapter with a brief discussion of the implications of social change in my study.

### **Background of the Study**

The background of the study encompasses a description of the professional school counselor. I also describe the role the school counselor exhibits through the eyes of the administration, parents, students, and the school counselor themselves. The perceptions of each of these stakeholder groups will help to define the background of the study.

### **Description of the Professional School Counselor**

The role of the professional school counselor (hereafter referred to as school counselor or school counselors) is multifaceted. These aspects include consulting with teachers, school administrators, and outside organizations and being the catalyst in coordinating services with these individuals and organizations (Helker, Schottelkob, & Ray, 2007). School counselors must be creative, skilled in resource management, knowledgeable in community mobilization, and must be masters at multitasking (Mitchell & Bryan, 2007). No matter the role of the school counselor, the goal is success in the educational setting for each student (Hann-Morrison, 2011; Pope, 2009). On a daily basis, school counselors help parents and students ensure student success. School counselors advocate for students to the school administration (Zalaquett & Chatters,

2012). In addition, school counselors suggest course work that leads to students preparing for and being recognized by colleges (Hann-Morrison, 2011).

The perception of the role school counselors play has been reported by students, administration, and even school counselors themselves (Leuwerke, Walker, & Qui, 2009; Moyer & Yu, 2012; Owens, Stewart, & Bryant, 2011). According to Zalaquett and Chatters (2012), the vast majority of school administrators are generally satisfied with the roles and work of school counselors under their charge. School administrators noted that counselors need to spend more time in the classrooms and leading small groups, both focused on helping students view themselves as successful (Sherwood, 2010). According to administrators, one area of identified success of school counselors is the strength of their relationships with peers, parents, and community partners (Epstein & VanVoorhis, 2010). Epstein and VanVoorhis (2010) concluded that school counselors should increase time spent in strengthening partnerships with other educators, parents, and community stakeholders. According to administrators' perceptions, as school counselors develop and nurture partnerships, student success will be demonstrated as students feel an enhanced sense of belonging.

While administrators' perceptions of school counselors is one indicator of student success, school counselors' awareness of students' socioeconomic, ethnic, and cultural factors is another (Steen & Noguera, 2010). School counselors' awareness of cultural differences is vital in the role because the lack of cultural congruence between low income minority students and the middle class culture of schools is a key factor that influences student success (Moore-Thomas & Day-Vines, 2010; Steen & Noguera, 2010).

There are several factors that help students experience success. Bryan and Henry (2012) found that student success, which helps students feel more connected to school, is dependent on a productive collaboration between school counselors and parents. Parents need to voice their perceptions of this collaboration in order to maximize academic success for their children. However, the experiences and perceptions of parents have been minimally researched (Gillilian, 2006; Hughes, 2007).

### **Parent Dynamics and Involvement**

Parents gaining greater control and visibility within a school can enhance students' academic, personal, and social success (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007). Due to social and cultural differences among parents and school personnel, there is often misunderstanding concerning appropriate parental involvement (Mapp, 2003). Different cultural groups differ in what they consider appropriate parental involvement in their children's schools (Bryan & Henry, 2012). Barriers such as language, staff attitudes towards parents, and past negative experiences discourage some parents from participating fully in their children's school (Bryan & Henry, 2012; Lavenda, 2011). Misunderstandings about appropriate parental involvement can, in part, be rectified through communication between the parents and school personnel (Bryan & Henry, 2012). Parental involvement in school has been linked to the students' psychological well-being (Cripps & Zyromski, 2009). The decline of parental involvement in secondary schools (Deplanty, Coulter-Kern, & Duchane, 2007) is detrimental to the students' academic, personal, and social success (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). School

counselors must strive to incorporate parents into their children's educational experiences to address these concerns no matter the age of the student.

### **Lack of Research**

The research available on parents' perceptions of school counselors is minimal. Researchers have primarily focused on perceptions of school staff, administrators, and students toward school counselors (Bonnelle, 1975; Burris, 1983; Gordon, 1987; Harris, 1986; Hughes, 2007; Ostwald, 1988). There is little research on the perceptions of parents toward school counselors that could inform the profession about enhancing key relationships and potentially identifying factors that contribute to student success, particularly specific experiences and perceptions parents have of school counselors. The majority of related research was quantitative in nature and lacked the rich description found in qualitative research designs. Additionally, the focus of my study was on improving the school counseling profession through investigating the experiences with and perceptions that parents have of school counselors.

There has been research on key stakeholders' perception of school counselors. Natividad (2010) researched the perceptions of administrators, counselors, and teachers and presented a comparison of each group's perception of school counselors. Although Natividad focused on stakeholders' perceptions, the conclusions largely comprised an articulation of the responsibilities of high school counselors. While this is valuable information, Natividad did not analyze parents' experiences with and perceptions of school counselors and the possibilities as to how the parent/counselor relationship could enhance students' school experiences.

In my review of the research literature, I found only one qualitative dissertation with a topic similar to my research (Hughes, 2007). Hughes (2007) conducted a qualitative inquiry with an emphasis on parents' expectations of school counselors in respect to expectancy theory, which asserts that a person's effort results in a desired performance (Hughes, 2007). Hughes conducted interviews to understand the expectations that parents have of secondary school counselors. Although the Hughes study is similar in methodology to my study, I focused on parents' perceptions of and experiences with school counselors and how these perceptions and experiences have potential to impact student success.

There have been a few other studies conducted that reflect areas related to my study. Although beneficial to mention, the research is on the fringe of what many consider within adequate research time frames (Creswell, 2014; Van Mannen, 1990). Ostwald (1988) investigated student and teacher perceptions of the roles and functions of high school counselors. Even though the research is outdated, Ostwald provided a glimpse into the perceptions that stakeholders have of school counselors. In addition, Harris (1986) conducted research on the perceptions of school counselors and students on the function of school counseling. Barboza et al. (2009), Amatea and Clark (2005), and Zalaquett (2005) examined administrator perceptions of the role of school counselors. Bonnelle (1975) and Gordon (1987) each provided perceptions from students alone on their experiences with school counselors. Saeedpour (1986) presented a combination of principals', teachers', and counselors' perceptions on the role of school counselors. Finally, Burriss (1983) offered expectations of school counselors from the perceptions of

counselor educators, counselors, principals, teachers, and students. The past research provides some important context for my study. However, because this research is 25 to 30 years old, it necessitates the need for a fresh perspective on this topic. It is because of the lack of current research in this area that I conducted my study.

### **Problem Statement**

Significant to elementary and secondary student success are partnerships between schools and parents (United States Department of Education, 2014). A successful educational experience can be influenced positively through the partnerships between parents and school counselors (Bryan & Henry, 2012). These partnerships have been researched from the perception of school administrators, school personnel, and students on the effectiveness of school counselors (Sherwood, 2010; Zalaquett & Chatters, 2012). Bryan and Henry (2012) reported that school counselors believe that partnerships between themselves and parents is important to student success. The problem is that some parents may feel isolated from school; if parents feel more connected, students have the potential to be more successful in their educational experience (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2011; Bryan & Henry, 2012). An additional problem is that the role of school counselors is not consistently defined, which may negatively impact students' educational experience (Bryan & Henry, 2012). Even though the American School Counselor Association's National Model (ASCA, 2012) states that school counselors need to foster effective relationships with parents, there is limited research on how these relationships develop and are maintained. It was for this reason that I sought to understand parental

perceptions of and experiences with school counselors and how these relationships impact student success.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative, transcendental phenomenological study was to discover parents' experiences with and perceptions of their children's school counselors in order to identify potential factors and processes contributing to working relationships between parents and school counselors and how these relationships benefit students. Initial research questions were generated to help guide the study and data gathering.

### **Research Questions**

In order to provide a structure to examine parents' perception of high school counselors, the following research questions were developed for this qualitative, transcendental phenomenological study. Husserl (1970) suggested that qualitative, transcendental phenomenological studies are the "motif of inquiring back into the ultimate source of all the formations of knowledge, the motif of the knower's reflecting upon himself and his knowing life" (pp. 97-98). The following research questions reflect parents' image of themselves and their perceptions of school counselors.

### **Central Research Question**

1. What are parents' perceptions of and experiences with their children's school counselors?

### **Research Subquestions**

1. In what ways do parents perceive school counselors impacting their children?

2. How do parents collaborate with their children's school counselors?
3. What do parents perceive that school counselors do that makes their relationships with students meaningful/beneficial?

### **Key Concepts**

The principal focus of this study was to explore parents' perceptions of school counselors and the potential of the success of their children. In reviewing the research literature, two concepts emerged as the impetus of this study. Initially, Bryan and Henry (2012) described how school counselors were perceived by administrators, students, and parents. This included the role that school counselors play in student success. Bryan and Henry asserted that administrators hold the key to establishing school counselor roles that are effective for the collaboration between school counselors, students, and parents. Griffin and Farris (2010) also reported that school administrators viewed school counselors as key members of the school administrative team. School administrators delegate responsibilities to school counselors, which can impact student success (Griffin & Farris, 2010).

Students' perceptions of their school counselors may be a combination of positive, negative, or mixed perceptions (Owens, Stewart, & Bryant, 2011). This inconsistent view of students toward school counselors might be a reflection of their physiological, mental, and emotional development (Roaten & Roaten, 2012). The developmental stage in students' lives influences their emotions and behavior (Roaten & Roaten, 2012). It is important whether or not physiological, mental, and emotional



development is impacted by student perceptions of their school counselors because these perceptions have the potential to impact student success (Roaten & Roaten, 2012).

When parents are invested in their children's education through participation in school, students demonstrate greater success (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005; Duru-Bellat, 2004; Seitsinger, Felner, Brand, & Burns, 2008; Tett, 2004; Wanat, 2010; Yanghee, 2009). Parental involvement enhances academic success and students' personal and social lives (Cordry & Wilson, 2004; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). As parents become more invested in their children's schools, they report positive relationships with school personnel, and in addition, students also feel more invested in the school (Wanat, 2010). School counselors can help encourage and facilitate these positive relationships (Wanat, 2010).

### **Nature of the Study**

Discovering parents' perceptions of school counselors and their personal experiences with them fills a gap in the current literature. Consideration of parents' perceptions of school counselors will lead to improved relationships between parents and school counselors, which has the potential to enhance student success.

### **Method**

A qualitative inquiry is used to discover aspects of phenomena that are complex and not easily observed (Arghode, 2012). As the data for my study were gathered, the data drove this discovery, which emerged without a preconceived direction. This evolving process is central to a qualitative research methodology (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Through initial interviews, the data generated were

clustered into themes, and these themes informed the trajectory of the study. As I interviewed parents as stakeholders in their children's schools, they described their perceptions, memories, judgments, thoughts, and feelings related to their children's school counselors. As interviews with parents proceeded, a number of themes emerged, from which I made tentative interpretations, piecing together the mosaic of how parents and counselors related to one another and how their relationships impacted student success.

The interviews supplied me with numerous examples and stories of parents' experiences and perceptions. According to Christensen and Brumfield (2009), phenomenologists "seek to understand individuals' life worlds at a deep level and then to describe that life world as it applies to a particular experience" (p. 136). Parents' personal experiences and perceptions are a part of the life world they shared with me. My task as a researcher was to facilitate their descriptions and to draw a deeper understanding of their experiences of working with school counselors. This process was germane to Heidegger's (1962) position on phenomenology, which posited that humans find meaning in the context of their individual background and experience. In this study, I sought to find a descriptive, rich meaning and understanding of parents' experiences with their children's school counselors.

As a part of the research process, I informed parents of the nature of the study as a way of inviting them to participate in one or two interviews. The strength of the qualitative approach includes the development of relationships between researcher and participants through creating emotional connections, learning mutually, and embracing

diversity (Hallett, 2013). I collected the data and coded it using a hand coding system, drawing on techniques, such as word repetitions, key words, compare/contrast comparison method, metaphors and analogies, connectors, and cutting and sorting to refine and interpret the data usefully (Colaizzi, 1978). In addition, hand coding helped me to organize the data and the overall coding process (Moustakas, 1994). Each of these techniques will be furthered explained in Chapter 3.

I recorded participant interviews and transcribed and analyzed them for relevant themes. The interview script included open-ended questions focused on exploring parents' feelings concerning interactions with and beliefs about professional school counselors. Upon answering the initial broad and open-ended questions, follow up questions clarified emergent themes related to the parents' experiences. The goal of this type of reflexive questioning was to identify themes that were unarticulated, yet woven throughout the interviews (Friborg & Rosenvinge, 2013).

## **Methodology**

The qualitative research method selected for this study was a transcendental phenomenological study (Creswell, 2014; Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). A transcendental phenomenological qualitative approach allows the researcher to view and understand a situation in reference to the experience encountered (Creswell, 2014; Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). Specifically, parents' views of school counseling are affected by their relationships and experiences with their children's school counselors. A brief description of the selection process follows, and a more detailed description is provided in Chapter 3.

I made selections of parents based on criterion sampling (Patton, 2002). Each potential parent met the following criteria:

- Selected parents must have a student currently enrolled in high school
- Selected parents must have had at least one contact with their children's high school counselor within the last year
- Selected parents must not work for a school district
- Selected parents must come from rural, urban, or suburban public schools

Parent selection also included snowball sampling (Noy, 2008; Patton, 2002). Snowball sampling occurred when potential parent participants informed other potential parent participants of the study or identified other participants who might be appropriate for the study. This was effective as I used parents' spheres of influence in order to attract new parents to the study.

Following participant selection, I initiated informed consent with parent participants (Appendix C). Informed consent consisted of a document that was signed by participants. This process is a part of my ethical responsibility as a researcher as articulated in my institutional research board (IRB) proposal. My informed consent to research participants was based on the following recommendations provided by Pollock (2012):

- I informed participants that they were participating in research
- I informed participants about the purpose of the research
- I informed participants about the procedures of the research

- I informed participants of the risks and benefits of the research to ensure their safety
- I informed participants of their rights to stop or decline from participating in the research at any time
- I explained confidentiality measures which I would use during the research process

After explaining and collecting signed informed consent forms, I initiated individual interviews with eight parents of high school students. The interviews yielded information about the feelings parents had about their children's school counselors. As the data were collected, I analyzed them for relevant themes (Karnieli-Miller, et al., 2009).

Documenting procedures in a qualitative research study are important to ensure reliability (Yin, 2003). Documenting included checking transcripts for palpable mistakes I may have made as a result of recording incorrectly or asking irrelevant questions (Gibbs, 2007). Another method includes checking the transcript consistently to compare data with codes in order to ensure the accurate definition of codes (Gibbs, 2007). By assigning data codes, themes emerged that I easily identified (Gibbs, 2007). Once the themes were identified, I communicated with other researchers in order to share my initial analytical interpretations of data. Such communication enabled me to validate the findings with other researchers not directly connected to the study. The specific strategies implemented were as follows:

- Ensuring that themes were derived through the triangulation of data

sources, such as interviews (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2012)

- Verifying with participants that qualitative themes were beneficial to them and the community (Pollock, 2012)
- Demonstrating accountability by clarifying the biases I, as a researcher, brought to the study (Deady, 2011)
- Reporting on all data that were discovered, both positive and negative (Pollock, 2012)
- Investing the time needed with the participants (Taylor Powell & Renner, 2003)
- Finding a peer debriefer for myself in order to ensure cultural sensitivity (Bartholomew, 2011)
- Providing an external auditor who examined the completed qualitative research project (Hume & Young-Loveridge, 2011)

Following these procedures ensured that I conducted the research according to accepted and time tested methodology and with the highest level of integrity. All of strategies are presented for reference purposes; however, some or all were implemented as needed throughout the study. Further discussion of each strategy is detailed in Chapter 3.

### **Definitions of Key Terms**

The following six key terms are important to contextualizing my study: (a) American School Counseling Association (ASCA)., (b) ethical mandates, (c) parent dynamics, (d) school counselor, (e) stakeholder perceptions and, (f) student success.

*American School Counselor Association (ASCA):* ASCA is an organization that provides national standards for professional school counselors in the United States and around the world. Research based programs through ASCA are provided to school districts in order to demonstrate academic achievement and success in school for students.

*Ethical mandates:* Ethical mandates from the ASCA provide school counselors with a road map of ethical behaviors from which to engage in the occupation of school counseling (ASCA, 2012).

*Parental dynamics/involvement:* The term parental involvement is used interchangeably with parental dynamics. Parental involvement and parental dynamics encompass the involvement that parents have within a school (Cripps & Zyromski, 2009). Activities that indicate parental involvement and parental dynamics may include parents attending extracurricular activities, communicating on a regular basis with school personnel and volunteering to help in the classroom. The amount of time spent and resources given define parental dynamics and parental involvement within a school (Bryan & Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). Students' successful academic, personal, and social involvement in school is dependent upon their parents' involvement (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

*School counselor:* School counselors have various roles. According to ASCA (2012), school counselors possess "knowledge, abilities, skills and attitudes necessary to plan, organize, implement and evaluate a comprehensive, developmental, results based school counseling program that aligns with the ASCA National Model" (p. 1). In order

to fulfill these expectations, school counselors embrace many administrative and clerical duties that help ensure a high quality counseling experience for the students. The role may be part of the administrative team or a traditional counseling position (Stanciak, 1995).

*Stakeholder perceptions:* Stakeholder perceptions include behaviors and actions of parents, administrators, and students that help define relationships and interactions with school counselors (Hommel, Musseler, Aschersleben, & Prinz, 2001).

*Student success:* Student success refers to any student attending a U. S. public school who experiences positive relationships, a vision of the future, an enhanced confidence in his or her own efficacy, and meaningful participation in strengthening both emotional and academic areas (Shepard et al., 2012). Meeting the goals of fulfilling the aforementioned four attributes is defined as student success.

### **Assumptions**

The following assumptions were associated with the study of parents' experiences with their children's school counselors:

- School counselors want to see students be successful.
- Parents desire relationships with their children's school counselors in order to enhance their children's school experiences.
- School counselors have many roles within their job descriptions.
- Students desire help from their school counselors.



- The nucleus of the relationship between the parents and school counselors is the student.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

There are strengths and limitations in qualitative phenomenological research. The strengths and limitations are largely based within the interview process. The initial benefit of a phenomenological design is that, through the interview process, participants validate their experiences by describing their experiences and perceptions (Christensen & Brumfield, 2009). Helping participants to voice their experiences allows them to explain their personal understanding and describe their values and priorities. This process is enhanced by participants' investment in the research process and the experience the researcher brings to the interview (Gibbs, 2007). I employed individual interviewing skills and used reflection and paraphrasing to elicit responses and help the participants share their insights. These counseling skills helped facilitate responses from parents. Prior to the interviews, the participants were made aware that the interviews were not counseling sessions, but a platform for them to share their experiences and for their information (data) to be gathered and recorded (Gibbs, 2007). The experiences participants had in sharing enhanced their understanding of the research process and understanding of what emerged from the data (Sheperis et al., 2009).

I used a phenomenological design to focus on a few participants who were interviewed in a relaxed environment, which promoted participants' personal stories and opinions (Reiter, Stewart, & Bruce, 2011). By focusing on a few participants, I was able to help facilitate the telling of their stories, which allowed those interviewed to expand

and deepen their responses. (Karnieli Miller et al., 2009). In the interview, I focused on the descriptions of the parents' lived experiences with their children's school counselor.

As a school counselor, I am aware of how culture may impact the research. In order to promote diversity within the research, I included a sample of participants of various cultures, which had the potential to provide a rich description of diverse parents' perception of school counselors.

There are limitations within the implementation of a phenomenological design. The interview can be a limitation through factors such as participant timeliness and availability (Patton, 2009). I followed up with participants through phone calls prior to the scheduled appointments in an attempt to address this potential problem. Actual interview settings could create problems also, due to possible interruptions. In order to provide an uninterrupted interview, I offered the use of a private room in which parents participated in the interviews. Producing a consistent interview setting and providing reminder phone calls helped to avoid interruptions and missed interviews in the data gathering process.

Another limitation of this study was the nature of the relationship between the parents and me. Parents may have reported only positive experiences in order to please me or influence the research in some way (Eide & Kahn, 2008). I was vigilant in assessing the relationship between myself and the participants to ensure that the primary focus was on data collection and appropriate follow up in order to check initial and validate later themes. It was vital that I not lose focus on data gathering, especially in the midst of participants tapping into emotions and personal meanings while telling their

stories. These occasions were important for me as a researcher to notice and record as part of the data analysis (Hunt, Chan, & Mehta, 2011).

I also experienced the limitation of being a first time researcher. All of the plans and methodology cannot compare to the strength of experience; however, the lack of experience also provided a fresh view of the phenomena and the research process. My limitation in experience was addressed through being accountable to colleagues and the dissertation committee. I participated in peer debriefing with a peer researcher after participating in interviews and reviewing transcriptions of the data. Being accountable to a peer researcher and the dissertation committee helped to minimize any bias that may have emerged (Xu & Storr, 2012).

### **Significance of the Study**

Strong working relationships between school counselors and parents likely enhance successful educational experiences for students (Bryan & Henry, 2012). When parents feel they are contributing members of their children's educational development, positive results from interventions are likely to be demonstrated in the student (Bryan & Henry, 2012).

Parents desire a voice in their children's education, and it is important that their opinions are heard and respected. One consequence of positive parent/school counselor relationships is the process of voting for bonds within public school districts. The National Parenting Association (2000) conducted a survey and found that parents' concerns in improving public schools and instilling values in their children were among the top concerns addressed. School counselors collaborate with parents to address their

concerns in working with students (ASCA, 2012). However, parents who demonstrate concern for their children's welfare, based on their perceptions and experiences, would most likely vote to add funding to local school districts (National Parenting Association, 2000). These parental actions can help preserve and sustain the school counseling profession and the work school counselors do (Vanderlip, 2006). Understanding parental perceptions and experiences with school counselors allows school counselors to be more informed of areas for their own personal and professional growth that enable students to experience success (Griffin & Gallassi, 2010).

The awareness gained from this research has the potential to enhance relationships between parents and school counselors and to revitalize school counselors in their professional functioning. In addition, this research informs more effective counseling and consultation techniques, which could potentially improve students' educational experience (ASCA, 2012). Improvement of students' educational experiences is described in the American School Counseling Association Advocacy Competencies model (ASCA, 2012). Within this model is an awareness of the need to maintain and nurture the roles school counselors play in developing relationships with parents (ASCA, 2012), which is the initial step to enhancing a students' educational experiences (Bryan & Henry, 2012).

### **Potential for Social Change**

This qualitative phenomenological study of parents' perception of school counselors may lead to positive social change. Initially, this study may help inform the planning and developing of effective school counseling programs. As school counselors

become aware of the parents' perceptions, counselors' methods and modalities may change to be more consistent with student success as an outcome. As school counseling programs become more sensitive to parents' perceptions, the delivery of counseling services may be enhanced with the knowledge gleaned from this study. Lastly, this study may enhance parents' investment in their children's educational experiences. When parents feel invested in their children's education and participate in school, students are more likely to be successful (Van-Bockern & McDonald, 2012). This study serves as a catalyst for encouraging parents' investment in their children's educations and students' potential for greater success in school.

### **Summary**

School counselors play a role in the educational experience of students (Hann-Morrison (2011). While the role of school counselors will continue to evolve, understanding the relationship between parents and school counselors can provide much needed insight. My study sheds light on these essential relationships in order to identify areas that contribute to student success.

In Chapter 1, I introduced how parents experience and perceive school counselors and how these perceptions influence student success. While I presented current research regarding the relationship of school counselors and various stakeholders, no current research exists on how the specific relationship between school counselors and parents develop and can enhance student success in school. Because of the lack of thick rich descriptions of the relationship between parents and school counselors, I proposed this study in order to discover what specific parent experiences and perceptions could bolster

existing research of how parent and school counselor relationships are developed and sustained and how these relationships might strengthen student success. Chapter 1 also included the study's assumptions, limitations, and significance, which serve as a bridge to the literature review in Chapter 2.

In Chapter 2, I provide an in depth review of the literature regarding the relationship of parents and school counselors and how that relationship has the potential to lead to student success in school. In order to provide a foundation, the initial section of Chapter 2 begins with a synopsis of the literature found concerning school counselors and parental perceptions. Chapter 2 concludes with an explanation as to how relationships impact parents' perceptions of school counselors.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

Understanding how parents view school counselors who work on behalf of their children has the potential to strengthen the academic performance of students and to develop insight into how relationships between school counselors and parents are developed and sustained. Understanding these relationships has the potential to illuminate the dynamics that impact experiences between parents and school counselors. To study these relationships, it is helpful to explore the research literature. The underpinning for my qualitative phenomenological literature review was the U.S. Department of Education's (2014) report on the importance of partnerships between schools and parents of students. According to the U.S. Department of Education, partnerships between schools and parents are imperative for students to have a successful educational experience. School counselors are often the bridge between parents and schools (Bryan & Henry, 2012). Presently, the roles and functions of school counselors have been researched from the perspective of administrators and other school personnel, but little research has been conducted on how parents are impacted by their relationships with school counselors and how school counselors support student learning and achievement (Amatea, 2005; Barboza et al., 2009; Sherwood, 2010; Zalaquett, 2005; Zalaquett & Chatters, 2012).

Addressing this lack of research is consistent with the American School Counselor Association's National model (ASCA, 2012) that states that school counselors need to foster effective relationships with parents. While the impact of school counselors

has been studied from the perceptions of administrators and other school personnel, information about the perceptions of parents related to their relationships with school counselors and how these relationships impact student success is warranted (Epstein & Van-Voorhis, 2010). I sought to fill this gap in the literature by focusing on parents' perceptions of and experiences with their children's school counselors. In addition, I explored how these relationships can ultimately benefit students' school experience.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

To identify peer reviewed articles published within the last five years, I used the following databases: EBSCO, ERIC, Proquest Academic Journals, Proquest Educational Reports, ProQuest Dissertations and Thesis, Google Scholar, and Thoreau: Search Multiple Databases. Walden University Library Proquest UMI provided the doctoral dissertations that were retrieved. The sources used to develop the literature review helped me to establish the definition of a school counselor, parent dynamics within schools, ethical mandates adhered to by school counselors, and the appropriate key concepts to establish this study. Keywords used to search databases included *school counselors, perceptions, attitudes, parents, relationships, beliefs, stakeholders, administrators, teachers, school staff, collaboration, high school, high school student development, middle school, middle school student development, multicultural, ethic, socio ecological model, and social change.*

### **Literature Synopsis**

Researchers have focused on administrators and teachers sharing their perceptions of school counselors (Zalaquett & Chatters, 2012). Parents' perceptions of school



counselors have been minimally explored using qualitative methods, which can provide rich and full descriptions of essential experiences and perspectives. Scholars have approached this topic from a largely quantitative research paradigm (Helms & Ibrahim, 1985; Kaplan, 1997). Understanding all stakeholders' perceptions of school counselors is crucial to understanding how student success is impacted by the quality of relationships. In this chapter, I outline the roles of school counselors, administrators, students, and parents. I include a detailed synopsis of how research has affected the views of school counselors from administrators, students, and school counselors. In addition, I identify potential factors that could lead to collaborative working relationships between parents and school counselors to increase student success (Bryan & Henry, 2012; Epstein & Van-Voorhis, 2012; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). In the remainder of this chapter, I focus on the key concepts of my study, how literature search strategies were implemented in my research, and corresponding literature supporting these perceptions.

### **Background of the Study**

In order to understand how school counselors' roles have evolved, a brief historical description of school counseling is warranted. School counseling began in 1889 when a Detroit public school principal, Jesse B. Davis, introduced a guidance curriculum to English teachers (Coy, 1999). Vocational guidance was the trend in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, due to the industrialization and urbanization that was prevalent throughout the country (Aubrey, 1992). School guidance received notoriety between 1914 and 1918 when several large cities across the United States implemented school guidance programs in the 1930's (Aubrey, 1992). When first introduced,

counseling was a technique presented to assist in these newly developed guidance programs.

The formulation of ASCA in 1952 gave school counseling the status of a profession. At the same time that ASCA was being birthed, the American Personnel and Guidance Association, forerunner of the American Counseling Association (ACA), was forming. Not only the formulation of professional associations but the licensing and certification in the 1950s legitimized the profession (Coy, 1999). The emphasis progressed from school counselors' responsibilities having evolved from vocational to the present day developmental guidance and counseling (Aubrey, 1999). Currently, ASCA has 33 position statements that provide details on various aspects of school culture and functioning that the school counselor influences (ASCA, 2012).

### **The School Counselor's Role**

Establishing the role of the school counselor was important in this study. Having knowledge of school counselors' roles allowed me to establish a useful direction in parent interviews and formulate questions relevant to those roles. Further, I could guess what parents' general perceptions were of school counselors meeting their roles with students based on my own experience as a school counselor. However, the reality of school counselors meeting all roles and responsibilities is unrealistic (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2012) because they do not always match up with what school counselors actually do, which results in role confusion in a school (Leuwerke, Bruinekool, & Lane, 2008).

### **Expectations of School Counselors**

The ASCA national model (2012) presents initiatives that define the roles and responsibilities of school counselors. The ASCA national model divides the roles and responsibilities of school counselors into four distinct areas: foundation, delivery, management, and accountability.

The foundation of the school counselor is to establish a school counseling program equipping school counselors with competencies that meet the demands of the profession in order to enhance the learning process for all students (ASCA, 2012). Once the foundation is secure, the delivery of services occurs. School counselors are responsible for implementing services directly to students through classroom teachers, administrators, and outside referrals. The delivery of services also encompasses school counselors' work with the parents and other stakeholders. The delivery of services often serves as the initial impression that school counselors leave with key stakeholders and is a part of the ongoing relationship between school counselors and stakeholders (ASCA, 2012).

Another area of the school counselors' role is management. School counselors manage school counseling assessments, data measurement, development of action plans, and organizing calendars to ensure efficient management of time and resources (ASCA, 2012).

The final area of school counselors' role is accountability. School counselors are responsible for ensuring that school counseling programs are making a positive impact on key stakeholders, including students, parents, administrators, and community partners

(ASCA, 2012). These partnerships with key stakeholders ensure that the essential role of school counselor is maintained within the school (Epstein & Van-Voorhis, 2010).

School counselors are also expected to have a high awareness of the culture (ASCA, 2012). Many factors contribute to the knowledge of a culture, including ethnicity, socioeconomic status, cultural norms, gender identity, and school counselors' personal life experiences. School counselors recognize the importance of embracing all ethnicities. It is estimated that, by the year 2020, students of color will represent nearly half of the elementary and secondary public school student population (Miller, Strosnider, & Dooley, 2000). School counselors need to be familiar with cultural and ethnic differences in the students they serve.

Along with ethnic differences, socioeconomic differences exist within the students and staff of a school (Moore-Thomas & Day-Vines, 2010). If school counselors are sensitive to these cultural differences, the relationships they form with students have the potential to promote student success (Steen & Noguera, 2010). For example, it is vital for school counselors to be aware of cultural differences between low income minority students and the middle class culture of a school (George & Aronson, 2003; Moore-Thomas & Day-Vines, 2010; Steen & Noguera, 2010).

In addition, school counselors' deep seated personal beliefs influence their own personal perceptions and opinions of their own experiences (Harris, 2002). Furthermore, school counselors' own ethnicity may or may not affect their cultural awareness. An example would be a school counselor of Asian ethnicity who was adopted as an infant by a Caucasian family; his or her ethnic identity may be with the Caucasian culture rather

than the Asian culture. Many factors contribute to knowledge of a culture, including ethnicity, socio economic status, and cultural norms. Through their professional preparation, school counselors are trained to be aware of cultural differences among their clientele (ASCA, 2012).

As part of an effective cultural approach, school counselors must work with all students within a school, regardless of students' gender identities. No matter where school counselors personally identify, they are cognizant of their own beliefs and attitudes about gender (DePaul, Walsh, & Dam, 2009). Self-identity includes school counselors understanding their own beliefs and attitudes about gender. Counselors must understand perspectives and values held by the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and questioning (LGBTQ) community (Depaul et al., 2009). This awareness by school counselors is important, as shown in recent cases at Eastern Michigan University and Augusta State University (Keeton v. Anderson Wile, 2010; Shallcross, 2010). In 2009 students from each of these universities, training to be school counselors, refused to counsel homosexual clients because doing so conflicted with their religious beliefs (Keeton v. Anderson Wile, 2010; Shallcross, 2010). Federal judges supported the respective universities' policies to dismiss from the program and expel these student counselors, based on violations of the ACA ethical code as interpreted by the university. Supporting a positive school environment for all genders is a position that all professional school counselors should strive toward (ASCA, 2012). The Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLEN, 2009) offers specific guidelines when working with LGBTQ students and can be used as a useful resource.

As school counselors strive for better understanding of and support for parents, they must focus on the strengths within a family no matter how that family is defined. This will enhance cultural awareness, strengthen counselor credibility, and help school counselors establish a productive collaboration with parents (Bryan & Henry, 2012). The expectations of school counselors include how they view their students and in addition how they view themselves.

School counselors' perceptions of themselves as members of the counseling profession can impact their competence within student counselor relationships (Butler & Constantine, 2005). When school counselors evaluate and identify with the profession and feel pride in their work, they are positively impacted in their professional self-esteem (Katz, Swindell, & Farrow, 2004) and professional identity (Crocker, Luhtanen, Baine, & Broadnax, 1994).

School counselors' self-esteem is also impacted by their attitudes toward their tasks and the services they render to students. School counselors are often asked to perform administrative, clerical, or secretarial tasks, and their attitudes toward these tasks reflect their professional identity and self-esteem (Brott & Myers, 1999). In contrast, school counselors who see their work as relevant and meaningful will have positive attitudes toward students and a sense of accomplishment within their professional functioning, resulting in a greater sense of self-esteem (Butler & Constantine, 2005). School counselors need a strong sense of identity; the lack of this can cause school counselors to demonstrate negative attitudes and apathy toward students (Yu, Lee & Lee, 2007). School counselors need to perceive themselves with a strong role identity in order

to be effective with the various stakeholders (Moyer & Yu, 2012). The manifestation of a professional attitude enhances school counselors' identity and personal effectiveness (Moyer & Yu, 2012). The stronger the school counselor's self-esteem, the more effective he or she will be in the profession (Katz, Swindell, & Farrow, 2004).

### **The Administrator's Role**

One third of all universities that graduate school administrators are accredited by the Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC)(Eller, 2010). The ELCC standard two specifically states that it is the school leaders' responsibility to forge the relationship with school counselors (Eller, 2010). In addition, ASCA (2012) encourages counselors to build a clear and competent relationship with their school principals. Whether it is initiated by the administrator or the school counselor, the positive relationship between administrator and school counselor is likely to help in promoting success in students.

### **Administrators' Expectations**

School principals are significant stakeholders within a school, holding the key to hiring and establishing specific roles and tasks for school counselors (Leuwerke,-Walker, & Qui, 2009). Because of this responsibility, it is essential for school principals and school counselors to collaborate in order to develop an effective school counseling program (Carnes-Holt, Range & Cisler, 2012). Collaboration can only occur when the work of school counselors is viewed by the administration as essential (Leuwerke, Walker, & Qui, 2001). Awareness of school counselors' roles allows administrators to

make informed decisions on the appropriate expectations for these school counselors and the value they bring to the administrative and educational team (Griffin & Farris, 2010).

School counseling programs are often threatened due to budget cuts (Vanderlip, 2006). Collaboration of school counselors with school administration is essential to sustain the longevity of the school counseling profession. If administrators have favorable views of the work school counselors do, they may decide to direct budget cuts away from school counseling positions (Vanderlip, 2006).

**Administrators' perceptions of school counselors.** In most cases, the overall perception of school counselors by administrators is positive (Huffman et al., 1993; Zalaquett & Chatters, 2012); however, the roles and functions of school counselors are often indistinct to administrators (Griffin & Farris, 2010). Amatea and Clark (2005) clarified these roles through a study in which they interviewed middle and high school administrators, discovering four distinctive roles evident in school counselors: *innovative school leader, collaborative case consultant, responsive direct service provider, and administrative team player*. When administrators understand and value the roles, responsibilities, and work of school counselors, these counselors feel valued, resulting in strong professional self-esteem (Zalaquette & Chatters, 2012).

College Board, the nationally recognized organization that has existed since 1900 and produces the Standardized Assessment Test (SAT), outlined characteristics of effective principal and school counselor relationships (Martin, Hale, Flannery & Wong, 2011). They reported that open communication for purposes of decision making was listed as an effective way for principals and school counselors to enhance their



relationships. In addition, other research (Martin et al., 2011; Zalaquett & Chatters, 2012) indicated that participation by school counselors on school success teams is another effective way for principals and school counselors to collaborate and coordinate student services.

Bardhoshi and Duncan (2009) reported that rural school principals' highest areas of priority regarding school counselors were crisis intervention and both academic and personal counseling. Counselors are trained for these roles and responsibilities (Bardhoshi & Duncan, 2009). Moreover, the ASCA position statements, state that crisis intervention was an essential responsibility of school counselors (ASCA, 2012).

Administrators' perceptions strongly influence the school counseling profession and thus provide an important perspective for my study. It is vital to understand the perceptions that administrators hold of school counselors. In addition, as parents in my study share their experiences with and perceptions of school counselors, there is the potential to see how their perceptions converge and diverge with those of administrators.

### **The Parent's Role**

As key stakeholders parents expectations of school counselors and their active role in school are important to student success.

#### **Parents' Expectations**

Parents are key stakeholders in their children's educations and reflect key elements of their social and cultural backgrounds (Bryan & Henry, 2012). Appropriate parental involvement is often misunderstood by school counselors because of differences in social and cultural backgrounds (Mapp, 2003; Strayhorn, 2010). Recognizing and

addressing the cultural and social differences is an important responsibility of school counselors (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2011), as well as encouraging parents to take an active role in their children's education (Ailka & Ohanaka, 2013; Cripps & Zyromski, 2009). This is especially important in secondary school, as parental involvement usually declines from elementary to secondary schools (DePlanty, et al., 2007). The decline in parental involvement in secondary school results in a corresponding decline in students' academic, personal, and social success (Cordry & Wilson, 2004; Henderson & Mapp, 2007).

Wanat (2010) studied parents' experiences in a K 12 school district and concluded that parents who had positive interactions with school personnel resulted in positive relationships with their children's school administrators and teachers. These parents reported feeling supported with answers to their questions concerning their children's progress, and that their involvement was valued as essential to their children's success in school. In contrast, parents who reported negative experiences with their children's school and who felt disconnected from the school, often due to their own work constraints, felt dissatisfied with their children's school and frustrated at the lack of communication between home and school (Wanat, 2010). While the results are difficult to generalize because the study represented only one school district (Wanat, 2010), it did provide an important perspective which is probably relevant to any school district and school.

Too often obstacles hinder parents from engaging in their children's educations; Yanghee (2009) proposed eight obstacles. These barriers were based on teachers'

perceptions of what keeps parents from being involved in schools. Although Yanghee (2009) researched this phenomenon from teachers' perspectives, school counselors may experience similar dynamics. Parents who experience some or all of these barriers may perceive school counselors very differently and less positively than parents who do not encounter these impediments. Thus school counselors' awareness of these barriers is important.

The first barrier involved teachers' negative perceptions of parent efficacy. When teachers have a negative perception of parents, parental involvement in their children's education is inhibited (Yanghee, 2009). The second barrier consisted of teachers' perceptions that ethnic minority parents are disinterested in their children's educations; this potentially minimizes parent school relationships (Yanghee, 2009). In addition to Yanghee's (2009) research on minority parents, other studies have found that teachers perceive parents with college educations and high socioeconomic backgrounds as more actively involved in their children's schools when compared to parents who are only high school educated and from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Duru-Bellat, 2004; Tett, 2004; Weinger & Lareau, 2003).

The third barrier discouraging parental participation was teachers' beliefs about the effect of parental involvement, and whether parental involvement is philosophically understood by school staff (Yanghee, 2009). Teachers who perceived parental involvement as having a positive impact were more likely to encourage it than teachers who believe parental involvement had a negative impact (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2007). The fourth barrier pertained to teachers modeling the attitudes of their

administration. When teachers perceived that the administration was adopting innovative and diverse programs to help engage parents in school programs, they would soon align with the administrators' perceptions (Brown & Medway, 2007; Yanghee, 2009). However, the barrier existed when teachers modeled negative attitudes of the administration.

The fifth barrier was a lack of school friendliness and positive communication (Yanghee, 2009). Parents who experienced a welcoming, friendly environment were more likely to engage in school activities; conversely, parents who experienced indifference and a lack of communication tended to negate the importance of school activities (Yanghee, 2009). The sixth barrier related to the lack of diversity in the student body. Minority parents rarely get involved in schools which offered limited culturally sensitive programs (Yanghee, 2009). Traditional parent involvement programs such as Parent Teacher Organization and open house night do not generally lend themselves to cultural sensitivity (Turney & Kao, 2009). Parents who do not speak English find themselves lost. Traditional school programs must integrate culturally sensitive programs in order for all parents to feel welcome within the school (Turney & Kao, 2009).

The seventh barrier focused on school policies that did not include parental involvement, objectives, and expectations. School policies that clearly value parental input result in greater parent involvement than school policies which marginalize parent expectations (Yanghee, 2009). The eighth and final barrier comprised ineffective leadership (Yanghee, 2009), which impeded effective parental involvement and

weakened collaboration between home and school. School leadership sets the tone for the staff and their involvement with parents (Thompson, McDonald & Sterbinsky, 2005). These eight barriers represented themes that emerged in my study at varying levels as I sought to understand how parents experienced their children's schools and school counselors. It was important for me to note how parents' perceptions may have paralleled these findings (Yanghee, 2009).

**Parenting styles.** As I prepared to gather data on parent perceptions of their children's school counselors, it was important that I considered the impact that differing parenting styles may have had on how participants shared their stories. Baumrind (1996) conceptualized a theory of three parenting styles: authoritarian, permissive, and authoritative. The *authoritarian* parenting style was identified by a great demand from the parent to the child, with little or low responsiveness from the parent to the child. Characteristics of an authoritarian parent included being rigid, harsh, and excessively demanding (Baumrind, 1996). When a child expresses a need, the authoritarian parent is quick to respond with harmful words and actions. The *permissive* parent was the opposite of the authoritarian parent. When a child needs something, this parent responds quickly, and is overly demonstrative with care, love, and praise or overly unrestrained in his or her actions. Characteristics of a permissive parent included failing to enforce rules and being overly responsive to their children's demands. The third parenting style was the *authoritative* parent who demonstrates firmness, but not rigidity and is willing to make an exception when the situation warrants (Baumrind, 1996). Parents demonstrating

the authoritative parenting style wanted their children to respond with autonomous reasoning skills, independent thinking, and respecting adult authority.

Parenting styles appeared indirectly in my study through the actions and responses of the parents during the interviews. I remained cognizant of the expectations that these parents placed on their children, and how these expectations and their consequences impacted students' and parents' relationships with their school counselors.

### **The Adolescent Student's Role**

Numerous changes occur in the life of an adolescent. It is a time when children undergo physical, emotional and intellectual changes that have the potential to create or exacerbate emotional problems such as depression and anxiety (Rosenth, Johnson & Johnson, 2008). The residual effects of an adolescents emotional problems can lead to isolation from school, family and friends (Flook & Fuligni, 2008). In addition, this emotional response could possibly lead to a skewed perception of students' school counselors. It was important that I acknowledged this possibility as parents shared how their children viewed their school counselors.

### **Adolescents' Expectations**

Understanding adolescent development was essential to my study as it was a primary source from which students' perceptions of their school counselors derived. In both brain development and social/emotional development, perceptions of adolescents toward their school counselors may be reflective in the students' perceptions of their school counselors.

Adolescent development includes cognition, emotions, and behavior on brain growth (Roaten & Roaten, 2012). Outside of the first three years of life, the adolescent brain experiences more dramatic changes than any other time of life (Wetherill & Tapert, 2013). Changes also occur in executive function and social cognition (Blakemore & Choudhury, 2006). The adolescent brain demonstrates structural changes that cause behavioral changes (Casey, Jones, & Somerville, 2011; Jensen, 2015). School counselors' understanding of adolescent brain development enables them to understand the stage of development the student is in and thus may foster more effective counselor student relationships (Erford, 2011; Roaten & Roaten, 2012). For example, school counselors need to put into context that specific reactions from adolescents also involve behavioral changes occurring within the developing brain (Casey, et al., 2011).

Social/emotional processing is a vital factor in adolescent development (Gooding, Burnett-Heyes, Bird, Viner & Blakemore, 2012). There is a relationship between the adolescent and emotional processing and social processing (Burnett, Thompson, Bird & Blackmore, 2011; Sumter, Bokhorst, Miers, Van-Pelt & Westenberg, 2010). This research indicated that adolescent relationships with peers and adults are reflected in their emotional and social processing.

The student's developmental role needs to be understood and responded to effectively by school counselors (Gorman, 2006). School counselors implementing development sensitive programs will enhance student functioning and help strengthen student counselor relationships.

**Student perception of school counselors.** Students are key stakeholders in understanding the collective view of school counselors, and it is important to understand their perceptions (positive and/or negative) of school counselors. A recent study of African American females' perceptions of their school counselors revealed seven key themes which may be relevant to all students' perceptions of their school counselors (Owens, et al., 2011).

The first theme involved students' general understanding of what school counselors do. School counselors were seen as supports that students could access to determine classes they should take for college and people they could talk to in order to get through tough times. The second theme consisted of the positive view these students had of their school counselors. School counselors were seen as some of the "most influential persons in students' high school career" (Owens, et al, 2011 p. 36).

The third theme consisted of these students' perceptions of who receives priority support from school counselors. Students viewed school counselors spending more time with those who got kicked out of school than with "good students." The fourth theme related to these students' understanding that school counselors were available if personal problems needed to be discussed; most students in the study stated they would not go to their school counselors for personal problems because they didn't want their school counselors to "know their business" (Owens, et al, 2011 p. 37).

The fifth theme involved students believing they had positive relationships with their school counselors and that their school counselors liked them. In spite of these positive relationships, students generally reported that they could not readily access their



school counselors due to school counselors' competing priorities. The sixth theme focused on racism and its impact on academic support from the school counselor. Students reported that their school counselors did not treat them differently due to their ethnicity. It was interesting to note that the students who experienced no racism from their school counselors expected that when they went to college, they would likely encounter racism. This fact suggests that it would be wise for school counselors to prepare students that their experiences beyond high school may not be congruent with those they have in high school. The seventh and final theme pertained to services that could improve school counseling. Students noted that they would like to see increased programs and activities focused on increasing social skills and helping students understand and improve interpersonal relationships (Owens, et al, 2011).

My study indirectly represented both positive and negative student perceptions of school counselors. As I discovered parental perceptions of and experiences with school counselors, it was important to see how students' perceptions aligned and diverged with my findings.

There are three specific areas in which the research on student perceptions enhanced the preparation for my research. First, the importance that students placed on their relationships with their school counselors provided a direction during parent interviews. Second, I discovered parent awareness, or lack thereof, of what resources school counselors can and do provide. Understanding more deeply the developmental stage of students to parental perceptions and experiences increased understanding of the relationships between parents, students, and school counselors. Third, understanding

how students and parents experienced school counselors' cultural sensitivity and competence was important context for my research.

### **Summary**

Throughout the reviewed literature, several key factors were found to support the basis for my study. I provided a background of the school counseling profession to contextualize how school counselors evolved in their support of students in school settings. This was followed by a review of four stakeholder groups within the school: school counselors, administration, parents, and students. I chose research that contextualized each of these stakeholders' perceptions about school counselors. I highlighted how school counselors' roles were perceived by each group of stakeholders. Stakeholders' perceptions impact powerfully the role of school counselors and their work activities. In addition to being aware of stakeholders' perceptions, school counselors must recognize and address social and cultural differences to enable parents to play a larger role within the school (Epstein & VanVoorhis, 2011).

Researchers have revealed that roles and perceptions of school counselors, administrators, parents, and students impact student success (Bryan & Henry, 2012; Griffin & Farris, 2010; Owens, Stewart & Bryant, 2011; Roaten & Roaten, 2012). In addition, high levels of self-esteem impacts school counselors' competence and self-efficacy and is reflected in the perceptions of stakeholders (Butler & Constantine, 2005). Perceptions of administrators toward school counselors are positive overall (Zalaquett & Chatters, 2012) and occur on a variety of levels (Amatea & Clark, 2005). Parents' perceptions of school counselors may be influenced by their parenting styles (Baumrind,

1996; Locke, Campbell & Kavanagh, 2012). How students perceive school counselors is both positive and negative (Owens, et al, 2011). The developmental needs of students may play a part in how students perceive school counselors (Gorman, 2006). The stakeholders' roles and their perceptions of school counselors provided an important foundation from which I formed tentative assumptions and developed initial questions to guide parent interviews in this research. As parents were interviewed about their perceptions of and experiences with school counselors, I considered how the current research connected to my inquiry.

Chapter 3 presents an overview of the research methodology for my study. This overview includes the philosophical underpinnings of and rationale I used in my methodology, participant selection, sample size, instrumentation, ethical considerations, procedures, themes, data collection, and analysis.

## Chapter 3: Research Design

### **Introduction**

In Chapter 3, I describe the research methods used for this study, identifying factors which contribute to the collaboration between parents and school counselors, which possibly benefits students. To gain a full understanding of the scope of the research, Chapter 3 is divided into four sections. Initially in Chapter 3, I restate the research questions and discuss the relevance of the study. In addition, the beginning of the chapter includes the rationale for choosing a qualitative methodology research design. Included in this section is the impact this study has on social change. In the second part of the chapter, I discuss the research methodology. I focus on the parent participants, including sample size, ethical procedures, and the protection of the participants. In the third part of the chapter, I provide a detailed description of data collection techniques, including data analysis and specific procedures. The conclusion of this chapter gives a synopsis of ethical procedures and explains the concept of trustworthiness.

### **Research Questions**

A set of research questions was presented to gather the parents' experiences and perceptions of school counselors and how collaborative relationships between parents and counselors impact student success. According to Roberts (2013), the aim of the research questions is to "set the scene for an explorative and flexible study" (p. 214). In this study, I focused on the following primary research questions:

- What are parents' perceptions of and experiences with their children's school counselors?
- In what ways do parents perceive their children's school counselors impacting their children?
- How do parents collaborate with their children's school counselors?
- What do parents perceive that school counselors do that makes their relationships with students meaningful/beneficial?

### **Qualitative Study**

A qualitative research method was best suited for this study due to a paucity of research on participants' direct experiences on this topic. Literature cited in preparation for this study included both quantitative and mixed methods research on parents' perceptions of school counselors (Fleishman-Hillard, 2005; Gillilan, 2006; Helms & Ibrahim, 1985; Kaplan, 1997). Although these studies provided a basic foundation, they lacked the deep, rich insights that a qualitative study can provide. Understanding the shared experiences of parents and their relationships with school counselors helps to inform practices and policies of the school counseling profession (Creswell, 2014).

With the information gathered through in-depth interviews, the qualitative researcher generally collects the data from multiple participants (Creswell, 2014). Once the data are collected in a qualitative study, the researcher identifies emergent themes. The researcher becomes cognizant of moving the discussion from a perspective of lived reality to the way participants experience the phenomena (Berndtsson, Claesson, Friberg, & Ohlen, 2007). In my study, the interviews began with questions discovered through

key concepts (Appendix E). The initial few questions to parent participants were as follows: Tell me a little bit about your high school children? Could you tell me something positive that distinguishes your child's school from other schools? How would you describe your relationship with your son/daughter's school counselor? Can you share with me how your interactions with the school counselor have impacted, either positively or negatively your children's relationship or experiences with the school?

In addition to adding insight through investigation of a particular phenomenon, qualitative research enhances social change (Maxwell, 2005). In this study, social change was stimulated as parents' voices were heard through these interviews. In addition, social change was evident as parents believed that their perceptions were important and significant. Parents' perceptions regarding their experiences and relationships with their children's school counselors and how these relationships could possibly impact student success generated the basis for social change.

### **Research Approach**

The rationale for choosing a phenomenological study includes several specific aims. The initial goal of phenomenological research is to describe and understand a lived experience from the perspective of participants invested in the experience (Roberts, 2013). Secondly, the adoption of a phenomenological research process allowed me to accurately represent parents' perceptions of school counselors in a way that targeted student success. Third, phenomenological methodology focuses on participants' perceptions and not on the experience or preconceived ideas of the researcher. Phenomenological research allows participants to relate a credible perspective of the

relationship between them and school counselors (Quinn, Clare, & van Dijkhuizen, 2008).

The final rationale for implementing a phenomenological methodology in my study was accountability within the data. I enhanced rigor in the research findings by being transparent in the research process and open to external audit (Patton, 2002), which heightened reporting accurate and valid results. Rigor in the research aligns with the methodology in two specific ways: (a) I selected participants by recruiting them based on existing parameters set forth in the research review and (b) the sampling selection was purposeful in using distinct criteria that ultimately lead to the appropriate participants voicing their perceptions and experiences.

Among various qualitative research modalities, the phenomenological method is the most appropriate for this study. This method provided the best vehicle of understanding parent school counselor relationships. There are several available approaches to phenomenology. I chose to implement a qualitative, transcendental phenomenological approach (Moustakas, 1994). Distinguishing from other types of qualitative research, in transcendental research, the essence of human experience is explored by acquiring and collecting data. In my study, collecting data on parents' perceptions of and experiences with their children's school counselors helped me understand the essence or meaning parents made of their relationships with school counselors. As a novice researcher, qualitative transcendental phenomenology was an appropriate choice for two reasons: (a) I sought the meaning behind the relationships with parents and school counselors, which is consistent with transcendental phenomenology;

and (b) transcendental phenomenology offered a detailed data analysis process that is a model for novice researchers to follow (Moustakas, 1994).

### **Role of the Researcher**

Intellectual rigor, professional integrity, and methodological competence are characteristics of effective and credible qualitative researchers (Patton, 2002). There are several roles that help the researcher navigate the research successfully. In the initial role, a qualitative researcher must be cognizant of his or her presence and examine the effects that his or her presence has on the integrity of the research (Patton, 2002). I welcomed parents and helped them to engage in the research process in a nonthreatening way by observing their reactions and being aware of my own personal limitations (Patton, 2002).

I was cognizant of my own personal evolution in my relationships, values, and emotions that occurred during the research. According to Patton (2002), it is important for researchers to be aware of any changes they experience and to record the changes in order to determine how changes may impact the study. It was essential that I valued the role of “collector of key data” (Karnieli-Miller et al., 2009, p. 283). When collecting the data, I approached participant interviews collaboratively with the goal of facilitating a positive experience for participants (Karniele-Miller et al., 2009).

In order to prevent personal bias, I sought to maintain empathic neutrality (Patton, 2002). A researcher demonstrating empathic neutrality is viewed as caring about participants, yet neutral about the data (Patton, 2002). Empathic neutrality is when the researcher “seeks vicarious understanding without judgment by showing openness,



sensitivity, respect, awareness, and responsiveness” (Patton, 2002, p. 40). By demonstrating emphatic neutrality, I was able to analyze the themes that emerged while remaining unbiased to the specific content of the material. Remaining unbiased was achieved through accountability with co-researchers and colleagues who were established within the field.

### **Researcher Bias**

My experiences, beliefs, values, and opinions helped to inform the design of this study. In addition, my personal and professional experiences as a school counselor influenced the methodology, the research questions, the data collection, and the interpretation of interview data. I am a licensed professional counselor in the state of Michigan and have worked as a public high school counselor for 10 years. Additionally, I serve on a committee that revises the national school counseling model for the ASCA. I also hold a state of Michigan governor appointed position on the Michigan Board of Counseling. I am well grounded in the experience of being a school counselor, invested in the process of how school counselors are trained and familiar with standards of practice that guide them in their work (Appendix D).

In addition, my experience brought to the study a familiarity with the operations of a high school and a comfortable working relationship with parents. Working with students and parents on a daily basis, I have developed a desire to enrich the relationship between myself and parents, believing that good working relationships between parents and school counselors are established by effective and efficient communication. I am cognizant that I brought this bias into this research and that these biases helped me orient

the research, focus my approach, and develop important theoretical sensitivity (Buckley, 2009). However, it is my desire to maintain a balance between my personal bias and the data collection and analysis. The desire to understand the relationship between school counselors and parents is integral to student success, and I am passionate about students succeeding.

Although I intended to remain objective throughout this research, my experience as a school counselor certainly influenced the conceptualization of the research, the study design, implementation, and interpretation. A consistent dialogue and relationship with several mentors; a phenomenological research expert, a former school counselor, a current school counselor, and a mental health therapist working in the schools, helped me contextualize appropriately my personal bias and prevented it from influencing analysis of the data.

### **Addressing Researcher Bias**

I have my own professional experience and have done preliminary ground work in articulating what emerged in this study, but ultimately, parents drove the direction of the study through the sharing of their experiences. The process of holding separate my bias is known as “bracketing” (Walters, 1995). Bracketing allowed me to disengage from my own preconceptions and be open to the perceptions of parents. Disengagement occurred by my taking time to clear my thoughts prior to interviewing parents. In previous experiences, I have found that personal physical exercise and mindfully entering the interviewing process was imperative in overcoming any preconceptions I may have had.

Kvale and Brinkman (2008) asserted that researcher bias is detrimental to the validity and reliability of qualitative research. In order to produce a valid qualitative research study, the researcher must follow traditions of systematic data collection (Patton, 2002), examples of which include cross checking and cross validating sources during fieldwork (Patton, 2002). This crosschecking and validating involves relying on other researchers by peer review evaluations, triangulation techniques, and having participants check data (Patton, 2002). In peer review evaluations, accountability is established by colleagues' accessing and reading interview transcripts. Triangulation occurs when peer review evaluations are reviewed by another peer for additional comments and scrutiny. Parents checked my data for accuracy in the interpretation of meaning (Appendix H). A descriptive explanation of each of these steps checking data will follow in my section describing credibility.

### **Methodology**

The following steps inherent in my methodology include participant selection, instrumentation, and data analysis. Each of these steps in complete detail are explained below. The implementation of each of these steps add clarification to the study.

#### **Participant Selection**

Selecting appropriate participants in a qualitative research study promotes strength or weakness within the study (Willig, 2013). The selection of parents for my study was consistent with the expectations founded in the literature review. When the research approach, research questions, and the participant selection are in alignment with the literature review, the study is strengthened (Willig, 2013).

**Participant identification.** Participants chosen for this study were parents of high school students from five different public high schools in the Midwestern United States. Initially, parents were selected using a criterion sampling procedure (Patton, 2002). Parent criteria used included: a) selected parents must have a student currently enrolled in high school; b) selected parents must have had at least one contact with their children's high school counselor within the last year; c) selected parents must not work for a school district; d) selected parents must come from rural, urban or suburban public schools. The selection of parents was conducted in such a way as to best disseminate the research questions and meet the goal of enhancing understanding of parents' perception of high school counselors (Sadler, Lee, Lim & Fullerton, 2011). Parents who met the study's requirements were contacted (Appendix A).

**Participant recruitment.** Initially, a few parents who had at least one contact with their child's school counselor within the last school year were contacted by me. Once the initial parents had been identified through a criterion sampling procedure, a snowball sampling technique was implemented to choose additional parents which enabled me to identify additional parents who met the criteria set forth. I began by requesting that a community stakeholders refer a parent for participation in this study. Once the initial parent participant was chosen, I asked that parent to identify any other parents within her sphere of influence, to supply more potential parents for the study (Sadler, et al., 2011). Although ethnicity is important, it was not a major factor in my study; rather, the school status, either rural or urban, was more fundamental. This process was repeated until all parents had been identified.

If I had a previous relationship with some potential parents, the possibility of a dual relationship was too great, and these parents were not considered for my study. However, these individuals were used as a referral source for other potential participants. A thorough written explanation of the study and its purpose along with the time commitment expected was provided to each potential participant referred (Appendix B). In addition, I gave each participant my contact information, in the form of business cards with a secure e mail address, and requested that these cards be passed on to additional prospective participants.

**Sampling strategy.** I used criterion sampling initially for my study in order to ensure that each parent met the anticipated criteria to respond to the research questions successfully (Russel & Gregory, 2006). This allowed for an ideal correlation between the purpose of the research and the choice of participants (Suri, 2011).

Criterion sampling in this study gave me, as the researcher, an opportunity to learn about the parents' perceptions of school counselors. Implementing criterion sampling allowed me to identify parents whose children attended either a rural, urban or suburban public high school. In addition, criterion sampling allowed me to identify parents based on a preconceived criteria that enriched the goals of the research (Patton, 2002).

**Sampling issues.** The validity of my study was not compromised because of my adherence to sampling protocol when using criterion sampling (Suen & Kim, 2006). It is vital to choose a sample population which is consistent with the demographics of the entire population of the community (Suen & Kim, 2006). For this reason, I chose a

combination of parents from rural, urban, and suburban high schools. I performed member checks with colleagues in order to determine that the participants chosen were homogeneous with the population of the area.

**Sample size.** In this study, the sample size was not predetermined. However, I strived to use a sample size that was fairly consistent throughout the literature. For example, several studies recommend that interviews in a qualitative study should include six to ten people (Boyd, 2007; Creswell, 2014; Porter, 2008; Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). Working with eight participants allowed me to document the emergence of new themes and also to identify important perspectives in an effective manner; data saturation also occurred when the data produced by the participants kept recurring and no new data was obtained (Bowen, 2008). Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007) recommended that in deciding the number of participants that researchers use a “corpus of interpretive studies that used the same design as in the proposed study and wherein data saturation was reached” (p. 118). Data saturation was the definitive goal in my study. However, I adhered to the guidelines set forth by other qualitative researchers and used no more than 10 participants, while seeking for data saturation to occur.

### **Instrumentation**

Although there are various types of instruments used to collect data, the in depth interview is among the most frequently used mode of research among qualitative researchers (Milena, Dainora & Alin, 2008). The first reason for choosing phenomenological interviews is that they provide a comfortable atmosphere in which participants have an opportunity for their voices to be heard (Patton, 2002). Parents

likely entered their interviews with predetermined ideas about schools, school counselors, and other areas associated with school counseling. It was imperative that throughout the interview process I remembered that the parents were the experts and I was there to learn from them (Milena, et al., 2008). The interviews allowed me the opportunity to elicit responses from parents about their personal feelings, opinions, and experiences with their children's school counselors.

Interviewing is also an appropriate research method because the interview questions can be made specific to the participants (Creswell, 2014). As the researcher, it was my responsibility to make certain that I listened to parents and initiated relevant questions that lead to data saturation (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). Data saturation was confirmation that the interview questions were effective and relevant to the study.

The questions asked during the interviews were semi-structured, open-ended questions (Appendix E). According to Hancock and Algozzine (2006), semi-structured questions allowed me to “ask predetermined but flexibly worded questions, the answers to which provide tentative answers to the researchers' questions” (p. 40). I followed this protocol and participant responses were recorded and transcribed and then analyzed to help in identifying themes.

As a counselor, my training in developing rapport, asking open-ended questions, reflective listening, and clarifying communication assisted in the success of my interviews (Ulin, Robinson, & Tolley, 2005). The success of these interviews in producing rich and accurate information was determined by my following predetermined guidelines and being accountable for the data gathering process (Ulin, et al, 2005).

## **Data Analysis**

I selected as my research method a transcendental phenomenological study (Moerer Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). This type of study focuses on how participants view and understand a situation in reference to the experience encountered (Luft, 2007). Specifically, parents perceived their relationships with school counselors in light of the experiences they have had with school counselors.

## **Procedures**

### **Informed Consent**

Data collected included informed consent from parent participants (Appendix C). Reviewing with participant's aspects of informed consent helped them know precisely what the research was about, its purpose, the procedures involved, how they participated, and how their data was used. I discussed in detail the potential length of the study, procedures, potential risks and benefits, potential personal impact, and confidentiality in the informed consent document provided to each participant (Patton, 2002). Informed consent was vital to the integrity of this research.

Informed consent also included information about my professional identity. I provided a copy of my professional disclosure statement to each participant, describing my education, and experience (Appendix D). The professional disclosure statement also thoroughly explained confidentiality and privacy, and provided the address and phone number of Walden University's research department and my state's licensure board grievance process, in case a concern should arise. In addition, I provided a complete explanation of participants' voluntary obligation and the fact that they could withdraw at



any time without penalty or negative consequence. Once I explained these informed consent procedures, participants acknowledged their understanding and acceptance of the terms by their signature, in accordance with Walden University IRB Board policy.

### **Confidentiality**

In compliance with the ACA Code of Ethics (2014), research from and about parent participants was kept in complete confidence (G.2.d). Along with providing each parent with my professional disclosure statement, I gave them a document which included their right to file a breach of confidentiality grievance (Appendix C). In addition to this form, each participant was informed of the measures taken to insure her confidentiality. One measure taken was that all interviews occurred in a private setting. The audio recordings used for subsequent transcription were labeled with codes that corresponded with the participant list. This was kept securely locked in a drawer.

### **Developing Anonymous Participant Identifiers**

It was also vital that personal information be protected throughout this study. In order to ensure anonymity, I assigned each participant a numeric identifier in which they would be identified.

### **Data Storage**

Privacy and confidentiality was maintained by the numeric identifier, and all information pertaining to each parent, such as tapes, notes, etc., was stored in a locked cabinet, within a locked room, within a locked building.

**Data Maintenance**

Data was collected and maintained on a password protected USB drive, which was stored in a locked cabinet in a locked room in a locked facility. The original recorded interviews were similarly secured.

**Institutional Review Board**

According to the requirements of Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), this research proposal was submitted for review to determine that all participant protective measures and ethical accountability measures were followed. At the completion of the first three chapters of this dissertation study, the chapters were submitted to Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval. Suggested changes by the IRB were implemented, and chapters were then resubmitted for final approval. The IRB final approval number is 01 14 15 0233608. This was in compliance with the American Counseling Association's (2014) Code of Ethics (G.1.a., G.1.b., & G.1.d.).

**Cultural Diversity**

Sue, Arrendondo, and McDavis (1992) concluded that counselor awareness of assumptions, values, biases, and understanding of clients' worldviews provides for competent cultural awareness. These are the characteristics that helped me as a researcher to help participants be comfortable and willing to share. The ACA Code of Ethics (2014) asserts that researchers should relate to participants in developmentally and culturally appropriate language (A.2.c.); using clear, concise terms may help them understand the purpose of the study (A.2.c.). Some participating parents spoke English

as a second language or came from a cultural background other than my own. In order to help alleviate cultural incompetence, I had, in the parents' first language, information that helped to explain the research (Appendix A,B,C,D,E,H). In addition, I was accountable to colleagues of the parents' cultural group to review documents to ensure cultural sensitivity.

### **Data Collection Plan**

Data was collected primarily through the qualitative interview and a demographic questionnaire that was given to each parent prior to the interview. Using semi structured open ended questions during the interview, I elicited in depth responses from parents and then narrowed down the responses for relevance (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). An audio recorder was used to capture the data. During the interviews, I also recorded my observations about participants' nonverbal responses as factors that might have proven relevant. A transcribed rendering of the interview was generated upon completion of each interview. The four part process of demographic questionnaire, data collection, with interviews, interview notes, and follow up interviews follows.

### **Interviews**

After explaining informed consent and collecting the signed informed consent forms, I initiated individual interviews with eight parents of high school students (all were mothers); to qualify for participation, these parents must have had least one contact with the school counselor within the last school year. Interviews occurred between each parent and me (Appendix J). This allowed me to observe the participants directly in an environment where they provided relevant information and where I followed their direct

answers with a line of questioning that promoted thick, rich, descriptive answers (Creswell, 2014). As the questions asked during the interviews were semi structured, I asked open ended follow up questions in order to expand parent responses. This allowed me to gain the greatest amount of detail and depth (Reiter et al, 2011).

### **Interview Notes**

Interview notes are one way to maintain the integrity of a completed interview (Tessier, 2012). According to Tessier (2012), interview notes are used for a dual purpose; initially, I used them to record impressions as the interview progresses. In addition, my post interview process included recording my own impressions of the interview, including my impressions of parents' reactions. It was important to record these impressions while they were still vivid in my memory (Sanjek, 1990).

### **Demographic Questionnaire**

Prior to being interviewed, each parent was given a demographic questionnaire and a self-addressed pre stamped envelope (Appendix F, G). The information in the demographic questionnaire provided context for each parent during the pre-interview process. Parents were asked to return this questionnaire via mail to me within fourteen days. An addendum with complete detail of the demographic questionnaire is provided (Appendix F, G).

### **Follow up Interviews**

Although follow up interviews are pertinent at times (Patton, 2002), I did not utilize follow up interviews as part of the data collection process as there was no need. The initial interviews provided strong and robust data. To insure trustworthiness,

however, member checks were implemented that led to some follow up meetings to discuss the conclusions I was drawing as a result of the data. Member checks are an important “component of validation in qualitative research” (Koelsch, 2013 p. 168). Member checks are a phase in research where I took the findings back to the parents for them to verify the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study the transcript from the interview was taken to each parent who was interviewed to check for accuracy of content and conclusions drawn.

### **Data Analysis**

Collected data was analyzed in three stages. The initial stage occurred following parents’ initial individual interviews. Collected data from this first stage was transcribed, studied, and organized (Appendix J). The data analysis revealed emerging themes and researcher impressions that I documented (Creswell, 2014). Moustakas (1994) referred to this process as *horizontalization*. I separated from the entire transcript the specific statements made by parents that gave insight into their experiences with and perceptions of their school counselors.

In the next stage I categorized and labeled based upon themes that emerged from the analysis of the data (Creswell, 2014). Moustakas (1994) recommended organizing themes into a table so that all perspectives could be reviewed (Appendix I). Upon saturation of collected data, I initiated the interpretation phase (Creswell, 2014). In this last stage, I developed meaningful conclusions from the data which included a list of discoveries that emerged while data was categorized, sorted and coded.

## **Coding Preparation**

Once the data was gathered, I prepared to code and organize the data. According to Rossman and Rallis (2012), coding is simply the organization of the data by bracketing into meaningful chunks and then developing a label to represent each bracketed chunk. In conducting this detailed analysis, I followed several procedural steps. Initially, I reviewed the data several times in order to detect any subtleties within them (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). I used horizontalization to look for significant, non-repetitive statements made by parents. This process allows each parent's sharing to be validated (Glaser & Laudel, 2013).

Once horizontalization was complete, the appropriate next step was organizing the data into groups based on themes which is referred to as *clustering* (Moustakas, 1994). According to Moustakas (1994), clustering provided meaning for what participants experienced with their children's school counselors and allowed for the feelings that surrounded that meaning to also be clustered. In clustering, I recorded what may have appeared as random thoughts or expressions from the parents as they responded to each question (Carney, 1992). I then reviewed these recorded notes, looking for repetition or similarity in response, and make notes of these similarities (Carney, 1992).

Member checks were another step in coding validation (Creswell, 2014); once an exhaustive description of the interview had been completed, I presented the findings to each parent in the form of an email for verification with a possible follow up interview (Appendix H). Through this process, parents identified information that was omitted and

clarified any contextual anomalies or inaccuracies. Having participants check the transcript in this way strengthened parent investment in the research process and made them stakeholders in the findings as well as assuring accuracy (Bradbury Jones, Irvin & Sambrook, 2010).

Once the coding process had been completed, a description of the people, places, and events involving parent perceptions was recorded (Creswell, 2014). Through this process a smaller, more specific group of themes emerged. Addressing this research without a known direction helped ensure that themes were developing from the data. This was not a haphazard or thrown together process, but a systematic approach in order to identify and strengthen emerging themes (Creswell, 2014).

In concluding the data analysis it was important for me to do some self-reflection, asking what lessons I learned from the collection and interpretation of the data (Creswell, 2014). This self-reflection included what next steps in data collection entailed. The important element in analyzing qualitative data was for me to be open to how the data would inform the emerging themes and accurately represented participants' rendition of their stories.

### **Data Interpretation**

In order to navigate the sometimes challenging aspect of data interpretation, Lyons and Coyle (2007) suggested a three stage process, beginning with an initial reading of the transcript. This initial stage of reading and rereading the initial transcript provided me with an overall impression of the interview. This process of reading and rereading occurred after each interview so I was able to literally immerse myself within the data

and my experience of interviewing each participant. Lyons and Coyle (2007) suggested creating initial notes in the margin of the transcript, with the goal of deciphering objective themes from these initial readings which I did.

The second stage of data interpretation involves returning to the transcript and the researcher notes. In this stage, I chose to listen to the audio version of the interview while reading the transcript and noting initial themes. This second stage required cross referencing between the transcript and the notes to establish a clear connection between themes and the data. This involved rereading and listening again to each interview, with the goal of developing additional insights into the meaning of the data I collected.

The third step in data interpretation involves grouping themes into thematic clusters. To accomplish this, I examined the themes which emerged and narrowed and organized them into more precise themes (Lyons & Coyle, 2007). This narrowing process led to the fourth stage of data interpretation, which Lyons and Coyle, (2007) refer to as “producing a summary table of themes with illustrative quotations” (p. 61). In this step I produced a table, in a hard copy, to illustrate the themes that I had identified (Appendix I). This summary table contained three categories; superordinate themes (the theme clusters), sub themes (initial themes), and specific examples of direct quotes from participants underscoring each theme which made the data meaningful in this analysis. These three stages evolved into a final analysis of the presentation of findings in narrative and chart form (Lyons & Coyle, 2007).

I presented the themes in a chart recording significant parent perceptions of school counselors (Appendix I). I also presented these findings in narrative form, to



participants to ensure accuracy in the data collection and interpretation. In addition, I shared these findings with previously identified school counseling colleagues so they could comment on the findings with complete anonymity of participants.

### **Ethical Procedures**

Ethical concerns exist in any type of research. There is an inherent tension that exists between the generalizations that research presents for the good of others and the responsibility to maintain participant privacy. The following measures of accountability addressed this tension: trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

#### **Trustworthiness**

Reliability and validity enables research to be replicated or repeated (Houghton, Casey, Shaw & Murphy, 2013). Reliability and validity also defines and measures bias and distortion within the study (Creswell, 2014), that can occur when the researcher is not adequately accountable or the reporting of the findings is not consistent with the meaning delivered by participants (Creswell, 2014). Validity in a qualitative research is established and maintained through the implementation of several strategies. The specific validity strategies I implemented in my study were as follows:

- Verifying with my participants that qualitative themes were beneficial to them and potentially to the community of additional stakeholders (Pollock, 2012)
- Demonstrating accountability by clarifying the bias I brought to the study (Deady, 2011)

- Reporting all information that is discovered, both positive and negative (Pollock, 2012)
- Investing the time needed with participants (Taylor Powell & Renner, 2003)
- Utilizing a peer debriefer for my own interactions with participants, in order to ensure cultural sensitivity (Deady, 2011)
- Providing an external auditor who examined my completed
- Research project (Hume & Young Loveridge, 2011)

Committing to and being accountable in the implementation of these procedures promoted consistency and rigor throughout the research process.

### **Credibility**

Patton (2002) described credibility with three distinct yet related inquiry elements. The first element is *rigorous methods*; as participants shared their perceptions and experiences, the credibility of the research depended on yielding high quality data. I have been accountable to Walden University's Internal Review Board which addressed this element. My methods were also validated through triangulating multiple data sources in order to corroborate my findings (Creswell, 2014). The second inquiry element is the *credibility of the researcher*. As I previously mentioned, my credibility was dependent upon my training, experience, and overall presentation of myself. Although I am a first time researcher, I have had excellent training in my Ph.D. studies through Walden University. The third element of credibility is that of *philosophical belief in the value of qualitative inquiry*. This element aligned with my fundamental

investment in and appreciation of inquiry, inductive analysis, purposeful sampling, and overall holistic thinking. A rich history of inquiry and inductive analysis has been evident in both professional and personal areas of my life. One manifestation of my commitment to the research process was my initiation of member checks (Patton, 2002; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011).

### **Transferability**

Transferability is the “likelihood that an intervention could be replicated in a new, specific setting” (Wang, Moss & Hiller, 2006, p. 77). By implementing thick descriptions of the concepts, a researcher can provide the potential of a generalizable theory that can be used in a new context. The term *thick description*, initially coined by Geertz (1973), referred to rendering the data in such a way that a reader can evaluate the findings in “sufficient detail to help in accepting people, understanding times, embracing situations, or identifying places” (Gringeri, Barusch & Camhron, 2013, p. 764). In order to ensure that my study was transferable, I developed concepts from the emergence of thick descriptions from the data (Ruddin, 2006), which described parents’ feelings surrounding encounters they had with their children’s school counselors. It was my desire that through this study parents’ voices were heard accurately and in complete detail regarding their relationships with school counselors.

### **Dependability**

According to Patton (2002), dependability in qualitative research is achieved when a researcher expresses the methodology so eloquently that another researcher can duplicate the study. Ferguson, Briesch, Volpe, and Daniels (2013) reported three

methods that ensure this dependability. First, it is important that the research is defensible. I needed to ask myself if my research articulated the protocol that was initially described. It was my responsibility to ensure an accurate and complete audit trail including written notes of all communication involving the research, in order to defend the protocol used in the research. Ferguson, et al. (2013) second suggestion was to use sound methods for research. I used methods of gathering data that had been successfully used in the past. Thirdly, is to ensure the production of reliable and valid data. Using member checks helped me to ensure that the information that was recorded is consistent with what parents were saying and what was being recorded.

In addition to Ferguson, et al. (2013), two other measures needed to be in place to ensure dependability (Patton, 2002). The first was to use field notes in order to remember important aspects and impressions from the interviews, including the verbal and non-verbal responses of the participants which I did. The final accountability measure was to debrief with peers. This debriefing provided insight into the information gathered from the interviews and challenged me to consider how I approached the participants in a respectful and culturally appropriate manner.

### **Confirmability**

In addition to establishing credibility, transferability, and dependability, confirmability is important in qualitative research (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). This means the degree to which my colleagues and parent participants in the study corroborated the research findings (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). I am aware that my own preconceptions and professional experience influenced the research. To ensure

confirmability, I recorded personal feelings, biases, and insights that occurred during individual interviews (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). In order to develop the rich themes that I was searching for, I was careful to follow and not lead the direction of the interviews (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). A strategy to strengthen this stance involved the use of reflective listening (Passmore, 2011) which involved listening carefully and “reflecting back a single word or pair of words from the participants’ story” (Passmore, 2011, p. 51). Listening carefully and reflecting back participant statements allowed participants to hear what I was hearing and validate what they themselves were saying. Moreover, to ensure conformability, I cross checked the data in order to check for contradictions (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011).

### **Design and Methodological Weaknesses**

Due to the nature of this study, there were a few areas in which weakness needed to be addressed. Since an important attribute of phenomenological research was interviewing, and the foundation of a good interview is the relationship between the research participants and me, the potential of my bias toward participants who appeared more engaged in the research was heightened. Another potential weakness may be participant resistance. I was concerned that my position as a school counselor may have influenced parents to not be completely honest in responding to the research questions. Finally, the private setting in which the interviews occurred may have potentially caused parents to feel completely vulnerable. As the researcher, I demonstrated heightened awareness toward the sensitive nature that some topics may have had for some parents.

**Addressing the weaknesses**

In order to be proactive in addressing these potential weaknesses, I initiated the research by discussing my professional disclosure statement and the research process with each participant prior to their commitment to the study. This included addressing the potential of bias on my part and of resistance and vulnerability on theirs. I encouraged parents to let me know if they felt that I was demonstrating any bias in the data collection and interpretation process so I could address it if and when it emerged. If a participant began to feel overwhelmed or resistant to a specific topic, or overly vulnerable, I encouraged her to share that with me. I also consulted with a colleague throughout the research to address any bias of which I was aware. My goal was to be proactive in order to diminish the potential for significant problems throughout the study.

**Summary**

The methodology of conducting this transcendental phenomenological qualitative study on parents' perceptions of and experiences with school counselors was detailed throughout this chapter. The research questions were shared, along with the rationale for choosing a qualitative phenomenological methodology. Data collection, analysis, and specific measures implemented during each stage of the research were discussed. This chapter concluded with my efforts to confront and address weaknesses and limitations in trustworthiness in order to diminish threats to the quality of my study.

## Chapter 4: Results

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this transcendental, phenomenological research study was to provide a description of parents' perceptions of their children's high school counselors. In this chapter, I describe the research process from the restatement of the research questions to issues of trustworthiness. Sample size, the frequency and duration of data collection, the method of transcription, and data collection variances from those discussed in Chapter 3 are detailed throughout this chapter. In addition, I discuss data analysis and connect the discussion to specific issues of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

### **Restatement of Research Questions**

The purpose of this transcendental, qualitative study was to explore parents' perceptions of their high school children's school counselors in order to identify the potential factors and processes contributing to working relationships between parents and school counselors and how these relationships impact positively student success in school. In order to explore this phenomenon, I examined the following research questions:

- What are parents' perceptions of and experiences with their children's school counselors?

- In what ways do parents perceive school counselors impacting their children?
- How do parents collaborate with their children's school counselors?
- What do parents perceive that school counselors do that makes their relationships with students meaningful/beneficial?

### **Demographics**

Reporting the demographics of each participant signifies the researched population shared some common characteristics. Along with reporting similar characteristics, differences in participants were also reported. The following describes the participants for my study and their similarities and differences that were reported in their demographics.

#### **Demographic Data**

Each parent (all were mothers) completed a 1 page demographic questionnaire (Appendix G) to collect information about their age, gender, level of education, and marital status. In addition, parents provided information about the age, gender, and current grades of their children/students. For parents whose interviews took place via telephone call, I asked the questions and recorded participant responses on the questionnaire. The interviews were recorded in their entirety and also included parents' verbal consent to record their interviews. For the parent who was interviewed by telephone, I provided informed consent forms and obtained her signature at a later date.



### **Participant Biographical Sketches**

Parent 1: Parent 1 was a 42 year old married mother of five children, two of whom were currently in high school. Her oldest son, who was in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade, had an individual education plan (IEP) due to learning difficulties. Her younger high school son was in the ninth grade. Parent 1 held an associate's degree.

Parent 2: Parent 2 was a 46 year old married mother of three children, two of whom were in high school. Her older high school daughter was in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Her younger high school son was in the ninth grade. Parent 2 held a bachelor's degree.

Parent 3: Parent 3 was a 41 year old married mother of one child. Her only daughter was in ninth grade. Parent 3 held a high school diploma.

Parent 4: Parent 4 was a 58 year old married mother of one child. Her only daughter was in 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Parent 4 held an associate's degree.

Parent 5: Parent 5 was a 47 year old married mother of three children. Her two older sons were both in college and her youngest son was in the eighth grade at a high school where eighth grade is part of the high school. Parent 5 held a graduate degree.

Parent 6: Parent 6 was a 43 year old married mother of one child. Her only son was in 11<sup>th</sup> grade. Parent 6 held a high school diploma.

Parent 7: Parent 7 was a 40 year old divorced mother of three children. Her oldest daughter was in 11<sup>th</sup> grade. Her other two children were not in high school. Parent 7 held a high school diploma.

Parent 8: Parent 8 was a 48 year old married mother of two children. Her oldest daughter was in college. Her younger son was in 11<sup>th</sup> grade in high school. Parent 8 held a high school diploma.

All parents and children's names and other identifying information such as schools were changed in order to protect the identity of participants and their families.

## **Data Collection**

### **Participant Recruitment**

Criterion and Snowball sampling was used to identify parents for this study (Patton, 2002). My initial contact was through four local church youth pastors, two clinical directors of counseling agencies, three medical doctors, one beautician, two clinical social workers, one chiropractor, and the local Delta Kappa Gamma Sorority. All initial correspondence to community stakeholders occurred through phone calls, texting, and email. In the initial correspondence, I explained the purpose of the study along with the criteria that potential participants must meet in order to be considered. I also made potential participants aware of the IRB guidelines stating that participants were invited to participate through the participation invitation letter that I attached to the initial e mail or sent via e mail once the email address was obtained (Appendix A). Contrary to what was stated in Chapter 3, at no time was a direct referral accepted from the community stakeholders. Instead, I accepted potential participants from those who read the invitation letter and chose to take the initiative to contact me directly.

Initially, I proposed that participant recruitment would be generated by my school counseling colleagues or myself. Colleagues were asked for recommendations.

However, their recommendations were not needed as other community stakeholders' recommendations were sufficient in developing an appropriate participant pool.

### **Sample Size**

The sample size generated from the recruitment process produced 12 potential study participants. Two of the initial parents recruited worked for a school district and were ineligible for the research study. One potential parent contacted me, but lived outside the geographical parameters and was, therefore, ineligible for my study.

I began phenomenological interviews with the eventual goal of data saturation (Bowen, 2008). As the interviews progressed, it was evident that data saturation had been accomplished by the repetition of data and no new data obtained (Bowen, 2008). Data saturation actually occurred with one potential parent yet to be interviewed. However, due to scheduling conflicts, the participant cancelled the interview, and I explained to the participant that it was not necessary to reschedule. I thanked her for her willingness to participate; however, data saturation had been obtained through the sample size of eight participants.

### **Location, Frequency, and Duration**

I used a confidential and secure location to conduct all interviews in gathering data. For six of the eight interviews, I used my private personal counseling office. Due to participants' scheduling conflicts, one of the interviews occurred at the secure, confidential office of the parent. The last interview occurred in my office, but was conducted over the phone. This unique interview occurred due to a major winter storm where state agencies prohibited driving, and during this interview, the parent was located

in her home office. The staging throughout all interviews was similar: two chairs, a table, and a voice recorder. The duration of the interviews was presented as a time commitment of 60 minutes with the possibility of a follow up phone call to explain and provide more detail if any information was unclear, and I consistently stayed within those parameters.

### **Transcriptions**

Each of the eight interviews was transcribed using a double spaced format (Appendix J). Transcriptions occurred within 3 days of the interview in order for me to recall the details of each interview while the details were fresh. I printed each individual transcribed interview for analysis. With the written manuscript in hand, I verified all of the transcriptions by reading the transcript while listening to each recorded interview which insured that written transcripts matched each recorded interview.

### **Variations in Data Collection and Unusual Circumstances during Data Collection**

There were several variations from what I originally planned in the data collection. The first occurred in collecting demographic questionnaires. After the first interview, I handed the demographic questionnaire and letter and asked Parent 1 to return it to me via the stamped envelope within 14 days (Appendix F & G). Parent 1 requested to fill it out and leave it with me directly after the interview. Based on this request, I then gave the other participants the option of filling the demographic questionnaire out immediately following the interview or returning it in an envelope. Every participant filled the questionnaire out immediately following the interview for expediency sake. I determined that this did not negatively impact the data gathering process or the research.

Another variation was due to weather. I had scheduled an interview and a snowstorm and inability to travel prohibited a rescheduling of the interview. The parent participant stated that it would be more convenient to conduct the interview over the telephone at the previously scheduled time. The parent assured me that she was in a secure, confidential room and I proceeded with the interview via the telephone. After reviewing the contents, I mailed the demographic questionnaire and informed consent and signature pages. The parent completed it and promptly returned it to me.

A third variation occurred when a parent requested me to come to her business office for the interview. The office was a secure, confidential setting and I determined it was appropriate for the interview. Again, through consultation with experts, I determined that these variations were minor and did not corrupt the data collection or the research process and consequently, invalidate the study.

### **Data Analysis**

Following collecting and transcribing the data, I immersed myself in several readings of the data. While reading the transcription, I played a recorded version of the transcription in order to verify the transcription for accuracy. This process was followed by organizing the data for analysis. Initially, I organized the transcribed data by the ten questions that were asked of the participants during the interview process. In this step of horizontalization, I looked for significant, non-repetitive statements made by parent participants (Glaser & Laudel, 2013). Through this process, I obtained over 30 invariant meaning broad theme statements. I condensed these meaning units into a total of 14 more specific themes by focusing on the similarities or differences in the ways in which

participants answered each question. Using these similarities and differences, I clustered themes into groups (Moustakas, 1994). An example of this process began when I asked participants the ways they perceived school counselors impacting their children. The broad theme that initially emerged was time spent with students in meetings. However, upon further analysis I discovered that parents felt the school counselor meetings with students created a sense of students feeling connected to their schools. Therefore, the more specific theme emerged of *school connectedness* as a perception parents had of how school counselors impacted their children. The process of breaking into the multiple subthemes continued until all broad themes had been broken down and reorganized (Appendix I).

All the data had been broken into 14 subthemes: student academics, social enhancement, addressing emotional needs, preparing for college, sharing ideas, school counselor knowledge, school counselors being nondiscriminatory, creating an inviting physical environment, test preparation, parents initiating change, student interaction with school counselors both positive and negative, humility of school counselors, and, special needs students. These 14 subthemes were then clustered into closely related themes. Prior to developing the 14 subthemes, the broader themes mentioned only once were removed in order to extrapolate the thematic data that were identified more frequently (Carney, 1992). Once the 14 subthemes were developed, I then sent them via email to parent participants for clarifying their perceptions about the data that was gathered and subsequent themes generated. Participant checks enabled participants to check and validate these themes, and for them to feel invested in the research process, and to ensure

accuracy of the data collection (Bradbury Jones, Irvin & Sambrook, 2010). Following the above established steps, the remaining 14 subthemes were then clustered into the following four primary themes: *Student Benefits, Parents Feeling Empowered, Interpersonal Environment, and Informed School Counselor.*

### **Emerging Themes**

As the four themes emerged from the data, it was apparent that these themes were robust and inclusive in answering the research questions. The perceptions and experiences parents had of their children's high school counselors were consistent and interwoven throughout the emerging themes. The following is an explanation of how the research questions and themes are inter-related.

### **Central Research Question**

What are parents' perceptions of and experiences with their children's school counselor?

**Research sub question #1.** What are parents' perceptions of their children's school counselors?

***Student benefits.*** Parents described that school counselors benefited their children in three ways: academics, social/emotional and college preparedness. Parent 1 shared how she was fearful of planning her son's return to a traditional school after he had been in a special needs school. Parent 1 shared with emotion her respect for the interaction she had with her son's school counselor. She shared the following in how she felt the school counselor benefited her son by planning his academic success: "So she

helped us to go through his credits and figure out what he had, and what he needed, and establish a plan to allow him to graduate on time.”

*Student benefits* in regard to academics was prevalent throughout the interviews. Parent 1 also shared the following to substantiate her experience that the school counselor was significant in benefiting her child:

And because he also has difficulty turning in homework assignments on time, she [the school counselor] put a box in her office with no name on it, just a box for him specifically, that if he forgets to turn in an assignment, at any point in the day he can stop in her office and drop the papers off and she will distribute them to his teachers.

Parent 2 attempted to convince her daughter to retake the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), a standardized test, in order to improve her score. Her daughter’s score went up after the school counselor convinced her daughter to retake the SAT. Parent 2 reported, “needless to say, we were thrilled by the guidance the counselor gave Sarah to retake the SAT.”

Discussing academic progress with the school counselor encouraged and challenged Parent 4’s daughter. Her daughter wanted to take harder classes than Parent 4 felt she should take. Parent 4 relayed the following experience of her daughter’s school counselor:

We went in to talk to the school counselor about Gloria’s schedule for her sophomore year. Prior to going in, I was convinced



that Gloria should not take any AP or Honors classes. Gloria stressed out too much during her freshmen year and I did not want to go through that again. When we got to the office, the counselor seemed glad to see us. Right away I explained why I didn't think Gloria should take the AP or Honors classes. Gloria said she wanted to take the classes. Gloria and I often disagree, but she's a good kid. Well, the counselor said that she felt Gloria should push herself. The counselor then asked Gloria what she wanted to do when she graduated. Gloria and I had never talked about this and I was pretty surprised the counselor asked this question. I thought we were there to discuss her schedule for her sophomore year. Anyway, the counselor explained that if Gloria wanted to go to a good college, she would need to take the hard classes. She really built Gloria up with her confidence and convinced me that when we looked at Gloria's future, this would be a good route to take. I am so thankful the counselor told us that. Gloria just got accepted to Notre Dame next year with a \$65,000 scholarship. The counselor totally convinced Gloria and I for her to take the hard classes and it made all the difference in Gloria's school experience.

In a similar experience, Parent 5 shared how her son was encouraged to take advanced classes when her son felt like he could not do it. Parent 5 shared:

I think that he was every bit capable of doing the advanced classes at West High school, so I went with Roger to talk to the school counselor. She was convinced Roger could handle the advanced classes and convinced Roger that he could handle the classes. I think that propelled him into his college career. Having the advanced math, which now I understand how good he is at math. I'm glad he didn't back off and take the easier classes.

Leading to academic success in students was not exclusive to the advanced students' parents that participated as was demonstrated in Parent 1. In addition, Parent 6's son needed special accommodations for his learning disability. Parent 6 shared how the school counselor helped with that area:

As Jonah got into high school, the school counselor came up with a course study plan for him for math. Well, it was a complete overview for all four years, but then kind of notifying us every year or every semester of changes if need be. She kinda implemented the plan because we noticed ourselves, and he even noticed, that it's too much to be in a classroom of more than 20 kids or so, so he actually came to us and said, "Mom, you know, I need something by myself when I take tests. I feel like I can't complete them on time." So then we, in turn, went to the guidance counselor and she kinda started, "Okay, what can we do to make it easier for him to take these tests?" So that has been one of the big things.

Parent 7 shared how the school counselor helped her struggling daughter with providing additional time to complete classes.

I went to the counselor and asked how Maria could actually graduate on time because you know she's failed a few classes and I was worried about her graduating. Now the counselor said you can do after school program, and it's cheaper. You know, she just stays from Monday through Thursday from 3:30 to 5:30 or 6:30 and does the program online. And it's at their own pace, so she can finish it in three weeks or it could take three months. She's supposed to finish before the last day of school.

Support of the school counselor was consistent as related by parents in each of their students. As the school counselor advocated for students, consistently the school counselor demonstrated support for students achieving their best academically. School counselors' creatively demonstrating focused support toward students' academic success resulted in students feeling more connected to, engaged and invested in the school. This theme of enhancing student connectedness to the school gave students a sense of belonging.

After sharing of an experience where her son went to the school counselor about a problem with another student, Parent 1 shared the following: "I think he felt understood. The counselor listened and he left her office having confidence in himself that he did the right thing by asking for help."

Parent 4 also felt like her daughter's counselor helped to enhance her daughter's sense of connectedness with the school. Parent 4 related an experience of her and her daughter going to speak to the counselor about choosing a college. Parent 4 shared:

One visit to the counselor was for colleges and college picks, and having to have a letter from your counselor recommending you for a college. And getting some input on colleges and did she think that was a good fit for her and stuff, so . . . I think it made her (the daughter) feel like she fit in and she was encouraged that she was doing very good and she was taking these hard classes, and the counselor gave her confidence that she could do it, and so she made her believe in herself and keep telling her what a wonderful student she is. So it made us both feel good – her about herself and me about her.

The benefit of school connectedness was evident in what Parent 5 shared as well. Parent 5 attributed her son's sense of connectedness to the school counselor but related it to her relationship with the school counselor as well. Parent 5 shared:

I would say that my kids, including the interactions over the last year, I mean my kids have always felt supported. Well, I do think that because we openly communicate with our kids – and hopefully I'm answering this – I feel like because we have a relationship with school counselors, it puts us all in good communication. I think my kids feel good that they know we've been in communication with

their counselors and that they care and we care. And you can feel good about the whole school system and the support that you're getting, or perceive that you're getting. Whether it's academic support or emotional support.

Parent 8 concurred that her son's relationship with his school counselor made a lasting impact on him feeling connected to the school. Parent 8 shared an experience her son had when he auditioned for a play but did not make the cut. She continued to share how heartbroken her son was that he could not be a part of the theater department. Her son's counselor suggested that he help with organizing costumes. Parent 8 reported that her son spent his entire sophomore year labeling and organizing the costumes for the entire theater department. She reported that she felt bad for him. However, as a senior, her son was asked to share for the yearbook the most significant thing that he participated in during his high school years. Parent 8 said she thought it would be when his band went to Normandy to perform. It wasn't. Her son's most significant memory of high school was organizing the theater department costumes. He told his Mom he "felt like I belonged to a part of a very big school." Parent 8 attributes this to the counselor's encouragement of her son.

Throughout the course of the qualitative interviews, the correlation between children's preparing for their future and the influence of the school counselor on their decision was robust. Participants related experiences with their children's school counselors that benefited their children's college readiness. Although the influence

school counselors have on children's preparing for college was consistent in the research, the responses of the participants on how this occurred varied greatly.

Parent 1 was concerned for her special needs son after a substitute teacher told him he didn't have to go to college. Parent 1 attributed her sons' paradigm shift toward thoughts of attending college to his interaction with his counselor. Parent 1 was emotional when she shared the following:

The fact that she (school counselor) cares that he's able to graduate on time and knows that it means something to him is amazing. She's laid out the requirements for graduation and she's talked to him about what he wants to do, and what colleges would be best, and what the requirements are to get into those colleges. She took the time to talk to him about what he wants and what kinds of classes that he would need to have under his belt to get into the colleges that he wants to go to, and extracurricular activities that he should look for. With his special needs I thought this was an amazing approach to my son.

Parent 2 felt that her family did a lot of investigating into various colleges. However, Parent 2 admitted that it was the school counselor that encouraged her daughter to take the SAT more than once that led her to being successfully admitted to the state school of her daughter's choice.

Parent 4 had a similar experience to Parent 2. Parent 4's daughter was preparing her classes and Parent 4 was encouraged by the help the school counselor provided in preparing the path for college readiness for her daughter. Parent 4 shared the following:

And being an older mom and not knowing – I didn't even know about AP classes and honors classes, and college writing. Some of the stuff I'd never heard of. So I was kind of out of it. I was kind of out of the loop. So actually she also has a daughter in the same grade, so she knew what classes Gloria was taking, she knew what it entailed, what the homework was, 'cause her daughter was in some of those, and so I think that really helped. Gloria and I talked about this, and she said I think it really helped because she had a daughter that's a senior who was going through the same things, and so she said she would pull me in at the beginning of the year and said, "How are you doing, Gloria? How do you feel about your classes?" and she said, "Mom, she talks to me all the time." So that is really good. I never knew that. I think she was there helping them do all their ACT [American College Test] prep – encouraging them and doing workshops with them. They did four study things before the ACT's with them, and you know, talked to them and told them you have to come to this, and sent letters home to us about what's expected. And Gloria took it three times because she's such a perfectionist, but she didn't hesitate to encourage her. I would say "Oh, you don't have to

take this again,” and she’d say, “No, keep taking it ‘til you get the grade that’s gonna get you into the best school – the school that you want.” Some schools require 30 and above, so if you want that 31, take it again. And so she did. She was encouraging her.

Parent 7 shared a conversation that she had with her daughter’s school counselor about preparing her daughter for college. She shared with great emotion that she is concerned that her daughter is not thinking of her future. Parent 7 said she was fearful for her daughter’s future because her daughter typically doesn’t take responsibility. She shared this with her daughter’s counselor. Parent 7 shared the conversation in the following excerpt of the transcript:

And she says a lot of times kids don’t want to make the wrong decisions, so they kind of, they’re stagnant. But if you’re stagnant and don’t make a decision, then you know, she says she’ll tell the students you end up living in your parents’ basement for the rest of your life, and you don’t want to do that. So she said that she will continue to talk to Maria and help her. I told her that Maria has said that she would like to be in the medical field.

Parent 8 continually spoke on the encouragement that her son’s counselor provided him. She shared that her son often took classes that gave him a taste of a future career and that those classes were discussed with her son by the counselor if that would be a career he would be interested in pursuing in college. Parent 8 stated that the counselor’s motto was “take the best classes that are in the best interest of the student.”



Although 7 of the 8 participants agreed that school counselors were beneficial in helping their children prepare for college, Parent 6 felt that the school counselor was unprepared to help her son navigate college because the school counselor was not informed about the specific career her son wanted to enter. Although Parent 6 admitted that her son's school counselor benefited her son in many ways, preparing for college was not one of them. Parent 6 shared the following:

Every time we've approached her regarding the fact of Jonah going to be entering into college, it's kind of like put on the back burner. Like we're giving her information that we've found out and she's actually surprised – like, “Oh, I need to go investigate that for myself.” So instead of her giving us information, we have been giving her information.

Most participants felt that school counselors benefited their children in three ways: academic success, school connectedness and college readiness. Each parent spoke in detail of how they felt their children had benefited through the relationship they had with their school counselors. According to the parents, these relationships helped make students more invested both academically and socially in their individual schools.

**Research sub question #2**

What does it mean for parents to collaborate with their children's school counselors?

*Parent's feeling empowered.* It is poignant to note that my study indicated that when participants reported student benefits of their relationship with their school

counselor, the relationship was instigated by the parents initiating contact with the school counselor. Although meetings were initiated by parents, the outcomes were conclusive that parents had a sense that school counselors helped their children benefit academically, to feel connected to the school and prepare their children for college. The partnerships between school counselors and parents were evident in the experiences parents shared.

Parent 1 shared about her younger son's interactions with his school counselor. She stated that she felt her relationship with the school counselor helped both of her sons be more successful in high school. In regards to her interaction with the school counselor, she shared the burden of responsibility regarding her son:

Nobody else is going to do it. If I don't push or persevere, then it doesn't happen. Because he doesn't have a voice for himself yet, and until he does, I have to do it. It's my job to speak for him since he doesn't have a voice.

Parent 2 encouraged her child to advocate for herself, but also feels a need to communicate with the school counselor in order to insure that her daughter is on the right path. Parent 2 explained about a situation where her daughter could not get into a dual enrollment class. Parent 2 encouraged her daughter to speak to the school counselor on her own. Upon returning home, parent 2 corroborated the information that her daughter had given her through an email sent to the school counselor. Parent 2 explained her relationship with the school counselor:

I feel it is my responsibility to make sure that my daughter got all the information correct. I also want the school counselor to know

who I am so that my daughter can be on their radar. She (school counselor) has a lot of students and I want to make sure that she knows that I as the parent am following up.

This type of collaboration between parents and school counselors for the success of students was consistent in all parents' experiences. Parent 3 expressed her frustration when she asked the school counselor to collaborate with her daughter's current mental health counselor. The school counselor initially stated that she only worked with certain mental health counselors. Parent 3 expressed her desire for the school counselor to work with the mental health counselor her daughter was currently seeing. The school counselor did take the parent recommendation and began working with the mental health counselor her daughter was seeing. According to Parent 3, the results of this collaboration between her and the school counselor helped her daughter tremendously.

Parent 4 had many opportunities to collaborate with the school counselor on behalf of her daughter. Parent 4 emotionally shared that during the previous year her daughter was on the competitive cheer squad and encountered problems with other girls on the squad. Her daughter was very distraught and the problems were affecting every area of her daughter's life. Parent 4 said that she met with the school counselor and together they came up with a plan on how to help the situation. Parent 4 reported:

I'm not even sure what the plan was that we came up with when we met. I do remember how I felt when we met. I went into the office feeling foolish, like I should know what to say to my daughter in these situations. I still remember how totally dumb I felt

going and asking for help. Actually, I was so glad that I did. When I left I felt like she (school counselor) really cared and kind of made me feel better about what was going on. I don't remember how it was resolved, just how I felt after talking to the counselor.

As reported by Parent 5, partnerships do not always equate with school counselors offering beneficial advice. She described her experience where the school counselor wanted her son to take the lower level classes so he wouldn't be overwhelmed. She reported her feelings and the conversation with the school counselor:

Well that son, Roger, he would not have been challenged in those lower level classes. He needed to be pushed to the upper level classes, and yet the counselor was saying, "Oh, it's so overwhelming when you get into high school. You need to maybe back off a little bit." So, I mean it was okay, but I felt like, okay, I have to be kind of in charge. My children and I and my husband need to help make the decisions. Not just go by what they're saying as a general statement. I really felt the school counselor heard me and respected me even though I totally disagreed with her.

In addition, Parent 6 shared a time when her son had been threatened by another student. Her body language and her voice reflected relief and confidence by the plan the school counselor and her came up with for her son's safety. She expressed gratitude toward the school counselor for taking the threat seriously and initiating an action plan.

As a single Mom, Parent 7 expressed how she depended on the school counselor to support her own suggestions to her daughter. The support was verified when Parent 7 shared the following:

I can say that we both (Parent 7 and school counselor) agreed that Maria is a bit of a – she likes to avoid, you know, confrontation. She likes to avoid some responsibilities, and I told the counselor how at home she just kind of asks her siblings to do things for her and she just kind of lays around with her laptop. So we both agreed that she's very kind of a laid back and not really too task oriented. I think that now that we're on the same page, because Maria has kind of avoided saying, you know, this is what's happening, and now I know, I will be able to be the support that she needs to.

Partnerships with school counselors was substantiated by Parent 8 when she spoke on an experience she had with attempting to get in touch with the school counselor. She initially left several messages with the counselor that worked with the “other” half (students) of the alphabet. She then left one message with her son's counselor and the call was returned right away. When speaking to the counselor, Parent 8 stated that she always felt listened to.

It is important to point out in the partnerships between parents and school counselors there were varying degrees of agreement and disagreement between both parents and school counselors. However, in each encounter, participants reported feeling listened to and affirmed by school counselors that resulted in *parents feeling empowered*.

**Research sub question #3**

In what ways do parents perceive their children's school counselors to have impacted their children?

*Interpersonal environment.* All participants reported that their children's school counselors welcomed their children into the counseling office and provided an emotionally and psychologically safe environment. This relaxed and welcome ambiance facilitated students feeling connected to the school. Feeling connected to the school is an outward feeling of belonging to the larger school body. Participants' children feeling welcomed into the counseling office was a direct reflection of the individual experience felt between students and their school counselors. This experience directly connects to the way in which school counselors interacted with participants' children and participants themselves. Parent 1 shared how her son's counselor was receptive to the various and often, complex emotions of her special needs son. During an emotional moment in the interview, Parent 1 shared the following:

And she's [school counselor] also had an open door policy for him, so if he's stressed or if he's having a bad day, he can come into her office and sit for a few minutes for a quiet time, so he's not overwhelmed. And so that was something that I was appreciative of – that she was sensitive to that.

Parent 2 shared how her children's school counselor is always available to her and her children. Parent 2 shared how she interprets a specific behavior as one that

demonstrates that she and her child felt valued by the school counselor. Parent 2 spoke to this when she shared the following:

I think, you know, the main thing to feeling valued would be, you know, to have an open door if a kid has a question, or even, you know, and just definitely keep the interaction positive with the kids and even with the parents, you know. Our counselor does a good job at that.

Having an open door policy contributed to the safety parent participants felt with the school counselor. Parent 3 shared her struggles with her special needs daughter and how she felt that there were times when the school counselor did not always make her feel appreciated but rather Parent 3 stated that she feels blamed for her daughters' misbehavior. However, in the midst of the conflicting emotions, Parent 3 stated that she did not think the school counselor always agreed with her parenting, but she did feel like the school counselor appreciated her interest in her child. She shared an occasion where the school counselor shared with Parent 3 how frustrating her child's behaviors had been that day. In the midst of this emotional conversation, the school counselor expressed her appreciation to Parent 3 for always being available. In return Parent 3 reported feeling appreciated and affirmed by the school counselor.

Parent 4 reported that her child's school counselor was attentive and available whenever she needed to speak to her. Parent 4 reported "I would say it was because whenever I had a problem she was easily approached and she always called me back, always emailed me right back." Additionally, Parent 4 reported feeling that the school

counselors' quick response is interpreted by Parent 4 as if her child is valued and important to the school counselor.

Parent 5 had a contrasting opinion about her children feeling valued by the school. She shared about a recent school assembly where the theme of the assembly was celebrating diversity. She shared how disappointed she was that the emphasis of the assembly was on the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, and Queer (LGBTQ) students and not on all students. She stated that school counselors do a good job helping all students feel valued, but the administration presenting the assembly in the way they did limited student diversity during the assembly. Parent 5 shared her perception of how hard it must be for the school counselor to attempt to make all students feel valued when the administration has other ideas. She stated that the school counselors demonstrated a love for all students:

The counselor emphasis that we're all one, helping all people feel supported in a school district that's wealthy and white for the most part. Supporting them. Supporting people who are larger. Supporting people who have disabilities. You know, making everyone feel a part and their value system matters. Their background matters. And I'm no better than you. You might be from a less wealthy community and you might be a different color than me, but we're still just one unity here.

When asked how the counselors at her children's school do this so the students feel valued, Parent 5 responded by treating everyone equal. Parent 6 stated that "open



communication” made her son feel appreciated. She replied with the following example of open communication:

When my son was struggling in his Math class, he didn’t know what to do. When he approached the counselor she listened to him and he told me he felt like she really cared. I know she cared because she re arranged his classes so he could be in a smaller Math class. I don’t really know what it is, but Jonah felt like she cared about him and that he wasn’t stupid.

Parent 7 shared an experience of meeting the counselor for the first time:

I didn’t really know what to do when I walked into the office. The secretary said go ahead and have a seat and wait Mrs. Smith will be right with you. I was going to sit down and out of nowhere popped this smiley counselor that invited me into her office. I was surprised by her friendliness because she really didn’t know me.

A sense of being comfortable with the school counselor is something that Parent 8 believed to be significant in her son feeling valued. Parent 8 related the following story as she admitted that her son was very comfortable with his school counselor:

When my son made an appointment with the counselor and spoke with her, they were very willing to “Yes, come on in, Aaron. Let’s figure out what you have to say,” so it made him feel comfortable – so that was encouraging to him. And in those instances I think they’re doing a great job.

Parents consistently shared how their children's school counselors made them feel valued. In addition, participants conveyed that their children felt the office environment was significant in helping their children feel positively impacted by school counselors. Parent 8 referred to her son feeling valued because the school counselor called him into her office with kindness and willingness to solve the problem her son was bringing to the school counselor. Along with feeling valued, Parent 8's son was received in what was experienced as a relaxed, safe environment in his counselor's office. According to participants, it was the implementation of the *interpersonal environment* presented by school counselors that helped make students feel comfortable approaching their school counselors for help. This theme emerged continuously as several participants mentioned the value of a relaxed and safe environment in school counselors' offices.

Parent 1 related an experience where she was in an IEP and a staff member said that they should probably wait for her son's Father. Parent 1 stated that this comment struck a nerve for her and she blurted out that she herself had been waiting her child's entire lifetime for his father to take responsibility for his own child. She said that at the time she was embarrassed but soon realized her outburst did not affect how the school counselor approached her. Parent 1 stated that the school counselor continued to address her with calmness and respect. Parent 1 stated that she felt like the response of the school counselor was a gift of calmness she had given her. The modeling of calmness in the midst of frustration, was something Parent 1 stated she would like to see her children shown by the school counselor. Parent 1 stated that she liked the way the school

counselor was able to “redirect the frustration and re represent the idea so I didn’t feel so foolish.”

Parent 3 reported on how her daughter felt a connection with the school counselor because of the advocacy the school counselor initiated on her behalf:

My daughter is in trouble a lot. It’s not that we don’t know that. The school counselor invites us in to talk about my daughter’s problems. I always feel like I’m being summoned to the principal’s office. But when I get there, she (school counselor) makes me feel okay. I get there and I’m all nervous and frustrated and she honestly is nice and approaches both my husband and I with kindness. I’m not sure she knows what to do with my daughter’s terrible behavior, but at least I feel calm when I leave her office.

Parent 6 corroborated the subtheme of a relaxed and safe environment having an impact on her son. She shared that her son was special needs and often needed somewhere to de stress. She said that she requested a place for him to de stress during his IEP. In response, the school counselor volunteered her office. She reported the following observation from her son:

Her (school counselor) office is like the busiest place on earth. People coming and going and the phone ringing and it’s crazy in there. After he told me about her office, I (Parent 6) was concerned that maybe the school counselor office wasn’t the place for Jonah to relax so I asked him. Jonah said, no he liked it in there because with

all the craziness Mrs. Jones would just do her stuff. Jonah told me it made him feel a lot less stressed to see her responding to the craziness of her office.

In the examples given from the research the relaxed and safe environment was projected in both the physical location, but more significantly in the person of the school counselor. The attitude of the school counselor was interpreted by the participants as one that resulted in this strong psychological safety.

***Informed counselor.*** Participants overwhelmingly perceived that school counselors valued students, provided a relaxed atmosphere, and were also knowledgeable in practical ways to help their children. From this pragmatic approach, the final theme emerged: *informed counselor*. In all participants' stories they shared the need for school counselors to demonstrate their expertise in a myriad of topics.

Parent 1 shared how the knowledge that her school counselor had placed her special needs son into classes she knew he would like:

The school counselor knew Edward was returning and would need special attention. We got to her office and she had reserved classes that she knew that Edward would like. She also presented a well-organized plan of action for Edward to accomplish in order to keep in on track to graduate. She knew Edward would not stay after school for extra classes, so she had an alternative in place during the school hours. She really went above and beyond with helping Edward and putting my mind at ease.

Parent 2 shared that her daughter wanted to enter college with as much college credit as possible. Her school counselor proposed the possibility of her daughter taking a dual enrollment instead of a traditional course. This option helped her daughter earn college credit while still in high school.

Consistent with other participants, Parent 3 shared that her daughter's counselor presented several options for her to regain credit she had lost in the previous semester. Parent 3 said that the counselor presented the options in a way that scared her daughter into realizing that she would have to make up the work. Parent 3 stated that the possible class options were presented "very professionally."

Parent 4 stated that she was thrilled to be guided by the school counselor and that she never knew the options that could be available for her daughter. She shared how her daughter's counselor not only provided professional, knowledgeable guidance but also incorporated a personal touch:

And being an older mom and not knowing – I didn't even know about AP classes and honors classes, and college writing. Some of the stuff I'd never heard of. So I was kind of out of it. I was kind of out of the loop. So actually she also has a daughter in the same grade, so she knew what classes Gloria was taking, she knew what it entailed, what the homework was, 'cause her daughter was in some of those, and so I think that really helped.

Parent 5 was impressed with the knowledge that the school counselor demonstrated in setting up her children's school schedule, "But I do think as far as setting

up their schedules, I mean, I feel like they always did a good job. You know, if you really are interested in math, here's the progression that you would take.”

Parent 6 was most impressed with the follow up of her son's school counselor. Although Parent 6 stated that the school counselor struggled in knowing the colleges that her son wanted to try to get into, the school counselor always researched them and followed up with requirements to get into the college. Parent 6 also experienced this in planning his classes. She related the following:

Jonah really wanted to take an art class that would prepare him for college. Unfortunately, he had exhausted all the art classes at West High School. He asked his counselor if he could take a class at the art center and have it count for credit. She said she didn't know, but would look into it. She came back with an alternative for Jacob to take an independent study. We were all happy with the compromise.

Parent 7 was appreciative of her daughter's school counselor in attempting to provide a less expensive alternative to her daughter making up classes. She shared that her daughter could have been charged over twice as much money for summer school if the school counselor had not told her about alternative classes. Being a single Mom, Parent 7 was very appreciative of the school counselors' guidance in helping her save money.

Parent 8 corroborated with the stories of every other participant. She shared an experience with her older daughter that was significant in her finding her career path:

My daughter Amanda was trying and probably still is trying to figure out what she wants to do with her life. Amanda's a bright girl and most bright kids I guess don't go to a career center for a semester. However, the counselor suggested that since Amanda was so unsure of her career path that she spend a semester trying to figure it out. At that time Amanda thought she wanted to be a nurse. So she entered the nursing career path. As Amanda became more familiar she really decided she didn't like nursing. We were all pretty thankful that learning experience came in high school and not at the expense of college.

Participants all reported that the knowledge of the school counselor was an important factor in impacting their children.

### **Ethical Accountability**

There is an inherent pull that exists between the generalizations that research presents for the good of others and the responsibility of the researcher to maintain accountability for the validity of the research. In order to minimize this dynamic, I took measures to establish ethical accountability when I engaged in this research study. The following is an explanation of the measures that were taken which includes trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

#### **Trustworthiness**

The rigor in my study was attained by implementing an ongoing verification of reliability and validity strategies within the research (Shaw & Murphy, 2013). The

ongoing process of multiple verification strategies helped strengthen accountability for the credibility, dependability and confirmability of my research (Morse, 2000).

Implementing reliability and validity within the ongoing process defines and measure bias and minimizes distortion within the study (Creswell 2014).

### **Credibility**

To protect credibility in the findings of this research, it was important to collect data in such a way as to reflect the data accurately and the perceptions of each participant consistent with their experience. Four activities were executed in order to promote the credibility of this study.

According to Patton (2002), the initial element to insure credibility is the *implementation of rigorous methods*. One way in which rigorous methods were executed was through member checks (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson & Spiers, 2008). Member checks were initially instrumental during the interviews with participants. It was during this time that I initiated probing and clarifying questions in order that the data collected was an accurate representation of what each participant was describing. I would clarify statements made by the participants by asking “Can you help me understand...” or by asking the questions “Is it fair to say...” Asking these clarifying questions eliminated guessing on my part to the meaning the participants were relating. In addition to the ongoing member checks throughout the interviews, member checks were initiated following data analysis and theme development. In order to accurately represent what each participant relayed during the interviews, the researcher emailed each participant a copy of a summary of the discoveries made in the research (Appendix H). Each



participant was asked to read the summaries and check for accuracies and inaccuracies and note any discrepancies they found. I then asked participants to email any discrepancies they found back to me. I provided my phone number in case participants were more comfortable discussing verbally their reactions. Seven of the eight participants returned the email to me (Appendix H). All participants indicated the summaries they reviewed were accurate descriptions of their perceptions and representative of their interviews. The eighth participant did not respond to email or by telephone. Several attempts were made to connect with the eighth participant to no avail.

The second verification for credibility is the *credibility of the researcher* (Patton, 2002). My credibility was accurately presented in my disclosure statement presented to each participant (Appendix C). Although, I am a first time researcher my training and experience demonstrated professionalism and thoroughness in this research process.

The third verification for credibility is my *philosophical belief in the value of qualitative inquiry* (Patton, 2002). Tracy (2010) referred to this process as triangulation. Triangulation is simply the pursuit of corroborating evidence. In this study, I reviewed evidence based research in order to verify the credibility of my generated themes.

In a classic study, Epstein (1986) presented the Overlapping Spheres of Influence; family, home and community. The premise of the model is that there are activities that occur at home and at school and others are conducted together in order to influence student learning. At the center of this model is the student. "School, family, and community partnerships cannot simply produce successful students. Rather, partnership activities may be designed to engage, guide, energize, and motivate students to produce

their own successes” (Epstein & Sanders, 2009, p. 287). Within the Epstein model there are both external and internal structures that share boundaries of school, home, and community. The focus of the model is that the entire burden of figuring out how parents become and remain involved in their children’s schooling is something shared between the school, family, and community (Epstein & Sanders, 2009). This theory verified the theme in the current research of the vital importance of school counselors and parent partnerships which ultimately benefits students. The theme of partnerships was also verified in the recent study conducted by Walker DeVose (2013). After conducting a qualitative research protocol involving interviewing parents on their perspectives of school involvement, Walker DeVose concluded that the desire for parents to be involved is evident and the students benefit when there is active parental involvement. The presence of this theme in the past literature provides credibility to the theme generated in my research; *Parents Feeling Empowered*.

Another verification for the data gathered occurred in a national study conducted by Foster, Young, and Hermann (2005) where school counselors’ roles were acknowledged as promoting student’s progress in academics, career preparation and personal/social development. These themes that were generated resonated with my current study. Although the Foster, Young and Herman study identified the roles of the school counselor, my study links the role of school counselors to parents’ perceptions about the success of their children in academics, college readiness and social/emotional success. The presence of these themes in the past literature provides credibility to my current research theme of *Student Benefits*.

Schaeffer (2008) presented research on school counselor advocacy as it related to colleges access of underrepresented students. In Schaeffer's research they found that empathy toward students was the prominent factor in school counselors advocating for underrepresented students. Schaeffer (2008) additionally found that there was a consensus in those interviewed in the research that advocating for all students was an essential role of school counselors. The identification of school counselors advocating for all students in this past research provides credibility to the current research theme of *Informed School Counselor*.

Fisher (1996) researched school counselor knowledge, attitudes and beliefs regarding homosexuality and gay youth. Although this research is outdated it is significant to point out that the topic was important to the timing of the research. Fisher (1996) administered a training course to school counselors in order to determine if the training would impact their knowledge, attitudes and beliefs regarding homosexuality and gay youth. Fisher determined that the implementation of the workshop did improve the school counselors' knowledge. Staying abreast of current trends is imperative for school counselors. In my research a theme that emerged was that parents valued the importance of an *Informed School Counselor*.

Cottongim (2002) conducted research on role school counselor's play in supporting children of divorce. In the findings of this research all participants reported that they feel their child's school counselor provides a supportive environment for their children at school. These findings are consistent with my study's findings that school

counselors provide a relaxed and safe environment. Confirming the *Interpersonal Environment* this former study strengthens the credibility in my study.

The fourth activity used to insure credibility was in the form of peer review. Creswell (2009) identified the peer review process as people who review and ask questions about the study to ensure that the study resonates with individuals other than the researcher. Both my dissertation chair and a colleague who recently completed his Ph.D. program served as peer reviewers for this process. Both reviewers are trained in qualitative research and reviewed data collection protocols, coding procedures, and data interpretations. In addition to reviewing the data and procedures, both reviewers were instrumental as a sounding board as I discussed emerging themes and protocol of reporting the themes.

### **Transferability**

Transferability within this study was evidenced with implementing the technique of thick descriptions allowing me to the greatest amount of detail and depth in the interview (Reiter et al, 2011). It is vital to implement the use of thick descriptions in order to gather rich imageries from participants and then disseminate the participants' stories to an expansive population (Tracy, 2010). Employing the technique of thick descriptions allows the researcher to present the data in such a way that a reader can assess and confirm the research discoveries in sufficient detail to help in "accepting people, understanding times, embracing situations, or identifying places" (Gringeri, Barusch, & Camhron, 2013 p. 768). I sought the use of thick descriptions in order to validate emerging themes and give readers a clear and vivid picture of this important

phenomenon. The rich descriptions rendered by participants help readers resonate with the experience of parents and their perceptions of their children's high school counselor.

### **Dependability**

In order to assure data in this study to be reliable and replicable, I implemented three activities to establish dependability within the findings of this study. Ferguson et al. (2013) suggested that the research articulates the protocol that was initially detailed. Creating a *concise interview protocol* is the first activity I implemented (Appendix E). In the 10 question interview protocol, the questions were specifically arranged to elicit perceptions of school counselors from all parent participants. The questions were arranged on an inverted bell curve moving left to right. The first three questions were designed to elicit rapport and warm participants to the interview process. Following the initial rapport building questions, the following five questions were designed to address potential parent interactions involving students and school counselors in the following areas; academics, social/emotional and college readiness. These five questions were designed to deepen the descriptive data in order to develop relevant themes. The last two questions were designed to shift participants back to rapport based questions. Presenting questions in the same order for each participant followed a concise interview protocol that ensured dependability in the study. At times, participants may have unknowingly answered questions prematurely. However, I was consistent in presenting questions in the same format for each participant in order to enrich the dependability of the data collected.

The second task to insure dependability was the use of *bracketing*. According to Moustakas (1994), bracketing is implemented when the researcher is cognizant to set their own experiences aside in order to embrace the phenomenon of the research. In this study I implemented bracketing by using a reflexive journal where I recorded my thoughts, feelings and perceptions of the phenomenon being studied. Having the reflexive journal allowed me to record and be aware of my thoughts and impressions and identify any potential bias in order to ensure that I was seeing and interpreting the data clearly.

The third task to insure dependability was to *follow a research based protocol* presented by Moustakas' (1994, p. 122). Moustakas (1994) presented steps taken with the entire transcript of every participant as individual and then as an entire whole of all eight participants. The seven steps are as follows:

- 1) Review each statement for how well it describes the experience.
- 2) Record all relevant statements.
- 3) Remove all statements that are redundant or overlap with others, leaving the key meaning units of the experience.
- 4) Organize the invariant meaning units into themes.
- 5) Coalesce the themes into a description of the textures of the experiences and augment the description with quotations from the text.
- 6) Using imagination and taking multiple perspectives to find possible meanings in the text, construct a description of the structures of your experience.
- 7) Create a textual structural description of the meaning and essences of the experience.

## **Confirmability**

The establishment of confirmability in the research study occurred with the implementation of two activities that ensured the data collected was neutral and free from researcher bias. The first activity was remembering to follow and not lead the direction of the interviews (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). In order to strengthen this stance, I implemented the use of reflective listening and reframing (Passmore, 2011). Prior to activating reflective listening and/or reframing, I gave the following instructions: “Let me know if I understand you correctly, I’m hearing you say...” I also responded consistently with “Is it fair to interpret what you are saying as...” All interpretations of the participants’ statements remained as part of the interview transcript.

I also verified confirmability with the application of member checks. Once the data was analyzed and themes were developed, I executed member checks in order to protect confirmability within the study. The emerging themes were sent via email to each participant (Appendix H). Each of the eight participants confirmed that the data collected was accurate and concurred with the developed themes as an accurate interpretation of their experiences with their children’s high school counselors.

## **Summary**

Chapter 4 addressed the results of the qualitative phenomenological transcendental study on parents’ perceptions of and experiences with their children’s school counselors. In the review of the participant interviews, several themes emerged. As parent participants reflected on their children’s school counselors, the initial theme that developed in the research was student benefits. This was revealed by participants as

benefits in academics, school connectedness and college readiness well-being. Evidence of the benefits was presented by participants in their stories of the school counselor helping prepare school courses that would lead their children to success. Other shared stories reflected how school counselors initiating activities made students felt connected to their schools. Additionally, stories of the school counselors were shared where children were given tools for success on college entrance exams. All of these stories were summarized as the participants' perceptions of school counselors.

Parent and school counselor partnerships was an additional theme that emerged that resulted in parents feeling empowered. At times the partnerships reflected positives in student outcomes and at times the partnerships were challenging and attended occasionally by negative events. Whatever the initiating event or even the results of the partnership, each parent participant shared how they felt empowered by their collaborations with school counselors. Parent perceptions of the impact school counselors had on their children was summarized in two emerging themes: *Interpersonal Environment* and *Informed Counselor*. Parent participants reported that an open door policy, school counselors being advocates and school counselors modeling a relaxed environment all contributed to their children feeling valued by school counselors. The fourth and last emerging theme was *Informed Counselor*. Parent participants' stories all revealed that the knowledge the school counselor possessed and pragmatic strategies embedded in that experience and expertise and how this impacted students, including meeting the specific needs of students. Examples such as maneuvering a class schedule to accommodate special needs, sensitivity to a family's financial needs, introducing an



option of dual enrollment to save money in college, presenting options a student to make up credit, and guiding students in future career options, validate the rigor and accuracy of these emerging themes. Finally, these specific examples demonstrate the versatility of knowledge that school counselors possess even on occasions where school counselors did not always know the answer to every challenge presented. One of the most poignant primary themes from participants was the perception of school counselors manifesting professional humility in their work, including the willingness and ability to take risks and encourage stretching students to their potential. Every participant shared an experience where they asked the school counselor a question and the school counselor simply replied that they would find the answer and get back with an answer, thus strengthening credibility by following through on a simple commitment. In addition to the themes that emerged during the analysis, I reviewed data analysis procedures including reporting sample size, frequency and duration of the data collected, the method of transcription, and variances from the plan discussed in chapter three. In the data analysis section of this chapter I discussed processes, themes, and making the findings trustworthy including credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

As the themes emerged, the answers to this study's research questions became apparent. The discussion on themes generated from the data were the basis for chapter 5. Chapter 5 includes an analysis of the study's findings and review them against the key concepts presented in chapter one. In addition, chapter 5 includes a discussion on the limitations of this study and recommendations for further research. The conclusion of chapter 5 frames the potential impact on social change this study posits.

## Chapter 5: Interpretation

### **Introduction**

In the implementation of this transcendental, phenomenological research study, I focused on descriptions of parents' from five high schools perceptions of their children's high school counselors in the Midwest region of the United States. Along with discovering parents' perceptions of their children's school counselors, the qualitative interviews were used to reveal ways that school counselors could strengthen their relationships with parents in order to enhance student success. Although it has been well documented that parent involvement in the school culture and environment is beneficial to students, parents sometimes feel isolated from schools and often do not participate in school events (Bryan & Henry, 2012; Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2011). Along with the gap in the current research related to parent isolation and school involvement, there is a gap in defining the role of school counselors, which may negatively impact children's educational experiences (Bryan & Henry, 2012). Therefore, I proposed this qualitative study in order to identify factors and processes contributing to working relationships between parents and school counselors and how these relationships possibly benefit students. Understanding the perceptions of parents and the meaning parents attach to school counselors is helpful for the development of accurate and targeted evidence based future practices for school counselors.

I implemented a qualitative, transcendental phenomenological methodology in my study. Eight parents (mothers) of high school children were recruited using a criterion

and snowball sampling technique (Patton, 2002). Participants were interviewed and shared stories of their experiences with and perceptions of their children's school counselors in response to semi-structured qualitative questions. I collected the data and transcribed and coded them using a seven step process developed by Moustakes (1994). After completing a rigorous analysis of the collected data, four primary themes emerged: student benefits, parents feeling empowered, interpersonal environment, and informed school counselor.

Chapter 5 comprises four distinct sections. Initially, I will discuss the validity of the current scholarly literature on parents' perception of high school counselors. This is followed by a discussion of the findings of the research in direct reference to key concepts outlined in chapter 1. I then address the limitations of the study and identify recommendations for future research. The chapter concludes with a summary of the implications this study has on social change.

### **Interpretations of the Findings**

The results of this study corroborated four explicit themes in the existing literature concerning parents' perceptions of high school counselors (Amatea & Clark, 2005; Bryan & Henry, 2012; Moore-Thomas & Day-Vinis, 2010; Steen & Noguera, 2010; Wanat, 2010). The four primary emerging themes were a result of 14 subthemes (Appendix D). The existing research helped to support the findings of my study as valid and reliable.

Initially, it emerged that student benefits from parents believing school counselors benefit their children in three specific ways: academics, social/emotional well-being, and college preparedness (Hann-Morrison, 2011; Pope, 2009). All parent participants

interviewed during my research study also shared their experiences of how school counselors enhanced their children's success in academic, social/emotional well-being and college preparedness. While each parent mentioned a variety of interventions school counselors initiated, participants emphasized aspects of these student benefits differently. One parent mentioned in-depth the way the school counselor guided all three of her children academically including placing her children in dual enrollment courses. All participants shared that they perceived school counselors as beneficial in helping their children to succeed academically. Student success in academics involved, for example, creating appropriate class schedules and/or placing children in appropriate classes. In addition, all but one parent mentioned college preparedness as an area they perceived the school counselor benefitting their children. School counselor interventions included college selection help, college degree ideas, or introducing students to various colleges. One parent shared that her daughter was confused about college but stated

Her school counselor went through a type of inventory with Gloria and she (school counselor) took a lot of time to explain the differences between a public and private university. I learned a lot when Gloria told me what her school counselor had told her.

Although only three parent participants mentioned the interventions their children received in social/emotional help from their children's school counselor, their stories were meaningful and imbued with emotion. One parent shared how her daughter was troubled in getting along with peers and her mother felt that her daughter was bullied. The parent shared that

Asking for a referral to a (mental health) counselor was the hardest thing I've ever had to do. The (school) counselor was really helpful. She didn't make me feel stupid or anything. She gave me a list and it helped. I was indebted to not only the referral to the (mental health) counselor, but to the way I was treated.

Other examples included school counselors helping their children find an extracurricular activity where their children felt welcomed. The student benefits school counselors provided to their children with college preparedness brought up strong feelings within the parent participants. One parent shared that her daughter's "college choice was so narrow until the school counselor opened her eyes to all that was out there." Another parent shared that the classes the school counselor placed her son in "helped him to see his future career in math." The benefits to the students were evident in the current research and verified in past research by Hann-Morrison (2011) and Pope (2009) who advocated that school counselors are an important catalyst for student success.

The second area of discovery that emerged into a theme was the partnership between parents and school counselors named parents feeling empowered. Bryan and Henry (2012) revealed that collaboration between school counselors and parents was a connection that had potential for student success. In addition, Henderson et al., (2007) researched parents and their visibility in a school and how that visibility led to academic, personal, and social success. Henderson and Mapp (2002) concluded that the lack of parental involvement in secondary schools was detrimental to student success. In my study, all eight parents advocated and proactively approached their children's school

counselor prior to the school counselor contacting them. Parents initiating contact with school counselors resulted in parents feeling empowered. Parent empowerment was evidenced by each parent indicating that she felt comfortable approaching the school counselor at any time and under a variety of circumstances. One parent reported that her children said that their school counselor was “super busy.” However, this parent reported that when she went in to speak to the school counselor, the school counselor came out of her office and cheerfully welcomed her. The parent said “it wasn’t at all what I was expecting. I thought she (school counselor) would be like pulling her hair out, but she wasn’t...she was very kind.” The congenial atmosphere was not only a physical experience, but an attitude school counselors consistently portrayed to parents. The welcoming personality of school counselors helped parents feel empowered, which resulted in parents feeling confident to collaborate with their children’s school counselors. One parent stated that

I didn’t know who to ask, so I asked her school counselor. The school counselor acted like my question was so important she was going to make an announcement about what I was asking about. I honestly don’t remember my question, but I remember how I felt hearing that my question was that important.

Parents advocating for their children fell into three literature based categories of academic, social/emotional, and college preparedness (Cordry & Wilson, 2004; Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Overwhelmingly parent participants in my study reported that they collaborated with their children’s school counselors in order to help their children academically and

found effective, supportive, and welcoming partners in that important endeavor. Although parent collaboration leads to success in academics (Bryan & Henry, 2012), parent stories were more varied, specific, and targeted. One parent reported that after collaborating with her daughter's school counselor, the school counselor placed her daughter in after school classes that resulted in her graduating on time. Another parent reported that her son was not placed in the appropriate level math class. This parent stated, "The school counselor helped my son by putting him in the right math class that year and every year since then." Three parents shared similar stories of how their children were going through personal issues and the school counselors were the ones to whom they turned to for a solution. One parent reported that she was having trouble with her ex-husband not paying child support. The parent reported the school counselor "found a cheaper way for my daughter to take the class." Sensitivity to the personal needs of parents and students was one way that parents and school counselors collaborated. The third way parents and school counselors collaborated was through social/emotional issues their children may have experienced. Seven parents reported connecting with school counselors around their concerns for their children's social and emotional well-being. One parent shared how her daughter had struggled with the athletic team she was on. The parent relayed how the school counselor was "instrumental in mediating the problem." These parents' stories corroborated the existing research highlighting ways in which parents join forces with school counselors resulting in parents feeling empowered.

Additionally, parents in my study reported their children's school counselors impacting their children through providing a safe interpersonal environment and by directing their children by being an *informed school counselor*. Specifically, parents in my study reported that an open door policy, their children feeling valued, and the school counselor being an advocate for all children strengthened the theme of the *informed school counselor*. Moore-Thomas and Day-Vines (2010) and Steen and Noguera (2010) both reported that vital to the role of school counselor is awareness of cultural differences. Steen and Noguera (2010) added that the relationship between students and school counselors has the potential to promote student success. The inviting environment and attitude of school counselors was prevalent in the parent stories of school counselors positively impacting their children. One parent participant shared how her child enjoyed going to the school counselor "despite all the chaos in the office." Another parent shared that her child believed the school counselor cared about her when the school counselor asked her about a recent contest she was in. One parent told her daughter she was coming to be interviewed and the daughter responded that her school counselor "talked to her all the time." The parent felt that this genuine interest and care shown by her school counselor was significant in making her daughter feel important and valued. All parents shared numerous and varied stories about how their children felt valued by their school counselors. Epstein and Van Voorhis (2011) concurred that students feeling a sense of school connectedness will be more successful in school. School counselors are pivotal in providing a sense of school connectedness and a safe environment in order for students to feel valued (Moore-Thomas & Day-Vines, 2010; Steen & Noguera, 2010).



Parents identified that the knowledge and expertise an *informed school counselor* brings to their children is invaluable. In previous research, administrators reported feeling that the school counselor role comprises an “innovative school leader, collaborative case consultant, responsive direct service provider, and administrative team player” (Amatea & Clark, 2005 p. 22). All these roles can be interpreted as expertise and knowledge school counselors bring to the benefit of students. When parent participants shared ways in which their children’s school counselors demonstrated knowledge, their responses were similar to those presented by administrators in past research (Amatea & Clark, 2005). As stated previously, one parent was surprised at how her daughter’s school counselor creatively provided a way for her daughter to make up a class without costing her any money. Two parents shared how school counselors collaborated with the special education department to provide their children with appropriate classes. The myriad of stories shared by parents in how school counselors helped their children navigate the college process was evidence that school counselors leveraged their expertise in practical and useful ways. Although parent stories did not speak directly to collaborations with other administrators, the results of students getting specific classes and exceptions to typical academics is evidence that school counselors have administrative privileges and leverage.

The focus of my study was discovering parents’ experiences with and perceptions of school counselors in order to identify real and potential factors and important processes contributing to strong working relationships between parents and school counselors and how these relationships benefitted students. The gap in literature

identified in chapter 2 involved a lack of specific understanding about how parents may experience a sense of isolation from their children's schools and how feeling more connected to school counselors could lead to enhanced student success. Parents in my study illuminated a combination of previously researched concepts that lead to student success. As parents' stories evolved it became evident that student success was also achieved by executing a specific sequence of concepts. Past research evidenced the need for each of the concepts independently, however my study threaded each concept together with the results of potential student success (Table 1). The interventions are explained and references to previous research is included (Table 1). Past research indicated that all children have a need to feel valued by the school counselor (Steen & Noguera, 2010) and this too was validated by my study. Once children feel valued by school counselors, they feel more connected to the school (Wanat, 2010). When children feel valued, they open up to school counselors about specific needs they may have (Moore-Thomas & Day-Vines, 2010). As school counselors respond strategically and collaboratively, the confidence in students and their parents toward the school and educational processes grows (Bryan & Holcomb-McCoy, 2007) and both students and parents invest in and engage the school more meaningfully. In my research a parent reported that initially she did not know what the school counselor's role was. However, after hearing from her daughter the advice that the school counselor gave to her daughter, this parent went to the school counselor to help her and her daughter make a final decision about college. Evidence of children opening up was reported in the times when both parents and children petitioned school counselors for help. When this happened,

school counselors demonstrated their knowledge and expertise which was born out in past and current research (Amatea & Clark, 2005). When school counselors establish their knowledge in a myriad of different contexts, parents understand school counselors' roles (Bryan & Henry, 2012). As parents understand the roles of school counselors, the relationship between parents and school counselors improves. These improved relationships lead to the strengthening of a collaborative relationship between school counselors and parents. Once the school counselor and parents collaborate, children experience success (Bryan & Henry, 2012; Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2011).

Inherent within these findings is the importance of school counselors developing intentional, systematic approaches to making students feel valued. Based on these parent stories, school counselors can enhance their professional credibility by investing time in establishing relationships with their students and that these relationships are noticed by parents. All parent participants and their children in my study had contact with their school counselors. As a catalyst for change, school counselors initiate relationships with students that, according to my research will ultimately lead to parents and school counselors collaborating for the success of students. Table 1 provides a representation of a systematic approach to collaboration and success while incorporating past research and themes generated in my current study.

### **Key Concept Findings**

Validation of my study is consistent with past research including authenticating key concepts upon which this study was initiated. The body of existing research included the work of Bryan and Henry (2012), Griffin and Farris (2012), and Owens, Stewart and

Bryant (2012). Bryan and Henry (2012) and Griffin and Farris (2012) presented administrators' perceptions of school counselors. Owens, Stewart and Bryant (2011) presented students' perceptions of school counselors. Bryan and Henry (2012) suggested that school counselors hold the key to establishing effective school counselor roles that facilitate collaborative relationships between school counselors and parents. Griffin and Farris (2011) added to my key element underpinning by asserting that administrators viewed school counselors as crucial members of a school's administration team. During the course of my study, all parent participants identified academics, social/emotional well-being and college preparedness means domains in which school counselors help children achieve success (Hann Morrison, 2011; Pope, 2009).

Achieving children's success in academics, social/emotional, and college preparedness validated the key elements presented in chapter 1. Each parent willingly shared specific circumstances where interactions with school counselors resulted in student success. For example, each parent sought advice from school counselors on academics for their children. School counselors having specific knowledge and expertise to guide students confirmed Griffin and Farris (2011) where school administrators viewed school counselors as an essential part of the administrative team resulting in student success.

The second phase of my study's key concepts emerged out of the research by Cordry and Wilson (2004) and Henderson and Mapp (2002). Their research asserted that parental involvement in school enhances academic success and students' personal and social lives. My research study verified that all parent participants were engaged in their

children's educational processes and shared their stories of collaborating with school counselors in which their children were successful (Wanat, 2010).

Related to my key concepts was that school counselors were viewed by their administrators, parents and students as knowledgeable in their field (Bryan & Henry, 2012; Griffin & Farris, 2010; Owens, Stewart & Bryan, 2011). The findings of my study confirmed that school counselors possess a specialized knowledge and expertise as evidenced by the participants' stories of seeking advice in many different ways and in a variety of contexts to help their children navigate successfully their education. Another key concept was that the collaboration between parents and school counselor would lead to student success (Bryan & Henry, 2012). In addition, the findings of my research not only concluded that collaboration between school counselors and parent is imperative, but also the findings of the research pointed to a process whereby parents and school counselors achieve successful collaboration.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Limitations exist in transcendental qualitative phenomenological research. For my study, initial limitations were on the interview itself. Factors such as participant timeliness and availability I anticipated as a potential limitation (Patton, 2009). Timeliness and availability of participants was addressed by my making appointments with participants at their convenience and providing a courtesy call to remind them of their interview appointments.

Although the initial limitation was directed toward the participants, another limitation was directed toward me as the researcher. As the interpreter of data, the

phenomenological interview results relied heavily upon the rapport that was established between me and parent participants (Wu et al., 2011). My current position of a high school counselor in a public high school undoubtedly influenced how I inquired into and gathered data and how I interpreted data during the interview process. I addressed this limitation by using bracketing in order to decrease bias (Moustakas, 1994) and in debriefing with peers and mentors.

Another limitation in using a phenomenological interview is the assumption that the stories told by parents were truthful and reflected actual experiences. My implementation of clarification and reframing techniques during the interviews was a source to elucidate the feelings associated with the parent stories and I had no reason to believe that participants were untruthful in what they shared with me.

The last limitation of this study is a derivative from the application of the sampling strategy. Although the methodology research justifies the use of criterion sampling for this study, implementing criterion sampling and snowball sampling limited the types of parent participants chosen. The parents had to have had at least one contact with their children's high school counselors. Even though this made it possible for the parents to speak on their perceptions of the school counselor, it also made the findings of this study generalizable to all parents of high school students who were at least minimally involved and invested in their children's education. By selecting only parents who have had contact with the school counselor, it eliminated parents who may have had no contact with the school counselor but may also have valid experiences with and perceptions of their children's school counselors.

## **Recommendations**

The results of this study beg for some guidelines on how school counselors and parents collaborate for the success of students (Table 1). Additionally, my study fills a gap in the research regarding parents' perceptions of and experiences with school counselors and how these perceptions and experiences could inform the profession about enhancing key relationships and identifying factors that contribute to student success. Parents who collaborate with school counselors are inevitably reciprocated in ways that benefits them and their children's success. Although the results of the current research confirmed multiple concepts within the current body of research literature, this study raised additional issues that should be considered in future research.

Initially I made the decision to not distinguish between the ethnicity and cultural background of parents. As a result of this decision, the results did not indicate that any issues due to ethnicity and/or cultural background of the parents were a mitigating factor to the study. Future research in this area may be warranted and should distinguish the relationship of school counselors based on school counselor ethnicity and/or cultural background and the parent ethnicity and/or cultural backgrounds.

While understanding the collaboration between parents and school counselors was preeminent in this research it also became evident that parents were searching for the specific areas in which school counselors could be of help to their children. My study indicated the best action for school counselors is to be intentional about taking the initiative to build, nurture and navigate relationships between themselves, parents and students. Future research focused on what parents can expect from school counselors

would enhance the picture my study began to form. Additionally, future research could potentially illuminate school counselors' perceptions of parents with the potential of providing parents with a guide to help them successfully use school counselors to their children's advantage.

All eight parents shared how school counselors influenced their children in academics, social/emotional well-being and college preparedness. In addition, all shared of a time they turned to school counselors for guidance on behalf of their children. During the stories shared, three of the parents shared stories about how the guidance of school counselors were directly opposite of what parents believed was best for their children's success. In cases where school counselors knew how to support students (children) better than parents did, raised some interesting possibilities of how school counselors utilize their experience and expertise. Future research could include parents' perceptions on the dynamics that school counselors may know children better than parents do within the school setting and present and future educational and developmental domains. This is a very sensitive paradigm shift within the parenting role that occurs during the adolescent years that begs for further understanding that follow up research could address.

In conclusion, although parents reported that they proactively approached school counselors, their perceptions of school counselors responses was consistent with school counselors responding reactively to concerns. The inconsistency of parents demonstrating proactive skills and school counselors demonstrating reactive and skills needs further research. This research could incorporate the circumstances in which



school counselors perceive themselves as proactive and reactive. This research has the potential to provide both parents and school counselors with insight in navigating successfully these important collaborative relationships and inform school administrators about how they can support these important relationships.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The purpose of this study was to address the gap in research on how relationships between parents and school counselors occur and how these collaborative relationships benefit students. The research of Bryan and Henry (2012) revealed that strong partnerships between parents and school counselors can have a positive influence on students' educational experiences. The questions that remained unanswered were how to create the strong partnerships between parents and school counselors and how collaboration could influence student success. These answers were illuminated through data gathered in interviews conducted with the parent participants. Through their rich and descriptive stories, a detailed process of parent and school counselor collaboration emerged.

The emerging themes of this study provides current school counselors and future school counselors insight into how to collaborate with parents in order to influence student success. With the goal of collaboration, the process begins with school counselors ensuring that each student feel valued without regard to any preconceived bias the school counselor may possess.

The current parental paradigm of the role of school counseling is likely to shift from the findings of my study. The influence that school counselors have on their

children will help parents understand the importance of nurturing and encouraging the relationship between their children and school counselors. The strength of these relationships can be considered a catalyst for student success.

In addition to current school counselors implementing the proposed steps toward collaboration with parents, social change will likely occur when current and future school counseling students practice the process of successful collaboration with parents. By intentionally training graduate students in a school counseling preparation programs, collaboration with parents can be operationalized and enhanced, thus strengthening professional school counselor identity.

### **Conclusion**

The stories shared by the parents were rich descriptions of their experiences with and perceptions of their children's high school counselors. These enlightening detailed stories of how school counselors and parents engaged in collaborative relationships and how school counselors responded successfully to parents and students informed an otherwise limited body of research. My study elaborated the potential for students to be more successful academically, socially and emotionally, and in being more prepared for college. The data generated from parent interviews also illuminated a process of collaboration that validates how school counselors maximize their training, experience and expertise. As the process toward collaboration between parents and school counselors emerged, it became apparent that each step was necessary for successive steps. This study provides important guidance in how current school counselors and

future school counselors can enrich experiences working with parents and a springboard for future research on important related topics.

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## Appendix A

### Initial Participation Letter

Dear Prospective Research Study Participant,

My name is Robyn J. Emde and I am a doctoral student at Walden University. In order to meet the requirements of my doctoral program, I am conducting a research study titled, "Parents' Perception of the Professional School Counselors Role". The purpose of this study is to gain insight into the perceptions that parents have regarding the role of their child's professional school counselor. I am currently seeking voluntary participants who would like to take part in my study. Individuals interested in participating must meet the following three criteria:

1. Not be employed by a public school.
2. Have a child in a rural, suburban or urban public school.
3. Parent participants must have had at least one or two contacts with their child's school counselor within the last year.

In order to participate in this study, participants must agree to be interviewed by the researcher regarding their perception of their child's school counselors' role for one hour. In addition, participants must be willing to participate in follow up phone calls in order to clarify data provided during the interview process. Participation in this study is completely voluntary and participants can withdraw at any time. If you are interested in this study and would like to participate you can reach me by calling (269) XXX XXXX. I am also available by e mail at [robyn.emde@waldenu.edu](mailto:robyn.emde@waldenu.edu). If you prefer to reach me via mail, my home address is listed here:

Robyn J. Emde  
XXX South St.  
XXXXXXXXXX, Michigan XXXXXX

Warmly,

*Robyn J. Emde LPC*

Robyn J. Emde, LPC

## Appendix A Spanish

Estimado Participante en perspectiva del Estudio de Investigación,

Mi nombre es Robyn J. Emde y yo soy un estudiante doctoral de Walden University. Para cumplir con los requerimientos de mi programa doctoral, estoy conduciendo un estudio de investigación titulado “La Percepción de los Padres sobre el papel de los Consejeros Escolares Profesionales”. El propósito de este estudio es obtener una vislumbre de la percepción que tienen los padres tocantes al papel de los consejeros escolares profesionales de sus hijos. Actualmente estoy buscando participantes voluntarios que deseen tomar parte in la investigación. Las personas que se interesen en participar deben alcanzar los tres siguientes criterios:

1. No pueden ser empleados de una escuela pública
2. Deben tener algún hijo en alguna escuela pública, rural, suburbana o urbana.
3. Los padres participantes deben haber tenido por lo menos uno o dos contactos, con el consejero escolar, dentro de los últimos doce meses.

Para poder participar en este estudio, el participante debe estar dispuesto a ser entrevistado por una hora, por la investigadora tocante a su percepción en cuanto al papel del consejero escolar de sus hijos. En adición, el participante debe estar dispuesto a recibir entrevistas telefónicas posteriores, para clarificar los datos provistos durante el proceso de la entrevista. La participación en este estudio es totalmente voluntaria, y los participantes pueden retirarse del estudio en cualquier momento. Si tiene interés en este estudio y le gustaría participar, puede comunicarse con migo llamando al: (269) 983 6686. También estoy a su disposición por e mail. Mi correo electrónico es: [robyn.emde@waldenu.edu](mailto:robyn.emde@waldenu.edu). Si prefiere escribirme personalmente, la dirección de mi casa es:

Robyn J. Emde

Calorosamente,

Robyn J. Emde LPC

## Appendix B

### Follow up letter/email

Thank you for expressing interest in participation in this study. As discussed during our initial phone conversation, this study seeks to gain information on parents' perception of their child's school counselor. It is my desire that this study will provide pertinent information that has the potential to add to students' success in school. Please review the attached Informed Consent Page. If you are still in agreement with participation and still meet the criteria listed below please return the informed consent document in the self-addressed stamped envelope provided, or scanned via e mail. If you have any questions, please email me at [Robyn.Emde@waldenu.edu](mailto:Robyn.Emde@waldenu.edu). Once I receive your consent, I will be in contact with you to schedule an interview time.

The criterion for participation in this study is as follows:

1. Selected parents must have a student currently enrolled in high school.
2. Selected parents must have had at least two contacts with their child's high school counselor within the last year.
3. Selected parents must not work for a school district.
4. Selected parents must come from rural, urban or suburban public schools.

## Appendix C

### Informed Consent

**Purpose of the Study:** This research study is being conducted in an attempt to explore parents' perception of their child's high school counselor. The purpose of this research study is to discover parents' perspectives of their children's school counselor in order to identify real and potential factors and important processes contributing to strong working relationships between parents and school counselors and how these relationships possibly benefit students.

**Participant Involvement:** Parents will initially be interviewed face to face by the researcher. This initial interview will last approximately one hour. Participants will be given the opportunity to fill out a short demographic questionnaire that will be provided for them to complete prior to the initial interview or following the initial interview. The demographic questionnaire will take less than ten minutes to complete. While a formal follow up interview will most likely not occur during the course of this study, the researcher will employ member checks to insure trustworthiness of the information. This will require that participants meet with the researcher over the phone or in person for verification and clarification purposes of the initial interview.

**Participant Recruitment:** You have been asked to participate in this study based upon the following criteria:

- a) Selected parents must have a student currently enrolled in high school.
- b) Selected parents must have had at least two contacts with their child's high school counselor within the last year.
- c) Selected parents must not work for a school district.
- d) Selected parents must come from rural, urban or suburban public schools.

**Voluntary Participation:** Participation in this research study is completely voluntary. If after committing to participation, you decide you want to discontinue, you may terminate participation at any time without penalty.

**Compensation:** There will be no compensation provided for participation in this study.

**Confidentiality:** Individual's responses and participation will remain confidential. Participants will receive a participant identifier which will be attached to the responses. Recording of interviews either through type written format or audio tape will occur, however, identifying aspects of the participant will not be shared. All files will also remain password protection to prohibit access by unauthorized sources.

**Status of Information Obtained:** The data collected during the study will be utilized for the purpose of identifying appropriate themes within the final dissertation document. Following the completion of the dissertation, information will be retained for five years prior to being destroyed.

**Results of Information Obtained:** The final themes identified as a result of your participation will be identified in the dissertation which will be published to ProQuest dissertation documents. A copy of results will be sent to the participating parents' mailing/e mail address on file within three months of research completion.

**Potential Risks:** Although no substantial risks are predicted, there is the possibility that you may experience some distress when discussing your experiences. In the event that you experience stress or discomfort, you should contact either Madison Center at (574) 283 8325. In addition to the emotional distress and discomfort that parent participants may face, the researcher will also disclose her legal obligation as a mandated reporter of child abuse and neglect and identify the type of information that would necessitate a call to the authorities.

**Potential Benefits:** Although there are no immediate benefits to you, participation in this study is likely to benefit counselors in training and the students who are served through school counseling services in your community's schools. One factor in students having a successful educational experience is parental involvement. Even though parental involvement in school is vital, the factor of parents' perceptions toward school counselors have been minimally explored. Based on information garnered in this study, parents will be given a voice through which their perceptions of school counselors is heard. In addition the gathered information hopes to help guide school counselors into a knowledge of what needs to be implemented in their schools counseling program in order to have the possibility for students to be successful. Finally, the information obtained will provide potential processes that contribute to strong working relationships between parents and school counselors and how there is a possibility these relationships have the potential to benefit students.

**Review of the Study:** This study has been reviewed by the Walden University Institutional Review Board.

**Further Inquiries:** A copy of this informed consent document will be provided to you for future reference. If you need further information, you may contact me at (269) xxx xxxx or email. If you have additional questions or concerns and are not satisfied by the efforts of the researcher to remediate them, you may contact a Walden representative by calling 612 312 1210 or send an email to [irb@waldenu.edu](mailto:irb@waldenu.edu)

I, \_\_\_\_\_, hereby give my voluntary consent for the researcher, Robyn J. Emde to include me in this study. I have read the informed consent documents and understand the potential risks and benefits of my participation. I also understand that I choose not to participate at any time without the fear of coercion or negative repercussions from the researcher.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Participant Printed Name)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Participant Signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

## Appendix C Spanish

### CONSENTIMIENTO INFORMADO

**El Propósito del Estudio:** Este estudio de investigación ha sido conducido con la intención de explorar la percepción de los padres, en cuanto a la consejería de sus hijos en la preparatoria. El propósito de este estudio de investigación es para descubrir las perspectivas de los padres en cuanto a los consejeros escolares de sus hijos para identificar los factores potenciales reales y procesos importantes, que contribuyen a una relación de colaboración fuerte entre los padres y los consejeros escolares, y como estas relaciones pudieran producir beneficios estudiantiles.

**Envolvimiento del participante:** Los padres, inicialmente, serán entrevistados, cara a cara por el investigador. Esta entrevista inicial, durara a proximamente una hora. Se le dará al participante la oportunidad de llenar un cuestionario demográfico corto, el cual les será provisto para que lo completen antes o después de la entrevista inicial. El cuestionario demográfico les tomara unos diez minutos para completar. Mientras que una segunda entrevista formal probablemente no ocurrirá durante el curso de este estudio, el investigador empleará chequeos de los miembros y tal vez entrevistas adicionales, para asegurar que la información dada sea fidedigna. Esto puede requerir que el participante tenga un encuentro con el investigador, sea por teléfono o en persona, para verificar y clarificar los propósitos de la entrevista inicial.

**Reclutamiento de los Participantes:** Se le ha pedido participar en este estudio basado en los siguientes criterios.

- A) Los padres seleccionados deben tener uno o mas estudiante enrolado en la escuela preparatoria.
- B) Los padres seleccionados deben haber tenido por lo menos un contacto con el consejero de su hijo, dentro de los últimos doce meses.
- C) Los padres seleccionados no pueden ser empleado del distrito escolar.
- D) Los padres seleccionados deben ser de las escuelas publica rurales, urbanas, o suburbanas.



**Participación Voluntaria:** La participación en este estudio de investigación es totalmente voluntaria. Si después de comprometerse a participar usted decide que quiere discontinuar, lo puede hacer en cualquier momento sin penalidad.

**Compensación:** No se proveerá ninguna compensación por haberse participado en este estudio.

**Confidencialidad:** Las respuestas y la participación de cada individuo serán totalmente confidenciales. Los participantes recibirán un identificador de participante que será anexo a sus respuestas. Las entrevistas serán grabadas por escrito o por audio; sin embargo, los aspectos identificadores de los participantes no se compartirán. Todos los archivos estarán protegidos por una clave, lo que prohibirá el acceso a fuentes no autorizados.

**Estatus de la Información Obtenida:** Los datos recolectados mediante el estudio serán utilizados para el propósito de la identificación apropiada de los temas dentro del documento final de la tesis doctoral (disertación). Habiéndose completado la disertación, la información se retendrá por cinco años, antes de ser destruida.

**Resultados de la Información Obtenida:** Los temas finales identificados como los resultados de su participación serán identificados en la disertación, los cuales serán publicados en la colección ProQuest de la tesis doctoral. Una copia de los resultados se enviará a los padres participantes, a la dirección postal o electrónica que este archivada, dentro de los tres meses de conclusión del estudio de investigación.

**Riesgos Potenciales:** A pesar de que no se espera ningún riesgo sustancial, existe la posibilidad de que experimente algo de estrés cuando discuta sus experiencias. En caso de que experimente estrés o incomodidad, debe contactar el Madison Center al (574) 283 8325. En adición de cualquier estrés o incomodidad que los padres participantes puedan enfrentar, el investigador expondrá su obligación legal como reportador mandatorio de abuso o negligencia de menores, a identificar el tipo de información que requiera notificar a las autoridades.

**Beneficios Potenciales:** Aunque no hay beneficios inmediatos, su participación en este estudio beneficiará a los consejeros que están en entrenamiento, y los estudiantes que estén recibiendo el servicio de consejería en las escuelas de su comunidad. Un factor importante para el éxito, en la experiencia educacional del estudiante es que los padres estén involucrados. Aunque es vital que los padres estén involucrados en la escuela, la percepción de los padres sobre los consejeros escolares ha sido muy poco explorada. Con base en la información recolectada en este estudio, los padres tendrán la oportunidad de ser escuchados en cuanto a sus percepciones acerca de los consejeros escolares. Además se espera de que la información recolectada pueda ayudar a guiar a los consejeros

escolares en un conocimiento en cuanto a qué se necesita implementar en el programa de consejería para que se posibilite el éxito de los estudiantes. Finalmente, la información obtenida proveerá procesos potenciales que contribuirán a una relación de colaboración fuerte entre los padres y los consejeros escolares, y cómo hay mayor posibilidad de que los estudiantes sean beneficiados a través de esta relación.

**Revisión del Estudio:** Este estudio ha sido revisado por la Walden University Institutional Review Board.

**Preguntas Adicionales:** Una copia de este documento de consentimiento informado le será provisto para su referencia futura. Si necesitas información adicional, puede contactarme al (269) xxx xxxx o por correo electrónica a [Robyn.Emde@waldenu.edu](mailto:Robyn.Emde@waldenu.edu). Si tiene preocupaciones o preguntas adicionales, o no se sienten satisfecho con los esfuerzos del investigador en remediararla, puede contactar a un representante de Walden, llamando al (612) 312 1210 o comunicarse por correo electrónico a [irb@waldenu.edu](mailto:irb@waldenu.edu)

Yo, \_\_\_\_\_, por este medio, doy mi consentimiento voluntario para que la investigadora, Robyn J. Emde me incluya en este estudio. He leído el documento de consentimiento informado, y entiendo los riesgos y beneficios potenciales de mi participación. También entiendo que puedo elegir a no participar en cualquier momento sin el temor de coerción o de repercusiones negativas de parte de la investigadora.

---

( Nombre del Participante )

---

( Firma del Participante )

( Fecha )

## **Appendix D**

### **Professional Disclosure Statement**

Robyn J. Emde, MA, LPC  
XXXX South Street  
XXXXXX, Michigan XXXX  
(xxx)xxx xxxx

#### ***\*Location and Hours\****

My office for completing this research study is located at XXX South. St. in XXXXX, Michigan. The office hours vary depending on the need for an appointment. If I am not in my office, just leave a message and I will get back to you shortly. If it is an immediate emergency please contact Madison Center in South Bend, Indiana or your local emergency room.

#### ***\*Confidentiality\****

Communication between a client and therapist is confidential, except that which is covered by law. Those situations might include, but are not limited to, threat of harm to another person or self, or suspected child and/or elder abuse or neglect.

#### ***\*Referrals\****

If during this research interview it is evident that the parent being interviewed has needs beyond the confines of a research interview, I am obliged to make referrals to appropriate professionals. This will be discussed with the parent before the referral is made. I will assist in any way possible to refer the parent to an appropriate professional.

#### ***\*About Your Counselor\****

Robyn J. Emde is a Licensed Professional Counselor, Thought Field Therapist, Endorsed School Counselor and a Michigan Certified Supervisor. Robyn has over 14 years of International experience serving children, adolescents and their parents as a teacher, an Educational Consultant and School Counselor. Her education includes attending The College of St. Paul and St. Mary in Cheltenham, England, receiving a BS from North Central University and an MA in Counseling from Bethel College. She is currently working toward receiving her PhD from Walden University specializing in forensics. In her work on her dissertation, Robyn is currently working on implementing research for her dissertation. Reward of her PhD should occur in 2015. She has specialized training in Play Therapy, Art Therapy, Crisis/Trauma Intervention, Grief Therapy and Marriage and Family Counseling. She is a member of the American and Michigan Counseling Associations, American School Counselors Association and The American Association of

Christian Counselors. In the Summer of 2012 Robyn was appointed by Governor Snyder to serve on the Michigan Board of Counseling.

***\*Concerns or Complaints\****

Michigan Department of Community Health  
Complaint and Allegation Division  
PO Box 30670  
Lansing, MI 48909  
(517) 373 9196

## Appendix D Spanish

Robyn J. Emde LPC

XXXX South Street

XXXX, Michigan

xxx xxxx

### Declaraciones Profesionales

#### :Localidad y Horario:

Mi oficina, Comfort in Counseling, “Robyn’s Nest” se encuentra en: **xxxx South St. xxxxxxx, Michigan**. Las horas de oficina pueden variar, dependiendo de la necesidad para una cita. Si no me encuentro en mi oficina, por favor déjame un mensaje, y yo devolveré su llamada con prontitud. Si se trata de una emergencia, favor de comunicarse con Madison Center in South Bend, Indiana, o acuda a los servicios de urgencias de su localidad.

#### :Confidencialidad:

La comunicación entre un cliente y un investigador es confidencial, excepto situaciones cubiertas por la ley. Estas situaciones pueden incluir, pero no son limitada a, amenazas de daños a alguien o a uno mismo, o sospecho de abuso o negligencia de menores. La confianza es importante en mis relaciones, y por lo general, será respetada.

#### :Referencias:

Si se determina que sus necesidades estén más allá del contenido de la entrevista de investigación, es mi obligación en referir su caso a los profesionales apropiados. Hablaré con usted antes de hacer tal referencia. Le asistiré en toda manera posible en referirle al profesional apropiado.

#### :Tocante a su investigadora:

Robyn J. Emde es una consejera profesional con licencia, Terapeuta del Campo de Pensamiento, Consejera Escolar Aprobada, y Supervisora Certificada en Michigan. Robyn tiene más de 14 años de experiencia Internacional, durante los cuales ha servido a niños, adolescentes y sus padres como maestra, Consultadora Educacional y Consejera Escolar. Su educación incluye el haber asistido al colegio de St. Paul y St, Mary en Cheltenham, Inglaterra. Recibió un BS de North Central University, y un MA en consejería en Bethel College. Actualmente está por recibir su PhD de Walden University con una especialidad forense. La recepción de su PhD deberá ocurrir en 2015. Tiene entrenamiento especializado en Terapia del Juego, Terapia del Arte, en Intervención en Crisis y Traumas, Terapia de duelo y Consejería Matrimonial y Familiar. Es miembro de la Asociación Americana, y de Michigan de Consejería y de la Asociación de América de Consejero

Cristianos. En el verano del 2012 Robyn fue asignada por el Gobernador Snyder, para que diera sus servicios en la Junta de Consejería del Estado de Michigan.

**:Preocupaciones y Quejas:**

Michigan Department of Community Health  
Complaint and Allegation Division  
PO Box 30670  
Lansing, MI. 48909  
(517) 373 9196

## Appendix E

### Interview Script

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this important research study. You have been selected for this study because you have been identified by community stakeholders as someone who currently has a high school student and has had at least one contact with their high school counselor within the last year. As stated in the informed consent, this interview is the first step in the research process. The information obtained during this interview will assist the researcher in gaining a more in depth understanding of parents' perceptions of their children's high school counselor. At the conclusion of this interview, I will provide you with a demographic questionnaire to complete and a self-addressed stamped envelope that you can use to mail it back to me. In addition, it may become necessary that I contact you at a later time in order to clarify some of your answers to today's questions. Do you have any questions I can answer at this time? Please let me know at any time during the interview process if any questions arise. Let's get started.

1. Tell me a little about each of your high school children.
2. Could you tell me something positive that distinguishes your child's school from other schools?
3. Could you tell me something negative that distinguishes your child's school from other schools?
4. As a participant in this study, one of the qualifying criteria is a minimum of one to two interactions with your children's school counselor within the last year. Please share with me the events that led to the interactions with the school counselor.
5. Can you tell me how these interactions with the school counselor have impacted, either positively or negatively your children's relationships or experiences with school?
6. This study is interested in understanding the relationship between parent interactions with school counselors and student academic success. Please share with me any ways that your interactions with the school counselor may have impacted your children's academically.
7. This study is interested in understanding the relationship between parent interactions with school counselors and social/emotional effects on students. Please share with me ways that your interactions with the school counselor may have had an impact on your children.
8. This study is interested in understanding the relationship between parent interactions with school counselors and college readiness on students. Please share with me ways that your interactions with the school counselor may have impacted your children's college readiness.

9. One purpose of this study is to tell your family's story of your relationship with your children's school counselor. If you were able to speak to a group of school counselors, what would you want them to know about your perceptions of the school counselor impacting your children.
10. Do you have any suggestions for school counselors on how they can better navigate the relationship between themselves and parents of their children?



## Appendix F

### Demographic Questionnaire Letter

Dear Research Participant,

Thank you for your participation in today's interview. Your responses to the interview questions have been recorded and will be analyzed in support of an increased understanding of parents' perceptions of high school counselors. Attached is a demographic questionnaire that will be utilized to provide context for each parent interview. Completion of this questionnaire should only take 5-10 minutes. Once you have completed this questionnaire, please place it in the self-addressed stamped envelope provided and mail back to me at the address provided.

Thank you again for your time filling out this demographic questionnaire.

Warmly,  
Robyn J. Emde

**Appendix G**  
**Demographic Questionnaire**

How would you describe yourself on the following?

1. Age: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Marital Status: (please circle one)

Single

Married

Divorced

3. Highest Level of Education Completed: (please circle one)

High School

College

Trade School

4. Number of High School Children in the Home: (please circle one)

1

2

3

4

5

6

5. Ages of High School Children in the Home

High School Child #1: \_\_\_\_\_

High School Child #2: \_\_\_\_\_

High School Child #3: \_\_\_\_\_

High School Child #4: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix G Spanish

### CARTA CUESTIONARIO DEMOGRAFICO

Gracias, nuevamente por su participación en la entrevista de hoy. Sus respuestas a las preguntas de la entrevista han sido registradas y serán analizadas para apoyar y aumentar el entendimiento de la percepción de los padres acerca de los consejeros de las escuelas preparatorias. Adjunto se encuentra el cuestionario demográfico que será utilizado para formar un contexto para la entrevista de cada participante. No debe tomar más de 5 a 10 minutos completar el cuestionario. Una vez que lo haya completado, por favor coloquelo en el sobre provisto, ya con estampilla y dirección, y envíelo por correo.

### CUESTIONARIO DEMOGRAFICO

¿Como se describiría a usted mismo, en lo que sigue?

1. Edad: \_\_\_\_\_
  
2. Estatus Civil: (favor de circular uno)  
Soltero                  Casado                  Divorciado
  
3. Nivel Más Alto de Educación Completado: (favor de circular uno)  
Escuela Preparatoria          Universidad          Escuela Vocacional
  
4. Número de hijos que tienen que asisten a la Escuela Preparatoria: (favor de circular uno)  
1          2          3          4          5          6
  
5. Edades de sus hijos que asisten a la Escuela Preparatoria:  
Hijo #1 \_\_\_\_\_                                  Hijo #2 \_\_\_\_\_  
Hijo #3 \_\_\_\_\_                                  Hijo #4 \_\_\_\_\_  
Hijo #5 \_\_\_\_\_                                  Hijo #6 \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix H

### Follow-up Email to Parents

**Date:** Feb 12, 2015 10:45 AM

Your summary is perfect! Great job, Robyn! Thank you for YOUR time!! It was a pleasure.

Jessica

**From:** Robyn Egan, February 12, 2015  
**Subject:** Research follow up

Hi Jessica,

Thank you so much for taking the time to be interviewed for my research. I found your experiences to be fascinating and enjoyed speaking with you. I know that your investment in your child/children's lives is great and will be rewarded. The following is a brief summary of some consistent themes that were found in all of the interviews. The underlined questions are the questions that I hoped to answer through this research and the topics following each question are ways in which your answers were interpreted to add to the research.

I am asking for you to take a minute and do the following:

- 1) Review the summary given below.
- 2) Please note any inaccuracies that you find.
- 3) If the following summary is accurate, please email me back and let me know.
- 4) If you find any inaccuracies, please feel free to call my cell phone and we can set up a follow up appointment for clarification purposes. My cell phone number is 269 325 6839.

In what ways do parents perceive school counselors impacting their children?

Academic Success

School Connectedness

How do parents collaborate with their children's school counselors?

Parent Initiated Collaboration

Schedule appropriate Classes

Navigate Special Needs

College Readiness

What do parents perceive that school counselors do that makes their relationships with students meaningful/beneficial?

Open Door Policy

Knowledgeable

Team Approach

Above and Beyond

Value all Students

What are areas that the school counselor and parent relationship have potential of being strengthened?

Parents not being heard

School Counselor Too Busy

Again, thank you for your time and please let me know if you have any concerns regarding accuracy. If you could reply by Friday, Feb. 13th it would be appreciated.

## Appendix I

### Primary Themes and Sub themes

#### ***Student Benefits***

- student academics
- social enhancement
- addressing social/emotional needs,
- preparing for college
- test preparation
- school connectedness

#### ***Parents Feeling Empowered***

- parents sharing ideas
- parents initiating change,

#### ***Interpersonal Environment***

- creating an inviting physical environment
- student interaction with school counselor both positive and negative,
- humility of school counselors,

#### ***Informed School Counselor***

- school counselor knowledge
- school counselors being non discriminatory
- special needs students

**Appendix J**

## Transcript Sample

**RE: Okay. As a participant in this study, one of the qualifying criteria is a minimum of 1 2 interactions with your child's school counselor within the last year. Please share with me the events that led to the interaction or interactions with your school counselor.**

F1: The last one was re enrolling Edgar back into the public school. He had been with K 12 at MVCA for the past year.

**RE: Is that a virtual school?**

F1: Yeah. It's also a public school.

**RE: Okay.**

F1: But, so we were just re enrolling him.

**RE: In a land, am I hearing you right, in a land public school?**

F1: Yes, back in our local public school district in classes where he attends at the school rather than virtually and online.

**RE: Okay.**

F1: So she helped us to go through his credits and figure out what he had, and what he needed, and establish a plan to allow him to graduate on time.

**RE: And he's currently a junior, you said?**

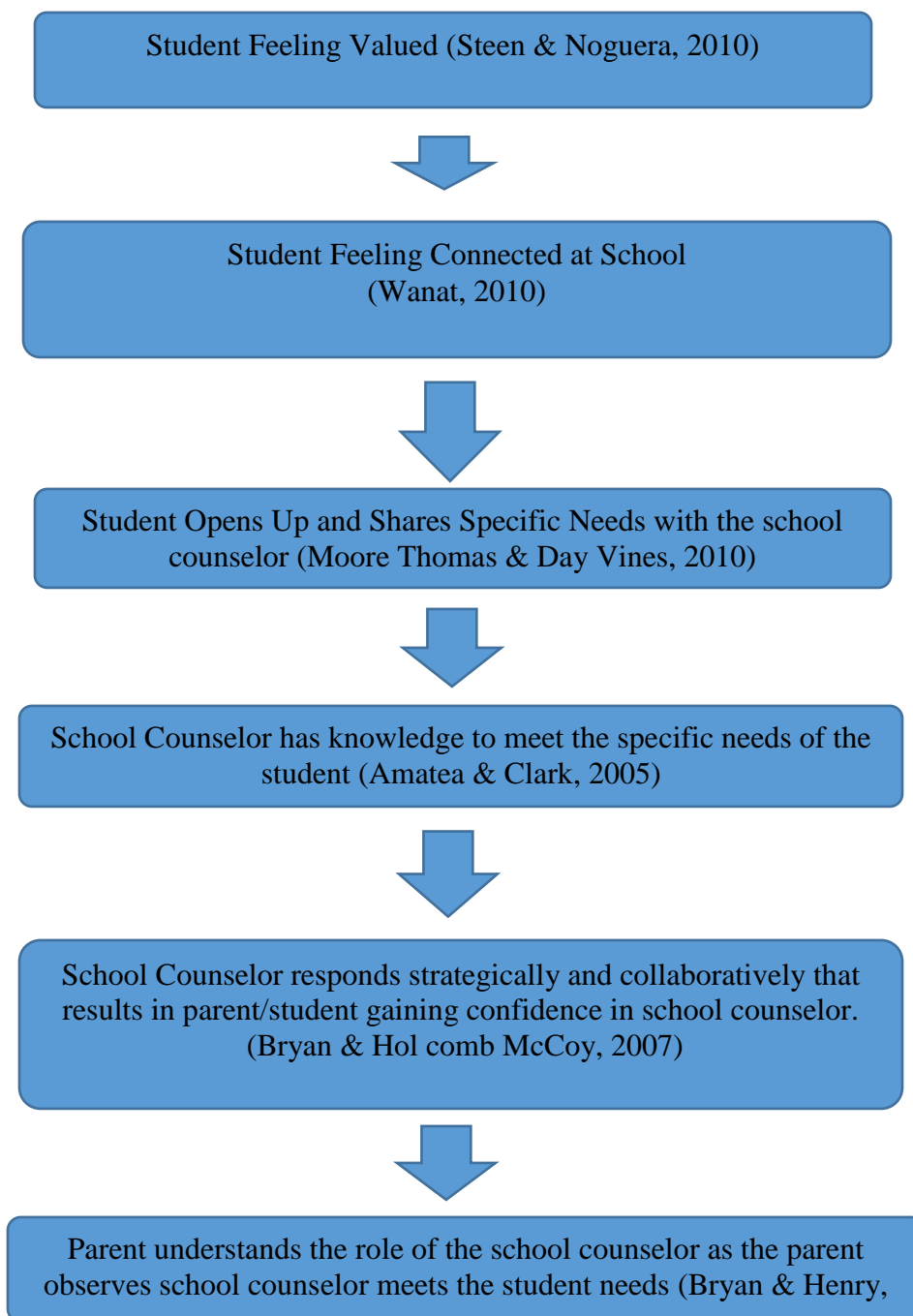
F1: He should be. He doesn't have all the credits to be a junior, but that's our goal.

**RE: Um, can you help me understand how this specific interaction with the school counselor has impacted, either positively or negatively, on your child's relationships or experiences with the school?**

F1: I think he felt understood and that she took extra steps to try and help him figure out a plan to graduate on time. She was filling in other classes into his schedule. She was able to accurately predict, based on previous experiences with him, what classes he would want for his extracurricular and hold a space for him. Because we had contacted her prior to enrollment to let her know that we were coming back, and I was quite pleased that she was able to choose a class for him and hold a space.

Table 1

## Research Gap Explained







Parent and school counselor begin to collaborate which leads to student success!!!!

(Epstein & VanVoorhis, 2011; Bryan & Henry, 2012)